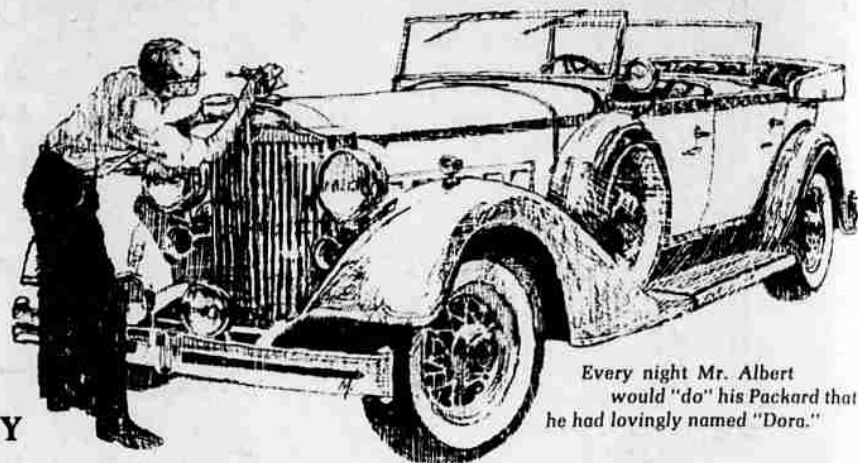


1962
Auto Show

Automobiles Are People!

By KEN PURDY



Every night Mr. Albert would "do" his Packard that he had lovingly named "Dora."

Don't call that car a hunk of steel—she may be somebody's sweetheart!

TO WOMEN, the idea of developing a sense of personal affection for an inanimate thing like an automobile seems weird and inexplicable—but men find it reasonable enough.

Three or four decades ago, when the automobile was comparatively a new factor in our lives, and when the tendency was to keep a car for five, 10 years, or longer, a whole family's attachment to a car could be deep indeed. Father's decision to sell the big high-sided touring car that had carried everyone to a decade's weddings, christenings, funerals, picnics, and unnumbered Sunday "rides" might well bring on a mutiny.

The conviction was real that the car was very nearly as much a living thing as the patient, sway-backed horse it had replaced. After all, each had its whimsies, characteristic faults, and endearing traits. In these days of quick trade-ins there is less of this family affection, but some men still fall in love with a car.

I know a man, for example, who became deeply attached to a '56 Cadillac. After much inner struggling, he sold it last year—and next day phoned the buyer and asked to buy it back. He hadn't been able to sleep all night! The man sold it to him—for \$500 profit!

At the opposite end of the scale: three or four months ago I was talking with Dave Garroway, who is an advanced automobile connoisseur. He asked me whom I would recommend to do a really superior restoration on a 1952 Buick. I asked him why in the world anyone would want to restore a 1952 Buick, a useful enough automobile but certainly no immortal design.

Dave said that one of his friends was hopelessly attached to this '52 Skylark, loved it like a brother, and wanted no other automobile. The car was,

after all, 10 years old and rather the worse for wear. Dave had spirited the car away on a pretext and had had it completely rebuilt mechanically at a cost well into four figures. Now he wanted it completely done over.

We agreed on Gustave Reuter, whose two-man shop in the Bronx, N. Y., produces work that cannot be improved upon. The Buick was finally upholstered and painted as no other 1952 Buick ever was. Dave cheerfully paid Reuter's bill, another four-figure item, and gave his friend's car back to him as a surprise. Garroway's friend owns the most expensive Skylark of all time.

Race-car drivers particularly tend to personalize their cars. An exception was the great Marquis de Portago. Usually he couldn't tell one car from another, yet he did take a dislike to the 3.8 Ferrari. He considered it malevolent and especially ill-disposed toward him. Portago had ample courage but was afraid of the 3.8 and wrote so just before the 1957 Mille Miglia in which he was scheduled to drive one. He was killed in it—he, his passenger, and 10 spectators.

YEARS AGO I knew a man who seemed to care more for his car than for his wife and children. The car was a Packard touring car which he named "Dora." It was a double-cowl phaeton, carrying an extra windshield for the back-seat passengers. Its owner was a man I'll call Mr. Albert, a machinist, a quiet, rather sad man.

He worked 5½ days a week, and every Saturday after lunch he went to the little garage behind his house and began to "do" his Packard. He worked on the car straight through, except for supper, until 10 o'clock at night. On Sunday morning he washed and polished it. After Sunday dinner, he changed

into his good suit, and he and his wife went for a ride, usually not longer than three hours.

Every weekday night, winter and summer, he spent two to three hours in the garage. What was he doing? He was taking care of Dora. I used to watch him by the hour. "Dear Dora," he would say, "there you are, good as new!"

DORA RAN like a watch. She was mechanically so nearly silent that sometimes all I could hear was the crunch of her tires on the gravel as Mr. Albert backed out on Sunday mornings. Now and then on his Sunday drives, Mr. Albert would get caught in a rainstorm. When that happened, he would go into the garage with chamois leathers and dry the car—top and bottom.

He was doing that one cold September night when Dora came off the jack and caught him across the chest with her front axle. He died, they said, instantly. His wife, who had come out to bring him some coffee, said his last words were spoken not to her but to Dora. "Darned old idiot!" he had said to the car, apparently because he was having trouble reaching around something. Then Dora came off the jack.

Mrs. Albert was driven home from the funeral. She sat on the front porch, and when a man came by she called him over and gave the Packard to him. He gave her a dollar, to make the transaction a legal one, and drove it away. Later she told a neighbor that she had made the man promise to destroy the car.

"It's a killer," she said. "I made him promise." Of course, he did nothing of the kind.

I've never forgiven her. She might have thought of me. After all, at one dollar, the Packard was well within my means that year.

COVER:

Ozzie Sweet photographs a family of five (plus poodle) in one of the smart new 1962 cars. For a comprehensive roundup of the new models, turn to page 6. And don't miss the highly entertaining auto story above.

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