

DRIVING



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SECTION E



Pete Yuen, 91, shows off the silver anniversary 1988 Avanti he drove to Bell Studebaker Museum for Avanti Appreciation Day. PHOTOS: ALYN EDWARDS

COLLECTOR CLASSICS

RARE STUDEBAKER WORTH THE WAIT



ALYN EDWARDS

Pete Yuen has loved Studebaker cars since 1947 when he saw a new Starlight coupe, representing the first completely redesigned postwar automobile. He was impressed.

But it wasn't until 1970 that the retired Vancouver millwright could afford to buy and restore a well-used 1947 two-door model with its six-cylinder engine and overdrive transmission. The car was from Alberta, it was loaded with parts and a salt lick had rusted an area where it was stored in the trunk. After putting that car back on the road, Pete kept buying and restoring old Studebakers.

When Studebaker introduced the rakish Avanti four-passenger sports car in 1962 as the most advanced car of its time, Pete had a growing family and couldn't afford to buy one. But he resolved to one day own the ultimate Studebaker.

As it turned out, he would have to wait until he was 85.

There was no car that looked like the Avanti, North America's first four-passenger sports car. With its Coke-bottle-shaped fibreglass body featuring a long hood and short rear deck, it was



Restorer James Bell and Museum of the Americas curator Renee Crist display the first production Avanti built by Studebaker for the 1963 model year. Six years of volunteer effort went into restoring the historic car.

introduced well before the Mustang-inspired pony-car era. The optional supercharged V8 engine could push the sporty Avanti to speeds nearing 300 km/h. The light aerodynamic sports car smashed 29 speed records at the Bonneville Salt Flats.

Unfortunately, the modern masterpiece came into showrooms too late to save Studebaker.

The company built only 3,834 examples for the 1963 model year and 809 Avanti cars in 1964.

The factory closed in December of that year. Two Studebaker dealers revived the model as the Avanti II and a succession of others continued limited production of Avanti look-alikes until 2007.

Yuen chose a burnt orange 1984 model that he bought on Vancouver Island in the spring of 2014, after he turned 85.

He wasn't satisfied with the sluggish steering and, when he determined an upgrade to rack and pinion wasn't economically feasible, he sold the car.

Now, at the age of 91, he is happily driving a pearl white silver anniversary 1988 Avanti, purchased from the original owner on Washington state's Olympic Peninsula. It is No. 7 of the 28 Avanti Silver Edition cars built in 1988 and likely the only one in Canada. The car is eight inches longer than the original Studebaker-built Avanti, is powered by a High Output GM 305-cubic-inch engine and has creature comforts including leather seats and air conditioning.

The opportunity for Yuen to drive his "new" Avanti to Avanti Appreciation Day at the Bell Studebaker Museum in Bellingham, Wash., was irresistible. He would show his car alongside other Avanti models and see the first Avanti ever built. Avanti No. 1 was restored at the Bell Museum, operated by James and Stephanie Bell.

The Avanti serial number 63R1001, the first production model built by Studebaker, was in sad shape in 2001 when it was donated to the Lemay Museum of the Americas in Tacoma, Wash., the largest car museum in the U.S.

Curator Renee Crist realized how significant the car was and pitched the idea to restore the car to the museum board of directors. Five directors put up \$5,000 each to kickstart the process that would be done by volunteers under the supervision of James Bell.

Despite being painted green with scales and looking like a bass boat, the Avanti was in reasonable condition with all parts present, including the original engine, equipped with a Paxton supercharger driven through a four-speed manual transmission and positraction rear end. Six years of volunteer effort, donated parts and more than \$50,000 in hard costs borne by the museum and donors has resulted in a spectacular authentic restoration.

Production Avanti No. 1 was painted in its original white with an orange bucket-seat interior. It is not known who is responsible for the outrageous sparkly paint job that had to be removed by soda blasting the body so the restoration could proceed.

The car had been originally used to produce the Avanti service manual and to train service technicians in Studebaker's South Bend, Ind., plant. After one year, it was sold to Boston University business graduate Dick Jason Goldfarb, who was celebrating his first job. He thought he got a great deal on the car.

When the restoration was completed, Avanti No. 1 went on display in the lobby of the Lemay Museum of the Americas with a sign recognizing all the donors and volunteers who made the restoration possible. It is the first restoration organized by the museum.

"We have educated so many people about what an Avanti is and the significance of the car," Crist says.

Yuen is among those who knows the history of the Studebaker Avanti and how it introduced many automotive firsts, including being the first North American production car to have a built-in roll bar and disc brakes.

It's an ageless car and so is Pete Yuen, who intends to keep driving his Avanti through his 90s.

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Aston Martin DBS GT Zagato a stunner

ALEX REID

Aston Martin has been killing it these days with its excellent new design language and exciting upcoming supercars, but what has really been setting our hearts on fire is the return of Zagato and its wild coachbuilt DBS GT.

We think you'll agree the car is stunning to look at, but newly revealed renderings of the car reveal there's more beneath the beauty — the car's got personality as well,

specifically in the form of an active aero grille.

Some 108 diamond-shaped carbon-fibre pieces right up front on the car move and shape the incoming air to suit the needs of the aerodynamic profile. When the car is off they remain closed, but once the ignition is turned on the entire grille flutters and opens up.

There is also no rear window, because carbon fibre is lighter than glass. Don't fret though, a rear-facing camera captures those slower

than you and displays them on the infotainment screen.

And don't forget you get an Aston Martin DB4 GT Zagato continuation car with your purchase, which has plenty of rear glass.

The older Zagato should also satisfy your need for a classic straight-six sports car, with 380 horsepower and a four-speed manual transmission.

Under the hood of the "new" car is a ferocious 5.2-litre twin-turbo V-12. There will be only 19 DBS GT



Zagatos built, each sold for £6 million (\$9.8 million) although that seems like a pretty good deal considering you actually get two cars. Driving.ca

There will be only 19 Aston Martin DBS GT Zagatos built.

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