



Photos: Al Rogers / Tim Costello

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Photographed @ Kingstown, RI

When Bob Chaves was a teenager coming of age in Rhode Island, one could hardly say he was in a hot bed of activity when it came to the world of performance cars. At that time, living on an island just off the coast, Bob had to take the ferry back-and-forth to the mainland, and even at that, the only dragstrip anywhere near the boy was at a converted U.S. Navy airbase. Undaunted, Bob's love for cars and all things mechanical led him to become a serious aficionado of drag racing, so on most weekends, he and six or eight friends could typically be found turning wrenches at whatever races they could find. Throughout the early sixties, Bob went from one air strip to the next, attending drag races and working on all manner of hot rods at that time, because there was no shortage of guys who would turn down volunteer help in the pits. It was during this period that the teenage Bob Chaves initially became exposed to Max Wedge and early Hemi Dodge and Plymouth Super Stockers. Admittedly, there were few of these machines in the New England area during that period, but the few that were around were fearful creatures indeed and the source of much grieving whenever they showed up at an event. Being fascinated with mechanical mayhem, it was only natural for Bob to be seriously attracted to these exotic machines, but for a young man at

ON THE COVER

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MAXED OUT

1964 MAX WEDGE PILOT CAR

that time, the idea of owning such a creature was nothing more than a pipe dream. Still, the impression was made, and as with most things, those impressions had serious long-term repercussions.

Young Bob couldn't have known it while he was racing around at Naval air stations back then, but his mechanical prowess would come in quite handy. After getting his degree and becoming a mechanical engineer, he spent most of his life as a civilian contractor for the Navy, working on various components aboard nuclear submarines! That kept Bob away from home quite a bit, but honestly, how much fun is a job like that? As Bob casually told us, "Yeah, I got to go for rides in a lot of submarines and I saw a lot of really spectacular things." There aren't a lot of us out here who can say we've watched sunsets from the conning tower of a nuclear submarine, or held on for dear life while a sub blew the tanks and literally jumped out of the

water, but Bob got to do all that fun stuff and seriously enjoyed every minute of it. During all of that, however, Bob's passion for old cars evolved specifically into a love affair with early Mopar B-bodies, and by the 1980's, he was actively hunting down the cars he'd lusted after during his younger days. In the late eighties, he bought a 1962 Savoy Max Wedge that needed some

work, and we're very pleased to say he still owns that machine today and it's still his primary Saturday night cruising vehicle. For some reason, Bob also took out a subscription to a new little Mopar newspaper-looking thing called "Mopar Collector's Guide" in 1988 (yes, Bob was one of our earliest subscribers), and began reading through





owner informed him of all he knew; supposedly the car had originally been a factory Max Wedge car, but he didn't know any of the Plymouth's history past the fellow he'd bought it from. Also, much to Bob's chagrin, he was told the car was thought to have originally been an automatic, but it had been converted to a stick sometime in the late sixties or seventies. Given that most of the car was steel, except for some fiberglass racing parts, Bob was initially skeptical, but there were some telltale signs of having been a Max Wedge still in the engine bay (namely the holes where the original wiring harness had been), and mercifully, there was an intact build sheet still tucked behind the backseat! Bob got the info off the sheet, made a couple of phone calls, and it was soon verified the Plymouth was indeed an original 426 Max Wedge Savoy, so Bob parted company with the money and hauled the rumbling B-body home to Rhode Island to join his '62. Then, it was back to work for the Navy, and for the next two decades, the race car sat while Bob spent a lot of money gathering parts for a restoration and a lot of time on the phone, and then the computer, researching the Plymouth and learning more about it. Little did Bob suspect in 1989 that he'd just accidentally stumbled across a rather serious bit of Mopar history.

the classifieds and gathering parts. In those days before the internet, amazingly, most people bought and sold things through paper advertising and word-of-mouth, or even in person at swap meets. Bob was no exception to that rule, and that's how he shopped for the cars and parts he finally had some spare change to afford.

We're very pleased to say that it was in January 1989 that Bob saw an advertisement in Mopar Collector's Guide for a 1964 Savoy race car for sale in Buffalo, New York. Since Buffalo was only about five hours away, he decided to investigate, and in early February, he made the trip down to Buffalo to have a look. Bob had always thought his ideal car would be a 1964 Savoy Max Wedge with a four-speed, preferably in red, so when he left on

that chilly day, that's the plan that was knocking around in the back of his head. The Plymouth waiting in New York turned out to be a fairly atypical old bracket racer that was still being campaigned at that time. The car had Keystone Klassic mags on it with gigantic Hoosier tires, it had been mildly caged several times by the looks of things, it was tubbed, the firewall had been beat on and cut on, the inner fender wells had been cut ages ago, for headers apparently, and, of course, there was a big scoop on the hood. Powered by a potentially built 383 at that time, the Savoy had a four-speed in it with a short-throw shifter and it sounded great, but Bob wasn't really looking to keep something purely as a race car, he wanted a street driver Max Wedge with which he could stir the gears. The

Galen Govier got the information first back in those days, and Galen confirmed all the data on the Savoy as per the build sheet; it was a low-compression 426 Max Wedge Savoy, it had been built on November 9, 1963 at Lynch Road, and it had left the factory



as a red car with a red bench seat interior and a push-button TorqueFlite transmission. Bob was thrilled it was a factory red-on-red car, but he wasn't too thrilled it had been an automatic, so he planned on keeping it a four-speed and continued gathering parts. As the years ticked by, he sold the race motor 383 and bought a correct vintage 426 wedge block, he found a correct cross ram intake, and little-by-little, the parts cache continued to stack up. Then, Max Wedge and Hemi guru Darrell Davis got involved and he, too, ran the numbers on Bob's car as part of putting it in his well-known registry of Maxies. This is where the shocker came in. Darrell confirmed it was a red-on-red Maxie, but what nobody had realized up to that point was something Darrell pointed out with a little anxiety on hearing Bob's plans to make the car into a cruiser with a four-speed – "You do realize that's the pilot car for all the 1964 Max Wedges, don't you? That's the first '64 Max Wedge car built." Bob didn't know that, and Bob was seriously taken aback by that tidbit of info.

As it turns out, this car, built on November 9, 1963 was noted as a trial run car for the 1964 model year. It was built as an all-steel car with a low-compression 426 wedge just to make certain there would be no bugs with the slightly reworked sheet metal and styling and with the slightly changed up engine and tranny. Three weeks later, the next batch of Plymouth Max Wedge cars were built, all aluminum nosed cars with high-compression engines, and Dodge followed suit almost immediately, also building theirs as aluminum nose high-compression cars. After those early cars were done, the factory built a mixed bag of steel and aluminum Maxies until production stopped in March of 1964, but Bob's old race car, no doubt, had been the first "test fit" car for the entire series that year. Once this was realized in the mid-nineties, Bob Chaves knew he had to restore the car more carefully – but he still planned on leaving it as a four-speed!

Retirement from playing with submarines finally occurred in early 2011, and Bob immediately jumped into working on the long dormant '64 Savoy with the help of his younger brother, Ron. Ron also has a '62 Maxie himself, and these rather Mopar-oriented brothers happen to



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co-own an original 1965 Plymouth RO Hemi Super Stocker, which they still run at nostalgia events. That car, currently with a Ray Barton Hemi in it, still runs 10.55's at 127 mph with Ron behind the wheel and Bob turning the wrenches. Regardless, Bob and Ron tore the little '64 apart in Bob's garage and set about fixing all the hacked sheet metal. They patched the inner fenders, repaired the firewall, put in stock wheel tubs, did some repair work to the quarter panels, took out the roll cage, did away with the chassis mods, and then it was time to pack the Maxie over to his friend, Mike Mancini, at American Muscle Car Restorations in North Kingstown, Rhode Island. Thus, in 2012, a whirlwind of activity and changes began that still has Bob highly amused.

When Mike Mancini first saw Bob's Maxie, he knew it was a cool car deserving a serious restoration, but once Bob laid out the little factoid that this had been the pilot car for all the 1964 Maxies to follow, Mike Mancini lovingly, but firmly, took control of the situation. "You're not leaving this car as a four-speed." "But I want to." "You can't. Absolutely not. This car is having a complete OEM restoration back to exactly the way it was built." The initial objections were politely brushed aside, and Mancini explained what Bob already knew, but was having a little trouble coming to grips with, "This car is more important than what you want. This one is a piece of Chrysler's history, and it has to be put back in completely original condition, there's too much of an obligation to history here." Bob realized that, and having his other cars to keep him entertained, and having just bought another '63 Savoy to restore, he agreed to grant Mancini carte blanche free reign to transform the red '64 into the best car it could be. Mike Mancini then set about doing what he does best, sweating out the most tedious of details and going three miles past the extra mile to do a restoration that boggles the imagination. Suddenly, most of the parts Bob had gathered weren't good

enough anymore, and Mancini scoured the country to find every possible NOS part left on the planet.

The initial restoration was completed in time for the Maxie to be displayed at the 2013 Carlisle event, where it received rave reviews, but Mike wasn't happy with it. Call it obsession or just extreme dedication, as nice as the car looked, he wanted better, so it was largely pulled apart, yet again, back at American Muscle Car and the quest for even more NOS parts continued. Looking at the Savoy today, we can honestly say we've never seen a



more fanatically restored Max Wedge car in our lives – almost everything you're looking at, from the mufflers to the exhaust system, to the gas tank, are assembly line perfect NOS parts cleaned and finished to look exactly like they appeared when the car rolled off the line at Lynch Road. Everything, the plug wires, the alternator, the hoses, the belts, it's all original equipment and it's all date coded for a late 1963 production car! Bob chuckles quite a bit today looking at his former hot rod drag car

from 1989 and seeing what it's become, "I never saw this coming!" In fact, as drop-dead gorgeous as the car is today, with all its original parts, Bob informs us Mike's still not satisfied because the Plymouth's tires are reproductions and he's adamant that he will find a set of original unused tires for the car before this is all over.

Amusingly, Bob got in the doghouse briefly with Mike when he went to check the car out with Brother Ron in early 2014. Since Mike's shop is in a rather industrial area, Bob took the Plymouth out for a brief test lap, with

Ron riding shotgun. A few blocks away, Bob put his foot into the carbs, the tires went to boiling, and they kept boiling as he pushed the button for second gear as well. The roar echoed off the buildings and a few minutes later they arrived back at Mike's shop to see him standing anxiously out front – "That wasn't you guys, was it?" Bob and Ron had a good laugh as Mike agonizingly explained to them how he'd now have to get all that melted rubber back out from under the car and they'd ruined the back tires! Everybody's still friends though, and that joy ride is a source of serious joking these days – with this one now admittedly an OEM show poodle, at least Bob knows for certain the big Max Wedge up front is more than just a pretty face.

The re-restoration of Bob's pilot car Max Wedge Savoy was finished in mid-2014, so next year will be the car's first full show season. Watch for this one to be at most of the major Mopar and muscle car events, as Mike Mancini plans to haul it around with the American Muscle Car

Restorations display next season. After that? Well, Bob still has the Keystone Classics he took off this car, and knowing how much he likes to drive, we wouldn't put it past him eventually to put those back on for a little bit of weekend fun. But, with his two other Maxies and a Hemi car to play with, this one is more likely to remain a pampered puppy for quite a while – none of which was intended when Bob innocently answered that classified ad back in the winter of 1989! ✖