

Remembering Bob Stevens

CARS & PARTS

Roadworthy Driving a *Dream Car*

Featuring
Corvette

FIRST GEN VALUES
C7 UPGRADES
SLEEK ZR1



ALSO INSIDE:

- GTO HISTORY
- 2015 MUSTANG PREVIEW

IF THE DATE ON YOUR LABEL IS **JUN 14**, IT'S TIME TO RENEW.

READY TO EXPIRE?

VOLUME 57, ISSUE 2
APRIL 2014

CARS & PARTS

OPTIMA CHALLENGE





BOB STEVENS

(1945-2014)

WE SAY FAREWELL TO A FRIEND AND TRUE ENTHUSIAST

THE AUTOMOTIVE WORLD RANG IN THE NEW YEAR WITH THE SAD REALIZATION THAT ONE OF ITS MEMBERS HAD PASSED.

Bob Stevens began as the editor for *Cars & Parts Magazine*, starting back in 1979 when he answered an ad in *Detroit News*. His career spanned the next three decades and carried him to numerous shows and events and into some of the most sought-after corporate office spaces by journalists.

Bob's connections over the years had afforded him not only opportunities, but also friendships with many movers and shakers in the automotive world. His enthusiasm was infectious and it was evident he was still as excited about autos as the first day on the job back in '79. Not an easy task when you are blessed enough to make your livelihood from a hobby that you love.

Enthusiasts the world over and

we at Amos Press will be forever grateful for Bob's years of service. His contributions through images and text and his friendly smile were genuinely heartfelt. His passion shone through the words that he wrote and we've asked several of Bob's friends and companions to share some of their favorite memories of Bob as a tribute to the man who gave so much of his life for the automotive hobby. To be sure, he loved every minute of it and, in his own words, "I'd do it all over again!"

JOHN GUNNELL

(author and former editor of *Old Cars Weekly*)

Bob actually got the first commercial old car writing job I

applied for in 1978. I had been a car club editor and if I recall, Bob wrote for some type of GM house organ. He was more of a professional then, and always was. I think that I first met him at the AACA Fall National Meet at Hershey, Pennsylvania. We were competitors and all, but we were always friendly.

Bob was a Vietnam military photographer and always told great war stories. One time he was in a helicopter that was shot down and he was reported dead. His mom was very surprised when he called her after waking up in a hospital.

Another time his camera strap got stuck in tank treads and he was nearly crushed. A third time he was taking pictures on a bridge when a



ABOVE Bob loved Corvettes, starting with his father's Roman Red '60. Bob later owned this dual-carbed four-speed version.

shot rang out and the bullet smashed his camera that was hanging from his neck. He also liked to tell about the time he was in a foxhole and the Viet Cong charged and ran right over them. When he poked his head out, they were charging back the other way and again ran right over him.

Towards the ends of our careers we became better friends. We would often see each other at the St. Ignace, Michigan, car show. Bob was a Michigan native and he and his wife would meet relatives there.

In the late '90s, we went to Germany together as part of a Mercedes-Benz press trip. We were talking so much in the airport in Chicago that we nearly missed the plane.

He was a prolific writer, but always a very humble man. He had the look of an old school newspaper man. He had a nice car collection. I visited his home one time when I bought my '53 Pontiac Catalina from Leo Gephart and picked it up at his son-in-law's home in Dayton. The next morning, I was at *Cars & Parts* borrowing some duct tape and baling wire.

I believe that Bob was a little bit

older than me. He looked forward very much to retirement and was jealous when I quit my job in 2008. He hung in there a few more years. I can't believe he's gone. He has many friends in the hobby.

WEST PETERSON

(Fellow editor at *Cars & Parts* and *Cars & Parts Corvette* with Bob)

Bob was probably one of the most, if not THE most enthusiastic person on this planet when it came to collector cars. I have never met another person more in love with doing his job of writing, photographing and participating in the antique car hobby, and certainly no one better at doing it. I learned an incredible amount from him in the four short years I worked side by side with him at Amos Hobby Publishing. I consider him one of my best friends, will never forget the countless lunches we had together, and thoroughly enjoyed traveling with him to shows. I was proud to have him as a passenger with me on the 2007 Glidden Tour to Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. If there is one person who I'd pick to travel across country, Bob would probably be the man.

KEN NEW

(former art director for *Cars & Parts*)

Suited-up in our corduroy sports coats, luggage in hand, Bob and I flew into Las Vegas several years ago to pick up a 1959 Edsel convertible at the Imperial Palace Auto Museum. Bob had arranged to buy the car and he and I would cruise back to Ohio via historic Route 66.

Our plans headed south out of Vegas across the Hoover Dam and into Kingman, Arizona, where we would lap onto Route 66 and head east. Additional plans called for photos and notes along the way, which would serve as fodder for stories in upcoming issues of *Cars & Parts* magazine.

The planning had started several months prior to our flight west, mostly by Bob, as I was sort of a tag-a-long. We touched down in Vegas and made our way to the museum where the white with black top convertible had sat for quite some time among a herd of several hundred collector cars. In fact, it had sat too long unattended – something



ABOVE The Cars & Parts staff (Bob Stevens in cap with sunglasses, behind the car) stand with Peggy Sue, a 1957 Chevrolet Bel Air the magazine restored and gave away in 1992.

that we had given no thought to whatsoever. Of course, we knew it would be a toss of the coin as to whether it was capable of delivering a couple of young bucks back to Ohio, but we headed towards Hoover Dam anyhow.

We had barely made it out of town when the transmission began to slip and lurch completely out of touch with the engine. The Edsel sat in one place so long the transmission fluid had pooled in the lower section, drenching the lower portion of the seals while leaving the upper parts dry as a bone – a combination that invited trouble.

We had barely made the Hoover when Eddie stubbornly refused to go a step farther so Bob coasted her to the side of the road. Out of the car for a couple hours, we scratched our heads and wondered if we should abandon our plans, at least I did. Did Bob? I soon found out. “Get in the car Ken. I’m going to give it a try,” he said sternly and off we lurched and managed to coast into Kingman, Arizona, by nightfall and find a motel.

Next morning, Bob got on the

phone to make contact with a local Cars & Parts reader who several months earlier had offered his hand in case we needed help near Kingman. The guy had told Bob he was thinking about opening an auto shop but hadn’t made up his mind as to what he would concentrate on. But Bob called him anyway. Guess what? He had settled on transmission repair and had just opened his doors a few blocks away.

We wobbled to the shop, his guys changed the trans fluid; tightened a few pan bolts and we were back on Route 66 with a satchel of hand tools and a rebuilt fuel pump that I had rescued from a box of junk at home. Not an Edsel guy at all, I have to this day no idea how that pump came into my possession. I had given it to Bob a month or so before our flight west.

Back on Route 66, we headed through the neatest, unspoiled section of old 66. Top down, we enjoyed the desert, trucked through Hackberry and rolled into Seligman by evening where we spent the night. The next day, we hummed along with Bobby Troup’s “Get Your Kicks On Route 66” song making our way to Winslow

where we overnighted in the famous Wigwam Motel, a courtyard of cement teepees constructed many years ago and still attracting guests several decades later. Off to Gallup, Albuquerque, and into Texas with a stop in Amarillo over the next few days, and things were looking good! That night, we phoned home to find out we were needed back home and make it snappy!

Into Missouri next, we decided to speed on into the night as the rancid smell of gasoline burped from under the hood. We rambled on to a motel. It was dark and we were tired, so we decided to wait until morning and weigh our options again. The fuel pump had gone south and Bob, never a dirt-under-his-fingernails guy, was ready to toss in the towel. My chance to shine had finally arrived! Enter the satchel of tools and that salvaged fuel pump. I had it bolted on in 30 minutes and we were headed home again without a further belch of bad breath from Eddie.

Looking back, Bob was always (well almost) the optimist at every turn of Route 66. I figure he’s up there in heaven grinning like a possum waiting



IMAGE: EARL DUTY

ABOVE Food and storytelling came easy for Bob. Here Jim Hinckley of Kingman, Arizona, listens intently to one of his adventures over a breakfast meal.



RIGHT Earl Duty and Bob grab a bite on one of their adventures together.

on the day when I'll join him and we'll recount that fabulous trip we made down Route 66.

LANCE MILLER
(Co-owner Carlisle Events)

My memories are short and concise about Bob Stevens. Just about every time I saw Bob he always had a camera around his neck, in fact he wasn't only an incredible photographer and storyteller but he was a genuinely great person. Bob was someone that you could look in the eye and immediately know he was a "good one". When I heard of Bob's passing, it truly saddened me. The car community along with Bob's friends and family truly lost someone special. Rest in peace, Bob, and please give my father a hug on my behalf.

EARL DUTY
(Long-time *Cars & Parts* contributor)

I knew Bob better than most. Our last road trip was 16 days traveling the west in a 1960 Edsel. Bob Stevens was my friend and my most memorable

road trip with Bob was when he and I caught a flight from Ohio to Sacramento, California, in December of 2009. The purpose of the trip was for Bob to purchase a White 1963 Studebaker Hawk he had found online.

Upon arrival, the owner presented us with (in his words) a "slight problem". The white '63 was currently disabled (it was sitting in a shed on cinder blocks). Slight problem you say? "But I have a solution", said the gentleman. "See that blue '63 Studebaker over there, I think it's roadworthy enough to get you back to Ohio." Looking back, Bob lucked out again.

Bob asked me, "think it'll make it"? My answer, "we'll have to make it work!" The Hawk ran perfectly. One of the white-knuckle parts of that trip was when I was powering the old ride through the "Grapevine" into L.A. (late at night), while trying to stay alive in L.A. traffic. On our way back east, we encountered a snowstorm in Kingman, Arizona, that almost put a stop to our trip. Ten inches on the ground, and more on the way.

We made the decision to "plow

ahead" not knowing the extent of how long we could be stranded in Kingman. At times, we were down to 10 miles per hour on the interstate with the wind blowing hard, and Bob with his head out of the passenger window navigating by yelling, "go left a couple of feet, you're going off the road." Needless to say, the wipers and defroster on the Studebaker were less than perfect.

It was basically like that from Kingman to Gallup, New Mexico, where we stopped for the night. And as Bob's luck would have it again, there was one room left at the inn! Bob had luck with old cars and road trips like I have never before witnessed. We just always made it home. The trip concluded with just a few minor repairs to the old car. All of which were off the highway, and in parking lots.

There is one person that cannot be left out. Dahlia Stevens has been Bob's devoted wife throughout most of his journey in life. Her undying commitment to Bob allowed him to fulfill his lifelong



dream. On thousands of trips to swap meets, she would act as pack mule for all the automotive parts and pieces Bob would just have to buy, because Bob's thinking was "someday I will own a car, to which that part will fit." I personally watched him spend \$800 to buy a "Banjo" steering wheel at Hershey. Being a bit naïve in the early days of our travels, I made the statement "Bob, you don't have a car to put that wheel on?" His answer, "I know, but someday I will." Kudos Dahlia, for a lifetime of loyalty. You are one special person. Until we meet again. I will miss my friend.

RALPH KRAMER

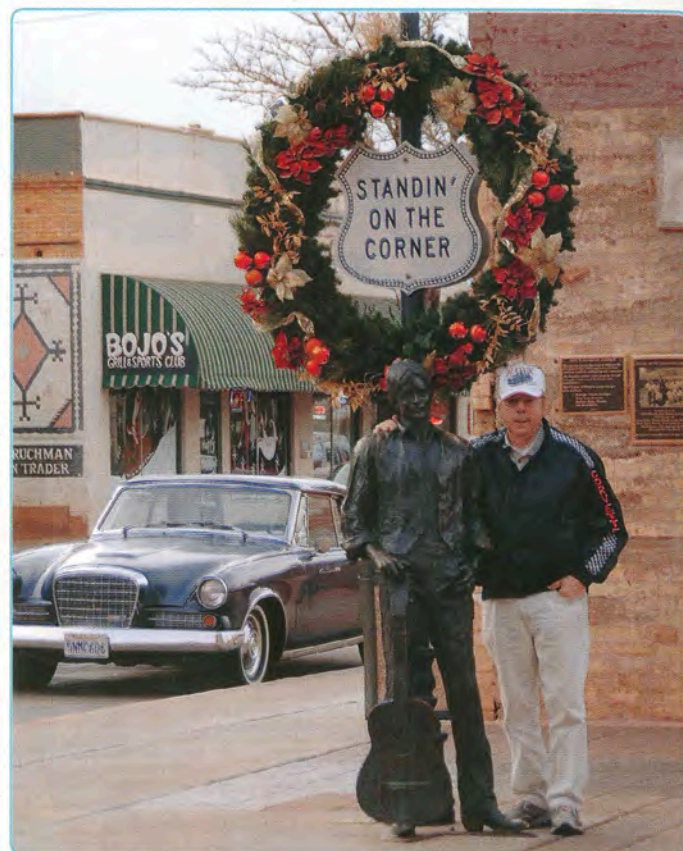
(Retired Chevrolet PR Director)

Bob Stevens gone! Say it isn't so. Bob was one of the really good guys of the American autowriter fraternity, and the fastest wordsmith. How did he crank out so much copy month after month, year after year, and still wear a grin at the end of the day? Bob left a Chevrolet editing

gig in the late '70s for a new job at *Cars & Parts*, which was about when I joined the Chevy PR staff. For the next 15 years, he was a good friend and valued counselor.

He knew Chevy and he knew the nuts and bolts of new product. And he always answered the phone. But old cars really turned him on. I remember when baby blue Peggy Sue, the restored '57 Bel Air, was first a dream and then a shell. Finally, she was finished. Bob wondered how to get it noticed beyond the readership of *Cars & Parts*. At Chevy, we were prepping cars for an east coast media day at the Pocono Raceway.

Hordes of autowriters would be wringing out and writing up the new stuff from all the carmakers. Why not add Peggy Sue to the Chevy line-up? We did. Bob's baby was a really big hit with everybody – almost. As I recall, someone compared 45-year-old Peggy Sue very favorably with our brand-new Lumina. Not everybody at Chevy was amused. To know Bob is to know what he did. He apologized, with a grin.



BRAD BOWLING

(Former editor of *Cars & Parts*)

As an editor, writer, and researcher, Bob Stevens was an unstoppable one-man factory. When I worked alongside him for three years at *Cars & Parts* magazine, I sometimes wondered just how many millions of words and thousands of articles Bob had written about the automobiles he truly loved. Because *Cars & Parts* had his fingerprints and sweat on every page for decades, Bob was an A-list celebrity in the old car world – the Tom Cruise of the vintage iron community – and he cherished the friendships that exposure brought him.

When Bob retired, I was happy for him, knowing that the weight of the deadline was off his shoulders and that he could spend more time with his wife Dahlia and the wonderful collection of vintage cars he had been assembling throughout his long career. He deserved it, and I know he appreciated that too-short period before his passing. I learned a lot about writing and research from Bob and had a great time doing it. ■

ABOVE A planned stop on many of Bob's western adventures found Bob "standing on the corner in Winslow, Arizona."