

## A VENT WINDOW VIEW – **NUMBA ONE HONDA**

2011 B. K. Showalter – December

Circumstances required that I hitch a late night ride home from my job at the airport. Reason one was that the water pump on my '67 Falcon had failed just as I pulled into the employee parking lot for my scheduled evening shift. Reason two was the after-hours charter flight for the local pro-football team I had signed up to handle had been delayed and was now due in after midnight. At that late hour, with the kids in bed, my wife could not come to pick me up.

None of us who were holding over from our regular shifts to work the trip really minded its late arrival because we were drawing overtime pay. However, getting a ride home after midnight was turning into a real problem for me until an agent we referred to as “Big Jim” (the big was to differentiate between him and a smaller version with the same first name) offered me a ride. Fortunately, he had recently moved into a place not far from mine.

Big Jim was a college student who had quite recently lucked into this part-time position with the airline. He was so new that all I knew about him was his size. He was a head taller than my six feet and meaty enough that he looked like a pro-football lineman disguised as a baggage handler.

While we waited for the airplane to arrive I learned that he was majoring in biology and had plans to teach that subject to high school classes eventually. He also admitted this job was the first he'd ever had that did not involve hamburger patties and deep-fried potatoes. It was during this conversation that I learned that Jim's outlook on life in general differed greatly from mine. His concerns about the world included subjects I'd never heard or considered--such as pollution and global warming. We'd barely touched upon those issues when the flight touched down, ending our chat.

For some reason, I had failed to ask what kind of car Big Jim drove. In that era of muscle car mania guys inevitably got around to automobiles early on in any conversation. We had not, but I simply supposed that a young guy as big as Jim would own a full-sized vehicle powered by a V-8; it would also have twin pipes and rear tires with less tread than a sheet of toilet paper.

We got off work at 1:30a.m., and to say that I had guessed wrong about Big Jim's transportation is an understatement for it turned out that his car had been built in Japan by Honda. I'd heard of Toyota and one of my friends owned an early Datsun, but Honda? For all I knew, Jim could have built the thing.

The car was about the size of a large grape, and Jim, basically, got into it like a guy putting on a shirt. It was tight for me to climb into, also, but the seat was not uncomfortable and the ride was okay when Jim got the car up to speed. Of course, with power coming from a 2 cylinder engine, that took some time. My respect for the car increased once we reached the Interstate where the hum from its 36 horse motorcycle engine sounded as smooth as an electric razor even as our speed reached 70mph. There is something exhilarating about traveling that fast in a tin-box that's a mere squeak over ten feet in length. Add in the fact that the car was carrying two men whose combined weight equaled a good third of the Honda's approximate 1300 lbs. and one might very well marvel at this overall performance at highway speeds.

Honda introduced this N600 model in Hawaii in 1969. Exactly twenty years later, a grape-colored Civic would become my primary transport! Who would have guessed that I'd finally join the ranks of those causes Big Jim espoused?