

A VENT WINDOW VIEW HALF-TON HAULERS

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The popularity of elderly pickup trucks continues to rise among collectors who often spend goodly sums to restore them to *like new* condition. Meanwhile, the new ones being built look so *Ritzy* their owners are reluctant to use them for hauling any kind of dirty or greasy cargo that may leave permanent stains or scratches on the new truck's bed. Whether restored or new, if their owners utilize them (as God intended) to haul anything harder than a boiled egg the *cargo* must be swaddled in soft coverings such as the "quilted" blankets used by furniture movers.

Of course there are those like me who utilize a pickup more or less as a tool that must be kept operationally trustworthy, one that does not look so bad that some next door neighbor wants to call in the cops to shut down what appears to be an unlicensed junkyard.

In truth, my pickups have run the gauntlet in terms of looks and mechanical condition. The first pickup I managed to acquire was a red 1953 Studebaker half-ton, a vehicle that offered some truly desirable qualities such as being constructed of steel that did not dent unless slammed with something heavier and harder than a sledgehammer.

Its six cylinders and sturdy frame gave it the ability to handle jobs such as pulling stumps or pulling Sherman tanks out of a mud hole. Yes, that was a plus, but with those qualities came a trip that treated passengers and cargo to a ride that suggested how popcorn in a hot skillet probably feels. Its six-cylinder engine was so coldblooded that wintertime starts in the midst of a typical Midwestern January stressed the truck's battery and my patience.

In fact, since I had to park it outside at night where it faced below freezing temps as well as a daily four a.m. engine start I soon acquired a *dip-stick* heater. That unit not only warmed the oil enough to make engine starts easier, it also helped warm the coolant enough that the defroster actually helped clear the windshield of frost while the heater warmed the driver.

The Studebaker boasted some additional features such as heavy duty springs and tires that looked as if they belonged on an ancient Peterbilt. I seldom loaded it with anything heavy enough to stress its worn shocks, the attributes that made it a workhorse *hauler*. Unfortunately those same features gave it a ride that rivaled the comfort level provided by the steel-wheeled hayrack we had utilized back on the farm.

The need to muscle the vehicle into parking spaces and its lack of comfort and helpful features during cold weather led me to swap it for a 1960 Falcon "Ranchero." That little machine provided a much softer ride and was small enough to fit into my one-car garage. Overall, that little truck made my early morning departures for work during winter months much easier.

Eventually, my appreciation of that unit led me to purchase a 1979 El Camino when I began to remodel a house I'd purchased after transferring to Oakland, CA. The Chevrolet was a comfortable ride in comparison with the earlier trucks I'd had and its two-tone light blue exterior was eye-catching to say the least. After another transfer, this time to Oregon, the unit's six-cylinder engine and several other elements began to fail; I traded that little truck for a 1989 Caprice. The full-sized sedan had served with the highway patrol of some Western state and was equipped with more *go* power than anything I'd ever driven; its heavy duty transmission and powerful engine made it a great road car. I put many miles on it before beginning the restoration of two—yes, "two," 1963 Chevy convertibles. I'd picked them up to play with during my upcoming retirement.

Yep, you guessed it; I soon realized that I needed another pickup to haul car parts and tools around town while restoring the convertibles. By then I was retired, but with my growing interest in restoring older vehicles, I found a '68 Ford Ranchero that needed a facelift. Eventually, in need of a *real* truck, I swapped the Ranchero for the '96 F-150 that still serves as my daily driver.

Warning!!! Any retiree who owns a pickup will never be short of friends needing something hauled; *my advice--don't forget to bring your 2-wheeler and some quilted blankets!*