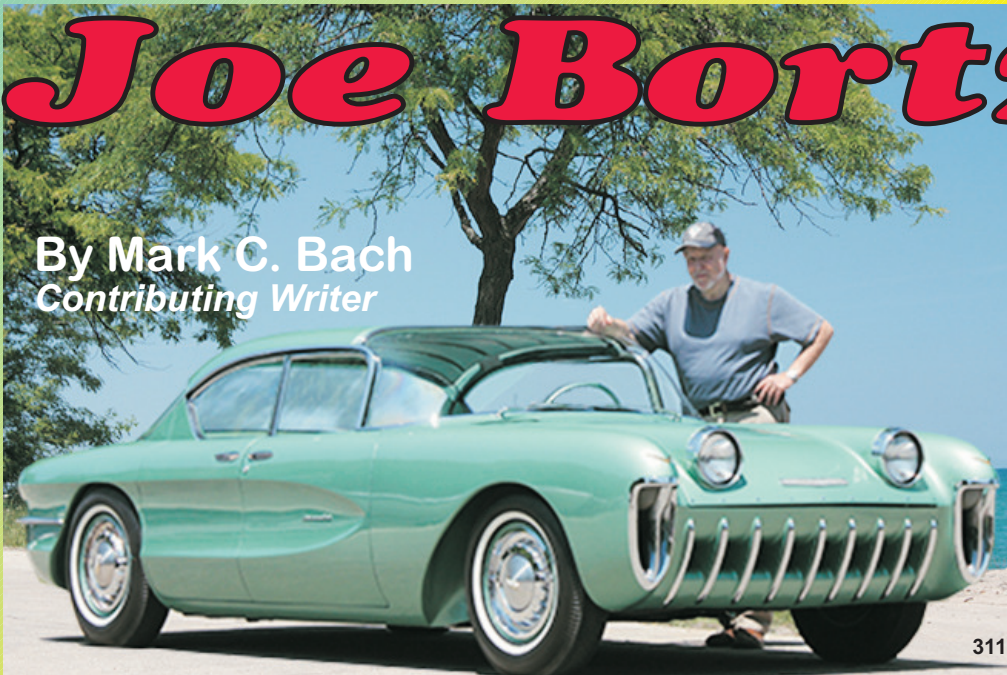


Joe Bortz

By Mark C. Bach
Contributing Writer



Joe Bortz has always been into classic cars, ever since he bought his first collectible car - a 1928 Chevy coupe in 1961. Soon he bought a 1931 Cadillac convertible coupe and kept on buying. Over the years, he's bought and sold over 100 pre-1950 classics, but probably nobody has bought and sold more factory concept cars.

Generally, when Detroit produced a concept car to either show it off to the public or use internally, the story goes the cars would be crushed and destroyed since they might not be totally "road worthy". But in truth, many designers and factory employees had a hard time destroying their life's work and amazingly some were tucked away in secret.

Bortz got turned on to concept cars when his son saw an ad for a concept car which Joe felt had to be a hoax since everybody "knew"

concept cars were never sold to the public. But Joe's son persisted and after a few phone calls, even Joe was convinced that maybe the seller really did have a concept car and rushed out to look it over and eventually he bought the 1954 Pontiac Bonneville Special. This car has later been bought and sold by Ron Pratte at the Barrett-Jackson auctions, where it most recently sold in 2015 for \$3.3 million.

That started some newspaper publicity about Bortz, and soon other owners started to seek him out to sell their concept cars. Bortz might be most proud of a 1955 Chevy Biscayne concept car that presently is on display at the newly remodeled Petersen Museum in Los Angeles. It turns out a junkyard in Michigan had kept not just one, but FOUR concept cars, away from the crusher and had them stored on

(Photos courtesy of The Bortz Collection and the Petersen Museum.)



Looking at this concept car causes me to see many upcoming Chevy designs and innovations.

Biscayne

site, but out of sight for years. It took some convincing but ultimately Bortz bought the cars.

The Biscayne was originally cut up into eight sections in late 1959 under the watchful eye of a factory executive. But he became anxious and left early, allowing the junkyard to avoid crushing the car. As you can see from the pictures, this car was in rough shape. But under the careful and slow care of two shops, the car was restored to its original showroom condition. Bortz first showed it partially restored in 2008 at Pebble Beach, and then in 2013 at Amelia Island when it was fully restored.

Looking at the car, you can see some now iconic shapes. That rear end screams Corvair and Corvette. The side coves mimic the Corvette as well. And the rear pillarless doors swing to the back, ala a "suicide" door. (Spoiler alert - look for an upcoming article on a '57 Cadillac Eldorado

Brougham, which features the same pillarless four doors from the factory). It was powered by a V8 and had gold anodized trim to signify that engine, much like the later '57 Bel Air has the gold V on the hood. The Biscayne's frame was totally rotted thanks to the Michigan winters, but the fiberglass body was in surprisingly good shape.

For the next year, it is on loan to the Petersen Museum, where the public can marvel at its shape and lines. Ironically, while the Bortz ' collection is extensive, he does not have a public display area or museum. Instead, he opts to allow the cars to be loaned out to other sites to be viewed and admired.

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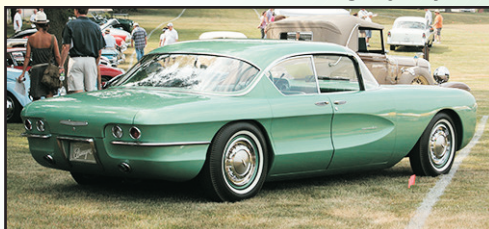
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As it was first found, at the Michigan junkyard.



Being pushed out, anxious for a restoration.



Passenger side view of the '55 Biscayne.



On display at the Petersen Museum in LA.



Proudly poised at the Petersen Museum in LA.