

The Astronaut and his '55 T-Bird

by Brendan McAleer / Reprinted from Hagerty News



On May 12, 2013, Commander Chris Hadfield became the first person to record a music video in space. His cover of David Bowie's "Space Oddity" was an instant hit, garnering millions of views. Bowie himself was impressed, calling the video "the most poignant version of the song ever created." While the fate of the song's Major Tom remains a mystery, Commander Hadfield's fate doesn't. He would return safely to Earth... and then he'd drive home in his 1955 Ford Thunderbird.

Driving interviewed Commander Hadfield about his T-bird and about his car history growing up on a farm in Milton, Ontario. Hadfield learned to drive tractors at age 12 before graduating to a 1962 Oldsmobile Delta 88 with (what else) a Rocket 88 V-8 underhood. He owned a '62 Oldsmobile, then a '64 VW Bug in university. Then came marriage and family and the very John Glenn choice of a 1983 Mercury Marquis woody wagon. But the boy who became the first Canadian to walk in space and command the International Space Station had always had a differently

wheeled dream. We caught up with him by phone, en route to an astronaut conference in Montreal.

"Absolutely I wanted to hold out for a '55," Hadfield says. "The '57 was bigger, and the '56 with the Continental back and opera windows was different too. Basically my whole life I've thought the '55 was the perfect combination of design, power, and size."

Hadfield had to wait until 2001, but he finally got his '55. He bought the car over the phone from Star City, Russia, where he was working as Director of Operations of NASA. A couple of years later, he and his father Roger had repaired the T-Bird's flaws and a new job at NASA's Johnson Space Center in Houston beckoned. A normal person might have shipped the car down to live in a garage. Hadfield and his then-16-year-old son Evan loaded the T-Bird to the gills and made a road trip out of it.

"We hit every world's biggest ball of string on the way, even stopped off at Graceland and got Elvis glasses. The car

(Continued on next page)

The Astronaut (Continued from previous page)



was pretty full—maybe we could have used the Continental back that trip,” Hadfield laughs.

Then, between 2003 and 2013, NASA’s Chief of Robotics and later Chief of the International Space Station Operations daily-drove a 50-year-old Ford to work every day.

“My commute was only about 10 minutes, and no highways,” Hadfield says, “I didn’t drive it if the weather was bad. But they don’t really have winter down there. Every single time I drove it, I was delighted. It was fun.”

“You don’t want to risk a car unnecessarily,” he adds, “But you do want to honor it. Everything about it is within my ability to fix, and I bought the car to be involved in it.”

According to the Commander, his Thunderbird wasn’t a unicorn in the NASA parking lot. Astronauts have a tradition of being interested in cars, with most of the Apollo teams driving Corvettes. But it’s not just about speed.

“All astronauts are pretty hands-on kinds of people,” Hadfield says. “You have to be pretty self-sufficient—there’s nobody to call in space.”



Now retired at the age of 60, Commander Hadfield seems busier than ever. He’s written several books, including one for children, and is a popular speaker at events. He’s also very active on Twitter. Pressed on whether he’d like to add anything to his garage, Hadfield responds with a laugh.

“At this point, I feel like I only have the time to be faithful to one car,” he says.

However, his father Roger has a varied collection that includes Rolls-Royce Silver Ghosts and McLaughlin-Buicks. And Chris is interested to see whether his children will share a generational interest, spurred by the Thunderbird. The car is something of a bridge across the years, worked on by Hadfield with his dad, and shared with his sons and daughter.

Now, restored by Dave Harrison of Strathroy, Ontario, over 14 months, Hadfield’s ‘55 T-Bird stands ready for years of faithful service. It is a dream come to life, grounded to the earth, ready for the next sortie. Commencing countdown, engines on.





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Jessi Combs may get her spot in the world record books

by Brandon Gillogly / Reprinted from Hagerty News



The culmination of Jessi Combs' efforts in her North American Eagle land speed racer may have been enough to posthumously crown her the fastest woman in the world.

Combs was killed while making her third run of the day

in the land speed racer on August 27, 2019. An accomplished fabricator and racer, Combs had off-road race wins under her belt and had made a dozen runs in the car, over several trips, pushing for higher speeds each time.

The title is currently held by Kitty O'Neil, who set the record in the Alvord Desert in 1976 at 512.710 mph. Combs' two-way average in the same Oregon desert was 531.889 mph. In the world of land speed racing, where records are often broken by fractions of a mile per hour, breaking a long-standing record by more than 19 mph is a monumental feat.

An exhibit of Combs' life and career is currently open at

the Petersen Automotive Museum, where it was announced that the results of Jessi's runs have been submitted to Guinness World Records for consideration to unseat O'Neil for fastest female land speed record



Unusual Cars You've Probably Never Seen



Ever heard of these? Ever actually seen one? Trust us, if you had you'd remember, because this 1963 Willys Interlagos Coupé is coooooooooool. Sure, it's essentially an Alpine built under license in Brazil... and it's similar to those sold in Mexico as Dinaplines.

Willys, which had an alliance with French automaker Renault, set up shop in Brazil in the early 1950s, and in addition to the Interlagos Coupé it also built a version of the Renault Dauphine. Only 822 (or fewer, depending on the source) fiberglass-bodied Interlagos were produced from 1962–66, and few escaped South America.



Not to be confused with the gorgeous Airline Coupe, this less-lovely but decidedly rare 1947 HGR Aerodynamic roadster went against the pre-war trend of heavier and more powerful sports cars. The Aerodynamic, powered by a 1.5-liter engine, was aimed at “gentleman drivers” who wanted to compete at major events.

One such gentleman was Norwegian Simon Knudsen Hansen, who campaigned the car in events throughout Portugal, including the 1948–50 Rallye Internacional a Lisboa. After swapping the original power plant for a 2.5-liter Lea Francis engine, Hansen scored a class victory and finished eighth overall at the 1951 Falperra International Hill Climb. The Aerodynamic is eligible for historic racing and rallies, and it should continue to see plenty of road time.



This sporty little car happens to be an accomplished racer. Delivered new to Portuguese amateur driver José Emídio da Silva and powered by a Panhard air-cooled engine, it placed first in its small-displacement class and fifth overall in the 1951 Vila do Conde Circuito da Primavera, was a class winner in the 1952 Portuguese Hill Climb Championship, and finished fourth overall and won its class again at the '53 Portuguese Hill Climb.

After sitting in a Portuguese car collection for decades, the car was immaculately restored and is ready for its new owner to return it to the motorsport stage.



This three-wheeler looks more like a military vehicle than a passenger car, which perhaps make sense when you consider that BSA started out making guns—BSA stands for Birmingham Small Arms—and moved on to motorcycles before producing its first automobile in 1907.

The 1933 BSA TW33-10, a cool alternative to the Morgan three-wheeler of the same period, has a spartan and snug interior, but you'll be the star attraction at any Cars and Coffee gathering.



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ED: I am looking for other Cars of the Month. These cars do not have to be concours award winners, just cars that have owners who are proud to own them. (Don't we all feel that way?) To nominate a car and owner, please contact me at gakiyama@earthlink.net. Thanks.

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