

Au Revoir mon Studebaker! *Farewell to the car of my boyhood dreams*

Rory Van Tuyl
September, 2011

For a boy growing up in 1950s America, there was no object of desire more attractive than the elegantly-styled cars of the era. Fords, Chevys, T-Birds, Corvettes; Chryslers and Caddies tricked out with sweeping fins - all of these excited my boyish lust for elegance on wheels! But the most desirable by far, the quintessential masterpiece of the car designer's art was, and still is, the 1953-54 Studebaker Starliner. This graceful conveyance, the most artful and aerodynamic design of the era, simply radiated sophistication as it seemed to be speeding along, even while standing still. Never mind that at the age of ten I had no license! I wanted this car! The only thing that turned me on half as much was Audrey Hepburn in *Roman Holiday*. Here's what it looked like in a promotional illustration of the time:



And so, when I got a job and bought my first car in 1962, it was only natural that I should choose a 1953 Studebaker Starliner. A well-worn 1953 specimen with oxidized paint caught my eye on a used car lot in Santa Clara, California. The price was right (\$350). I saw through the wear and tear to the beauty that lay below. I was hooked. Thanks to an easy-terms loan from my mom, I became a Studebaker owner at last. I drove it to work, I took girls out in it, I drove it on the hills of San Francisco and all the way to San Diego and back. I had my first and only car wreck. (The Stude survived and got a new paint job in the bargain.)

But by 1966, I was married and needed a more up-to-date and spacious family car. I got a good deal on a Chevy and, sadly it must be admitted, sold my Studebaker to another guy with a lustful eye for this elegant carriage.

Many years later, in 1981, a chance conversation with a co-worker who was a true Studebaker fanatic led me to yet another Starliner. This one would be a hobby car, not family transport. Throughout the 1980s I made minor upgrades to this 1954 V8 hardtop and held it together well enough to cruise around Santa Rosa, California, my home from 1977 to 1988. It was a lot of fun. I even auditioned her (unsuccessfully) for a role in a movie that was filmed in town. The Stude was simple enough to be serviced by an amateur, and well worth the trouble and expense just for the pleasure of cruising about, arm on the windowsill, one hand on the two foot diameter steering wheel, a moving reminder of days – and cars – gone by.

In 1988, circumstances took me away from Santa Rosa. Thinking I would return in one year, I put the Stude in a storage locker – just for a year, mind you – and got on with my life. But I never returned to Santa Rosa. My work and personal life took root a hundred miles away, and my Stude lay well-protected but unused for **22 years!**

That's right, folks. I deserted this lovely machine and carried her around in my heart and mind for all those years, too distracted to take her out for a spin. I remained a member of the Studebaker Driver's Club, an organization of thousands of Studebaker fanatics from all over the world, and subscribed to its monthly magazine, the oh-so-cleverly titled *Turning Wheels*. Finally, in 2011, I made a decision at last: my Stude needed a new owner, one who would care for her and use her in a manner befitting her magnificence. Where better to find such a person than in the pages of *Turning Wheels*?

It didn't take long. As soon as the magazine started arriving at their homes, the Studebaker fans hit the phone to enquire about this as-is beauty for sale. Some were more serious than others. The most in-love prospect was also one of the earliest to respond: a dyed-in-the-wool Studebaker lover from New Jersey. The deal was concluded sight unseen (except for a few snapshots), and by earlier this week I had loaded my dream car aboard a transcontinental auto transport headed to the east coast.

People ask me if I was sad to see my car leave. In fact, I was relieved. Like a fine antique, the Studebaker deserved to be used and displayed. I had not really "owned" it - I had merely been its caretaker for thirty years. What follows is an album of snapshots showing my car coming out of storage and heading off to here new owner and a new life in southern New Jersey.

The storage locker opens, revealing...



A bit dusty, but looking pretty good nonetheless!

Time to move out...



To the Tarmac

And finally...



To the tow truck



Then a short ride...

Bon voyage, mon Stude!



To the trailer.