
The Al Katona Story by Terry Brim

We are all born with different likes, dislikes, personalities and yes even quirks (except yours truly of course). By his own admission, Al Katona was born liking cars! He may have got this honestly however since his dad was a mechanical engineer for White Motor Company in Cleveland and had an affinity for cars as well.

Al's first recollection of car "tinkering" was when he was five or six years old. He had gone out to his garage and preceded to take the tail lights out of his dad's 48 Dodge. When his dad finally caught up with him and asked what he was doing, like George Washington, Al couldn't lie.."I just wanted to see how they worked"

That was the start of it,. After that according to Al, he was into just fooling with cars.

Unlike many of us, Al was not into reading comic books, etc, but rather he was into reading hotrod magazines. Every year when the new car models came out, Al remembers going to the downtown car dealers

to look at new cars.

He saw his first Corvette at Euclid Beach Park which was part of the motorama show in Cleveland every year. The car was a 53' Corvette on a turn table. This was at the tender age of 9 and Al was hooked. He remembers had an argument with his dad because he wanted him to buy one, but like most dad's, he simply told Al that he was out of his mind! Sound familiar?

After that, Al would go down to the Chevy dealers every year when the new Vette's came out, get the brochure and just dream.

His first ride in a Corvette came when he was 13. One of his friends father bought a brand new 58' fuelie! Al remembers going to Cumberland, Maryland to the sports

cars races in the 58' and doing over 100 mph for the first time. That trip really sold Al on Corvette's.

For many of in high school in the early sixties, the cool

kids were the ones with the 57' Chevy's. Al was no different except that he was the cool kid! Having had a 57' 2 door Bel Air hard top with a 283 V8. Al bought the white/red 57' car when he was 16 for \$700 from a guy on his paper route who had bought it new.

This was in 1961/62 and Drag Way 42 in West Salem, Ohio had just opened. Al had put a Duntov cam, dual quads, and headers with cut offs on the car and was anxious to see what it would do.....(Al and Larry Linder share a common bond.... See Larry's article "My 57' Chevy" on page 7.)

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He kept that 57' until he came to Dayton to attend UD. Unfortunately he was forced to sell the car to pay for college, a road well

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traveled by many of us. Al knew many of the current members of our chapter who also attended UD (Tom Sliemers, Larry Linder, Klaus Huber), but he didn't know them personally. Al was married at the time and worked two jobs to get through school.

Seems as how Al drove a Dayton Daily news truck 4 days a week and in the summer, he worked 3rd shift at Dayton Tire and Rubber.....busy guy!

At the time, he lived on Alberta street and walked past what was then Ray Bryant Chevrolet. One morning, Al spotted a load of 67' Corvette's being unloaded at the back of the dealership. Al says he stood there watching them unload every 67'. Of course he was ultimately late for class having lost track of time, but he remembers that to this day!

That afternoon when he finished class, Al again stopped by the dealer and asked the salesman if he could see the 67's delivered

earlier that morning. With a smile on his face, the salesman responded "sure kid".

The first Corvette Al bought was around 1967. It was a red/red 340 hp 63' split window 340hp. Al kept the 63' for 2-3 years. During this time, he joined the Dayton Corvette club and got into road racing. Al says the main reason for joining the club was because there were 10-12 guys in the club and all they did was race!

NCCC auto crossing was what got Al got into the Big Blocks. Soon after, he bought a silver 66 425hp Vette from Dick Rue auto sales on N. Main. It didn't take Al long to blow the 425 motor. He then went down to White Allen and bought a L88 short block and ran that with the high



the L88. He continued racing

these type of cars until around 1973. During this



time, he "went thru" 6 or 8 Vette's including two 1967 435hp Corvettes which he converted to L88s.

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Contrary to factory delivered carburetion, Al says he never used the tri-power set up,

but preferred the big 850 double pumper carbs. According to Al, back then, they were not interested in numbers matching cars, only how fast they could make them go!

rise 850 double pumper holly.

By then, Al was into SCCA running race prepared class with

All good things must come to an end however and so it was with Al's racing days. When I asked him why he got out of it.....money and a new wife, who would have ever guessed. 1973 was also when Al started his title company and like most

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people starting a new business, he poured everything he had into it, both time and money.

During this time however, he did try to keep one of his 67 L88's, but he just wasn't able to. In the process of selling the car however, Al says it struck him that "these cars were beginning to appreciate! He had bought the car for \$3800, chopped it up for racing and still sold it for \$4500.



Also about this time, Al met Jay Kellogg and decided to go to an NCRS event up around Vandalia, Ohio. What he expected was to find a bunch of racing guys but instead, what he found were guys into matching number cars, etc. At the time, Al didn't join the NCRS as he just wasn't into all this matching numbers stuff.

Around 1975, his Title bus-

ness finally began to take off and Al started to get back into Corvette's. He had bought another red/red 63' split window coupe.

When I asked him how he got into the buying/selling game, he related a story of driving to work one day and seeing a white 63 split window coupe for sale in a guys yard. Al stopped and thinking the price was little high tried to negotiate with the guy but to no avail.

Next day he stopped by again only to find the car had been sold for the asking price 2 hours after he had left the previous day.

Shortly thereafter, Al found another car, this time a black/red 63 split window fuelie in Fairborn. The car was an original owner with only 32,000 miles on the odometer. Best of all, the guy was only asking \$1900. Al bought the car on the spot, left a down payment and told the guy he would return after the bank opened in a couple of hours with the rest of the money. When he came back there were two other guys looking at the car

and they both wanted to buy it. In fact, one of them offered Al \$500 more than he paid for it on the spot and the other guy offered him \$800 more on the spot!

That's when the fever really struck and for the second time, it hit Al.....these cars really were appreciating and there was money to be made while having fun at the same time! In fact, over the next few years, Al developed quite a reputation around town and guys were

calling him about buying and selling Corvette's.

Any time Al saw a vette for sale that he thought was worth more than the asking price

or was one that would be in demand, he bought the car.

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Al says he had cars stored all over town and kept a constant inventory of half dozen or so cars. It was during this time also (79/80) that Al got back into NCRS and started doing restorations.

In 1973, he saw an ad for a Corvette swap meet in Bloomington, Ill. After calling about the swap meet and a place to stay, he and his wife decided to spend a week end in Bloomington looking for Corvette parts....

At that time, Al said there was no such thing as after-market parts!

In the early years at Bloomington, there was no judging, no cars for sale, just a parts swap meet and according to Al, "there was some really neat stuff there" He came back loaded! This was the very first Bloomington swap meet and until 1979 or so, that's all it was with maybe a few cars for sale.

Al got into judging when at the first Bloomington judging meet, he brought his 63 split window Air coupe (it was the first 63 to be judged at Bloomington), they asked him if he was interested in becoming a judge for 63's.

The rest is history, over the years, Al has developed quite a reputation at Bloomington for judging.

Around 1988/89, Al decided to sell all of his cars except the white 63 split window air coupe. Al has never gotten back into the buying/selling or restoring Corvettes. These days, he just enjoys his beautiful 67'



The car is an original 435 hp which he bought from the friend of guy that Al knew in in Corning, NY. (this is the same guy Pete Czar bought his 59 fuelie from). Al had known about the car since about 1980 or so when it was a race car in the Corning area. Upon hearing that the car was being restored, Al told his friend that if the car was ever up for sale, to let him know.

Fast forward to 1996/1997, after he had all but forgot about the car, Al received a call asking if he was still interested in the car? Of course

the rest is history.

Al's 67' is a beautiful red/black original 435 car with bolt on wheels, side pipes., head rest, power brakes, and power steering.



Al runs a 72' block in the car with L88 aluminum heads and L88 cam but, he has the stamped matching numbers block tucked safely away in his garage.



Al says the 67' is a keeper but someday he would like to round out his collection with a 57' fuelie and a 63' split window.

Thanks Al, it was a real pleasure!!

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