

Old car makes new friends

By Jerry Barker

My favorite car is a 1968 Chrysler Newport. People are really surprised by the shape it's in for as old it is.

My father-in-law bought the car when it was considered a muscle car due to its 383 engine, and it's still all original.

He had planned to eventually leave the car to a friend of his, but that friend passed away two weeks after he bought it.

Later, when my father-in-law died, my mother-in-law didn't know what to do with the car.

After five years, she decided to do the next best thing and told my wife that my father-in-law wanted her to have it.

Because my wife has a sister, she didn't want to just take it, so we agreed only if we could buy it.

I don't know how much my wife paid for the car, but we didn't pay the normal price a person would pay for a car like that.

We have the original bill of sale and the car cost \$3,800 when it was new, but it's worth \$10,000 or more today.

My mother-in-law let us buy the car on the condition that we take care of it the way my father-in-law did, and I do.

He had never driven it in the winter and I only drive it from the first of May to the first of October. I want to make sure it doesn't get damaged from salty road conditions.

I recently had the car repainted. You can hardly tell it's been repainted and it remains the original color: turquoise.

The car is accented with a chrome front grille and bumpers. It still has the original interior and upholstery, also turquoise.

It even has the original spark plug wires and spare tire, which has never been out of the trunk.

I don't do anything to the car as long as it runs, although I did put antique license plates on it a few years ago.

The car only has 54,000 original miles on it, so I drive it much other than to car shows.

I try not to drive more than a 50-mile radius with the car if I can help it, but we go to every car show in the area.

We took first place at a car show in Indiana, a first and second place at Gilmore Car Museum shows and third place at a McRockin' Café show.

At one car show, we earned only 695 points in an 800-point system because the car had rustproofing on it, from when I was new.

The judges told us to take the rustproofing off, but I refused because the car isn't rusted out. We lost points, but I didn't care, the car is more important to me.

We often go to car shows with friends and hang out together. We really enjoy being around other people and talking to them about old times, old cars and things we used to do.

At a show in Vicksburg, we were asked to drive our car in a parade and we've since been to three in Vicksburg and one in Paw Paw. I was surprised because I didn't think the car was old enough or good enough for a parade.

I've always been interested in old cars because I raced at Galesburg Speedway back in the '60s. My son also raced for eight years and likes old cars, so if we ever get rid of the car, it will go to our son.

My brother-in-law owns a 1964 Studebaker that's original, as well as a lot of old Fords and Mercuries.

My father-in-law also owned a 1948 Dodge that he gave to his grandson in Ohio.

I guess you could say that old cars are in the blood in our family.

—As told to Tara Marion

Jerry Barker and his wife, Janet, live in Mattawan. He drives a 1989 GMC Suburban and recently retired from Eckrich as a machine operator.