

by **Elisabeth Andrews** Photography by **Steve Raymer**



The dash of Sheriff  
Jim Kennedy's 1956  
Ford Thunderbird.

# *Old cars* *and the people who love them*

Some people collect art. Others have extensive wine cellars stocked with rare and fine vintages. But for these car owners, the greatest beauty and enjoyment is to be found not on a wall or in a bottle but on four old wheels.

While everyone can appreciate the craftsmanship of vintage automobiles, their owners have a particular relationship to them not easily understood by the outside world. They have sought and obtained the cars of their dreams, and the satisfaction they derive from them is limitless. The cars are more than novelties: they are wishes granted, hopes fulfilled, cherished members of the family.

The car is almost always a connection to a personal history: many Bloomington owners

purchased cars similar to those they first learned to drive. They might choose a car like the one their parents owned, or, like Tom Coleman, a model they remember admiring on the street as a child. Even for younger drivers, the cars seem to embody nostalgia for an earlier age. Lyle Feigenbaum, too young to remember the '50s, nevertheless describes his Corvette fondly as a "piece of Americana."

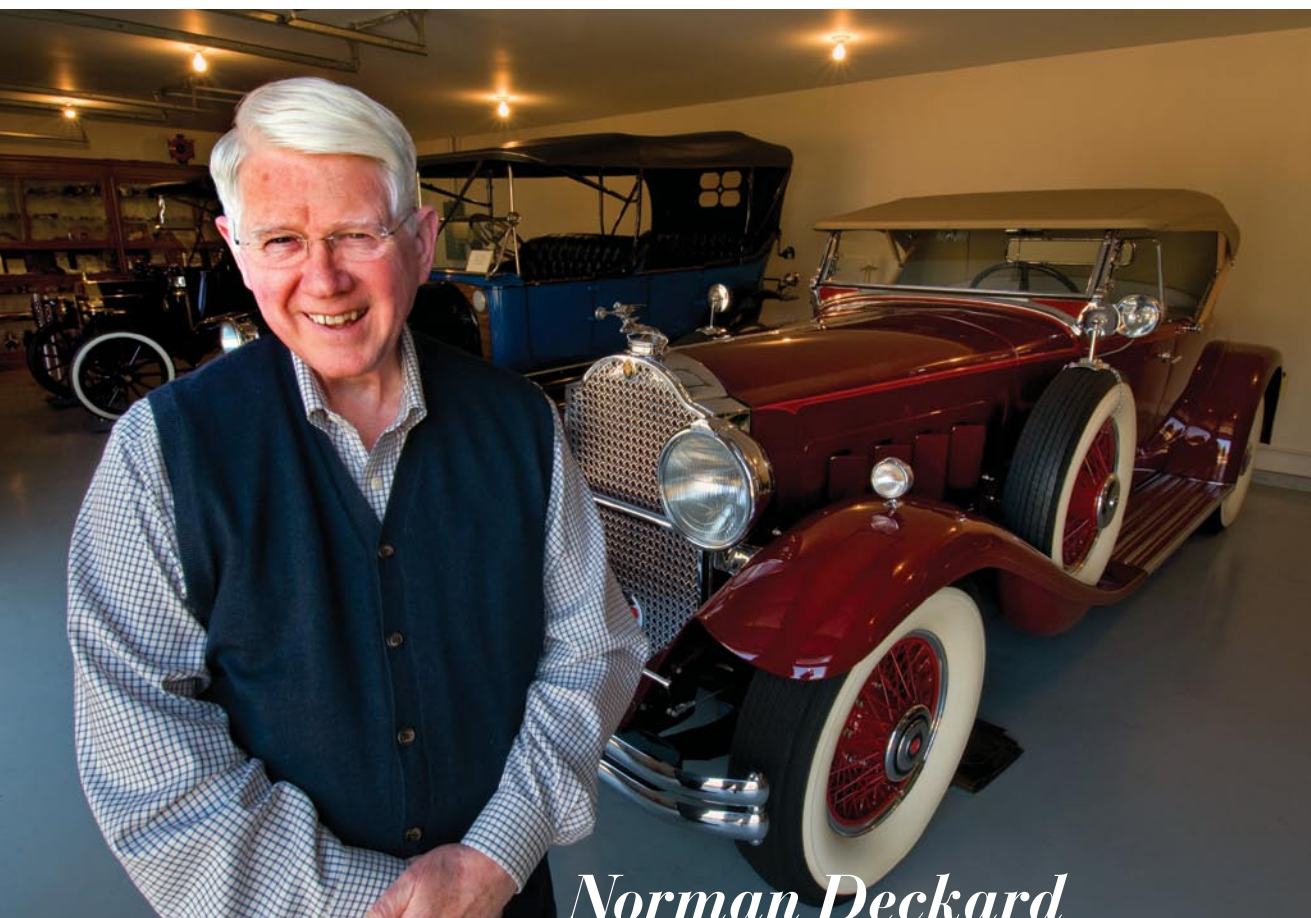
Even British car ownership—practically a movement in Bloomington—represents not precisely Anglophilia but, again, a type of American reminiscence. The "British Invasion" of the early '60s brought with it music, movies, and cars from across the pond. MG owners like Nancy and Charlie Henry were in high school during that time, and purchasing a car like the one they had then brings back happy memories.

Many owners join car clubs like Cruisin'

Classics of Bloomington or the Hoosier A's. Some, like Norm Deckard and Ed Dathe, enter their cars to win awards for restoration and maintenance. Others, like Doug Bruce and Tucker Madawick, are ready to take competition a step further with vintage racing. But for certain owners like Sheriff Jim Kennedy, just driving his old T-Bird is enough.

The one thing all of these owners have in common is a willingness to talk about their vehicles. It seems there are no shy vintage car owners, accustomed as they are to being stopped on the street or in a parking lot. So if you still have questions after you've read their stories here, go ahead, pull up next to them at a stoplight. They're expecting you.





(left) Norman Deckard's maroon 1930 Packard and beside it, a 1913 Rambler.

(below) His 1955 Chrysler St. Regis and next to it, a 1948 Chrysler Town and Country with wood siding.

## Norman Deckard

Norman Deckard's car collection could fill a museum. In fact, it once did. For six years, he operated an auto museum in the space that now houses the Bloomington Convention Center, with 27 vehicles and hundreds of parts and paraphernalia on display.

His obsession began when he was still a kid living on his parents' farm, which sat on what is now East 3rd Street. "I've been dragging home old cars since I was 14," he says. He began a business of sorts, fixing up the cars and selling them for a \$25 profit. The best of the bunch he would keep and drive around the farmhouse that has since been replaced by Chili's.

Now 69, he has pared down decades of acquisition to just ten cars, each of them spectacular. There's the 1913 Ford Model T Deckard describes as his "pet" with its kerosene

headlights and original mahogany detailing. He has a 1913 luxury Rambler the size and shape of a horse-drawn carriage that he drives in Bloomington's Fourth of July parade. "It's just a monster," he says.

Then there's the 1930 Packard, a custom roadster with a "rumble seat" that opens out of what at first appears to be its trunk. ("It's twice as much fun riding in the rumble seat as driving it," Deckard opines.) He has a 1931 Ford Model A, and a 1935 Auburn made in Auburn, Indiana. His 1955 Chrysler St. Regis, he says, could outrun nearly every car of its day.

He's also kept his father's 1948 Chrysler Town and Country with its wood siding. Then things get really colorful with his '55 aquamarine Ford Country Sedan—the company's first station wagon—and his white-and-damask-rose Ford Fairlane Crown Victoria, also from 1955.

Every one is in shockingly pristine condition, from the fully restored soft tops to the immacu-



late floor mats. They all run perfectly, and are started at least every few months to prove it. This heroic feat of maintenance is achieved primarily by Deckard's friend Bob Empson, who will appear sometimes at one in the morning to do whatever needs doing on the cars.

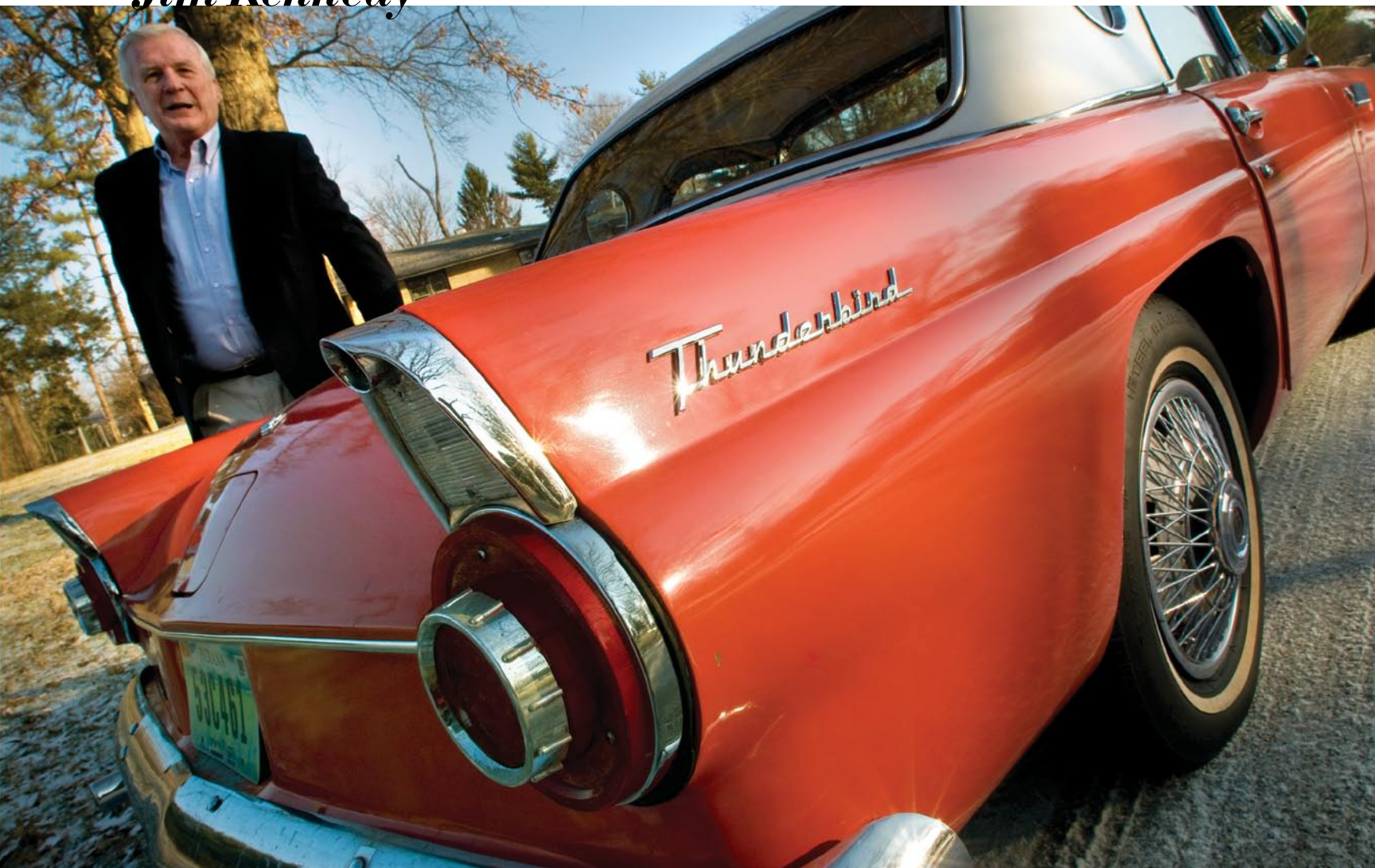
Grateful as he is, Deckard is hardly surprised by this sort of dedication. The cars have a certain sway over people, he says. Deckard explains that some people are "car freaks" and once you've caught the bug, there's no going back.

"There are still two or three things I'd buy," he says wistfully.



## Jim Kennedy

Sheriff Jim Kennedy  
and his "Fiesta Red"  
1956 Ford Thunderbird.



Some say Jim Kennedy's T-Bird is pink. Others describe it as salmon or coral. In fact the Monroe County Sheriff's 1956 Ford Thunderbird is "Fiesta Red," after the Fiesta-ware that adorned so many mid-century tables.

But the argument is lost on Kennedy.

"I wouldn't know. I'm colorblind," he says.

All he was after in purchasing the vehicle 15 years ago was to relive the joy of driving his father's Thunderbird when he was in high school. He recalls the time his dad left for a trip overseas and failed to take his keys with him. "The taxi wasn't out of sight before I was in the garage."

The only problem for this law enforcement officer, who served as the chief of IU's police

force and co-founded the IU Police Academy, is he's been rather spoiled in the transportation department.

"I've been driving police cars, which have beefed-up suspensions," he says. "This car has horrible suspension. If I had to drive it every day, I'd shoot it."

Instead, Kennedy saves the vintage car for leisurely drives on sunny days. For his everyday transport, he has the next best thing: a 2003 Retro Bird, the 21st-century remake of the Ford classic.

In purchasing this latest acquisition, Kennedy wisely avoided the color debate, choosing a model he can authoritatively identify as "Mountain Shadow Grey."



Nancy Henry and  
her 1959 MGA.



## *Nancy Henry*

Back when they were high school sweethearts in the '60s, Nancy would wait for Charlie Henry to pick her up in his gray 1960 MGA.

"You could hear it coming blocks away," she recalls.

Now, both with their first marriages behind them, they are together again. Only this time, Nancy's doing the driving.

In her red 1959 MGA, she puts aside her job as a nurse at the IU Student Health Center and concentrates on the joy of the open road.

"It's so fun to drive," she says. "I put on a cap and glasses and feel anonymous."

Having learned to drive in an Austin Healy, Nancy is no stranger to British sports cars. But most of her adult transportation was devoted to shuttling children around town.

"We had kids, so we had vans," she says. With the children now grown, "it's the first time I've

been able to have an MG back in my life."

The best part of ownership, Charlie and Nancy agree, is the camaraderie of their car club, the Hoosier A's.

"I realized that's where the fun is—meeting people, going out on a beautiful drive on a beautiful day," Charlie says. "That's when you have the reward of having a toy."

Nancy, who moved from Texas to be with Charlie, says touring the county roads with the club helped her fall in love not only with her husband, but with Indiana.



## Tom Coleman

Tom Coleman was born in 1934. His house number is 3434. His license plate ends in 1934. So it may be no surprise to learn that he drives a 1934 Deluxe Ford Tudor.

Coleman has loved the car since childhood, when he and his six siblings would compete to see who could identify the most car models.

"Whenever I would see this particular car, my heart went 'pitter-pat, pitter-pat,'" he says.

He had to wait a long time before owning it, though. First, two of his older brothers totaled their cars before Tom reached driving age, leading their father to conclude that all his sons needed to stay off the road. Then he joined the Navy, and was far from any roads for many years. Shortly after his return from service, he became a father, which didn't leave much time for tinkering with automobiles.

It wasn't until the late '80s, when he had come to Bloomington as chair of Indiana University's School of Fine Arts, that he found his dream car. He purchased it from a highway patrolman in Bedford, and has lovingly cared for it ever since.

"When it's running well, I call it the 'silver streak,'" he says. "And when it's not, it's 'the old car.'"



## Doug Bruce

"I've always said that I'm a frustrated racecar driver," says Doug Bruce, an architect who will soon take to the track to face off against other vintage car drivers.

(top) Doug Bruce polishes up his 1959 Austin Healy.

(left) Tom Coleman and his '34 Deluxe Ford Tudor.

Having grown up just off the Bloomington Speedway, raced bicycles in the Little 500 and the Velodrome during his youth, and attended 33 Indy 500 races, the excitement has been mounting for a long time.

Stoking the flames is his father, Howard Bruce. A retired insurance salesman and the current president of the Hoosier A's motor club, Howard has been the man behind each of Doug's vintage car purchases.

"Dad will call me and say, 'I found a car.' That's where all the trouble starts," Doug says.

It all began, in fact, with a Triumph Spitfire Howard brought home when Doug was in high school. Doug immediately took to the vehicle, but Howard soon tired of the car's propensity to break down.

"I had to learn how to fix the car myself because I was afraid he would sell it if it broke one more time," Doug recalls.

Nowadays Doug uses those skills to keep his and his dad's Austin Heals running in top shape. The two can often be found together in a garage off West 3rd Street tinkering under the hood.

Getting the racecar ready is their top priority before Doug heads to vintage racing school in May. The 1959 Austin Healy bug-eye Sprite has been taken apart and put back together from top to bottom and front to back. The anticipation is tangible as father and son make minute adjustments to the engine.

"This is a love I've always wanted to pursue but never did," Doug says. "These races are things I've only seen on TV and read about, and now I am going to do it."





# Ed Dathe

Mary and Ed Dathe and  
their 1931 Ford truck.



Ed Dathe has always loved antiques. His Unionville home is full of vintage items like kerosene lamps from the turn of the century and a bean cabinet evoking a 19th-century general store.

Even when he was a teenager in the 1950s, he preferred old cars to new, buying up classic Fords when others had turned their attention to the newest postwar models.

So when Dathe spotted the 1931 Ford truck being pushed out to the road with a “For Sale” sign on it some 20 years ago, he wasted no time in persuading a friend to help him purchase the vehicle. The two worked for 15 years to restore the truck to its original Model A glory.

In order to take sole possession of the truck, however, Dathe had to part with another precious piece of history: a collection of diaries from a Civil War drummer boy. “He wanted \$5,000, but I didn’t have it, so I swapped him for the diaries and \$800.”

Since then, the truck has won over 70 awards at regional and national conventions.

Best of all, it helped him win his wife, Mary. The two had known each other in high school but didn’t meet up again until they both attended a classic car show in 1994.

“I was in the back of my truck talking to somebody when I saw her and said, ‘Where have you been all this time?’ So I took her out for ice cream,” Dathe recalls.

Nine years later, they were married at the holiday gathering of their car club, Cruisin’ Classics of Bloomington.





(left) Lyle Feigenbaum and his '54 Corvette.

(below) Tucker Madawick and his yellow 1959 Elva Courier MK.

## Lyle Feigenbaum

As the owners of the Scholars Inn restaurants and bed-and-breakfast, Lyle Feigenbaum and his wife Kerry are tied up with work most nights. To keep their romance alive, they needed to find a way to have fun together during the day.

"We decided to look for a 'date car,'" Lyle recounts. They wanted something sporty but relaxed that would encourage them to enjoy their rare free time together. So they decided to take a tip from Prince and go for a little red Corvette.

"I love Corvettes. They are a piece of Americana," he says. "I didn't want one that was so expensive we couldn't drive it, so I went for the '54. It's considered less desirable than the '53 and '55 models so it was within our budget."

Lyle took the bold step of shopping for his car online. "I just Googled '54 vet' and one came up," he says.

After calling the Alabama Chamber of Commerce to have someone investigate the car on his behalf, he had it shipped to Bloomington.

"I'll never forget seeing that thing come off the back of the truck," he says.

Although they purchased the car to get some alone time, it's earned them plenty of attention.

"We drive that car, it turns heads," he says.

"The toughest part when you are driving is people on your tail who want to get a closer look."



## Tucker Madawick

With his stethoscope pressed against the engine of an Austin Healy, his broad white moustache twitching, Tucker Madawick is the picture of a mad scientist.

"The only problem is I can't seem to remember where I left my white coat," he jokes.

Madawick is the man behind the British cars of Bloomington, servicing and rebuilding them with the skilled hands of a virtuoso. In fact, growing up in Yonkers outside New York City, he had intended to be a concert pianist. But he broke a knuckle when he was 14, and went to work at a gas station instead. His dexterity proved equally valuable in the tuning of automobiles, and a career was born.

By the mid-1960s, he was working for Nissan as a racecar mechanic, also dabbling in the maintenance of just about everything that moves.

"I got into motorcycles a little bit, I got into boats a little bit, I got into flying a little bit," he says. "Actually, I've been through tanks, tractors, and bulldozers, too."

Eventually, he tired of the pace of the city and moved to Indiana, where he's built a

clientele of about 50 vintage car owners in Monroe County.

He has also passed on his passion to the next generation, with his daughter Ericka managing the office and website. At 27, she's the youngest driver in the scene.

"I have a 1973 MG Midget that you could fit on a queen-sized bed," she says.

Soon, she'll follow in her father's footsteps as a pit crew member when Tucker heads to Michigan to learn to race his vintage automobiles. ✨