

A VENT WINDOW VIEW – In *The Pink Lady*

2012 B. K. Showalter – February

I recently spent thirty minutes in a medical clinic's waiting room where, contrary to many such places in which one must kill time, the supply of magazines was plentiful and the selections up to date. Too often in these areas choices are limited to titles such as *Cosmo*, *Good Housekeeping*, *Food Network* and *Woman's Day*. If ever a car buff happens across a magazine of interest, it is two years out of date and has recently been gummed by a teething tot. This time, however, there was an intact *Hemmings* magazine in the mix; battered and tattered, it nonetheless kept me occupied until the nurse called me in for my physical. Heart rate, weight and blood pressure—all registered numbers that made the doctor happy enough to compliment my efforts to stay healthy.

Personally I believe the real reason for those good numbers had less to do with diet and exercise than with memories of happy days past inspired by the photo of a 1959 Ford ragtop I'd just seen in that old magazine.

The car appeared to be a clone of the *geranium pink* and *colonial white* Ford that Marjorie and I drove on our first CHVA National Tour--Route 66 in 2001.

We were unable to participate in the leg from Chicago to Joplin, but traveled the balance of the tour to road's end in Santa Monica, CA. In spite of its age, our forty-year-old convertible handled the outing as if fresh off a Ford assembly line.

Two years earlier when I found it amid a jumble of blackberry vines, it was in sorry shape. It had no engine and the convertible top had weathered into rags, but for all the vehicle's many dents and twisted bumpers it had not been wrecked. And, surprisingly, in view of the almost non-existent top, the floors were solid.

Needless to say, my wife was not impressed, but when I found the top mechanism was intact, I convinced her that the Ford was worth restoring. Of course, as I wrote a check to the owner, I had no idea how much labor the task would require.

A friend allowed me to store the car in his garage until I could make certain the title was good. Once that was accomplished, I began to disassemble the body to see what had to be done. It soon became clear that removal of all the old paint was a must. Glass, interior trim, the dash, door mechanisms—if it could be unbolted and removed, it was. Next, I called in a favor and trailered the hulk to a friend's shop to be “soda blasted.” Years of dirt, grime, and paint disappeared faster than the Lone Ranger after his shouted “Hi-Ho Silver.” I then trailered the Ford to a body shop where the owner had agreed to rent me a space for it. Along with a bargain-basement price for rent, I agreed to help out around the shop when not working on the convertible.

Lucky for me, half the 13 bays in the building were leased by Mike, another body man. He saved my bacon when the owner nearly died in a car wreck the day after I moved my car into the shop. This resulted in a year of hard labor for me as I helped Mike with his now *12 bay business* by answering the phone, sweeping up, and doing all the grunt work around the place. Finally, with Mike's help, the body was reassembled, painted and made ready for the engine even as the shop we were using was sold. Luckily, the car was ready to be moved to another shop for the engine and tranny installation.

When the Ford was “finished,” I had just enough time to take it for a forty mile test drive before beginning the 1600 mile trek to Missouri to join the Route 66 tour. En route to Joplin we traveled I-80; the car (named “Pink Lady”) carried us through sleet and snow storms. Later, on the tour to Santa Monica, it weathered 100 degree temps as we crossed Arizona. Nothing ever went wrong—well, nothing that duct tape couldn't fix!