

Remembering the Life of Bob Wilcox

The Adams Show 2004--that's where I went in search of the man who owned that remarkable red '69 Chevelle I knew from my youth at 75 & 80 Dragway. From the MCC website, I knew his new shop was close to my home and I really wanted someone who was particular to help with the restoration of my '69. You see, I wanted a simple business transaction and I had already selected a body shop; so I simply needed a drive train expert, (or so I thought) to aid in completing the project.

Well, the day after the show, Bob showed up at my place to "inspect" my '69. The litany of things I was doing wrong started right after the "Hello, how are ya!" He didn't even give me the chance to say, "Don't worry, I'll pull the motor and trans." No, instead the car was on his trailer and subsequently on its way to Chevelle heaven. Two days later I got the good news; "O.J., the block and the crank are good, but the rest is junk." Well, I'll tell you, I was pretty stressed. I'm a teacher and my budget is definitely limited. "Lets' go to lunch; my treat;" that started the first of soo many three hour conversations, for which Bob was absolutely famous. He couldn't tell any story in less than an entire afternoon!

We talked of old times at 75&80 and of my goals for this restoration. I hadn't been in a fast car in 25+ years. Needless to say, Bob fixed that! Back to his shop and on a little sojourn we went. Started out pleasant enough, putt-putted up Frederick Road, Rt. 97 North and then on-the ramp to Rt. 70 East. Little did I know that this was his favorite part of his "test ride." We were going over 130 mph. and had made one of Bob's patented low 11-second passes. First time I'd felt that exhilaration in years and I wanted more...much more.

Fortunately, over the next seven years, I was granted many opportunities. But as those of us who knew Bob well, this was only the beginning of his generosity. He rescued my restoration from a less than scrupulous body shop owner (another of my many mistakes), used his considerable knowledge and resources to find "real" parts for my car and worked tirelessly to give me the ride I really wanted. He too wanted a ride in that car.

It was his first frame-off restoration and we made big plans for a time frame my resources would handle. Alas, my ride is still in Chevelle heaven, but the best part of it is complete, waiting patiently as it has since that fateful day in 2004 for completion. It will feature one of Bob's last drive trains and will be, God willing, dedicated to his craftsmanship, uncompromising standard and genuine love of Chevelles.

Bob was also only too willing to give lessons in workmanship. I "volunteered" to help him on occasion, because as anyone who's seen the shop knows, Bob needed help on occasion. The first job I did was a battery cable installation. Well, Bob looked at it, said "ok" and then did the entire job again, explaining each little mistake I had made and its implications. He wanted to make sure that there was "no way possible" for this installation to cause a short or a fire. Bob knew fire all too well as one caused the loss of his 70 LS-6. Over the years, I worked with Bob on several occasions and I knew I had arrived when he brought one car to my home garage and asked me to finish the last parts of the restoration. Of course, he came over to check on the progress...and correct the details.

Nobody I know or have ever met has known Chevelles like Bob. Nobody cared for customers' satisfaction like Bob and those of us who are left to carry on his tradition know just how difficult our task will be.

But Bob would want us to carry on...he was in the process of restoring his beautiful '69 race car and had built a nasty big block for it. He was also in the process of restoring one of his favorite cars of all time, and believe it or not, it was not a Chevelle! It was a Pontiacat least it was still GM. He would say, "Habits are formed early; do the job right and to the best of your ability, and HAMMER DOWN!"

Sidebar:

A last little known fact; in the years that transpired, I decided to re-power my other classic, a 55 Chevy. The last motor Bob ever completed for a customer was not a big block, but instead a naughty little small block that we paired with one of his patented, fully rollerized "Super M-22's." It will be on display at the MCC Adams show next year and will remain a lasting tribute to our friend. The week before he died, for my birthday, Bob had given me an original front emblem for the car. Bob was just that kind of generous to his friends and he wanted me to have original parts for my 55. Bob even contributed to this project from beyond this life. How? I received a call from one of his many friends; this particular one is in Ohio, who found an original 55 bird. Bob never told me he was looking for it, but the car really needed it. Those who really knew him also knew of his love for tri-five Chevys; as these were his first hot-rods.

Till next we meet again, my friend.

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