

Hitched for Good

Ford pickup and Trillium trailer make a perfect pair for life in the slow lane

One of the great things about living in the backwoods, along the Gull River, near Minden, Ont., is that you just never know what you're going to encounter next. So, when our neighbour, Russ, shouted over to us, "You've got to come and see this," we didn't hesitate for a minute and went right over.

My husband, Stan, and I stopped dead in our tracks as we rounded the corner of our neighbour's garage. Much to our amazement, there was a beautiful

antique Ford truck with a matching travel trailer, both painted an eye-catching burgundy.

Russ introduced us to Mel Rouse and his wife, Ruth, who owned the rig and are members of the Road Hazards Car Club based in Orangeville, Ont.

It didn't take long for my curiosity to kick in, and I began asking Mel questions, which he was thrilled to answer.

Originally the pickup was a bright orange, with a black grille and hood. The 1934 Ford was

purchased in the United States and brought to Pine Harbour, which is situated near Tobermory, Ont. The truck's first Canadian owner was a Mr. Robinson, who had bought it to haul building supplies.

In 1950, a cousin of Mel's purchased it and drove it for a couple of years. Mel's grandfather and father then bought the truck in 1952, and they put it to good use as a work truck.

Then, another cousin of Mel's used it to haul construction mate-



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rials for his new cottage. When the cottage was finished, the trusty old Ford was stored away in a steel barn, near Williamsford, Ont. In 1983, Mel purchased the pickup truck. However, before too long, it got sidelined again, this time in Mel's garage. Eventually, Mel got around to restoring it, and he drove it for about ten years.

In 2003, Mel performed a complete frame-off restoration and paint job. The entire truck was taken apart piece by piece, painted and then put back together again. Talk about a labour of love! It took ten months to complete, from November 2002 to August 2003. Thankfully, it was ready in time for their daughter's wedding.

It took several years and lots of elbow grease, but the hard-working orange pickup of old had been transformed into a classic antique, encased in a Chrysler Garnet Effect paint job. Garnet Effect?...What can I say, it still looks like a beautiful burgundy to me.

"This old Ford has been a real workhorse," says Mel lovingly. "It's hauled building supplies all over Ontario and survived five generations of Rouse's. It's become part of the family, and like all families, it takes a lot of love and hard work, but it's worth every minute."

Made in Markham the 1975 Trillium trailer didn't come onto the scene until 2006. It was in really good shape, and Mel and Ruth only had to replace some of the wood panelling inside, and reseal the windows. Mel had the trailer painted to match the pickup, making a perfect pair.



Bill's '56 Mercury has clocked more than 200,000 miles.

JUST KEEPS ON TRUCKIN'

Our 1956 Mercury pickup has been our family truck since 1978. It was originally a British Columbia telephone company foreman's truck in Williams Lake, B.C. My friend, Karl Hamson, found it in Abbotsford in 1978, and with components from three other parts trucks, he put it on the road for us.

Its first tour of duty was as a shop truck for our "Old West" store in Chetwynd, B.C. Later, it hauled our daughter Hayley to the Hillhurst United Church in Calgary for her wedding in 1987—and, just like the song says, it got her to the church on time! The old Merc has appeared in several music videos, too, and in a George Fox special on CBC in 1994. George just loved our truck. It's also served as a tow rig for my friend Kenny Gilmour's Top Alcohol dragster, which competes in the National Hot Rod Association's Division Six. The car is driven by Ashley Bart—Canada's only female Top Alcohol dragster driver—and it's always a pleasure to be of service for such a fine racing team.

In 1995, the Merc was stripped down for a complete frame-off rebuild, and with the help of many talented friends, it was reborn in 1994. It's now on its fourth motor—a warmed-up, early 327-Chevy—and has racked up more than 200,000 miles.

These days, the Merc only sees summer duty, as a cruising hot rod, and camper and boat hauler.

Other than that, I just drive it—everywhere, man!

Bill Matheson, Calgary

Now, instead of hauling building supplies to construct cottages, Mel and Ruth take the truck on vacation, trailer in tow. They've covered more than 40,000 miles, travelling to Auburn, Ind., and Baltimore, Md., in the United States and, in Canada, from Niagara Falls to North Bay, Ont. And they've attended many rallies and special events, including the Bean

Festival in Arthur, Ont., and Bol-erama in Omemee, Ont.

"We had no idea how much the truck would enhance our lives," said Mel. "We've met so many wonderful people and made new friends as we cruise the scenic highways and generally enjoy life in the slow lane."

*Irene Davidson-Fisher,
Minden, Ont.*