

The life story of a '78 Chevy Silverado

BY ROXIE MURPHY
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Anyone who thinks 17-years-old is too young to find lasting love hasn't met Scott Kneeskern, the original owner of Black Beauty, a 1978 Chevy Silverado recently restored to its original glory.

"I was a senior in high school when I ordered it, only 17-years-old, and they let me sign for it," Kneeskern said. "A friend of mine went with me and bought him a new one too."

Kneeskern had been looking for a Chevy truck to restore.

"A guy I knew in Bland, Jim Rector, traveled all around delivering Michelin Tires," Kneeskern said. "I had been looking for one and he was looking for one for me. I asked him if he found me one and he said 'no, go buy a brand new one.'"

So he did. At Weidinger Chevrolet in Vienna, he placed his order and signed for the truck. Later, his mother who worked at the local bank had to co-sign on the loan for him.

"I bought a brand new one and ordered it the way I wanted," Kneeskern said. "My best friend then was Bill Baxter, we both worked at Lorots Grocery where the pharmacy and library are now — he went with me."

Kneeskern knew he wanted a 1978 Chevy Silverado — the name of which is derived from the English word Silver and the Spanish word El Dorado. "I wanted a 4-wheel drive and ordered almost everything you could except cruise control. I got pretty well everything you could back then."

The truck had four optional motors to choose from — one standard and three optional upgrades. He chose a 350 cubic inch engine (5.7-liter) small-block V8 with a 4.00 and 3.48-inch bore and stroke with between 145 to 370 horsepower.

The four-speed automatic came with a black exterior and burnt orange interior, a choice of cloth or vinyl, that the catalog listed as "top-of-the-line." The instrument cluster that included voltmeter, oil pressure and engine temperature needle gates, air conditioning, heat, tachometer, and radio was bright brush finished.

The exterior was jeweled with bright upper body and lower body moldings, a full tailgate insert and chrome Silverado nameplates.

"I used my truck," Kneeskern said. "I hauled wood, hay, everything. I used it as a truck and it was rusted out and it was getting in bad shape."

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KNEESKERN PROUDLY shows off his restored 1978 Chevrolet Silverado at the Belle park.

PHOTOS BY ROXIE MURPHY



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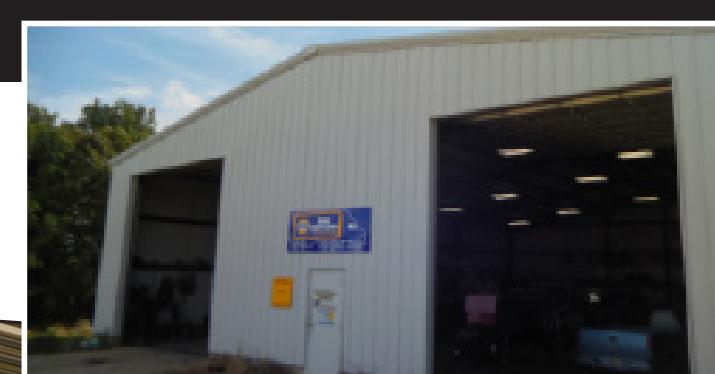
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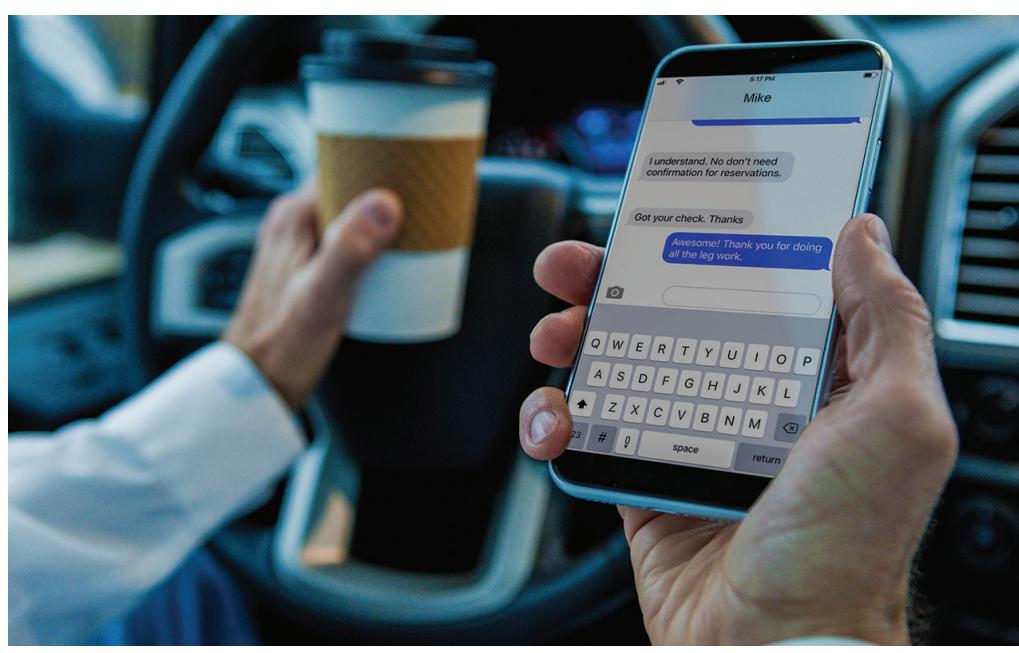
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Car Care

UNTERRIFIED DEMOCRAT

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How to reduce distractions behind the wheel

Distracted driving is a significant safety issue. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention indicates about eight people in the United States are killed in crashes that are attributed to distracted driving every day.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration says there were 2,895 distraction-affected fatal crashes in 2019, with distraction-related events accounting for 9 percent of all fatal crashes in the country. Distracted driving also puts Canadians at risk. Transport Canada's National Collision Database says distracted driving prevalence rose from 16 percent of fatal collisions in 2006 to 21 percent in 2016, and those numbers are still climbing.

According to the Insurance Information Institute, distractions are a major safety threat. Eating, talking with passengers, adjusting vehicle controls, and using a mobile phone while behind the wheel are activities that take drivers' attentions away from the road. In fact, distractions are broken down into several categories:

- Visual distractions: Anything that takes one's eyes off of the road.
- Manual distractions: Anything that takes one's hands off of the steering wheel.
- Cognitive distractions: Anything that takes one's mind off of driving.

Drivers can follow these tips to make vehicles distraction-free and reduce the risk for accidents or near misses.

MAKE ADJUSTMENTS BEFORE SETTING OFF

Make adjustments to mirrors, radio stations and seat settings prior to driving. In addition, drivers who intend to utilize a GPS navigation system should enter the address and look ahead at the course before getting on the road.

KEEP SMARTPHONES OUT OF SIGHT

Reducing the urge to check a phone alert or send a text may come down to out of sight, out of mind. Silence the phone and store it in the glove compartment, center console or a purse in the back seat. The phone should not be handled until the destination is reached or if the vehicle is pulled over safely out of traffic. Smartphones have settings that can be programmed to send automatic notifications to people contacting the phone owner to say they're driving or temporarily unavailable.

EAT BEFORE LEAVING

Consuming food or drink on the road takes a person's hands off the wheel and eyes off the road. Drivers should try to eat before getting on the road, or pull over to a rest stop for a snack if need be.

USE HANDS-FREE DEVICES IN EMERGENCIES

Many cars come equipped with Bluetooth

or other hands-free technology that enables a distress call to be made without having to take hands off the wheel. Many are voice-activated or can be engaged with the push of a button.

LIMIT PASSENGERS

A vehicle full of passengers can be very distracting. It's why many areas no longer allow newly minted teenage drivers to transport more than a few passengers until they're older and more experienced. Limiting passengers even for experienced adults can help reduce distractions as well.

People can take steps to reduce distractions on the road and share their advice with others they love.

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He took the truck hunting, fishing and hauled wood. Before its restoration, it sat at 370,000 miles on the odometer.

"It has been pretty well a part of my life," Kneeskern said. "I considered selling and a person I run around with said 'you can't sell that truck.' I called it Black Beauty 'cause other people call it that, but I haven't really named it."

In the 1970s and '80s, CBs were a big deal. "Scooty was my (handle)," he said, and a decal with the name was proudly displayed on sliding back glass.

Kneeskern married and had children and eventually, the truck was replaced with another daily driver. So he started restoring it.

"I wanted to keep it the same," Kneeskern said. "No fabrications. All original."

He called Bernie and Michelle Kolb with Classic Rides Restoration, formerly located across from Rector Radiator, and asked the couple about restoring the '78 classic.

"My truck was one of the last ones he finished there before he moved the shop to their home in Linn," Kneeskern said. "They did the restoration and I was in there every week talking about what we were going to do."

Restoring the outside of the work truck required a lot of cutting and welding in partial or full panels.

"New front fenders, another truck that a guy had give to me we used the bed off of it and put it on my truck cause mine was rusted out completely," Kneeskern said. "Above the tires, front fenders was rusted, back fenders, rocker panels and cab corners. He pulled all that off and cleaned up the frame."

Kneeskern had Kolb spray the underbelly of the truck with rhino lining to help prevent new rust from forming.

"He replaced all the springs, which were



KNEESKERN POINTS out (below) that the finished truck has the original burnt orange dashboard. An upholstery company out of Taos, Mo. had to dye black material burnt orange for the new bench seat.

PHOTO BY ROXIE MURPHY

of 2021.

"I picked it up in February of last year and started it in September 2019," Kneeskern said. "She's a shiny black now. Looks better than it did when I bought it."

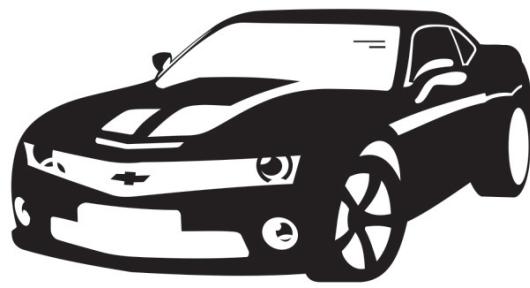
When the truck was finally back home, Kneeskern's son-in-law and daughter purchased letters to put his handle on the sliding back glass and brought the restoration full circle.

Now that the weather is coming around, Kneeskern will bring his Beauty out of hibernation.

"I drive it when the weather is nice," he said. "If it comes down to it, I would use it as a work truck again, but now I have it fixed up and I am going to take it to show it."

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Car Care

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Corvette • from page 19

never sell it. "It's a car I really like and my wife gave me permission to buy it. If she said I could have it, hell ya!"

Steve says it's great fun to drive a "Cool Car." When he drives the Corvette, it's a quick attention getter. People look at the car and some give a thumbs up, others wave, all indicating they like the car. "It catches your eye. It's a good looking car," he said. Corvettes have an American mystic surrounding them.

How fast does it go? Steve says he actually doesn't know because he hasn't pushed it that far. "I bought it because I like old cars and because Diana said I could have it." He still likes old cars, particularly this one.

Not too long ago, he had Alex Haller and Wayne Henderson do some work on the Corvette, going through most of the drive train, vacuum system and made updates. Also, Justin Haslag owner of Top Notch Body Shop replaced the carburetor with a new fuel injection system. This was a big upgrade and improved the performance and efficiency of the engine.

The car is mostly original. He replaced the interior carpet but not the seats. It looks great and with the new fuel injection system, it is mechanically better than the original. The car is 54 years old yet has less than 100,000 miles on it. "I would not hesitate to take it anywhere."

Steve takes the '68 to some local car shows, but the shows "are not my life" as they are for some car enthusiasts. His kids, Josh Deaton and Rachel Deaton Kempker, like the car, too, but they are afraid to drive it because they know his attachment to it.

This Corvette was manufactured in St. Louis. It has a four speed manual transmission. Steve said Rachel learned how to drive a stick shift by driving the Corvette.

When the family lived in Marshall, Mo., Steve's neighbor saw him drive the Corvette into his driveway. The neighbor also had a Corvette and he proudly showed it to Steve, who asked him if everything on the neighbor's Corvette was original. Steve said the guy looked at him intently and asked him if he saw something wrong with it. Steve told him, "No, I wouldn't know." Steve says he's not a purist when it comes to the car, but many Corvette owners are.

To him, the Corvette has added to his quality of life. He is one of many people in Maries County who have and enjoy nice, old cars.

When the weather is nice, he likes to drive it with the top down as it is a convertible. It's not a perfect car and he drives it when and where he wants to. He said up close it can be seen that the car is not perfect, but it's fun. Sometimes he drives it to the Lake, and that's fun when so many people "gawk at you."

Steve laughs when he tells about what Rachel said when she saw the Corvette they'd bought. She said it only seats two people, and Diana said "That's right." Rachel probably didn't understand at the time, but Steve says she probably does now. Diana died in 2013 at age 52 of cancer. Steve lives alone now in probably one of the most beautiful spots in the area. His land abuts the Gasconade River and he has fire pits and a place to sit in a couple of spots on a bluff overlooking the river. He's lived along the river since 2007, saying he loves the smell of an outside fire burning, and loves to be outside. "It's my get your mind right place."



STEVE AND DIANA DEATON purchased the 1968 Corvette over 25 years ago. They both liked old cars and enjoyed going places in it. It's a cool car and usually attracts attention. Deaton (above) stands by his Corvette at a car show in Argyle.

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