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My Excellent Sportsman Adventure in Wenatchee

By Guy Generaux

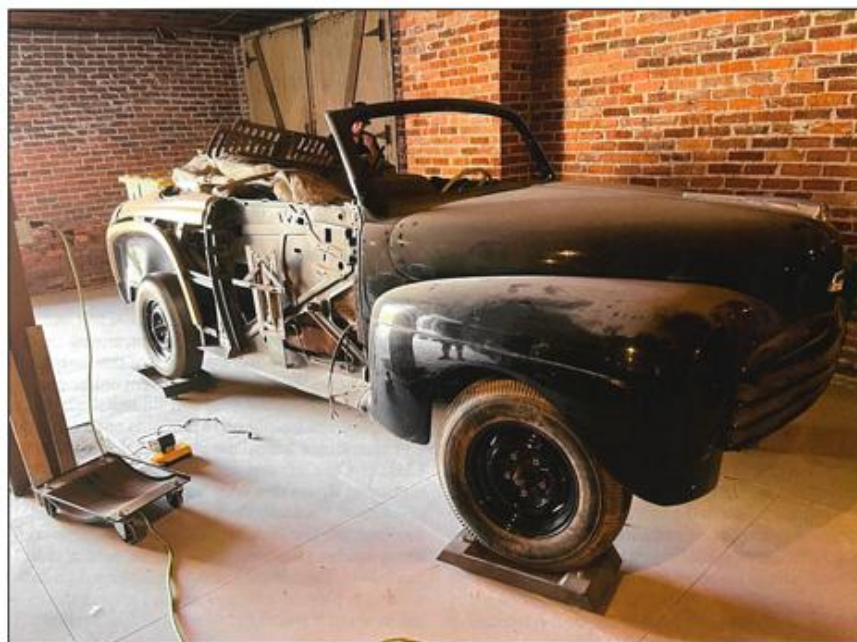
In July, 2022 my local Puget Sound RG #18, hosted the Western National Meet in Wenatchee, Washington. Having attended several National Meets, I've always come away with a trove of unanticipated experiences. This is just one reason these events are invariably so enjoyable. This time, it was "My Excellent Sportsman Adventure."

Following our Tuesday tour to the nearby Bavarian hamlet of Leavenworth, I happened to be

sitting in the lobby of the host hotel. Nearby, a conversation was in progress between Frank Miller (driver of a 1949 Ford from Massachusetts) and Josh Conrad (then director of the Ford Foundation Museum, Indiana). My hearing is less than stellar these days, but I managed to catch the word "Sportsman" in the exchange, so my radar went up immediately.

Leaning into the chat, it seemed that Frank knew somebody who knew of a fellow in East Wenatchee who was restoring woodies, including a Ford Sportsman. The person of interest was not registered for the meet, but Frank had obtained a phone number and had been trying to contact the owner. In a moment of exquisite timing, Frank's phone rang and an invitation to visit within the hour was accepted. Since Frank had already driven in excess of 3,000 miles and Josh had traveled via jet to Seattle and then Wenatchee, I offered up my '40 Ford Convertible as the shuttle.

The Ford Sportsman is among the rarest and is keenly sought-after of all early V-8 models, with approximately 3,700 produced from 1946 to 1948. They consistently command the highest dollars of



Doug Baker's 1947 Ford Sportsman found its way from Mexico City to Wenatchee.

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Another treasure: a 1951 Mercury Station Wagon was in good company.

any Ford V-8 at auction (and seldom come up for sale). Aficionados of the Model 71 estimate less than 150 exist today. In my nearly 50 years as a member of PSRG, I can recall only seeing two Sportsman Convertibles among our club membership. One, a '46 was co-owned and restored by Tom Beffa and Bob Eilert, who have a famous photo of them together with the car and Jay Leno at the 2004 Pebble Beach Concours. Later, the Sportsman was acquired by fellow Puget Sound club member, Tom Sharp who also owned a '47 model. An avid early Ford station wagon collector, authority and restorer, Tom fine-tuned a modest re-restoration of the '46 to earn a perfect 1,000 point Dearborn Award at the 2019 National Meet in Hood River, Oregon. The entire Sharp woodie collection, of about a dozen vehicles, was sold at auction in 2022.

Navigation by Siri directed our trio toward the opposite side of the Columbia River, almost directly across from our hotel headquarters. Arriving in the '40 convertible, we were warmly welcomed by Doug Baker. His stately 1926 mini-mansion presides over a swath of orchards and

lawns that could have been mistaken for a park, rather than a private residence. Doug led us across the property, while referencing historical facts about the estate. On the lower road was a weathered fruit storage warehouse (in itself, a fascinating building), where we encountered a diverse collection of a dozen cars and numerous other spaces filled with sheet metal, mechanical parts and more.

Three woodies were in attendance: a 1953 Buick Roadmaster Estate Wagon, a rare 1951 Mercury Station Wagon, and a 1947 Ford Super Deluxe Sportsman. All were in various stages of restoration. However, the Buick and Merc looked to be about 90 percent finished. Both were beautiful, which made the Sportsman all that more compelling - for it was a basket-case project with substantial work ahead. Likely, there are very few unrestored Sportsman vehicles in existence. It was a indeed special opportunity to see one in the rough.

This particular car came with an intriguing story. For years, it resided in Mexico City. Whether the

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Showing his second Sportsman, Doug Baker (right) talks with Alyn Edwards (our National Meet Banquet Master of Ceremonies) at the concourse.

convertible was purchased in the US and driven into Mexico at some point is unknown. An article in the November/December 2021 issue of the *V-8 Times* (page 41-42) claims that 32 previously undiscovered Sportsman bodies were exported to Mexico, to be assembled and sold there. This evidence was unearthed in an exhaustive search of Ford Motor Company archived documents.

Josh was aware of rumors that a 1947 Sportsman had been hidden away in Mexico City for years. According to him, a couple of different collectors had apparently located the car but without a proper title, it proved to be a monumental hurdle to clear it at the border, and they abandoned their pursuits. Doug Baker often vacationed in Mexico and his Spanish was, "Just good enough to be dangerous," he quipped. By accident, he became acquainted with a gentleman who knew of the 1947. With Doug eager to buy the car, the fellow miraculously engineered a deal to get it into the states, if the paperwork was secured in advance.

With assistance of National V-8 Director, Dan

Kreibel (who had DMV connections in California), the Sportsman was granted a title and Doug took possession.

Currently, Doug is involved in getting the car back together and with the hope of transitioning it to the road soon. He is attempting to track down the full history of the '47 as well. In another surprise twist, he owns a second 1947 Sportsman, and it was a driver. Although Doug wasn't registered for the meet, he brought his second Sportsman to the parking lot at the edge of the concourse, where it attracted considerable interest throughout the day. To see a nice '47 Ford Sportsman on the street, plus another in pieces in a span of two days, was an unexpected treat.

Following the Wenatchee National Meet, Doug Baker joined our local Puget Sound Regional Group. Little did we suspect that our new friend, the effervescent Frank Miller, would pass away within a year. For Frank, Josh and me, our "excellent Sportsman adventure" was one of the highlights of the week in Wenatchee.



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