



When the Top Goes Down - The Value Goes Up!

If your thoughts turn to top down cruising in a classic car this summer,
it may be money well-spent...

By John White,

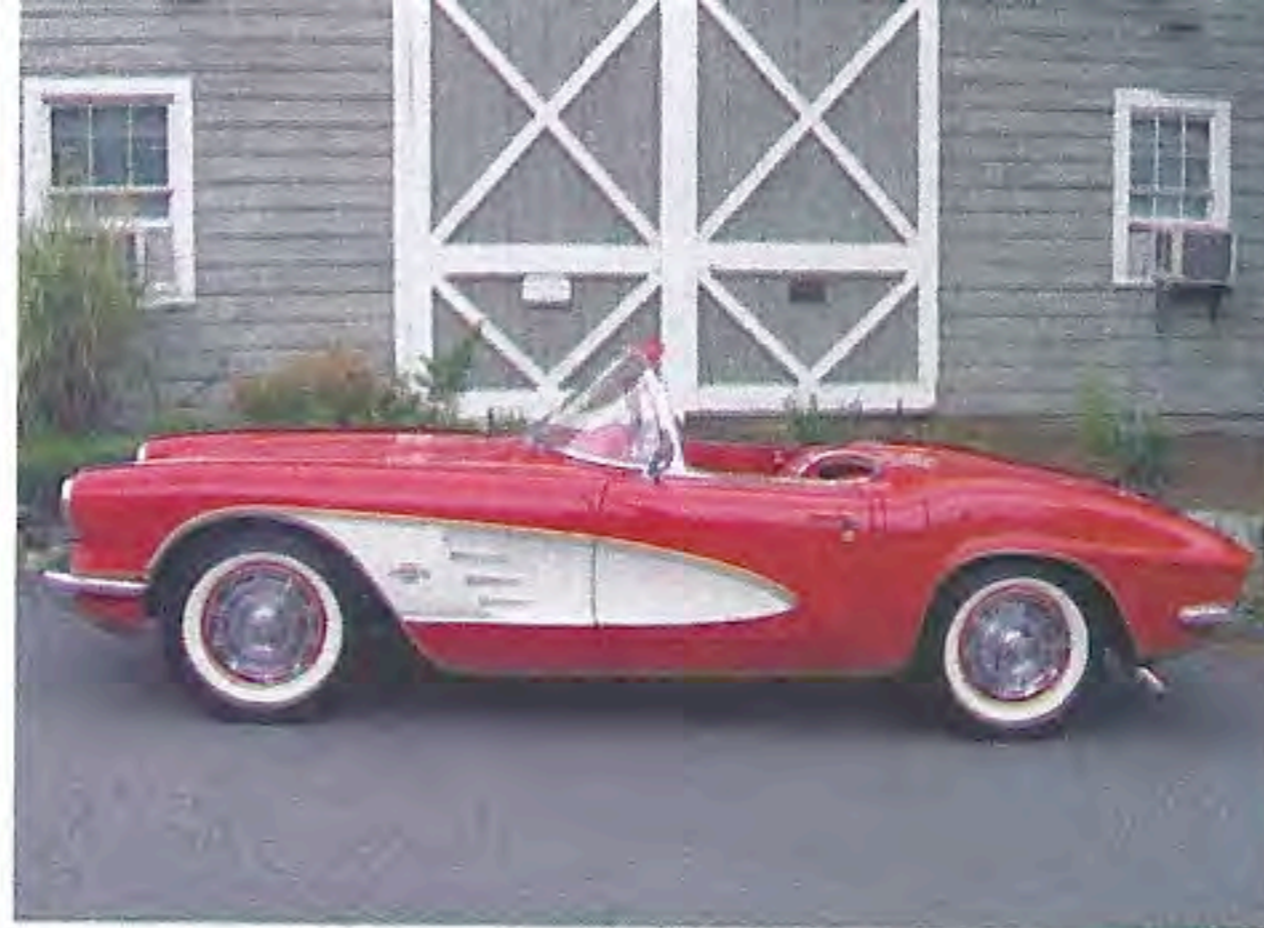
Photos by Lee Wolfe, Black & White Photos Courtesy of John White

Pity the late baby-boomers whose childhood memories won't include summertime top-down motoring with their parents in large, powerful American convertibles, for between 1977 and 1982 American car companies ceased manufacturing cars with retractable, soft tops. As for me, I fondly recall evening cruises with my dad in his 1969 Chrysler Newport drop-top (yellow with gold vinyl interior) - once having to stop for a herd of deer crossing Roxiticus Road in Mendham. Stars overhead, engine smoothly idling, and headlights on the faces of unperturbed and indifferent animals.

Unfortunately, the spirit of the 1970s and 1980s was dampened by the oil embargo of 1973, a prolonged recession and the lingering effects of the social upheaval caused by the Vietnam War. This malaise manifested itself in the American automobile industry and the result was boring, big-bumpered, horsepower-reduced mobile "appliances" - none of which were available with stylish and fun top-dropping capability.

Coincidentally, this era also saw the rise of imports from Asia and, possibly, the beginning-of-the-end of our globally dominant automobile industry.

Perhaps though, if your parents (or you) had a certain joie-de-vivre, or flair for the offbeat, you motored through this period in a European import, where the choices for open air fun were many - from diminutive the Fiat 600 to the imposing Rolls-Royce Cornish. The Evolution of the Convertible - In the beginning, car manufacturers were thrilled to produce anything that moved, and central to that key attribute was lightness. Naturally, as a fixed top added weight, cars with soft canvas tops, providing just basic protection from the elements, were the norm. As manufacturing techniques improved, and as engine technology led to continuing increases in horsepower, cars with fully enclosed coachwork became commonplace. In fact, by the mid-1920s, production and sale of closed cars surpassed that of their open-topped coun-



This high-performance **1961 Corvette 283/270 Roadster**, in Roman Red, has its original 2x4 carburetor, 283 cubic inch, 270 horsepower engine, and its factory 4-speed transmission. It comes to us courtesy of The Stable, Ltd., where it is available for \$74,000. Visit www.stableltd.com or call (908) 234-1755, 217 Main Street, Gladstone, NJ.

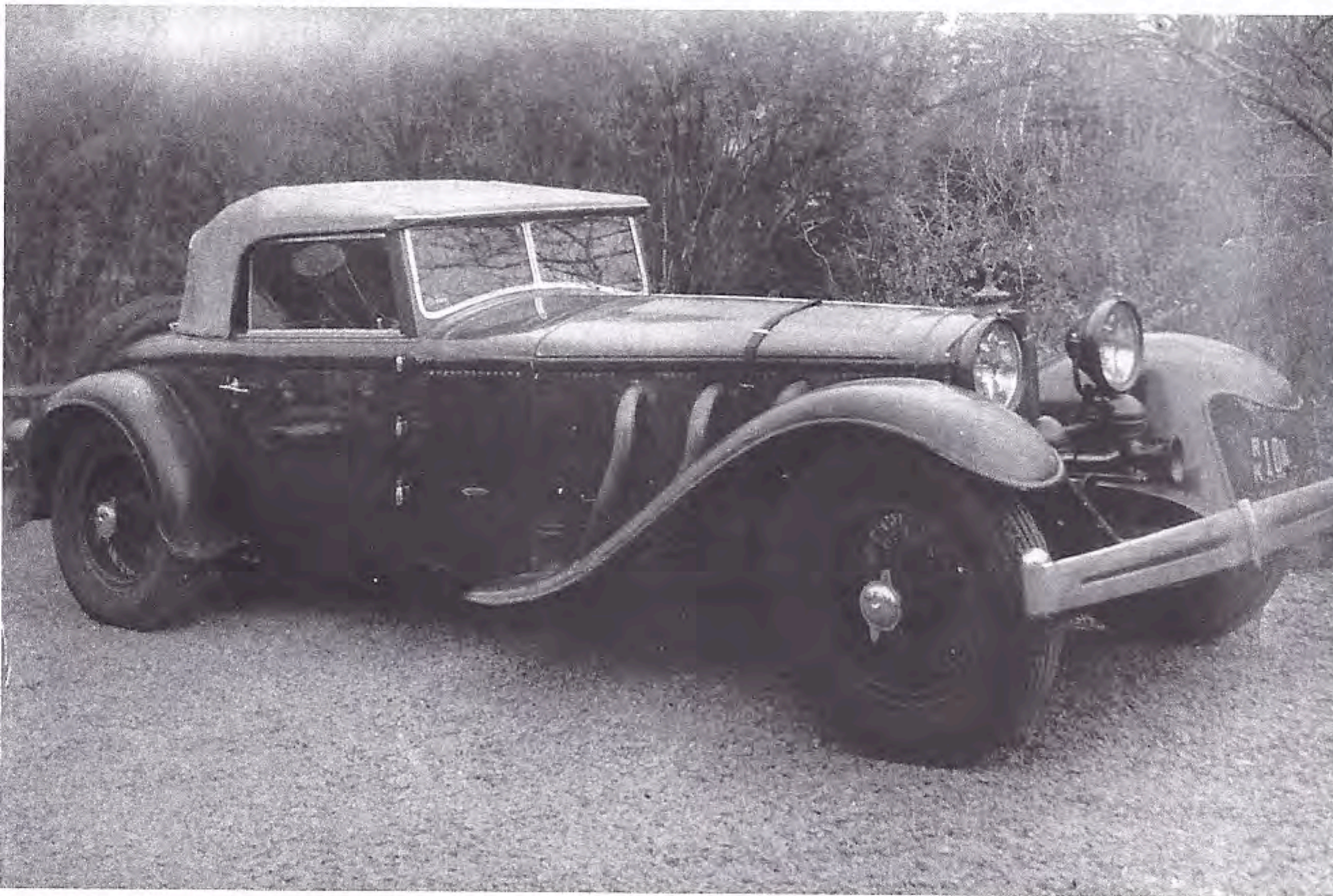
terparts.

Although enclosed coupes and sedans were the first choice for early 20th century motorists, convertibles remained

in production and accounted for some of the most interesting vehicles manufactured up through the 1940s. For the open-air enthusiast of this period, there were a multitude of styles to choose from, in both 2-door and 4-door combinations; from convertible "coupes" (2 doors, 2 seats), to convertible "sedans" (4 doors, 4 seats).

The most popular style of convertible, however, is referred to as the "Victoria," which has 2 doors and 4 seats - and this is the style that most people think of today when they think of a convertible automobile.

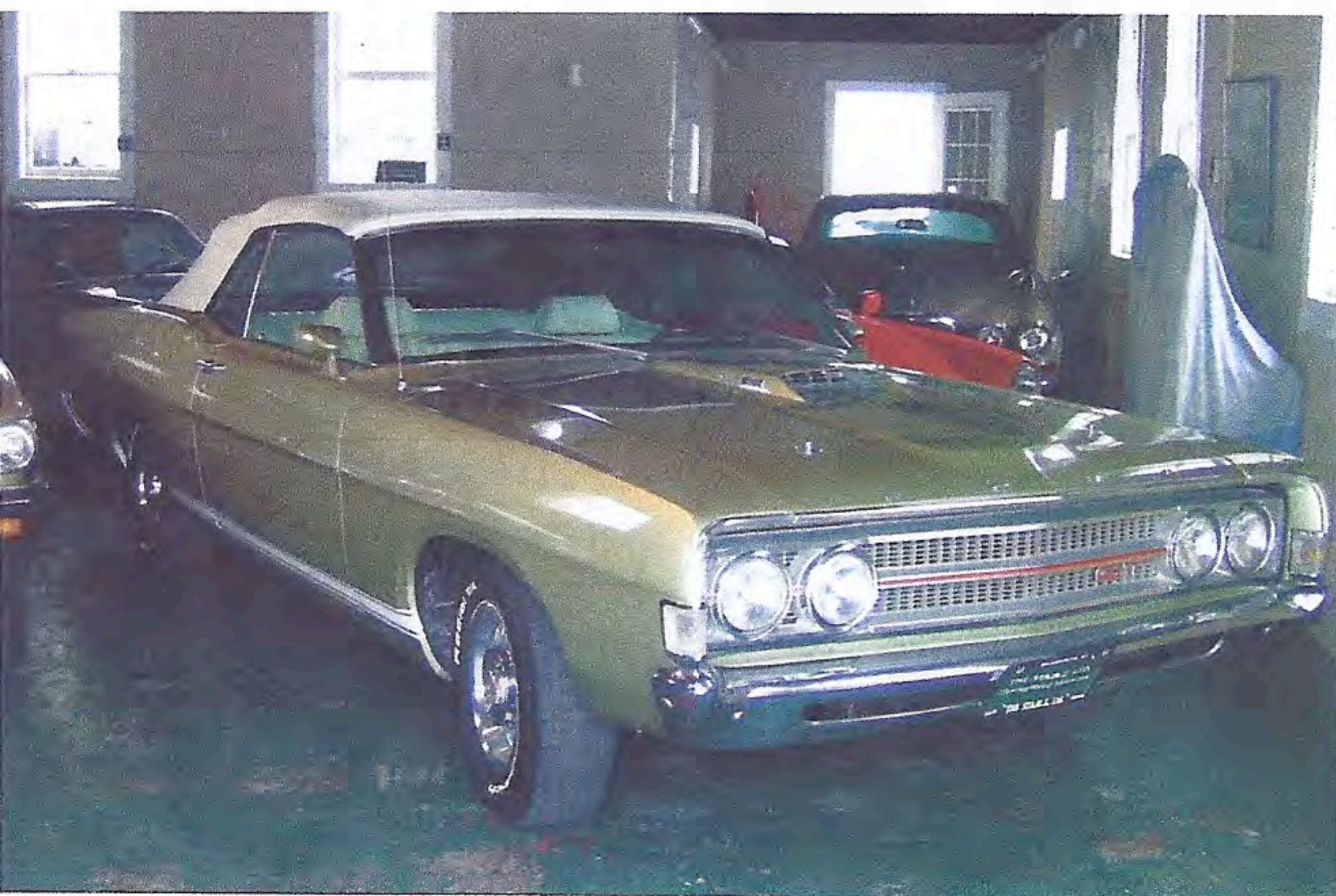
Not all convertibles of the classic era, however, had soft canvas retractable tops. In 1936, French manufacturer Peugeot introduced a retractable hard-top - called the "Electronique Transformable" - and this car most certainly inspired Ford designers to produce the sophisticated Skyliner of the



Mrs. Beattie of Pottersville wishes her husband had kept his **1928 Mercedes Model S**, because now it's worth a million dollars!



This 1963 Ford Galaxie 500 Convertible, in Peacock Blue, is equipped with its original 352 cubic inch V-8 engine with twin exhaust, spinner wheel covers, automatic transmission, power steering, original AM radio, and power convertible top. It comes to us courtesy of The Stable, Ltd., where it is available for \$22,000. Visit www.stableltd.com or call (908) 234-1755, 217 Main Street, Gladstone, NJ.



1969 Ford Torino GT Cobra-Jet Convertible - By 1969, Ford was seriously involved in international racing and built special cars based on their production models - the 428 Ram-Air Cobra-Jet was one of them. This model is one of 28 with a 4-speed and comes to us courtesy of the Stable, Ltd., where it is available for \$65,000. Visit www.stableltd.com or call (908) 234-1755, 217 Main Street, Gladstone, NJ.

late 1950s. Although impressive from an engineering perspective (multiple electric motors, hydraulic pumps and over 600 feet of controlling wires),

Skyliner motorists miss out on a fundamental convertible experience - the soothing sound of raindrops hitting canvas on those occasional moments

when the weather turns and your top must go up (another fond childhood memory).

Convertibles as Investments - To the extent that you should consider an antique or classic car purchase as an investment (caution strongly urged), convertibles prove a safer bet for a number of different reasons. Typically, they're more stylish, they're certainly more fun, but primarily, they're rarer than closed-body counterparts. Using an affordable classic as an example, out of 15,444,858 German-manufactured Volkswagen Beetles, only 330,251 were cabriolets. Of those, an untold number perished due to rust (the second contributing factor to rarity), as open-topped cars are obviously more susceptible to the elements (example: my college roommate's 1963 Alfa Romeo Spider that had virtually no floor).

Of course, there are always exceptions. For instance, the iconic Mercedes-Benz Gullwing coupes of the 1950s and 1960s typically trade for

more than their convertible siblings. But unless you have in the neighborhood of \$500,000 or more to invest, this shouldn't be a concern.

The relative softness in the market today - and the approaching summer months - present an opportune time to consider and enjoy ownership of a classic convertible. Like any investment, however, it is critical that you do your research. Talk to owners and marque experts, buy privately or at auction only after having an expert evaluate your car of interest, and only buy from dealers with reputations that have stood the test of time.

Once you've done your due diligence and made your purchase, you'll only have one other consideration - to wear a hat, or suffer the consequences of windblown, tangled hair. **BRJ**

As Managing Partner of Bernards Appraisal Associates, **John White** oversees and manages all marketing communications and sales efforts for the company. He also brings a wealth of knowledge to the firm in matters related to vintage and classic automobiles, drawn from 30+ years of passion and personal involvement. **Bernards Appraisal Associates, LLC**, 350 Main Street, Suite 4, Bedminster, NJ 07921 Phone: (908) 234-1153 or email: baa@earthlink.net



The author's mother prepares for an outing with her sisters in her **circa-1940 Plymouth**.



1985 ROLLS-ROYCE/BENTLEY CORNICHE CONVERTIBLE This beautiful and very interesting car was originally purchased by a local (New Vernon) high-profile man who wished for a lower-profile car and had his Rolls-Royce visually converted to a Bentley by changing all Rolls-Royce cosmetic components to Bentley (all original Rolls-Royce parts are as new and have been boxed and kept with the car.)

He also had a Harvey Bailey suspension kit installed in the car for more sporting Bentley-like touring. In near-new condition throughout, the car is finished in original Ebony with tan leather piped in black and black Everflex top. The interior is fitted with the rare locking cocktail complements to each door, surrounds the occupants with fabulous polished Circassian Walnut facia and cabin trim and has original Mouton overlays covering the original Wilton carpets. All original manuals and papers (including instruction tags) are present as are all original tools and the unopened instruction cassette. Mileage 18,218 Price \$ 68,000

THE STABLE LTD.

Thoroughbred Motorcars Since 1973

Sales: 908-234-2055 ♦ Service 908-234-1755 ♦ Storage: 908-234-2595

www.stableltd.com

Main Street, Gladstone, NJ

Policies underwritten by Palisades Safety and Insurance Association, and Palisades Insurance Company.

**You could save
\$753 on your
car insurance.**

C'mon get happy!



PALISADES
The Nice New Jersey Car Insurance Company



Groendyke Associates
908.638.8558
www.groendyke.net
295 Rt. 513, Califon, NJ 07830