

The Holiday Adventures Of Three DeSoto Guys By Bill Wurzell

Many members of Chesapeake Region also belong to other car clubs... Secretary Jim Turner, Bob Baer and myself also belong to the DeSoto Owners Club Of Maryland. Other club members are Tom Kenney, Bob Lenio and former longtime DeSoto club president, Ferd Driver. Also, Jim Turner was recently elected President of the DeSoto Club and Bob Baer is Activities Director. Yours truly?...I'm just a rank and file member.

In late 2013 Bob Baer was contacted by a very nice lady from McLean, Virginia--Miss Barbara. She explained to Bob that she had a 1949 DeSoto Custom four-door sedan in her garage she might be willing to donate to our DeSoto Club. Bob passed around a photo of the car during our December 7, 2013 luncheon in Linthicum, MD. At that time, Bob didn't have a whole lot of information about the car.

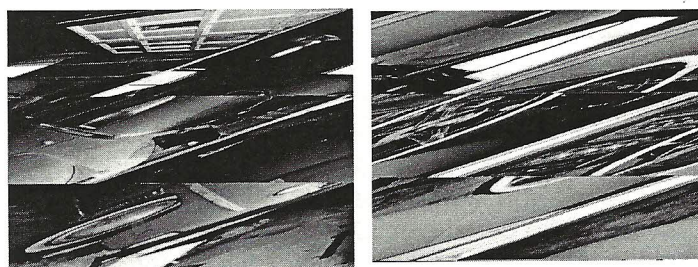
Fast Forward to January 2014. Bob and Jim were in touch with Barbara and scheduled Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Holiday, January 20, to visit Barbara and check out the old DeSoto. Bob and Jim probably felt they needed some extra muscle to do any heavy lifting that might occur, so they graciously invited me to tag along.

We subsequently learned the DeSoto was pulled into the garage under it's own power in 1974...and it's been sitting there ever since, 40 years! The car has been in Barbara's family forever. It was purchased by her husband's parents, brand new in 1949, in Johnsville, Pennsylvania. The new owners drove the car to their home in Kansas. The car stayed in Kansas for many years until Barbara's in-laws passed on. Her husband Harry acquired the DeSoto and drove it from Kansas to Virginia. Harry drove the car and used it for a few years with the intention of restoring the DeSoto. Harry was no stranger to old cars, as he restored two vintage Volkswagens. Unfortunately, Harry passed away before he got around to the restoration. So there it sat, under 40 years of dirt.

Bob, Jim and myself were eager to see the car, and to see if we could possibly get it running, or at least establish a status for the DeSoto. Barbara greeted us around 11:00 am and showed us into the garage. We were pleasantly surprised by many aspects of the car. It was up on wooden blocks and the tires were off the ground. There did not appear to be a lot of evidence of rodent activity as so often happens in these cases. The interior was great--seats, door panels, floors, carpeting, headliner and dashboard, even the steering wheel, while it had a few cracks, wasn't hateful. The exterior of the body showed no damage or rust-through, actually no rust to speak of, semi-wide whitewalls, and all four hubcaps intact. I checked the motor oil which was remarkably

clean, right up to the full mark with no signs of moisture or rust on the dipstick. Of course, the fuel filler pipe smelled like turpentine.

We, or I should say, Bob and Jim got busy removing the spark plugs; no easy task, they wouldn't budge, even with the heavy duty, long handled, wrench Bob had with the perfect size socket for the spark plugs. Bob said: "we need more leverage!" Couldn't find a pipe that would fit over the wrench handle, so Jim picked up an old bumper jack that was laying on the floor. The opening in the shaft of jack fit nicely over the handle and while Jim applied a steady pull, Bob pounded on top of the spark plug ratchet with a hammer and the first plug came loose...so did the other five! How ingenious--we should be proud of these guys.



Bob poured oil down each spark plug hole. They tried turning the fan but "no soap"--it would not turn the motor. Bob got under the front of the car with the biggest socket he had, but it was too small to fit the crank bolt, so we did not turn the engine. We installed a spare six-volt fully charged battery that I had brought along. Bob hit the starter but only a click. We had little hope this would work because we suspected many of the wires were done for, not to mention the starter and generator. We were able to get all the lights working including the headlights, parking, tail, and center stop light; even the dome light came on brightly when the door was opened. The medium blue paint looks as though it will respond to polish, is even and what we could see wasn't faded. All the glass is unbroken and not delaminated. The car has a clean Virginia title in Barbara's name. She wants to sell her house so the DeSoto has to go.

We took a break and had coffee and cookies with Barbara, and talked about the DeSoto. Barbara's druthers are to see that the car goes to a good home, doesn't get retro- or rat-rodged or heaven forbid, crushed! We all agreed the old DeSoto has a lot of potential even though it's a sedan. Unfortunately, our local DeSoto Club does not have the resources to take on the restoration. We are trying to get the word out about the car and hopefully find an organization or individual that will take on this nice old car and bring it back to life, ending it's forty years in solitary confinement. If there are any serious parties reading this or you know someone responsible that would take it on, contact either Jim Turner or myself--our contact information is in the newsletter.