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Baltimore's Harbor Tunnel Celebrates 50th Anniversary

By Jerry Gordon, photos by Tom Kenney

Take a time-capsule trip back to 1957. You decide to make a quick mid-summer driving tour in your new 1957 Chevy convertible from New Jersey to Williamsburg, VA, which will take you through Baltimore and Washington, DC down the east coast on Routes 1 and 40. You factor in an extra hour travel time because the route will include driving through Baltimore's crowded inner city streets. It's a well-known bottleneck for north-south traffic along the east coast. You encounter 51 traffic signals inside the city limits. While going from one red light to another, you keep asking yourself "why don't they do something about this mess?"

Well, the state of Maryland was already working on a solution – building a tunnel under the Baltimore harbor that would route north-south traffic around the city. The Harbor Tunnel opened the day after Thanksgiving in 1957. The design included a controlled access thruway and a 1.7-mile tunnel, a total of 17.5 miles.

It was anticipated that 30,000 vehicles per day would use the tunnel. Later, the Harbor Tunnel's role in moving traffic in and around Baltimore was supplemented by the Francis Scott Key Bridge and the Fort McHenry Inner Harbor Tunnel. Zipping around the metro area is a cinch now.

At the Harbor Tunnel dedication ceremony on November 29, 1957, a group of Chesapeake Region members and their antique cars were invited to participate. The antique cars were



Pictured above is the official photo of the Chesapeake Regions' antique cars leading the procession through the tunnel on 11-29-1957. Below is Ed Allen's 1957 Chevrolet displayed at the 50th Anniversary ceremony 11-29-2007.

organized by Willard Prentice, a charter member. The Club members' cars led a procession of politicians and other dignitaries' cars to officially open the tunnel. The day's opening ceremony was described by one eyewitness as a "holiday atmosphere."

Fast-forward fifty years to November

29, 2007, when the Baltimore Harbor Tunnel had its 50th Anniversary celebration. There was a lot less fanfare at this event, with about 250 in attendance at the ceremony and buffet lunch. Chesapeake Region was invited to provide five cars for display at the event. Ed Allen's 1957 Chevrolet was selected by the staff to decorate the stage inside the building. Our other four cars were parked at the main entrance to the Harbor Tunnel complex. The antique cars created a lot of interest.

The program included a video about the construction of the tunnel, which was considered an engineering feat back in 1957 – at the time it was the world's longest twin-tube, trench-type tunnel. The twin-tube sections were constructed at the Sparrows Point shipyard and floated over to the construction site. The tunnel roadways were built inside after the tubes were fully connected.

Even with the two alternate harbor crossings, tunnel traffic has grown to 72,000 daily trips. The original one-way toll was 40¢; today it's \$2.00.

Club members arrived early and were treated to a grand tour of the new maintenance garage, storage facility, and administration building, which is an impressive state-of-the-art operation.

The following members displayed their cars: Mary & Ed Allen, 1957 Chevrolet; Helen & Jerry Gordon, 1961 Cadillac; Paul Habicht, 1959 Cadillac; Thelma & Dave Johnson, 1956 Thunderbird, and Tom Kenney, 1955 DeSoto.