

Suburban

AS the Fifties drew to a close, America was rebounding from the Eisenhower recession of 1958, an economic downturn that had two major effects on the domestic automotive industry. First, it played havoc with the mid-priced segment populated by brands like Buick, DeSoto, Mercury, Pontiac and the new kid on the block, the Edsel. Ford's Edsel, positioned between Mercury and Lincoln, had the misfortune to have been introduced in the fall of 1957, just in time to be victimised by the falling economy, ultimately leading to its demise just a little more than two years later.

The second effect of the 1958 recession was the steadily increasing sales of small compact cars from Europe, especially Volkswagen in tandem with the declining fortunes of tiny American Motors who had discontinued production of its full-sized Hudson and Nash

Splendour

California's Carmi Standish owns a real gem of a station wagon, Pontiac's first Wide Track grocery getter, one with a luxurious twist

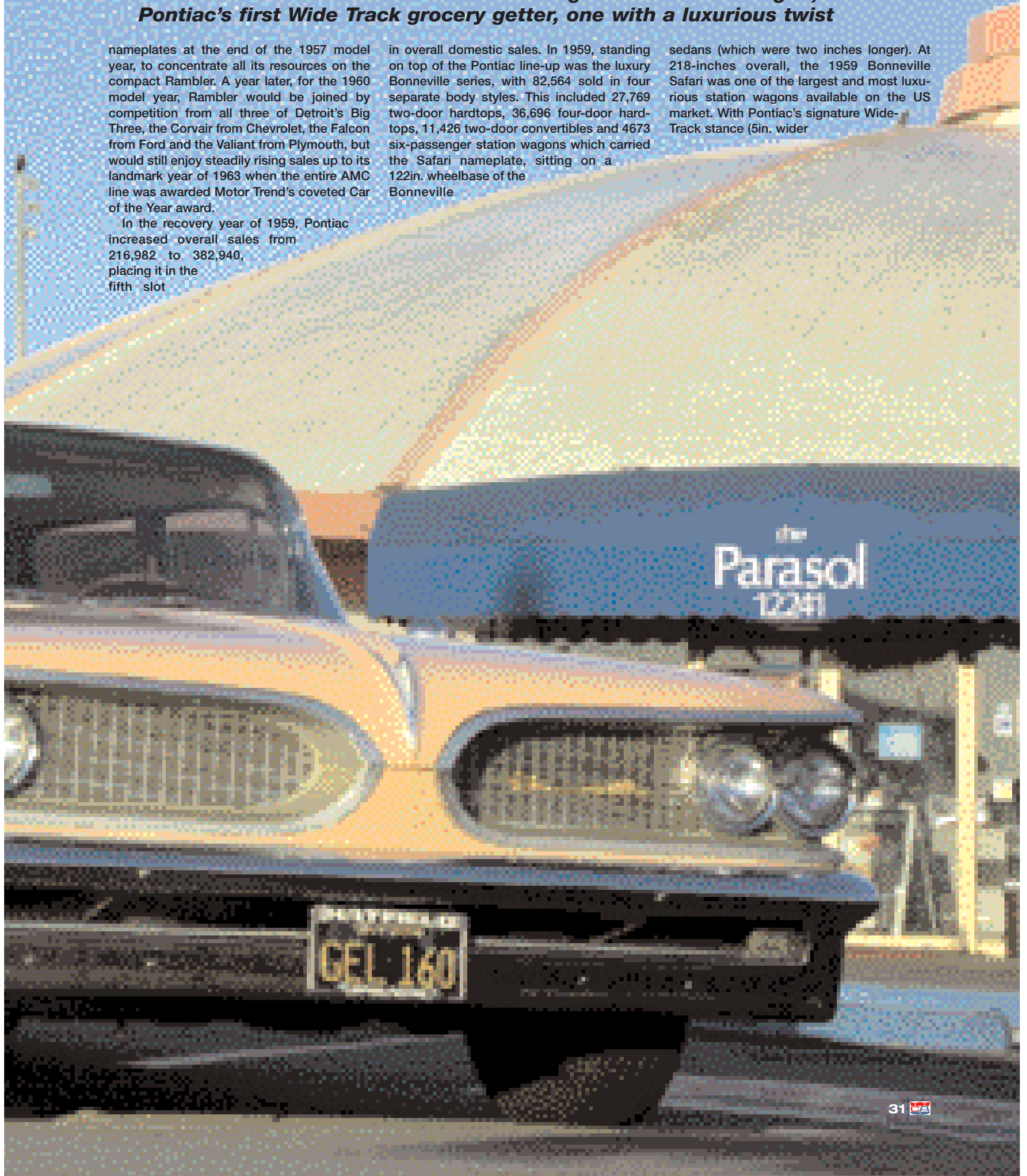
nameplates at the end of the 1957 model year, to concentrate all its resources on the compact Rambler. A year later, for the 1960 model year, Rambler would be joined by competition from all three of Detroit's Big Three, the Corvair from Chevrolet, the Falcon from Ford and the Valiant from Plymouth, but would still enjoy steadily rising sales up to its landmark year of 1963 when the entire AMC line was awarded Motor Trend's coveted Car of the Year award.

In the recovery year of 1959, Pontiac increased overall sales from 216,982 to 382,940, placing it in the fifth slot

in overall domestic sales. In 1959, standing on top of the Pontiac line-up was the luxury Bonneville series, with 82,564 sold in four separate body styles. This included 27,769 two-door hardtops, 36,696 four-door hardtops, 11,426 two-door convertibles and 4673 six-passenger station wagons which carried the Safari nameplate, sitting on a 122in. wheelbase of the

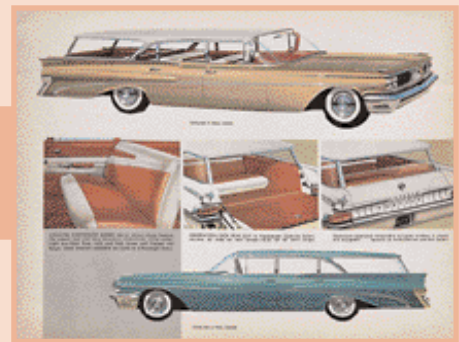
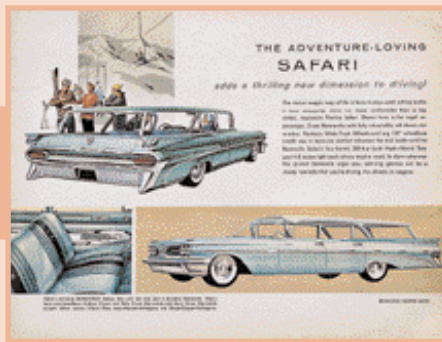
Bonneville

sedans (which were two inches longer). At 218-inches overall, the 1959 Bonneville Safari was one of the largest and most luxurious station wagons available on the US market. With Pontiac's signature Wide-Track stance (5in. wider





Words and photography: Richard Truesdell



up front, 4.5in. in the rear), the Bonneville Safari enhanced any suburban driveway, well suited as a status symbol during America's post-War baby boom. (As a point of reference, Pontiac sold 21,162 six-passenger and 14,084 nine-passenger station wagons in the lower-priced Catalina series).

TOP: SKY-HIGH TAILFINS WERE A PRESERVE OF THE CADILLACS, SO PONTIAC JUST WENT FOR MULTIPLE FINS, UP AND DOWN. NOTE THE SPINNER HUBCAPS
ABOVE: THE 'ADVENTURE-LOVING' BONNEVILLE SAFARI WAS SO WIDE IT DIDN'T NEED THE USUAL ARTISTIC LICENCE FROM THE BROCHURE DESIGNERS ...
BELOW & OPPOSITE: CARMİ HAS MANY PERIOD-CORRECT ACCESSORIES, LIKE A SEARS COOLER AND LUGGAGE



The land yacht pictured on these pages is the prized possession of Carmi Standish, an aerospace procurement specialist hailing from Long Beach, California. When asked how she started collecting cars she explained her addiction to classic Americans. 'Back in 1987, a friend of mine was going to restore a 1955 Chevy,' says Standish. 'He suggested I find a car to do the same, as I was constantly complaining every time I took my daily driver to the garage - 'Why do they charge so much? What did they replace this time? Why does labour cost so much?' The only thing I knew how to do was change the oil, from watching my father. So, my friend found a 1956 Chevy Bel Air and told me we needed to go look at it. I was living in Cerritos (a suburb of Los Angeles) at the time and I told him I didn't have a place to work on it, so he said I could work on it at his house. So, we went to Hawthorne, California (whose most famous native sons were the *Beach Boys*) to look at the car. At first glance I told him it was ugly.

'The paint was gone, the interior was trashed, there was no engine in the car and there was this long thing lying on the back seat,' relates Standish. "'What's that and does it go with the car?'" I asked my friend. He told me it went with the car, calling me an idiot,



telling me it was the driveshaft. At this point he realised I really knew nothing about cars and said in a very stern voice that he knew I wouldn't buy the car, that I'd chicken out. His dare led me to buy the car and we towed it to his house in Bellflower, California (another Los Angeles suburb).

Once the car got there, I bought about four shop manuals, joined the local Chevy Club Chapter and started asking questions. I kept a diary of how long I'd worked on the car and took pictures of everything that came off the car. Although I had the car painted and the interior done by someone else, I restored everything else and the car was finished one day short of two years (1989) from when I bought it. I was bitten by the car bug, never to look back. I couldn't wait to get another classic car, not to restore, just to have!

We asked Standish, who is now in her forties, if she had any fond rear-facing third seat station wagon memories from her childhood, knowing that they are an acquired taste and she told *Classic American* that her family never had a station wagon that she can recall when growing up. 'I had friends that had station wagons and I always thought it was fun to sit in the back and wave to everyone behind the car. I've always loved various colours in cars, but I was never really into station wagons.'

After the '56 Bel Air, while visiting a friend in Yucaipa (a town to the east of Los Angeles, near San Bernardino, a famous town along Route 66), she asked to see the cars that he owned and when he lifted the garage door, 'I saw his Pontiac Bonneville Safari Wagon! It just hit me and I couldn't take my eyes off the car! I thought it was strange because I'd never thought I'd own a wagon. I told him if he ever decided to sell it, I wanted to be the first person he called. Little did I know, he had the



Googie Style

One would think that living in Orange County, California, it would be easy to find period-correct backgrounds in which to shoot vintage and special interest cars. Actually nothing could be further from the truth. Up until the early Sixties, much of Orange County was nothing more than orange groves with just a few big cities, like Santa Ana, Orange and Anaheim (home to the original Disneyland) and some surrounding suburbs. In the northern part of the county, close to the border with Los Angeles County in Seal Beach stands the Parasol Coffee Shop (12241 Seal Beach Boulevard.), a Southern California landmark, once part of a 10-unit chain. This outstanding example of Googie is threatened by the wrecking ball, the potential victim of an over-zealous developer/owner of the Rossmore Shopping Centre who wants to renovate the strip mall which it stands in front of into another depressively anonymous stucco box. The

Friends of the Parasol (www.houseplant-picturestudio.com/parasol/parasol.html) is one of many grass-roots efforts striving to preserve as much of the remaining mid-century architectural heritage as possible.

The circular restaurant has stood on this site since 1967 and is a local institution, especially to the many senior citizens that live close by and take advantage of its daily specials in an effort to stretch their retirement-limited fixed incomes.

If you're a fan of mid-century American architecture and are planning a visit to Southern California, specifically to the land behind the 'Orange Curtain' be sure to visit www.roadsidepeek.com/googie/ocgoogie/ It serves as a great road map to the best remaining examples of Googie-style architecture. See it before it disappears. Look out for an in-depth look at Southern California's Googie car culture landmarks in an upcoming issue of *Classic American*.





car listed for sale already. A couple of days passed and he called asking if I was seriously interested. We did the deal back in April 2000 and the rest, as they say, is history. It was in about the same condition as it is now. Since then I've done some minor things like rechrome the front and rear bumpers and colour sand the Sunset Coral paint (which she says was originally Frontier Beige) which really helped its appearance.'

Standish's Bonneville Safari is powered by Pontiac's famed 389cu.in. V8, a direct descendant of the marque's first modern V8, displacing 287cu.in, introduced for the 1955 model year. The sticker for her car (base price - \$3532) shows that it was equipped with the following options: Wonder Touch power steering (\$107.50); electric antenna (\$30); Wonder Touch power brakes (\$43); dual exhausts (\$31.20); power Safari liftgate (\$32.20); power window lifts (\$107.50); deluxe spinner wheel covers (\$16.45) and two-tone paint (\$12.85) bringing the as-delivered price, including destination (\$192), up to a grand total of \$4104.70.

When asked what she feels are her car's strongest attributes Standish says it is a combination of the unique wide-track look, the classic look of the instrument cluster and the spacious room for lots of luggage. Standish believes that vintage cars should take you

back to whatever era they're from. 'They should take you back to a time when you didn't have any worries, there were no obligations and you remember those 'special' times as a child (or teenager) that you can now live again. When I take the car out and people see the vintage luggage, the water cooler, the hat box or the picnic basket with matching thermos, it also brings back memories for them too. A smile instantly comes across their

face and you know for that one moment in time, they've forgotten all their worries and have placed themselves in their parents' wagon going to the drive-in, going on vacation across country or simply going shopping with their mother! Life is good at this point in time!'

Looking inside the interior the first thing you'll notice is the Sears Ice Cube Cooler. We were curious, and Standish told its story: 'My father had a 1962 Corvair Monza with an ice cube cooler. I remember driving to North Dakota and every time we'd stop for gas, my mother would drain the water from the cooler and add ice cubes to the back of it. She'd then plug it into the cigarette lighter and we were on our way! She'd also store our sandwiches in the front compartment to keep them cool so when we stopped for lunch at a park along the highway, everything would be nice and fresh! I remembered the cooler and thought I'd see if I could find it on eBay, it would be a great conversation piece at shows ... it certainly has turned out that way.'

Standish is active in the Southern California club scene. Together with her partner, they own several classic cars, all from the Fifties. They include an MG-TD, a two-seat Ford T-Bird, the previously mentioned Chevy Bel-Air and another GM monster, an Oldsmobile 98 in addition to the Pontiac Bonneville Safari Wagon. She belongs to several car clubs but participates most with Great Autos of Yesteryear. 'Our club is over Twenty years old and has such a diverse collection of cars that every event brings something new and different to see. We have over 1000 members nationwide and over 3200 vehicles.'

She has this advice to *Classic American's* readers on the other side of the pond. 'If you don't think you fancy a particular car ... forget about it! Just when you least expect it, that special car will pop up that you absolutely have to have and once you have it, make it yours, make it special and make it something that will bring back fond memories not just for you, but others as well. Newer cars come and go, but the classics will be around for a long time to come.' We couldn't have said it any better ourselves. Way to go Carmi! 🌟



TOP: OUT ON THE FREEWAY, THE OTHER MOTORISTS CAN REMARK UPON THE FOUR GROUPS OF LOUVRES ON EACH REAR WING THAT SIGNIFY A TOP-OF-THE-RANGE BONNEVILLE ... AND THEN THEY CAN WISH THAT THEY DROVE SOMETHING AS COOL AND INTERESTING
ABOVE: EVEN THE INSTRUMENT BINNACLE HAD LASHINGS OF CHROME
LEFT: THE CUSTOM SAFARI STATION WAGONS CAME WITH THE FOUR-BARREL 389CU.IN. V8 AS STANDARD, WITH 300BHP ON TAP THROUGH THE HYDRA-MATIC 'STRATO-FLIGHT' AUTO TRANSMISSION