

November Car of the Month

BOB MONTAGUE'S 1921 LINCOLN TOURING CAR

By Missy Schrott – Alexandria Times

Bob Montague has a garage full of antique automobiles and a lifetime of roadside breakdowns, wedding chauffeuring stories and car show awards to complement them.

In late February, Montague's Lincoln was featured as the oldest running Lincoln in the world at the Boca Raton Concours d'Elegance, an annual car show in Florida. Not only is the car pre-Ford and one of Lincoln's oldest models, it has been in Montague's family since it was purchased new in 1921.

"I'm exceptionally proud of the Lincoln because it's been in my family for 97 years," Montague said. While the car has been in Montague's family for nearly a century, it didn't follow the typical father-to-son inheritance one might expect from a rare heirloom.



Bob Montague with his 1921 Lincoln. (Photo by Missy Schrott)

Montague acquired the car through the Willard family, whom he is connected to through his grandfather. The car belonged to Andrew Jackson Montague's first cousin, Belle Willard.

In 1954, Montague was a student at the University of Virginia when he heard about the Lincoln from his cousin. When Willard died, the cousin was executor of her estate. The cousin knew that Montague was a "car nut without a car," so he told him about Willard's Lincoln, which had been sitting unused in a shed for about 14 years – rusty, raggedy and rat-ridden.

"Of course I was curious, so I went out to look," Montague said. "He said if I wanted it, and I could get it out of there, he could probably arrange for me to have it as a gift, or inheritance."

Overjoyed at the prospect of his first car not only being free but incredibly rare, Montague sought the help of a local motor company to retrieve it from the shed. Four men and a Jeep later, the car was freed.

In just a week, the mechanics had managed to unstick the engine and get the car running. In the 64 years since, Montague has kept the vehicle roadworthy, making it the oldest Lincoln that is still licensed and driven.

The car is a 1921 Leland-built Lincoln with four doors, a convertible roof and room for seven passengers. It was one of 7,000 Lincolns built before Ford bought the company in February 1922. Very few of the 7,000 cars are still in existence, let alone functional like Montague's. His car has also never had an off-body restoration job, making it all the more exceptionally rare.

Since Montague has owned it, the convertible has only had two cosmetic paint jobs, two tops and two upholstery jobs. Most recently, he reupholstered the interior in its authentic leather. Montague said he treated it as a series of projects, rather than a major one-time restoration, in order to keep maintenance affordable.

"Part of what I treasure about it is that it's been in our family since new, but it's also an exceptional design amongst automobiles," Montague said. In 1921, the Lincoln sold new for \$4,600. In 2018, it would have been about \$60,000, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics' inflation calculator. "It was for the classes and

not the masses. Not being snobby, just being accurate about it," Montague said.



Montague's Lincoln sits on display at the Boca Raton Concours d'Elegance car show. His car was featured as the oldest Lincoln in the world that is still licensed, roadworthy and driven. (Photo by Hal Hardaway)

Montague said his favorite shows to attend are big anniversary celebrations. He said he's attended 100th birthday car shows for Ford and Packard and is looking forward to attending Lincoln Motor Company's centennial in 2020. He was invited to the car show in Boca Raton after his Lincoln won "Best in Show" last summer at a show celebrating the 100th anniversary of the Leland manufacturing plant for aircraft engines.

Montague said part of the reason he wanted to attend the Boca Concours was that it supported the Boys & Girls Club of Broward County, the county that encompasses Parkland, Florida, where the school shooting that resulted in 17 deaths occurred in mid-February.

Hal Hardaway, a neighbor and fellow classic car enthusiast, attended the show with Montague. He said Montague's Lincoln was one of the few cars at the show that was unrestored. "You have 200 plus cars there," Hardaway said.

Montague said he hadn't planned to attend the show, but was encouraged by the special invite, the charity involved and the fact that he was eager to display his new leather upholstery.

He carted the Lincoln to Florida in an antique auto trailer he often borrows for shows from another friend in the car community, Chip Rohr.

Fittingly, Rohr first met Montague when he found the latter stranded in his Lincoln on the side of Route 1 in Woodbridge, Virginia, without gas.

"I had a '57 Thunderbird, and I don't know why I was down there, but I saw the car on the side of the road," Rohr said. "You do as your parents teach you – I pulled over to see if he needed help and that was the first time I met Bob."

Now, Montague and Rohr are both in several auto clubs together, including the Antique Automobile Club of America, the Classic Car Club of America and the Vintage Car Club of America.

Beyond traveling to up to four car shows a year, Montague likes to show off his vehicle locally, most recently in Alexandria's George Washington Birthday Parade. He's also auctioned off rides in the Lincoln to support the Alexandria Symphony, raising \$1,100 last year, and driven several relatives and family friends to their weddings, including Kathleen Kennedy Townsend, the eldest daughter of the late senator Robert F. Kennedy.

"It's the kind of thing you can do with old cars," Montague said. "You can help charities, and you also can get people married."

AFTERWORD

By Steve White

Our thanks to Missy Schrott and the Alexandria Times for granting permission to reprint the above story about Bob Montague's 1921 Lincoln. It is condensed here due to space limitations, but will be available in its entirety on the club's website.

Since that article's publication, Bob's Lincoln went on to earn the Youth Choice Award at our Region's 2018 Rohr Car Show. Bob was very pleased that young people were showing an interest in our hobby and were so smitten with one of the oldest cars at the show.

Missy Schrott's article mentions "Leland-built Lincoln." This is a reference to Henry M. Leland, who was a young machinist from Vermont making arms for the Union during the Civil War. His hero was Abraham Lincoln and his passion was precision.

In 1902, Leland helped found the Cadillac Motorcar Company and developed their early cars, which became famous for precision engineering and fine craftsmanship. He sold his principal interest in Cadillac to General Motors in 1909.

The Lincoln automobile evolved from Leland's company that built Liberty aircraft engines during WWI. The first of the automobiles to bear his hero's name were introduced in 1920. These Lincolns were among the finest cars of their era.