



Tom Haberek wins an award at the Chrysler Employee Motorsport Association car show for Best Vintage Chrysler 300, 1955-1979.

The car of a lifetime

After graduating from high school in 1973 and starting at a county college with a job placement service, **Tom Haberek** saw on a bulletin board that the local post office was accepting applications.

He took the postal exam and the Postal Service soon hired him. He realized he'd need a reliable car to get to the Sterling Heights, MI, postal facility to start work in March 1974.

"So, when I needed a ride to go to work, I bought my Chrysler [on] March 28, 1974," Haberek said, remembering the exact date.

Why *that* car—a black 1970 Chrysler 300 four-door hard top?

"When you're young, you wanna have bucket seats and automatic on the floor. You know, you wanna make it look sporty," he said, noting that he added white wall tires with spoke wheels. "But the thing is, it was a four-door, not a two-door car. It's a family car with a four-door. But I've never seen another car, four-door like *that*."

"Plus," the South Macomb, MI Branch 4374 member added, "the car was fully loaded [with] all the options—power seats, power windows, power

antenna, power trunk release. And it was a Chrysler 300." Haberek cited the Chrysler 300's reputation as one of the fastest cars in the '50s.

The car is larger than a modern sedan. "They call them boats. Big car. I mean, huge," he said. "You know, it's 5 feet wide and 18-and-a-half feet long. The front seats are almost like your couch because it's so big."

In those days, the Postal Service sometimes offered carriers a drive agreement while they were serving as a substitute. "You could use your car to deliver mail on park-and-loop," Haberek said. "So, I did use that car a few times to deliver mail in, because it had air conditioning."

Once a man stopped him on the route and asked if it was his vehicle. "It was such a flashy-looking car at the time," Haberek said, adding that when he said it was, the man responded, "They must pay you good money."

Haberek remained with the Postal Service for 36 years and the Chrysler 300 stayed with him, too, though it stopped being his primary means of transportation. "I didn't drive the 300 so much," he said. "It sat until before I retired."

When he was gearing up to retire in 2010, he decided to take the Chrysler traveling and going to car shows. To do so, he knew he needed to do some work on the car.

"In my garage I took the car apart, took the suspension apart, rebuilt the engine, put it all back together, and then we were able to travel on it," Haberek said. "I've got 30,000 miles on it since then."

Haberek has never been afraid to fix any vehicles, including those of friends and relatives, saying he has general knowledge of working on cars. "I don't know how to do everything on cars, but I can do a lot," he said.

He's done a lot of work in his own garage or a friend's. "I set something up so I could sandblast the front end of the car," Haberek said. "I did a lot of detail. And then I had it repainted."

Haberek bought a '70 Chrysler 300 convertible, replacing all of his car's aftermarket parts back to original Chrysler parts. "I threw mine away, my original stuff," he said, "so I needed that stuff to make it look original again."

He rechromed the bumpers from the spare car and put them on. "And I had a



Haberek works on the car in his garage.

new vinyl top put on it. So, the car right now looks better than new,” he said.

Haberek loves showing the car at various auto shows and competitions. The Detroit area has quite a few events, including the Detroit Autorama, the Woodward Dream Cruise, a car show for Chrysler employees at its tech center, the Motor Muster at Greenfield Village and Henry Ford Museum in Dearborn, the Eyes on Design car show at the Ford House in Grosse Pointe Shores, and the Jammin’ at the Junction Classic Car Show in Roseville, at many of which Haberek has received awards, including Best in Show.

“Local car shows happen a lot,” Haberek said, including at churches or restaurants. “Almost every day of the week, you can find some place in the Detroit area to take your car. Not to get an award, but to just to hang out.”

Sometimes the competition is stiff. “It does get pretty tough. You see some of these cars [and] every nut and every bolt is absolutely perfect,” he said.

The recognition and awards feel good, too. “I’m quite honored, because, like I said, I’ve always liked the car,” he said.

And when attendees at car shows compliment Haberek’s car, he tells them, “Oh, I’ve had it 50 years,” and they seem amazed. “You always find the guys that say, ‘I wish I would’ve kept my car,’ ” he said. “Well, this one, I’m glad I never got rid of it. Because I didn’t realize when I first bought it how popular car shows would be in this time period, you know? So, I’m lucky.”

While at the Detroit Autorama, Haberek’s Chrysler was noticed by a reporter from *Hemmings* magazine, which covers classic, vintage, muscle and street rod cars and has

been published since the 1950s. Two months later, the man saw Haberek and his wife at a different show and approached him. He was impressed with the Chrysler 300 and had sent his editor a photo and wanted to write an article on the car because he loved Haberek’s story.

The article appeared in February 2024, giving specs of the vehicle and detailing how Haberek had used the car to take his wife to her high school prom in 1979 and then in their wedding in 1982, as well as countless concerts and cruising. “That was really exciting,” he said of the feature. “I was just amazed how much recognition that car got last year.”

Sometimes people try to buy it, asking him to name a price. But he’s not interested in selling it. “Nope. I’ve had it too long,” he tells them.

Despite the praise, Haberek says the Chrysler still needs work so he can continue entering it in competitions. “The frame of this car is not in the best shape,” he said. “It’s one of the last things I’d like to do on this thing.”

As far as the hobby of car shows goes, he’s hoping it continues. “I don’t see that much future in it because I think these younger kids do not care about these little cars, you know? It’s like a dying thing right now,” he said. “I’m just glad that I’m able to appreciate it and have a good time at it at this time in history.”

The generation currently owning these cars

has “some kind of thing for the past, and they want to try to relive the past, but they’re not getting any younger,” Haberek said. “I hope there’s a huge future for it. I do.”

The thing that Haberek loves the most is the pride he gets when people look at his car and he can say that he did most of it himself. “All of my friends tell me, ‘Tom, if it wasn’t for you, this car wouldn’t look like it. It still wouldn’t be here.’ If I didn’t take care of it, it would probably be in a junk yard,” he said.

The Chrysler 300, like his identity as letter carrier, has been a part of his life for a half-century. “You know, I could buy another car, but it won’t be something I’ve had since I was 19,” he said. **PR**



Still going strong—Tom and Jan Haberek use the car in their wedding in 1982 (above) and still drive it more than 40 years later.

