



# The Steering Wheel

## January 2024

Newsletter of the Midwest Antique Auto Club

Not affiliated with any national club.

An independent group of collectible vehicle enthusiasts.

Dedicated to the preservation of the antique/collectible automobile.

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Meetings are held on the third Sunday of each month. The Board meets at 1:30 p.m. and the general meeting begins at 2:00 p.m. during the months of November, January, February and March at the **NEW CASSEL RETIREMENT CENTER at 900 N. 90<sup>th</sup> St., Omaha, NE 68114.** During the summer months of April, May, June, July, August, September and October, there are no inside meetings. In these months we have “Official Car Tours” on the third Sunday of each month. Plus whatever extra tours may please us. There is no meeting in December, that meeting is replaced by our annual Christmas banquet. All vehicles are welcome, any year, make or model, but a drivable collectible/antique vehicle is not a requirement for membership. **The latest Steering Wheel can be found at <https://midwestantiqueautoclub.org>.**

The deadline for articles for the Steering Wheel is the last Saturday of the month.

### The President’s Message



Hello Everyone,

It was great seeing everyone at our end-of-year Holiday banquet at Pizza King. A big thank you to your board members that helped put this on (the Cushmans, the Kannas’ and the Hedegaards). It takes time and effort to make sure we can enjoy the Christmas Party each year. A special thank you to my wife, Karen, for all she does to support the MAAC club and me.

Unfortunately, we have had a couple of deaths in our MAAC family. Daryl Baker passed away on December 23. We just saw Daryl and Linda Baker at our Christmas party so it was a shock to hear of Daryl’s passing. Lisa Ellis (Clif and Joyce Ellis’ daughter) passed away in December. Please keep the Baker and Ellis families in your

thoughts and prayers.

I hope to see you at our indoor meeting in January.

John and Karen Thurber

## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

### January Indoor Tour

We are planning to hold our second indoor meeting on **Sunday, January 21<sup>st</sup> at 2:00 p.m. at New Cassell Retirement Center – 900 N. 90<sup>th</sup> Street, Omaha.** Please enter New Cassell in the lower North entrance. Last year, we had a member show and tell on their car projects in January. **This year, I would like to hear from the members on how they got interested in old cars.** For me, my father was a big influence on my love of old cars. If you have pictures or a scrap book, please bring it to the meeting to share with the other members. Ed will be making his famous chili to share with everyone. Members, please bring a salad or dessert. Also, if you want something other than water to drink, please bring your own drink.

**2024 MEMBERSHIPS ARE DUE** -They are still \$25.00. If you didn't pay you membership dues as part of the Holiday Banquet registration form, please send payment to Jim Cushman at 1901 No. 59th Street Omaha, NE 68104

### February 18th Indoor Tour

More news to come on the February event – please see the February Steering Wheel for more information.

### MEMBER NEWS

**December Holiday Party** - We had a great time meeting on December 16th at the Pizza King. We had almost 40 members attend the party. Thank you to the Cushmans, Kannas' and Hedegaards for scheduling the event. And thank you Board members for helping set up the party. I hope everyone enjoyed themselves and stayed healthy.

**November 19<sup>th</sup> Indoor Meeting** - We had our first indoor tour at New Cassel Retirement Center on November 19<sup>th</sup>. We voted on and selected the existing MAAC Board (see page one) with Clif Ellis volunteering to become Vice President. I appreciate the long-time service of Dave Hansen as Vice President. Dave decided not to run again. Unfortunately, I didn't keep a list of attendees. Again, thank you for everyone that showed up.

**Memorial Service for Lisa Ellis** - I am sorry to let you know that Lisa Ellis, the daughter of long-time MAAC member Clif Ellis, passed away in December. A visitation will be held at First United Methodist Church at 7020 Cass Street, on January 12<sup>th</sup> from 5 pm to 7 p.m., with a memorial service on January 13<sup>th</sup> at 10:30 a.m. at First United Methodist Church. Please keep Clif in your thoughts and prayers.

**Daryl Baker's passing** - I am sorry to let you know that long-time MAAC member Daryl Baker passed away on December 23rd. Daryl previously worked for Creighton University. Daryl and Linda were always a joy to have on our car tours. Daryl especially liked tri-five Chevys. Please keep Linda and the Baker family in your thoughts and prayers.

**Roger Olsen's passing** - I am sorry to let you know that long-time MAAC member Roger Olsen passed away on November 8<sup>th</sup>. Roger was active in several antique car clubs in addition to MAAC, and restored several antique cars, starting around 1974 with another Model A Ford. Known for his extensive knowledge of cars, he was always fixing something, or simply tinkering with car parts. For many years he also did a lot of work with antique car radios. He was preceded in death by his wife Lavonne. He is survived by his son Brian (Claire) Olsen, of LeMars, IA., and their three children, Willow, Dakota, and Autumn; daughter Rebecca, of Fort Collins, CO.; sister Doris Rule, of Council Bluffs, as well as extended family..

Below is an article from Hemmings Motor News on the 1957 Oldsmobile Station Wagen owned by local car enthusiast, Gus Frics. I hope you enjoy it.

## **This 1957 Oldsmobile Golden 88 Fiesta Is Packing J-2 Rocket Power**

**By Jim Black, Hemmings Motor News**

**12/22/2023**

For a quarter century, station wagons were an icon of American motoring. In the postwar era, when suburbia was a budding mecca of country living, growing families discovered the dual-purpose benefits of owning such a vehicle. Wagons could haul project lumber or the neighborhood little league team with equal ease, to say nothing about daily commuter service, weekly shopping excursions, and long cross-country family vacations. Add a tow package, and wagons could pull boats and campers with nary a whimper.

The station wagon's can-do dynamics, however, were only stymied by stunted evolution. Sliding panels, sky view roofs, and magic tailgates that came and went over time did little to stem the Eighties appeal of spacious minivans, or the Nineties surge of full-size SUVs brimming with creature comforts, easy-loading ergonomics, and available four-wheel drive. Wagons fell from grace, and by the new millennium were absent from domestic new car announcements.

Over two decades later though, a growing sect of collector car enthusiasts revitalized vintage wagons. While once a staple of county-fair demolition derbies, station wagons are now enjoying third or fourth lives as collector cars. Owners with restored and survivor wagons of all types, from all eras, have been making their presence known, using any excuse to get them out, whether it be a throw-back road trip or a visit to the local, regional, or national car show. All wagons are generally looked upon with fondness these days, if only because they spur memories of long-ago road trips. Some, however, wow crowds with their styling, rare options, or both, as found in our featured 1957 Oldsmobile Golden Rocket 88 Fiesta.

The Fiesta was groundbreaking when new, but to understand why, it should first be remembered that – unlike its corporate siblings or cross-town rivals – Oldsmobile's presence in the postwar station wagon market was hardly strong. By the conclusion of the 1950 model year, the GM division from Lansing captured a paltry 1.7 percent of the wagon market by selling a scant 2,750 units (in comparison, Chevrolet produced 166,995 wagons the same year; Ford built just over 29,000). The cost of building and maintaining wood-bodied station wagons likely didn't help things. And even though an industry-wide change to all-steel construction was already in the works, Lansing's front office abandoned station-wagon construction until 1957.

During those six years, Olds wisely cemented its image with impeccable styling, cabin comfort, and (briefly) race-proven power on NASCAR's stock car circuit, all at an attractive price point. The first two of those key sales elements were ramped up for 1957, led by a striking styling revision – akin to other GM makes – that made Oldsmobiles seem all-new from the ground-up. It was the perfect opportunity to dive back into the station wagon market.

To do so, Oldsmobile turned to the Mitchell-Bentley Corporation in Ionia, Michigan. Mitchell-Bentley already had a well-established reputation as a custom coachbuilder – including projects for Ford Motor Company, Chrysler Corporation, Nash, Packard, and even Studebaker – while honing its station wagon skills with Chevrolet, Pontiac and, most notably, Buick. Buick's all-steel wagon body proved a natural fit for the Oldsmobile chassis and that division would even receive its own Fiesta-like hardtop wagon, called Caballero.

Mitchell-Bentley built the new Fiesta in two body styles sprinkled in two trim levels (with limitations). The first was a traditional, four-door, fully pillared design – dubbed the Fiesta Sedan in sales literature – offered only in the entry-series Golden Rocket 88, the name "Golden" was added to honor General Motors' 50th anniversary. Had the 5,052 Fiesta Sedans been the only wagons Mitchell-Bentley built for Lansing, it might have been met with a hint of trepidation, but they weren't.

Mass production of the airy hardtop design spearheaded by Buick nearly a decade earlier now had deep roots and extended beyond sedans and coupes. Apart from the Fiesta Sedan, the Fiesta championed the four-door hardtop station wagon design for Olds in glowing fashion, capturing 5,767 buyers in the Golden Rocket 88 trim level, and another 8,981 who preferred the added mid-range luxury of the Super 88 series. That's a grand total of 19,800 wagons in a single season, which obliterated the division's entire 1946-'50 postwar wagon output of 9,957 units.

Oldsmobile's optional J-2 Rocket was based on a standard 371-cu.in. engine, though a trio of two-barrel carburetors and a 10:1 compression ratio helped the V-8 develop 300 hp at 4,600 rpm and 415 lb-ft of torque at 3,000 rpm. The \$83 cost in 1957 equals \$907 today.

Playing a helping hand was the Fiesta's equally new standard engine: the 371-cu.in. Rocket T-400 V-8. Boasting 9.5:1 compression and a Quadra-Jet four-barrel carburetor, the engine's advertised 277 hp and 400 lb-ft of torque earned newfound respect among discerning buyers. Further, the Fiesta's sturdy X-frame chassis and redesigned suspension could manage more power, like that of the J-2 Rocket.

Announced later in the model year, the \$83, W-code, J-2 engine is best described as a race-inspired version of the 371. A bump in compression (10.0:1) and a trio of two-barrel Rochester carburetors helped vault the Rocket name back towards the summit of performance discussions thanks to its advertised 300 hp and 415 lb-ft of torque. A dual exhaust system was required, and it was recommended that 97 octane (or better) was burned for optimum operation (race-prepped J-2s cranked out even more power).

Better still, the J-2 wasn't limited to top-of-the-line coupes. Which meant any, big, stylish Olds was capable of sub-9-second sprints to 60 mph. The J-2 was improved a year later and boasted 315 hp. Despite this, in the scant two years of availability the best estimates for cars fitted with the J-2 vary between 2,000 and 2,500 units. Rare territory for today's numbers-oriented enthusiasts, which makes our featured Golden Rocket 88 Fiesta even more compelling. It was factory-equipped with the J-2 option, paired with an also optional Jetaway automatic transmission.

The interior features two-tone vinyl seats and door panels with a padded dash and column-shifted four-speed Hydra-Matic transmission. A few aftermarket gauges and an audio deck were added under the dash.

Omaha, Nebraska, resident Gus Fric has a strong preference for Fifties and Sixties GM's offerings, as demonstrated by the 1957 Cadillac Eldorado Brougham, '58 Pontiac Bonneville, and '65 Buick Riviera in his collection. An absentee was Oldsmobile until fate smiled during a trip in 2010.

"I was visiting my mother in Chagrin Falls, Ohio, during the fall when I got a call from Tom Reno, a friend in Colorado Springs, Colorado. He asked if I was still looking to buy another classic car and I told him yes, but if I had my druthers, I'd prefer it to be an Olds Fiesta wagon; it was at the top of my wish list," Gus explains.

"As luck would have it, Tom knew a guy in his town that just completed a two-year restoration of a 1957 Fiesta, and it was for sale. It also had the J-2 engine. The owner's name was Bob Petri, so I gave him a call and quickly arranged a trip to see it." says Gus.

Two weeks later, Gus and his wife, Mary, travelled west to see the car in person. In between the call and trip, Gus had received fresh-out-of-restoration pictures to provide a sense of what the couple would see.

"The Fiesta looked even better in person, and I was amazed what a great job Bob had done considering he painted it in his garage. Although it wasn't the factory applied color combination – Bob changed the two-tone scheme from Rose Mist Metallic and Victorian White to Sapphire Mist and Platinum Mist during the restoration – they were available on the 1957 Olds color palette. I also learned that he had purchased the Olds from the original owner; that was the bonus. Aside from the engine and transmission, he ordered it with power steering, power brakes, power windows, air conditioning, Wonder Bar radio, electric clock, and traffic light reflector. I still can't believe how easy we came to terms on the final sale price."

Don't let its presentation on these pages fool you into thinking the Fiesta is a trailer queen, witnessing only the best summer weather conditions.

"From the day we made the 600-mile drive home, this 1957 Olds Fiesta wagon has never let us down. Everywhere we take the car, we drive it with the air conditioning on during the hot days and wipers on when it rains. Wherever we go, someone has a wonderful story about spending part of their youth in a station wagon. After we left the 2019 Oldsmobile Nationals in Wichita, Kansas, for instance, we stopped for gas and a woman came over to talk to us about the car with tears in her eyes, overcome with emotion and the memories the wagon apparently brought back to her," Gus says.

The Fiesta has been a consistent award winner at many events, bestowed with everything from Mayor's Choice and People's Choice to Best in Class. It also earned First Place honors at the 2012 Oldsmobile Nationals and a specialty award at the 2022 Des Moines Concours d'Elegance.

Since purchasing the Fiesta, Gus hasn't had to do much in terms of maintenance. "I did rebuild the front suspension using new polyurethane components and changed out all the shocks with modern KYB gas-charged units," Gus says. "I also replaced the tires with a set of P225/75R14 whitewall Coker Classic radials. The relatively simple upgrades improved the long-distance drivability of the Olds.

"When we were kids, station wagons were ubiquitous, and people took them for granted," Gus says. "Now that they have all but disappeared from the mainstream American landscape, when one drives by, it always seems to evoke a fond memory of family, friends, and better times. Few things are finer than a big American station wagon on the open highway and the thumbs up you get from people along the way. Ownership of this Fiesta wagon has been a dream come true."



**MIDWEST ANTIQUE AUTO CLUB**  
**AN INDEPENDENT GROUP OF COLLECTIBLE VEHICLE ENTHUSIASTS**