

# A fifty-five year wait!

By Leon Mills

***I was born*** and raised in the central valley until 1998. I've restored several early cars and pre 1890 bicycles. In 1965 I was an 18 year old working in a local market, attending college, and trying to pay off my 1963 Impala before joining the Air Force in late 1966. An elderly couple kept hinting that they were going to bring their granddaughter by the store to meet me. They finally did and it was a match made in Heaven as Sharon and I have been married for 54 years. At that time her Uncle Austin had a red and white Starliner that he had purchased from Leduc Ford in Turlock, CA, and the Starliner was his automotive pride for special occasions. The Starliner was so RED that it wasn't hard to envy owning the car someday. Body type is obviously coded 63A with color code JM1 for Monte Carlo Red and Corinthian White. Trim type is 35 for vinyl and red broadcloth. The Starliner has aftermarket vinyl seat covers front and back now, hoping they are there to protect the original covers and not because the originals are worn beyond repair. It was assembled in the San Jose, CA, plant on March 16<sup>th</sup>, 1960 and is the 50,852nd of the 68,641 Starliners produced that year.

***As time*** passed the Starliner was used less but was faithfully maintained as evidenced by the detailed Log Book Austin kept and I now have, and it was always garaged away from the Central California burning sun. Due to an increasing lack of use, the car began to fight back with brake issues, rough running episodes at stop lights, and a minor accident by a grandson show-boating for a group of young ladies. The Starliner was repaired, still driven some, but with Austin's passing in the early 2000's, the Starliner ended being parked. Austin and I had previously talked about me purchasing the car someday, but he wasn't ready and I was still looking at an empty piggy bank.

***Over the*** next couple of years, the fate of the Starliner was discussed, but the family was unwilling to part with their Dad's car, so eventually it was parked in a small tin shed, mostly out of the weather, but definitely out of the harsh California sun. That was about 2002 and the last time the Starliner was driven.

**Spring** of 2020, the family decided to do something with the car and asked if I was interested? YES, of course, 53 years after joining the family, it was coming to a new home in Reno, NV, where we now live. With the Pandemic in full swing, it took a while to find a transport company to pick the car up. Finally, one called back, said they had a delivery from Reno to Modesto and could pick up and haul back the Starliner. It took half a day to uncover the Starliner, to get the tires aired up, and moved from the shed for loading. Reno Towing sent an operator that was a diehard car guy and he was as excited to haul the Starliner back to Reno as I was to have him. He said his arm got tired returning waves to passing motorists. Looking at the log, the Coker wide whites only had 300 miles on them before being parked. They all held air and were replaced with new after we got the car running again.

**It is** not a true “survivor car” because of the repair and minor paint work needed after the accident, so now simply referred to as our “garage find”. While not as pristine as some of the amazing survivor cars seen in the national *GALAXIE* magazine, it did buff out well. I use Griot’s car care products so the red is bright enough to again catch the eyes of true car lovers. Mechanically the Starliner was completely gone through. Stagnant time erodes condition and performance. The usual was replaced or rebuilt like brakes and lines, the Cruiseomatic, front and rear springs, steering components, and ALL wiring. Critters had been living under the air cleaner, and fortunately had left the under hood wiring alone. The intent during refurbishing was to keep as much as possible original, and to maintain the look of the era. A few modern safety and electrical upgrades were allowed like a dual master cylinder, a better intake and carburation, better ignition, all mostly hidden by the *large* yellow air cleaner. It was decided to pull the engine for ease of detailing the firewall, and was found to need an overhaul in spite of the 63,300 original miles. It was at that time that we found the engine must be an early FE engine as there is a spring-loaded button under the timing cover to hold the cam in place instead of the more common shims and retaining plate. For those that have worked on the 352 FE engines, they know the intake manifold alone weighs like 85 lbs. (My guess), so I installed a lighter aluminum intake for better flow and other than the painted aluminum valve covers, and a hidden power cutoff for theft protection, the remaining engine compartment is close to the 1960 stock appearance.

**The interior** is still as found except for cleaning, adding new seat belts, new wiring, and re-finishing the steering wheel. The steering wheel had a faux leather cover that I was hoping was there to protect the original finish. Not the case! The wheel is made up of the inner steel structure, then an outer black hard rubber form, then a soft color coat, and finally a thick clear plastic covering. The wheel had several cracks typical to that style of steering wheel and the clear coat was missing several chunks. I decided to repair the wheel by first chipping away the remaining clear coat, then repairing the cracks by first opening them up with a small Dremel tool and then filling with Por 15 Epoxy Putty after watching the process on YouTube. The Epoxy Putty comes in two pliable strips, cut off the amount you need, work the two strips until a consistent color, then firmly press into the cavities and let harden. The wheel is divided into thirds with the top third being smooth in front with finger grips on the back. The other two sections have small grooves in front with the same finger grips on the back. It took about 40 hours to strip the clear coat, fill the little imperfections, sand them down, prime, and repeat the process until the bottom 2/3's of the wheel was ready for a color coat. There are 103 grooves in each section for a total of 206 little grooves to be filled and sanded.

**At the** time of this article, it is still a couple of months before the annual Hot August Nights car show here in Reno showcasing 6000 cars. The show is still scheduled this year and it is hoped not cancelled like last year for the reason we all despise. The Starliner is entered into several HAN events and should show well as there haven't been many '60 Starliners at previous events.

It is also entered into a local event prior to HAN, in a small community near Reno where the daughters of the original owner will be present to showcase the car for the first time since being given a second chance. Especially fitting as, it is Father's Day Weekend.



**Shed Storage**



**New tires ready for the Sundial hubcaps**

*Leon Mills*