

## A VENT WINDOW VIEW – **Half-a-Ton of Fun**

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Trucks provided many memorable moments in my life, including some I'd as soon forget. Most of the rigs I saw when growing up on a Missouri farm were small pickups that folks used as personal transport as much as for light hauling. Those included a 1937 International and a 1940 Ford, half-tonners that should have been limited to a quarter-ton. For larger loads, folks hired *custom* truckers equipped with ton-and-a-half or two-ton rigs. Those usually had an *Omaha Standard* solid-sided grain box with brackets that made it possible to convert it into a slat-sided livestock hauler.

My dad never owned a truck which meant the family car was often pressed into service as a cargo hauler. Eventually he learned that this is a poor choice when the payload includes a healthy Duroc piglet.

The first pickup that became a part of my personal transportation history came years later, well after I had established a household of my own. The bargain-priced '52 Studebaker freed up our sedan for family use when I was at work. That truck was a sturdy piece of iron that needed little care until winter temperatures made early morning engine starts a misery. A dipstick heater solved that problem at home, but a shift that ended late at night sometimes led to difficulties when it was time to leave work.

Eventually this led to the purchase of a 1960 Falcon Ranchero and the sale of the Studi. The little Ford suited my needs perfectly until the transmission tail-shaft housing snapped. At that juncture, I also realized that a single-seat vehicle was not roomy enough for me and three kids when the sedan was unavailable, so that Falcon was my last truck until the kids were no longer underfoot.

Finally, in 1979, I acquired an almost new 1979 El Camino, a trade-in by a former Floridian who found the lightweight Chevy unsuited for daily use on the fog-dampened hills of San Francisco. That truck became one of my all-time favorite rides. Its two-toned light blue color gave it eye appeal, while the handling and V-6 economy made it a delight on long drives as well as my daily flatland commute on Oakland's Nimitz Freeway.

Sadly, at 43,000 miles the vehicle wore out—not in just one area, but all over. The V-6 got an overhaul that scarcely improved its performance even as the transmission began to fail. Dashboard gauges had long since gone “offline” so, when the a/c failed, I sold the rig. A day or so later, I stumbled upon a '68 Ranchero with a good 302 and a solid tranny. It lacked an A/C, but that vehicle provided great service around town and on several long haul trips for years.

Then, when my mother-in-law moved from her three-bedroom house into a senior apartment center, she gifted us several pieces of nice furniture and I decided we needed a roomier, air-conditioned rig for the roundtrip between Oregon and Iowa.

The '68 Ranchero quickly sold, and I soon found and purchased a 1996 six-cylinder F-150 short-bed that had once been utilized by a utility firm. It was built for heavy loads, but its six-cylinder engine made it economical enough for daily use and for hauling loads of compost and dirt for my in-house gardener. Plus, there is something elementally satisfying in a “real” truck-based rig rather than a design crafted from a two-door family sedan. Yes, a real truck is more difficult to climb into and out of, but good visibility and plenty of interior space are pluses for an aging driver. Just don't let someone talk you into hauling too heavy a load. What goes on must come off, and whether it must be scooped or lifted, it can ruin a man's affection for his rig.