

- Nothing depreciates a car faster than a neighbor buying a new one.
- If it's true the world's getting smaller, why do they keep increasing the price of postage?

Girls win
Panorama golf tournament
..... Page 6



ASK THE EDITOR:
Where does Lawrence Madsen get all his old cars? Page 9

Coon Rapids Enterprise

VOLUME 118 THURSDAY, APRIL 25, 2002 NUMBER 17

Coon Rapids Enterprise - Thursday, April 25, 2002

Page 9

Where does Lawrence Madsen get all those old cars?

Dear Editor,

When I'm out driving around, sometimes I see Lawrence Madsen driving slowly in an old car. Where does he get all those old cars and how does he get them to run?

Karen



Dear Karen,

That's really a good question, because I've seen him drive vehicles so old I can't tell you the model or vintage. I saw Lawrence down at the Country Store today so I asked if he'd be willing to talk to me about his cars. And that's when he let me drive his 1952 Packard down the highway at 65 mph with no seat belts! COOL! It cruised nicely although I had to muscle the wheel in order to turn (no power steering). And the radio was only AM with one speaker -- a far cry from those ear-shattering, competitive car stereos that they're selling in Carroll at Sound and Service's 25th anniversary sale.

Karen, I'm glad you asked me about Lawrence because he's an interesting fellow. A bit eccentric perhaps (he calls himself a 'throwback') but quite accomplished. He's had and quit more high paying jobs than a Packard has spark plugs, and they've taken him all over the world. He expresses regret when he talks about the divorce from the mother of his three children. And he brags as much as any proud parent about his kids.

Now at 65 years of age, Lawrence lives at the top of Fifth Avenue in the house where he grew up. The old home place could use a serious pickup and put-away session, but the stately oak trees disguise the mess for 7 or 8 months a year, so what the heck. And Lawrence seems to know where he's placed every piece to every car he's ever parted out. So why mess with man's organizational skills? In a way, it's kind of like my desk here at the office.

Lawrence doesn't know how many cars he's had through the years. He prefers Packards and Chrysler products but if it's old and mechanical, he'll tear it apart and make it purr. And in total confidence he'll take the old car on a drive to Des Moines or Omaha!

There's also no shortage of projects for Lawrence to tackle. On his property on the particular day I visited, Lawrence has a '51 Nash that needs all its parts (which are in the back seat) put back together, and also a '47 Desoto that needs 'tweaked', he says. That's not including the '52 Packard which I drove; it runs pretty well except for its timing belt. And who knows what else sits down the hill on the 10 acres of his property. He mentioned one old car has a big tree growing right through the hood.

Seriously, a few of Lawrence's old cars need more than 'tweaked'. But if he gets to fixing one -- when he's done, they run! He speaks of his cars in reference to the time he expects the repairs will take him to make.

"I could have one going by tomorrow night," he bragged, pointing to an old truck with bug eyes.

I asked him if he had regrets about any of the cars he sold or bought during the years.

"Maybe a little regret about selling a 1947 Packard Super Clipper Deluxe," answered Lawrence, who recalled that it had a rod out of it and the parts were hard to find, so he eventually sold it. Sometimes if an opportunity presents itself,

he'll sell an old car before he even gets it retitled or repaired. "Like everybody else, I try to make a dollar or two."

"Sure, I've had some regrets, but a man that doesn't make mistakes doesn't do a darn thing," he said he remembers his friend Clarence Nielson telling him once.

Lawrence said it's not hard to find old cars available to buy.

"If I'm driving to Des Moines and pull into a gas station, someone will come out to talk to you when they see the car," he described. "They'll come and say something like, 'I know where you can get this one', and so on."

He also gets plenty of leads at swap meets, where guys like Lawrence go to trade cars, parts and stories.

The house that still stands on Lawrence's property was where he grew up as an only child. The estate has been in his mother's family since 1915. The house is in bad shape and Lawrence now lives in a nearby trailer. Lawrence's father, Carl, came to the United States from Denmark in 1911. He didn't marry Laura Elliott until 1936 -- when he was 50 years old! Of course, waiting to marry and start a family didn't give him too long to enjoy Lawrence; he died when Lawrence was just 13.

"When my dad died, I started spending a lot of time at Jake Smouse's jewelry store," Lawrence recalled. "Jake gave me encouragement and helped me out a lot."

However, school gradually became less important to Lawrence. He joked when he admitted he dropped out after eighth grade "to become a farm hand and a bum"; but I sensed he harbors some remorse for doing so.

At 17, Lawrence joined the Navy in 1955 as a CB Mechanic. After training he became a member of the Fleet Aircraft Service Squadron in Keflavik, Iceland. While in the Navy he earned his graduation equivalency degree. After that he was reassigned to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba until his discharge in 1958.

Also in that year Lawrence met and married Ann Hoyt of Bayard.

"I don't regret it and I still like her," he admitted.

From there, Lawrence hoped new plans. He joined the U.S. Air Force and soon the happy couple moved to Keesler Air Force Base in Boloxi, Mississippi, where Lawrence learned ground radar electronics repair.

Lawrence said he now suspects that he suffered from epilepsy as a child, although he doesn't remember his first real incident until he was standing at attention in an Air Force flight line.

"Apparently I had a seizure," he described. "They were smart enough to know it, but I didn't."

Lawrence was soon given his honorable discharge. He might have been entitled to a full pension had he been aware of his disorder at the time. However, he said he has no regrets about it today. "All is well that ends well," he summed up.

Returning to life as a civilian, Lawrence took a job with Western Electric in Des Moines, where he traveled around many Iowa communities to install mechanical dial switch systems for local telephone exchanges.

"I was a fat cat at the time. I made good money," he said.

But the job required that he be on the job site anywhere from two weeks to two months at a time, and that probably wasn't a good thing for a young couple just starting to have a family.

The Madsens had their first child "I was blessed



with a baby girl. Probably the best day of my life," said Lawrence.

Christine now resides in Minneapolis, MN and is a legal secretary in a corporate bank.

Two other children were added -- Carla Lee and Carl. Carla now teaches school at Warren Harding in Des Moines and Carl lives in Minneapolis, where he's a Captain in the Minnesota National Guard.

"They've all got college degrees," bragged Lawrence. "Every generation has a throw back so I guess I'm one," he said, noting that his mother had a degree from Simpson College.

He may have been a throwback, but for the next 10 years or so beginning in 1965, Lawrence accepted a series of high paying jobs that even a straight-A college student might not qualify for. He went to work for RCA on the White Allis project in Alaska. White Allis project was the code name for a system that powered all the surveillance radars that spied on Russia during the Cold War. He worked in approximately 20 remote stations in Alaska, Iceland and Greenland. He'd be gone for up to 10 months at a time. "But the pay was extremely good," he said. Even after all these years, Lawrence still didn't disclose too much about these jobs. He had high level security clearance in those days and he still respects that secrecy.

Plenty of job dissatisfaction and time away from his family took its toll. Lawrence estimated that he got fed up and quit nearly a dozen times, but they'd always want to rehire him. And he'd go back.

"I'd quit and they'd laugh and say, 'we'll see you back here soon. Have fun back in Coon Rapids!' I'm not a braggard or anything but I must have been pretty good or they wouldn't have rehired me all those times."

Lawrence said his long absences eventually led to his divorce in 1975. While Ann was home being a good mother to her kids, "she just got tired of all the nonsense and promptly divorced me, which I completely understand," he said.

"That's also about the same time my mother passed away and I inherited the family farm, so to speak."

And that's where Lawrence has settled for the past quarter century, fixing old cars and keeping a low profile. He speaks warmly of his mother and says "she'd kick me in the rear end to see this place so messed up". Then he resolves to fix the place up a bit more this summer. He's got his work cut out for him. It seems like every time he turns around, one of his 'friends' brings over another old car to be fixed up.

Once Lawrence almost let his epilepsy get the best of him. Sometime around 1984, he says he was driving one of his antique cars home when he suffered a seizure. His foot pushed down on the accelerator and he sped up the hill out of control. He drove through several yards before he finally crashed into a retaining wall. Since then, he's been serious about taking his medication.

So there's the story on Lawrence Madsen and his antique cars. He's a complicated man but he likes to keep his life simple -- just like the cars he loves to tinker with. Next time you see him, tell him you read this story and ask him for a ride in whatever old car he's fixed up.

