

1931 Packard 826 Sedan

Story & photos by GARY MARCHETTI

I HAVE ALWAYS LOVED CARS from the 1930s—those Depression era cars are simply amazing. I don't know what it is about them; maybe it's the long swooping fenders, the bright round headlights, the soft fabric or leather upholstery, or the Art Deco style that attracts me.

The first car I bought when I was 15 years old was a 1930 Ford Model A Roadster with a rumble seat. I wasn't old enough to drive it so I began my first restoration project. After a year of work, the car was back on the road and was my daily driver all through high school and college. There were many years and many cars along the way before I found my 1931 Packard 826. I had been restoring other cars but wanted to find a CCCA Full Classic® so I could >



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compete at some of the concours events in the Southern California area.

I found this car on eBay and put in a bid. The car was in Ohio and I know you are supposed to look at a car and thoroughly go through it from top to bottom, but the price was right and besides it was a Packard. One of the tricks I have learned when buying a car online is to check and see if it is being advertised on other websites with a "Buy" price. Well, this car was advertised elsewhere and I was high bidder on eBay so I called the dealer who was selling the car. I told him I was his high bidder on eBay and that I wanted to buy the car directly from him at his selling price. Originally he said, "No I have lots of action on the car and I don't have any internet ads; it must be a mistake." I said, "I will send you the ads and call you back in five minutes."

I sent him the four or five websites where the car was advertised, called him back and he decided to sell me the car. We arranged for the car to be shipped from Ohio to Escondido with the stipulation that he remove the hood ornament and send that to me UPS. I had a strong suspicion that the hood ornament would not make the trip in an open trailer without spreading its wings and flying off to someone's hood mascot collection. Both the hood ornament and car arrived at the shop in good condition.

After unloading the car, I started to go through it with my friend Mike Adams from Mike Adams Restorations, formerly Bowden's Auto Body. The car was extremely straight and solid, had very little surface rust, the usual mouse-eaten upholstery and the appearance that it had been in a barn fire that had delaminated all the windows, melting most of the rubber and made the arms on the "Goddess of Speed" droop down. The engine turned over but had not been started for many years. Still, it was a Packard, a perfect car to restore back to its former glory. So now the hard work begins.

The car had not been out in the open for a long time and needed everything. I decided that I wanted to do a full body-off restoration and make this 1931 826 a show car. To build a show car takes an extra level



of care and attention to detail. I began by taking photos of the body from every angle so I could document the original pinstripe design. Next, I photographed the interior, the chassis and the engine compartment. With all this documentation, it was now time to start taking the car apart. Although the car had very little rust, it had not been taken apart since it was new about 85 years ago. This process takes a lot of time and patience, and lots of plastic bags.

Every piece that was taken off the car was bagged and tagged so I would know where it belonged when we were ready to reassemble the car. After removing the hood, fenders and radiator I now had a better view of the engine compartment. I photographed the engine from every angle and then removed the engine components: starter generator, carburetor, manifold, exhaust and the linkage. As each area was being disassembled I bagged the parts and photo documented everything. Next, I brought in my upholstery trimmer, Bill Meinerding from the Coachworks in Encinitas. We removed the seats, door panels, all the interior window and door hardware and put it all in large trash bags so we would have patterns for the restoration. I photographed and documented everything. Then we pulled out the headliner and removed all the window glass and metal window trim. With the car stripped down to this point it was time to pull the engine and send it off to be rebuilt. This Packard 826 engine has nine bearings so it will run very smoothly. The engine turned over but to comfortably drive this car and bring this engine back to its original condition and specifications, I decided it would be best to send it to a shop that specializes in engine rebuilding. LMS engines in El Monte has done several older car engines for me in the past and I have been very pleased with the results. So we loaded the engine on a pallet and drove it to the rebuilding shop. They were excited to see this engine and started on it right away.

I then removed the doors from the car and started stripping all the paint off the body. There was minimal bodywork that needed to be done so once I had sanded the body down to bare metal and sanded all the >

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interior of the body, we removed the body and bolted it onto a cart. The doors, body and fenders were now ready for primer and blocking. I know this sounds easy but the process to sand the body by itself took over 80 hours. At this point I had over 200 hours into this project. The frame was the next to be worked on. I removed the Bijur oiling lines and connectors so they could be cleaned and sanded, rebuilt the brakes, rebuilt the shocks and then sanded down the entire frame, leaf springs and the front and rear axles. I didn't sand blast the chassis but hand sanded and wire wheeled the entire frame. This took a lot longer but the result was a frame that looked like it did before it was painted at the factory in 1931. This process took about three weeks to complete. The frame then went into the paint booth and was primed and painted by Mike Adams and his team.

The engine came back from the rebuilder's shop, so it was cleaned up and painted, and I added a new throw out bearing. I then married the transmission back onto the motor. I reinstalled the Bijur oiling system lines on the chassis, and mounted the motor, transmission, and driveline. The chassis was now ready for the new wiring harness.

While I was working on the chassis, Mike Adams and his team were working on the car body. The car was now in primer and blocked out so we remounted the body on the frame, attached the running boards and fenders and reinstalled the doors. With a few minor adjustments, we had everything lined up. We then took everything apart, put the body back on the cart, and moved it into the paint booth. After a few different sample spray outs, I decided on the original Packard "B" color scheme. This is Packard Blue on the body with the belt line and fenders Black. The pin stripe is bronze gold and truly makes the Packard Blue stand out. The car was now ready for paint. I ask Mike Adams to do his magic and paint this car for me himself. Once the car was painted, color sanded and polished, we reassembled everything. The Packard was now ready for windows to be installed along with the final wiring and upholstery.

The restoration process requires a lot of patience, a team of skilled craftsmen and a bucket of money. The car was completed >



At the 2017 Southern California Grand Classic and San Marino Motor Classic



Gauges and dashboard



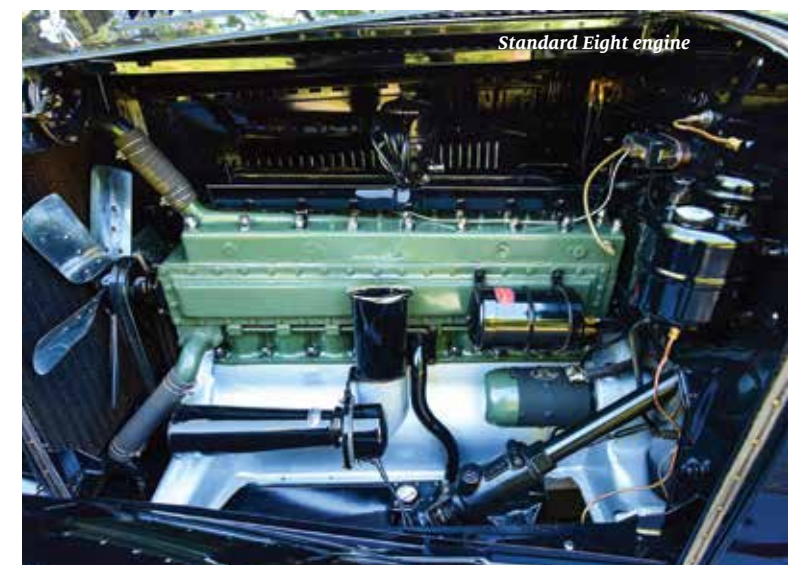
The luxurious rear compartment



Gary and his Packard



An inviting interior



Standard Eight engine



Brochure chassis

in about 16 months and I estimate it took 1,100 to 1,200 hours. This process is not for the faint of heart and there are always many challenges in finding and replacing parts and getting everything to work the way it did when the car was originally built. Without the expertise of my team of restoration specialists, this project would not have been possible.

The Packard 826 was the entry-level car for the 1931 Packard line up. They made only one model 826, a five-passenger sedan, and the rest of the Standard Eight models that year were part of the 833 series. The 826 came with a rear-mounted spare tire, a Standard Eight engine, Bijur oiling system, a four-speed transmission, and a luxurious interior. The 826 had a 126-inch wheelbase compared to the 833 line with its 133-inch wheelbase. Although this was not a custom-bodied car, it is still a CCCA Full Classic®. So I decided now that the car was completed, I wanted to start showing it at some of the local concours events.

In June of 2017, I entered the car in the Southern California Region's Grand Classic, held in conjunction with the San Marino

Motor Classic. It was a first-place winner and judged at 96.5 points, earning CCCA Primary badge #3270. The judges found a few areas that needed correction, so I made those modifications. Next, we entered The Hillsboro Concours d'Elegance and won "Best of Class". The Niello Concours in El Dorado Hills was our next CCCA Grand Classic in October of 2017. We won third in our class of 12 cars at the event, but scored 98.5 points with the CCCA and achieved the "Senior" CCCA award. March of 2018 brought us to Rancho Santa Fe for another CCCA Grand Classic. Now the Packard was dialed in and we scored a perfect 100 points receiving our CCCA Premier badge. I was very excited by this recognition, as we had been showing the car for less than a year. In April, I brought the car to the La Jolla Concours and we achieved a 3rd-place award. Next, I took the Packard to Arizona for the AACA Western Spring Meet. We won our class and achieved the AACA National Junior status and were recognized for a National Award the 2018 President's Cup for the Western Region, and nominated to show our car at the Zenith awards in Auburn, Indiana. The Muckenthaler Motor Car Classic is held each year in May, so

in 2018 we showed the Packard 826 there and won our class. A few weeks later, I attended the Huntington Beach Concours and we won our class. I entered the Packard in the Ironstone Concours in 2019 and won the Packard class. We also won Best of Show at the 56th annual membership meet in 2019 with Packards International. We recently won the 2020 Best of Show and Sponsors Choice at the Desert Classic in Palm Springs.

I enjoy showing this car as it is a piece of automotive history that few people have seen. Participating in the car show circuit has given me the opportunity to meet some great car enthusiasts that I would not have ever met just attending the shows. I have developed some lifelong friends and memories and this 826 has paved the way for me to find and restore some other great cars. Because I have been showing this car a lot these past years I have not been driving it very much. I have some other Classic cars and I must admit this Packard 826 handles and accelerates better than many cars from this era. It really is a fun car to drive--Just ask the man who owns one! ●