

My Ride: The hunt for classic car stories expanded across Connecticut in 2025

By Bud Wilkinson, *Correspondent* Dec 19, 2025



The 1966 Jaguar XJ13 racing car replica restored by Stew Jones Restoration in Winsted.
Bud Wilkinson/For Hearst Connecticut Media

Some owners of classic cars and trucks can be intensely protective of their four-wheeled possessions. They rarely drive them, never take them out in the rain, and carefully dust their exteriors rather than use soapy water. These owners post “Please do not touch!” signs at car shows and, come winter, carefully tuck them away so as to avoid contact with road salt.

The thought of anyone else driving their vehicles is anathema to them. Only rarely has an owner invited me to get behind the wheel — maybe 10 times in nine-plus years of writing the My Ride column. Amazingly, it happened twice in 2025, and those memories stand out in looking back over the past year, along with a few other events both positive and negative.

Trusting me this year was Giuseppe “Joe” LaMonica of Torrington. He allowed me to take a spin in a parking lot in his black 1975 Ferrari Dino 380 GT4. It was sufficient to enable me to now claim to have driven an Italian supercar.



The Mercedes-Benz 280SE 3.5 Cabriolet owned by Rich Raskin of Southport.
Bud Wilkinson/For Hearst Connecticut Media

Getting to operate a 1943 Ford GPW, a World War II military “jeep” belonging to Tom Stansfield of Goshen was more memorable. It was a tight fit behind the steering wheel and the clutch took some patience, but I got an immense sense of history driving down a country road. The stone walls became hedgerows in France in my mind. I began to worry what was around the next curve. A German patrol perhaps? The real concern was distracted SUV drivers as it took concentration to make the “jeep” to stay in its lane.



The 1956 DeSoto FireFlite Sportsman that Casey Golec of Torrington sold in September.
Bud Wilkinson/For Hearst Connecticut Media

Overall, the year soon ending has been satisfying and exhilarating with greater exploration for My Ride. The mid-February sale of the Republican-American newspaper in Waterbury, where the My Ride classic car column began in 2016, was preceded by a period of uncertainty. Would new owner Hearst Connecticut Media Group continue My Ride? Not only was the weekly feature retained, it was soon added it to many of the company's other newspapers across the state.

That change opened up new territory to hunt; basically the entire state. Consequently, My Ride ended up collecting stories in 36 different cities and towns. A total of 41 cars shows were also attended between mid-April and early November.



A 106cc Sears motorcycle from the 1960s that was built in Italy by Gilera.
Bud Wilkinson/For Hearst Connecticut Media

The models that were profiled were predictably varied. Among the ones that stood out were a 1911 Hupmobile Model 20, a rusty 1956 DeSoto FireFlite Sportsman, a rare 1966 Jaguar XJ13 replica of a prototype racing car, and low volume 1971 Mercedes-Benz 280SE 3.5 Cabriolet.

The Hupmobile belongs to Parker and Gwen Ackley of Fairfield. In addition to writing about it, I witnessed the Hupmobile participate in a staged hill climb at a show in Easton in May and even got to ride in it at a car show in Fairfield in June. What a fun car.

The DeSoto was owned by Casey Golec of Torrington. It got noticed at a car show in Torrington because of its patina. The column on the DeSoto appeared in June. Golec enjoyed it over the summer and then sold it in September. He recently reported that the person who bought it from him — with a vow that he'd keep and cherish it — flipped it a week later and made a \$5,000 profit.

The Jaguar XJ13 belongs to a wealthy owner from Seattle and was nearing the end of a six-year restoration at Stew Jones Restoration in Winsted. The project began as a jigsaw puzzle and ended up as stunning piece of high-horsepower art worth several hundred-thousand dollars.



Domenic Gallo of Waterbury, the owner of a 1972 Chevrolet C10 pickup, tries to deduce why My Ride's 2010 Mazda Miata was misfiring in September.

Bud Wilkinson/For Hearst Connecticut Media

Rich Raskin of Southport owns the valuable Mercedes-Benz, one of 1,232 examples produced between 1969 and 1971, and has modified the classic license plate in a manner that causes a chuckle. The plate doesn't say "Early American," rather "Early German" for the car's country of origin.

For new readers who may wonder, it takes much more than an eye-catching vehicle to become a My Ride subject. It requires "meat on the bone." There has to be a sufficient story. Many ask to be profiled, but a lot get rejected. It never hurts to inquire, though.

Perhaps it's a reflection of the overall polarized mood in the country, but there were unexpected confrontations during the course of story-gathering, including one incident that happened in Bristol.

While shooting video in a quiet neighborhood, a homeowner demanded to know why I was standing in the street across from his house with a camera in my hands. He threatened to summon police and to take legal action if his house was shown in a photo or video. The man had no expectation of privacy under state law and was told it was perfectly legal to shoot whatever from city property. He vowed that he'd see me next in court and took down my license plate, ignoring my offer of a business card. I wonder what the cops told him?



Gwen and Parker Ackley of Fairfield dress in period clothing when they take their 1911 Hupmobile Model 20 to car shows. They allowed spectator Robin Denny of Thomaston to sit behind the wheel at September show in Fairfield.
Bud Wilkinson/For Hearst Connecticut Media

Most of the surprises this year were pleasant, such as spotting an old motorcycle parked near a corner of an owner's garage in Shelton. It turned out to be a nearly-complete, 106cc, single-cylinder model made in Italy by Gilera that sold under the Sears name in the late 1960s. The bike displayed rust and was missing some parts, but was a cool relic.

One My Ride subject came to my rescue this year. While heading to visit Domenic Gallo of Waterbury and his 1972 Chevrolet C10 pickup, the engine of my 2010 Mazda Miata began misfiring. The "check engine" light hadn't come on. Gallo ran a quick diagnostic upon my arrival, found nothing wrong, but predicted I soon would. He told me not to be too concerned; that I could limp it home. He was right. Shortly after leaving his house, the light came on. His advice was appreciated.

What is never lacking is enthusiasm from all owners of vintage vehicles, whether they hand over the keys or not. It's always enjoyable hearing their tales.

Harwinton native Bud Wilkinson writes about classic cars and motorcycles for Hearst Connecticut Media. He previously reported for The Columbus Dispatch in Ohio and was columnist for The Arizona Republic in Phoenix before reporting for KSAZ-TV in Phoenix where he won a Scripps Howard National Journalism Award and an Emmy Award for commentary. He may be reached by email at budw@ride-ct.com.

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Bud Wilkinson - video at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MBvQmYudEWc>

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