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DRIVING

First Cars: Ah, Sweet T-Bird Of Youth

By GAY JERVEY

ONE was an 11-year-old child, so entranced by his first glimpse of it at the 1939 World's Fair that he later sketched the vision from memory. Today, he has both the framed drawing and its inspiration at his Connecticut home. Another was determined to surprise his wife with a 40th birthday present that would remind her of a time when she felt young, adventurous and full of promise. Still others were influenced by a specific movie, a television show, a glimpse of something on the street — or just an overwhelming desire to go as fast as humanly possible.

They come from varying walks of life, from far-flung corners of the country and from different generations, yet they all share the same thing: a love of cars, in most cases very specific cars. And their love borders on obsession.

The 11-year-old was Malcolm Pray Jr., and the object of his desire was a 1936 Delahaye, one of only seven ever made by the French company. Twenty-five years after he first laid eyes on it, Mr. Pray found the Delahaye on Long Island and drove it home to Greenwich, Conn., where he now has a collection of more than 80 vintage automobiles.

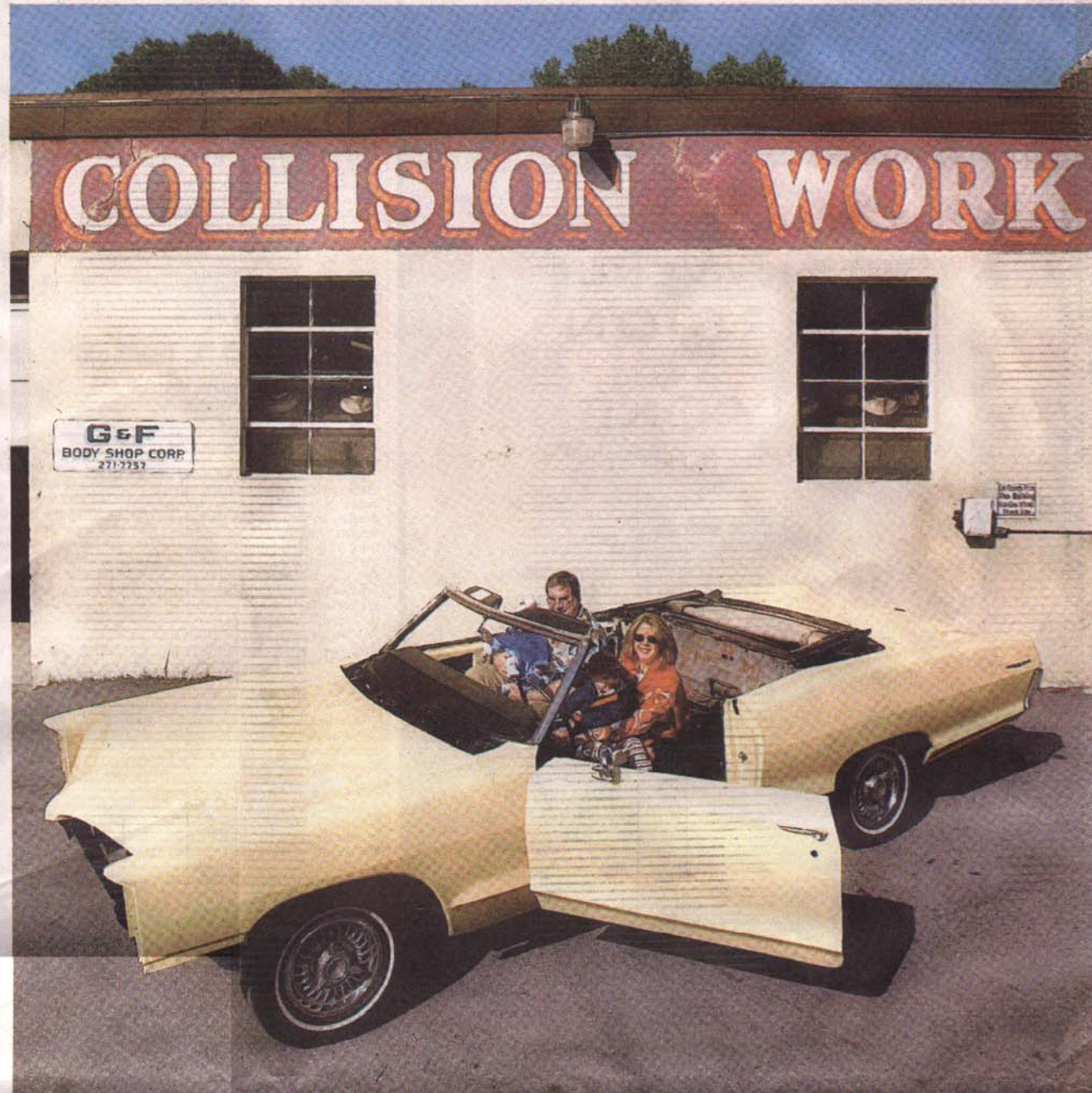
The doting husband is a 44-year-old Manhattan lawyer named Lawrence Savell. His wife, Cathy, dreamed of a 1966 Pontiac Catalina convertible, which she had first talked wistfully about when the two were dating. After searching high and low, Mr. Savell used the Internet to find the exact same car his wife had driven as a high school senior in Massachusetts and presented it to her, complete with the original 1966 license plates and a CD of 1960's songs he had made for her.

"You see a certain car, and you say, 'I want that and I'm not stopping until I get it,'" said Edward Gunyo, a 50-year-old financial consultant in Minneapolis who spent nearly 15 years lusting after the 1963 Buick Electra convertible, which had first mesmerized him at an auto show. In 1978, he finally stumbled upon one, buried in a friend's garage.

"I told the guy that I had to have it," Mr. Gunyo said. "And I gave him my '52 Buick for it." To this day, Mr. Gunyo keeps a \$2 toy model of the Buick, a birthday present in 1963, displayed in a glass case, and from time to time, he takes his Electra out for a drive.

"A lot of this is simply wish fulfillment,"

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TOP DOWN After Cathy Savell grew wistful over the 1966 Pontiac Catalina she drove in high school, her husband, Lawrence, tracked it down for her 40th birthday present.

Fred R. Conrad/The New York Times