

THE ESSENTIALS BIG AND BOLD READER PROFILES OUTSTANDING TEXAS IN MOTION

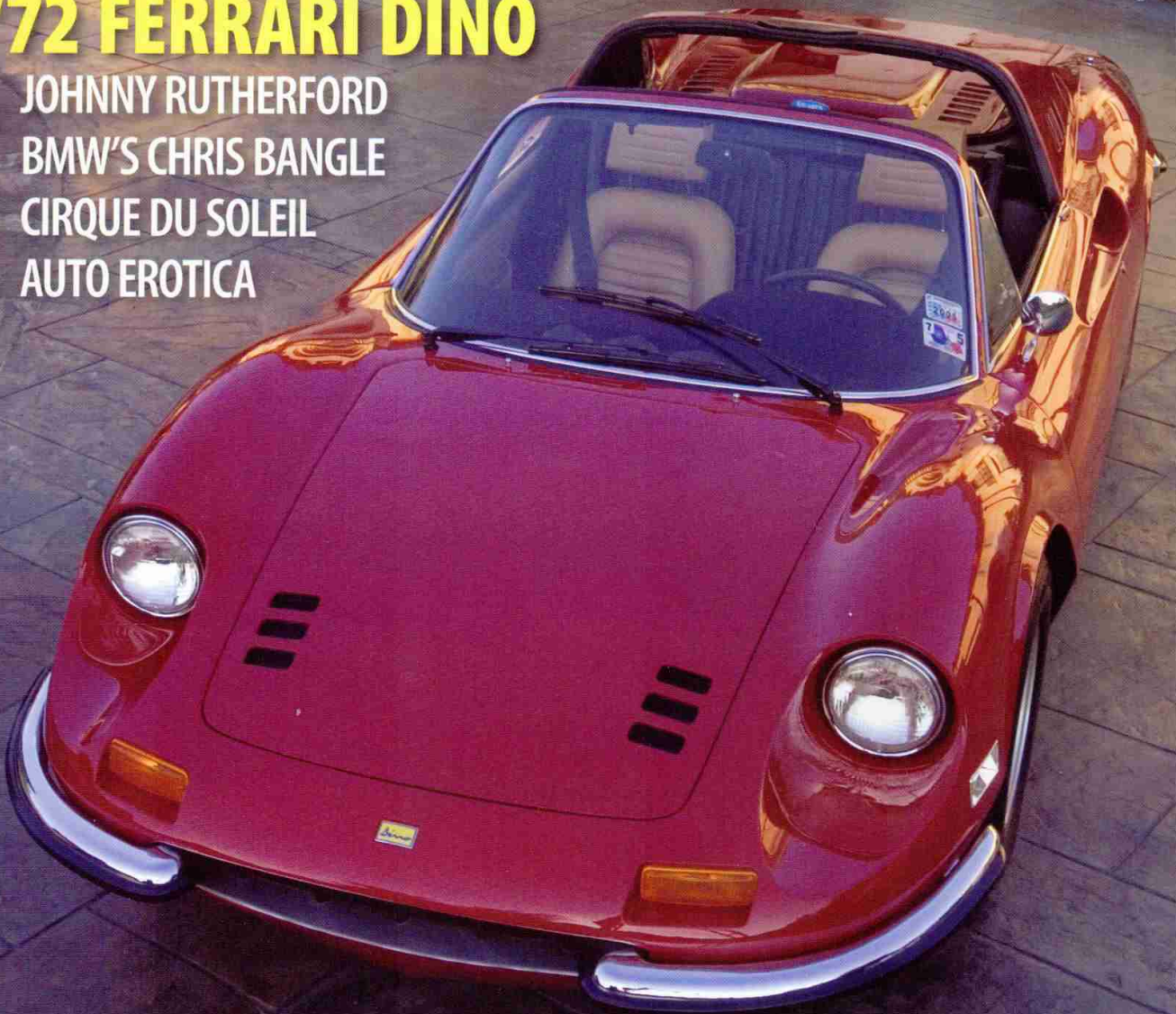
THE AUTOMOTIVE ENTHUSIAST LIFESTYLE

Texas Driver

M A G A Z I N E

'72 FERRARI DINO

JOHNNY RUTHERFORD
BMW'S CHRIS BANGLE
CIRQUE DU SOLEIL
AUTO EROTICA

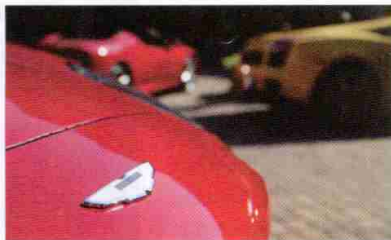


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(Garage Mahal)



DRIVING FORCES

RON STURGEON BUILT A CAREER OUT OF NECESSITY AND FOUND THE ROAD TO PROSPERITY

BY PAULA FELPS

YOU DON'T HAVE TO LOOK FAR to find Ron Sturgeon's passions; they're fairly evident from the moment you pull into the driveway of his elegant 14,000-square-foot French chateau in the affluent suburb of Colleyville.

Even with the doors closed, his two Texas-sized garages hint at his passion for cars. Once inside, that automotive attraction is confirmed, offering a feast for the eyes of any auto enthusiast. Divided between two facing

spaces, each garage has its own identity and feel. The so-called "blue garage" pays homage to European driving machines and includes miniatures of brake systems, drive trains and transmissions, while the "red garage" stands as a testament to his ongoing interest in Mercedes Benz. Named for the color of their walls, each garage offers a peek into the world that Sturgeon has built for himself one car at a time.

SEEING RED AND FEELING BLUE

Sitting in the corner of an immaculate red garage, the bright blue Volkswagen Beetle stands out from the line of Mercedes Benzes, but in many ways could be the cornerstone of Sturgeon's collection.

"My dad died when I was a senior in high school," the self-made entrepreneur recalls. "My step-mom kicked me and my twin brother out two weeks later. All we had was \$2,000 that we'd been left for college and a 1965 Volkswagen."

Unable to afford repairs for the failing VW, Sturgeon learned how to repair his car and soon had opened a shop to repair Volkswagens. He bought wrecked cars as an affordable and almost unlimited source of parts, and before long he had created an entirely new business – an auto salvage yard. That business became the pace car on his road to success.

As his business boomed, Sturgeon moved beyond his Volkswagens and began indulging his other automotive ardors. Today those interests are reflected in a collection

that includes everything from a 1957 BMW Isetta micro car to a 1997 Aston Martin. There's the 1971 Mercedes Benz 280SL convertible – the first Mercedes that Sturgeon ever restored and quite possibly the last car he would ever part with – and along the way he has owned just about every four-wheeled contraption that has tickled his fancy.

"I did have a significant collection of micro cars," he says as he affectionately pats the Isetta, a post-WWII miniature that he and his wife, Kathi, drive to breakfast on Sunday mornings. "I've sold a bunch of vehicles on Ebay in the past 18 months. I just kept accumulating and accumulating, and finally it gets to the point where you have too much.

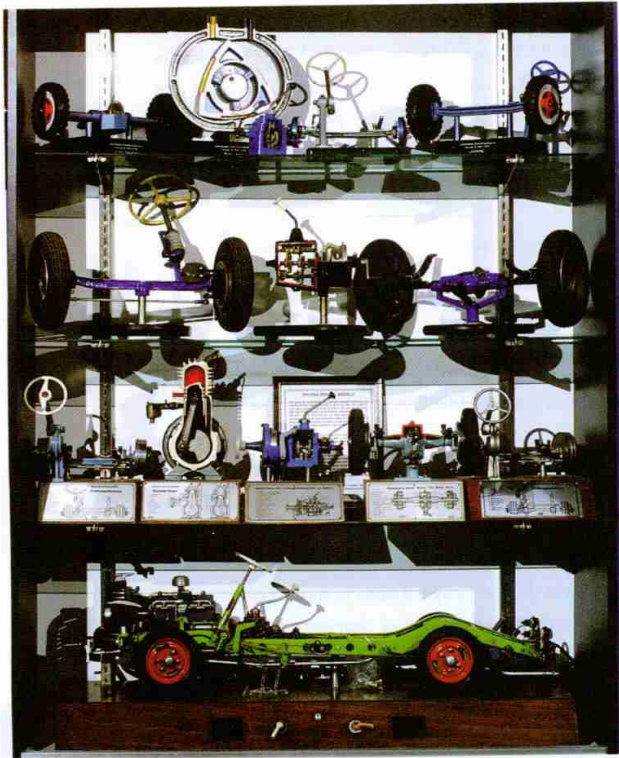
"The cars I've kept are the cars I really liked."

He no longer owns the 1957 Victoria 250 or the 1952 Kleinschnittger 125 micro cars, both of which were featured at Pebble Beach in 1997. But their presence remains in the red garage, thanks to framed event posters and photos, including one of Sturgeon with late night talk show guru Jay Leno.

Pictured left is the Isetta (red and white), that Ron and his wife, Kathi drive to breakfast every Sunday morning.



(Garage Mahal)



Other pieces of the past rest in glass showcases, such as the radio-controlled 1939 1/4th scale Fiat Bolilla Roadster and the hand-built 1/12 scale Porsche 914, which features working transmission, doors, lights, brakes, windows and windshield wipers.

"It has a lot of working features, but the thing that gets me is why someone would do a 914," Sturgeon says with a touch of disdain in his voice. "Imagine if it had been a 356 or a 911... but a 914?! I don't understand that!"

A TOY STORY

What Sturgeon does understand, however, is cars, and his garages are just the tip of an impressive automotive iceberg. Inside his 2-year-old home, a two-story library was designed to hold a portion of his toy car collection. Sturgeon has amassed some 3,000 toy vehicles, more than half of which bear the Mercedes Benz emblem.

"I started out collecting new Mercedes [toy] cars, but it didn't take long to realize that there was a lot of redundancy in doing that," he says. "After a few years, I decided I was going to focus on antique toy cars. I still collect Mercedes, but only the ultra-rare and open cars."

The toys consume the massive open library, which was modeled after the old two-story libraries in Europe. And while he knew the shelves would likely someday be used for books, Sturgeon counted the antique cars in his collection and measured the amount of shelf space required to house them all.

"It was designed to hold the entire collection, but once we started putting them in here, the designer said we couldn't just line them up on the shelves," he says. "They needed to be displayed so people could really see them. So only about half of them actually fit in the room."

Even minus half the collection, it is an eye-widening and time-consuming room to visit. Divided into sections, it is a toy chest where price tags can top more than \$20,000; rarities like the Black Prince Mercedes pedal car – the only one of its kind – share space with historically accurate Indy racecars and sedans from the '50s and '60s. His prized possession is the Eva Braun car, a rare tin-plate toy modeled after the 1930s-era Mercedes coupe that Adolph Hitler gave to his girlfriend, Eva Braun.

"I spent five years looking for that car," Sturgeon says of the toy. Produced by a German company named Tipp & Co., the collector paid \$12,000 for the rare Mercedes replica.

"There's an entire era of history that nobody wants to talk about," Sturgeon says, noting that replicas of Hitler's car, the jet black "Fuehrer wagon," and the beige Staff Car were also made by the company. And therein lies his next great challenge:

"My understanding is that the Staff Car was also produced in camouflage," he says. "I don't know if it truly exists, but I'm looking for it."

That is where Sturgeon derives much of the joy of collecting.

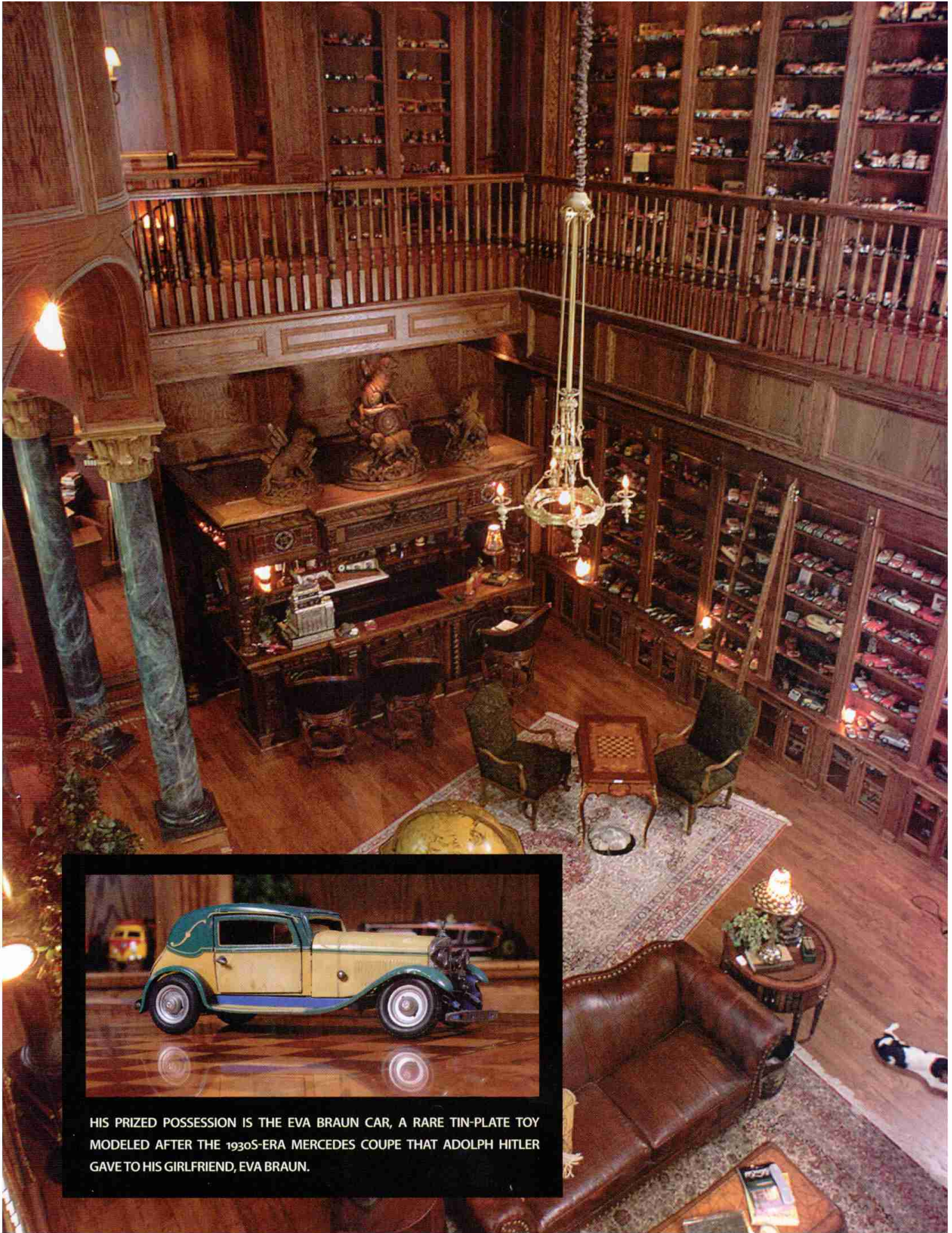
"The fun is in the search," he says. "It's not about owning things, it's about tracking it down. The more you collect, you just continue to get more focused; you might look for toys with boxes or focus on a subset. That's what this is all about."

Sturgeon's collection is so extensive that he has a curator to help catalog inventory and filter through the numerous emails and requests from collectors who find him via the Internet.

"I've been doing this so long that now they find me," Sturgeon says. "My curator knows as much as I do about [my collection]."

But that isn't about to put the brakes on his collecting passion.

"The thing about collecting is that there's always something else," he says with an easygoing grin. "No matter how much you have or what you get, there's always something that someone else has that you want." ☺



HIS PRIZED POSSESSION IS THE EVA BRAUN CAR, A RARE TIN-PLATE TOY MODELED AFTER THE 1930S-ERA MERCEDES COUPE THAT ADOLPH HITLER GAVE TO HIS GIRLFRIEND, EVA BRAUN.