

## Retired from GM, Wolken Has Kept '58 Caddie 'Land Boat' for 50 Years

By Gerald Scott

Retired GM Tech Center employee Steve Wolken has a great story to tell about his classic car, a 1958 Cadillac Fleetwood Sixty Special.

Wolken had his 5,025-pound land boat on display at the GM Tech Center Employee Car Show in Warren and we caught up with him there and took in his amusing car stories at that time.

"I'm retired, I actually worked at Performance Engineering. I was the program manager for the Cadillac professional vehicles. Obviously, we don't do that sort of work inhouse any more, we work with upfitters," Wolken said.

"We'd upgrade the Cadillac with various truck components and what-not and turn it over to them to split and stretch. My entire career was here at the Tech Center. I've owned this car for 50 years, it was my great uncle's last car."

Although Wolken's particular Cadillac is a "hand-me-down" from that great uncle, it nonetheless has a terrific provenance.

"This was my great-uncle's last car. He was a wealthy man in his own right. In the 1930s he would buy Packards and other vehicles. Cadillac in the 1930s only had limousines for a wealthy owner.

"In 1938, Bill Mitchell created a Sixty Special, which obviously was going to be an owner-driven car. My conservative uncle saw that, but he waited until 1940 to

buy his first Fleetwood. I have the original lithograph brochure, which shows he paid \$2,400 for the vehicle.

"Subsequently in 1946, 1950, 1954 and 1958, did it again (by buying that year's Sixty Special). When he passed away in 1962, I'm sure he was ready to buy another one. Luckily my father said, 'I'll take it,' because he willed it to his slightly younger sister, so I had it for the past 50 years."

It's a great coincidence, then, that a guy who inherited a mint-condition 1958 Cadillac Fleetwood ended up working not only at GM – but at Cadillac division to boot.

"I grew up in St. Louis, Mo., and my family had nothing to do with the auto industry whatsoever. When I graduated as an engineer, they told me, 'You can live in Detroit or you can live in Detroit.' So I said, 'Okay, I guess I'll live in Detroit.'

"It was in my half of the garage. My mother and I drove it, I drove it in high school.

Needless to say, I was laughed at in high school in the 1960s but now when I go back to my high school reunions in St. Louis, I'm the only guy driving the same car. And I'm not laughed at any more. I'm finally growing into it from an age standpoint."

Now here's where Wolken's car story takes an interesting turn for the better.

It seems that the 1958 Cadillac Fleetwood in general was a show-

case for GM advertising in that era. Wolken explains further.

"In 1957, General Motors was honoring its 50th anniversary (1908-1958). All of the car divisions worked with the *Detroit News* for a pictorial that occurred in December of that year, to commemorate the 50 years," Wolken recalled.

"Cadillac chose to do their photo shoot across the Detroit River, in Dieppe Park in Windsor. This is the one that showed up in the owner's manual as a divider.

"This was the fall of 1957. In the fall of 1997, I chose to recreate the original picture, in the identical spot, in Dieppe Gardens.

"I had a friend here who went to a resale shop in Ferndale to come up with surprisingly similar outfits (to the 1957 female models) and she and her sister recreated the photo.

"My car is identical except for the color. I recreated the identical location, I even put the guard rail in the same spot.

Yet for all of that, Wolken does-



Steve Wolken's 1958 Cadillac Fleetwood Sixty Special.

n't "baby" his car, it's still a driver. "I Woodward Cruise the car, it's got 110,000 miles on it," he said. "It still has the original) 365 four-barrel with a four-speed automatic transmission. Granted, first gear was only 1 to 3 mph, but hey."

## Mound Rd. Signal Timing Study Done

Residents and visitors to Macomb County will now find that their trip down Mound Road will go a lot easier as improvements to traffic lights will allow for better traffic flow.

This past May, the Macomb County Dept. of Roads completed a project to develop and implement new optimized signal timing plans for 50 traffic signals along Mound road, from West Utica Road south to 9 Mile Road.

The total cost of the signal optimizations study was \$250,000 and was fully funded through the Federal Highway Administration's Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality program.

It was done in order to determine the effectiveness of the new signal timing plan development process.

As a result of the study, average vehicular delay has been reduced on Mound Road, saving Macomb County residents and visitors both time and money. The primary directions of commuting traffic (southbound in the morning, northbound in the evening) realized an approximate five-minute average reduction in

total travel time.

Motorists using the corridors during the three peak travel periods (morning, midday and evening) will save an estimated 835,520 hours of travel time and 366,310 gallons of gasoline each year because of improved traffic flow due to the new timing plans.

It is believed the total annual savings to motorists due to improved signal timing is expected to be \$13,919,310.

"There is a tremendous return on investment of these federal CMAQ grant dollars," said Macomb County Executive Mark Hackel. "The time saved, reduction in fuel use, and improvement in air quality realized by the citizens Macomb County is significant."

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