

"Retired But Just Beginning To Work"

The year was 1957. If you listen closely, in your mind, you can hear Fats Domino. It was a year that gave birth to the first electric watch, the Frisbee, and Vanna White. But, for me, the sweetest of them all was the birth of my Chevrolet Bel Air convertible. It took 13 years for us to meet, but she was worth the wait. And, it turns out, she was just 30 miles down the road.

Chevrolet began producing the Bel Air in 1955, as a stylish alternative to their more conservative line and as an aggressive competitor to Ford. "The Hot One's Even Hotter" was Chevy's advertising slogan. She is sexy all right, with rear fenders sweeping back to a pair of racy tailfins, rear fender skirts, and hooded headlights. The hood is topped by a pair of half-round nacelles led by small chrome fins that match those on the fenders.

I purchased the Chevy in 1970 for three hundred one dollars (\$301). The body was in great shape except for a rusted out spot in the floor pan behind the driver's seat, which was due to a hole in the top. I drove the Bel Air home, where it was merely admired for 36 years. Now that I am retired, after 31 years with the railroad, my work has just begun. As for the belle, she now has my undivided attention.

I have repaired the top and fortified the floor pan with a steel welded in and fiberglass reinforced patch. It seems stronger now than when it was new. Mechanically, I installed a small block 327, 300-horsepower engine with a high-rise intake manifold and four-barrel carb. It has a 4-speed transmission with positive traction rear end and, of course, new interior and paint.

I am proud to proclaim her the most beautiful belle on Blueberry Hill. No offense, Vanna.

Johnny R. Harris