

CAR SPOTTING

FUN FOR THE WHOLE FAMILY – AND A LOT
CHEAPER THAN RESTORING OLD CARS!



The allure of forgotten, neglected and weathered vintage vehicles is one of the more interesting and enjoyable dichotomies of the old-car lifestyle. For all the appreciation of an exquisitely restored muscle car, there's an undeniable wistfulness that overtakes an enthusiast when he or she stumbles on a piece of Detroit iron that has seen better days.

In a weather-beaten hulk spotted in a field or next to a barn, we see the possibilities of giving it that top-notch restoration or at least saving a car you're sure you'd take better care of – and there's always the nagging question of how that car went evolved from someone's expensive pride and joy on the day it was purchased to a mouse condominium out in the back 40.

Words and Photography by Barry Kluczyk

America is a big, wide-open place filled with people who have a lot of stuff – especially old cars. And while a lot of them are hidden, a great many are out there to spur the imagination and provide vicarious thrills about the good-old days of American cars. Fortunately, all you need is patience, a keen eye and a camera to turn car spotting into a cheap and fun pastime. Cheap, that is, unless you buy one of more of the roadside finds.

We're probably preaching to the choir here, but great old cars are where you find them and that's usually down back roads in rural areas. Without a doubt the dry states of the Southwest are the best locales for spotting vintage cars, but the Northwest and Southeast are surprisingly rich, too – although there tends to be more trees and vegetation to obscure their view.

This seasoned car spotter has always had excellent luck in the industrial areas of larger cities, such as Los Angeles, Phoenix and Las Vegas, as well, where bargain car lots, repair shops and body shops tend to offer plenty of great material.

Of course, responsible car spotting involves respecting peoples' property and by no means trespassing. We've always had

excellent luck with shooting photos from a public area and even knocking on a few doors for closer looks. As with most things in life, some owners are more than happy to chat and show you their cars, while others will be downright ornery about the perceived intrusion – but it never hurts to ask.

Curiously, some people will leave an obviously desirable muscle car resting tantalizingly in their yard, only to tell everyone who stops it's not for sale. Those owners must got some sort of thrill at either the attention or satisfaction in turning away those who see value in their possession. Regardless, it's a frustrating tease for enthusiasts who would likely rescue these cars.

The accompanying photos depict recent spottings by this author on trips around the country, but if you'd like an even larger fix on classic muscle cars, check out carsinbarns.com – the dedicated section on Mopar wing cars alone will send you to project-car nirvana.

And you've captured some great vehicles yourself on the back roads and byways, email them to us. We'd love to share the lost classics our readers have stumbled on.



Not all authentic muscle cars have been restored – not by a long shot. We spotted this 1969 GTO lying in the weeds near Watkins Glen, N.Y. last summer. It was on a main road that many enthusiasts take to the track, so we can only imagine the owner has had many knocks on his or her door.



Between Lakeland and Winter Haven, Florida, we spied this Torino GT – complete with Laser stripe and shaker scoop – at a salvage yard that was closed for the day. The rear quarters were pretty cancerous, but the car was comparatively straight and looked like a fine resto candidate for someone who didn't mind replacing a couple of quarters.



Sure, this 1966 Ranchero needs a grille and probably a hood, but under all that grime, or "patina," is a pretty solid old truck with good glass. Note the 289 badge on the front fender, too, which ups the desirability quotient significantly. It was spotted in the funky Fremont area of Seattle.



Boat-tail Rivas aren't exactly classic muscle cars, but they offered the big-torque 455 and there's something undeniably cool about their styling 40 years later. We caught this one in the Olympic Peninsula area of Washington State.





The fiberglass folly was someone's vision of custom-car greatness in the 1970s. We're not sure if it's kitschy-weird in a cool, ironic way or just-plain too weird to translate today. It was positioned prominently with a "for sale" sign about 60 miles north of Detroit.



The \$4,600 shoe-polish price on the windshield of this Charger was probably a good starting point for a car that had the nose-up attitude of a car without an engine. There were a couple of other third-generation Chargers in the yard, too, and if you look closely, at the car edge of the lot is a '69 Ford Torino fastback. This was rural Indiana.



The same Indiana yard we spotted the Chargers and Torino fastback was also home to this past-its-prime Mustang Cobra II. For some enthusiasts who came of driving age after the heyday of the muscle car, cars from the Seventies and Eighties tug at their heartstrings and these decaded specials are at the top of the wish list.



One more from the Indiana yard – a 1961 Ford Sunliner convertible with surprising good trim and straight flanks. A paint job, interior and a 400-hp Windsor crate engine would do this drop-top a world of good.

In Phoenix, near the airport, we spied a yard crammed full of Sixties goodies, with our favorite the '67 Cougar in the foreground. Sure, the paint was completely burned off, but the grille halves were in good shape and we loved the street machine-era snorkel scoop bonded to the hood.



Behind the Cougar in Phoenix were at least a couple of dozen other great candidates, including a '55 Chevy two-door wagon and a massive 1960 Lincoln Continental. Look further back and you'll see a '59 Chevy wagon and a 1964 Plymouth Barracuda.



Out on the Olympic Peninsula in Washington, we spotted this neglected Camaro IROC convertible. Again, for enthusiasts who came of age in a different era, this car evokes as much passion as spotting a '68 Camaro in the same condition 20 years ago.



Resting and rusting in the weeds near Bay City, Mich., this 1967 Pontiac LeMans looks like it has still got some life left in it as a resto-mod or even a GTO parts car for a restorer who wants authentic GM sheet metal and other components.





Another LeMans spotted in Michigan – make that “Lamans,” according to the guy who didn’t qualify for the spelling bee and wrote out the obvious on the car’s door. There wasn’t much left on this one except the frame and body shell, but they were in good shape.



We spotted this first-generation Bronco in the Finger Lakes area of New York. In case you hadn’t noticed, the prices of these early 4x4s are going through the roof, especially for examples – like this one – that haven’t had their rear fenders cut out clearance-enhancing flares.



The lot near Pittsburgh, Pa., where we spotted this Corvair panel van and Dodge A100 window van must have been home to the collector of Sixties vans, because there was also one of Ford’s cab-over Econoline vans on the property, too.



Like so many old cars out west, this Ford wagon is simply waiting along the highway – in Wyoming – waiting to be adopted by a new owner. It’s easy to see the possibilities of restoring or resto-modding such a car, but for rarer body styles without much re-pop support in the aftermarket, you have to make sure the glass and trim are in good shape.

If you want to overdose on old iron, con your spouse into a Phoenix area vacation and stop by Desert Valley Auto Parts' North Phoenix location. They're literally stacked up like cord wood there and it only costs, like, a couple of bucks to wander the lot. Cheap entertainment, indeed.

We found this 1970 Chrysler 300 Hurst edition on our last visit to Desert Valley Auto Parts, but it's long gone now. It was in very restorable condition, but considering only about 500 were built, it would be kind of cool to cruise around in it un-restored.

BELOW: *You never know where you'll find old vehicles. We spotted this gorgeous 1966 Ford 4x4 in an affluent Seattle neighborhood that was otherwise filled with Volvos, Mercedes-Benzes and BMWs. It was clearly not a neglected classic, but car spotting doesn't have to be limited to those rusting in peace.*



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