

COLLECTOR CLASSICS

Couple lovingly restores car used on first date

Absolute Heaven on B.C.'s Sunshine Coast is home to Penns' 1957 Corvette retirement project

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Doug Penn raised three children before retiring as the deputy fire chief for the City of Burnaby and moving to Sechelt on the Sunshine Coast.

His destination was Absolute Heaven: that is the Absolute Heaven Oceanfront Suites and Spa B&B that he and his wife Doreen created for their life after retirement.

They brought with them the 1957 Corvette that Doug has owned since 1976. That car conveyed them on their first date.

"Her father thought I was rich driving such a nice car," Doug recalls.

Once they had completed renovations on their B&B, which includes two large private suites, the couple turned their attention to the Corvette which had been stored for 33 years.

They budgeted \$40,000 for the project. But once it was started, they decided to do a complete body-off-the-frame restoration. These cars are rare as only 6,339 of the 1957 Corvette were built.

Doug had loved the early Corvettes since buying his first 1957 model in Utah in 1968.

"I paid \$975 for the car and sold



Doug Penn with his 1957 Corvette at the his B&B in Sechelt. The beautiful styling that characterized the vehicle is enhanced by the black paint with silver accents.

it two years later for \$2,000 and thought I had made a fortune," he recalls.

In 1976, he was contacted by a university classmate who had moved to

San Jose, Calif. His friend had spotted another '57 Corvette advertised in the local newspaper.

It belonged to a man's son who had moved to Montana and his dad

wanted it out of the garage.

Doug paid \$2,800 for the Corvette which had been a show car at one time and with much of the drive train and suspension chrome plated.

The car was powered by a 427-cubic-inch engine and a Turbo 400 transmission from a 1966 Corvette. It had Recaro racing seats, air shocks and drag slicks so it probably was run at the drag strip.

Doug brought the car to Canada and drove it for a few summers while he was still single and then put it into storage after he and Doreen started a family.

"I remember taking my two sons, Craig and Tom, for a ride with the top off when they were very young and they hung on tight for fear of flying out of the car," he says.

He credits friend Larry Nygard with helping to get the restoration project started and moving forward.

Travis Brown of Sharp Touch Restorations in Maple Ridge ironed out the fibreglass body that proved to be very rough and showing the effects of a few collisions over the years.

More than 115 feet of fibreglass mat and 17 gallons of resin were used to get the fibreglass body into perfect condition.

The mechanical work, including the installation of a 350-cubic-inch Chevrolet V8 crate motor and Turbo 350 automatic transmission, was done by Laurie Miller of Super Sports Motors in Pitt Meadows.

The car is painted in its original Onyx Black colour with Inca Silver coves. With the exception of the motor and transmission, the car is factory correct.

Doug's job was to find and acquire all the original parts necessary to put the car back into better-than-new condition.

The reassembly went perfectly as Doug had labelled and numbered all the parts he had stored on racks in his garage.

"The car is phenomenal. It's perfect. In the paint, you can see the reflection of cars all the way across a parking lot," Doug says of the results.

"Both my sons have driven the car and they joke about me never selling the car as they want it to stay in the family."

The restored Corvette is a popular attraction for guests at Absolute Heaven Oceanfront B&B.

"Everyone who stays here is pretty well blown away by the car," Doug says.

One guest from Germany went home and made a coffee-table book of photos featuring the car and the property which he sent to the Penns.

Would he do it again? Doug says yes, because it is a car that has sentimental value.

But the final tally for the restoration was way over budget and he knows he could have bought one already restored for far less money. He rationalizes having his car restored this way:

"The experience was so much fun and I got exactly what I wanted."

He and Doreen have plans to drive the restored car on a tour of the old U.S. Route 66.

"I promised Travis Brown, who did the bodywork and paint, that the car wouldn't become a trailer queen."

They plan to drive and show the car locally and attend the Coasters Car Club annual Sleepy Hollow Rod Run in Sechelt on the first weekend in August while their better-than-new Corvette will continue to be a feature at their Absolute Heaven Oceanfront Suites and Spa B&B.

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