

## **CAR OF THE MONTH**

I first met Vern Parker when he was automotive editor for the Washington Times. Each week, his column featured an unusual car he went to see and learn about. Not wanting to be left out, I called Vern and told him about my 1953 Oldsmobile. He was interested and came to see it with a Times photographer in tow. We have been friends ever since.

At the time, and for many years, Vern also sponsored an annual show featuring cars he had written about. It was impressive how many fine and rare cars would show up. And it was an honor to be invited. Vern still does an on-line version of his old car column, called Street Dreams. Just google on Vern Parker name and you will find it.

Vern Parker is an iconic “Car Guy” and we are fortunate to have him as a member of the Bull Run Region. Right now, I feel fortunate that he has provided me with the July Car of the Month.

When I asked Vern to do a story about his own car, he was reluctant. He told me he had never written about himself or his car. That probably explains why he wrote it as though it belonged to someone else. – Steve White

## 1939 LaSalle By Vern Parker

From the first LaSalle in 1927 until the last one in 1940, the make had a reputation for style, grace and quality. After all, it was the junior companion car of GM's flagship Cadillac division.

Over the 14-year run, LaSalles were equipped with Cadillac V-8 engines, except for 1934, 1935 and 1936 when in-line straight-eight engines built by Oldsmobile with Cadillac parts were installed.

A decade and more after the final LaSalle was manufactured, hot rodders and customizers swarmed over used car lots and junkyards searching for desirable LaSalle parts. LaSalle transmissions were known to be bulletproof and optimally geared, while the tall, narrow grille added a touch of style when grafted onto virtually any car.

Vern Parker, like many others, had admired LaSalles, but had no intention of acquiring one. Then one day about 20 years ago Parker was visiting a friend in Arlington who had an antique Ford in his driveway. That was when an

elderly man walked by and said, "nice car." He added that there was another old car a half-dozen blocks away.

That information piqued Parker's interest. He asked his new best friend to show him where the unidentified car was located. And off they went. It was in a locked garage under a protective cover which was visible through a window. Even through the cover Parker could identify the car as a LaSalle. But nobody answered the doorbell.

During the next week Parker returned several times until he located the owner of the mystery car. The owner was in the midst of writing a classified ad for the Washington Post offering the car for sale.

The two men went to the garage and uncovered the shrouded car -- a 1939 LaSalle four-door sedan. It showed no sign of rust, nor any body damage.

And the car included a pair of throwback features that were mandatory if Parker was to buy the vehicle: Non-sealed-beam headlights in free standing buckets by the graceful grille and running boards.

Parker gave the owner a down payment to hold the car if it passed muster the following day.

Parker returned the following day with a member of the local Cadillac-LaSalle club who was knowledgeable concerning LaSalles. Following a cursory inspection and a test drive, the inspector told Parker, "If you don't buy this car, I will."

The remainder of the money was paid and a week later Parker and one of his sons returned for the car. The 7.00x16-inch white sidewall tires were nearly 40 years old and the cracks in the sidewalls had cracks." Parker says.

Once they got the LaSalle home in Vienna, Virginia, the first order of business was to order a new set of tires and tubes.

The new owner was pleased when he opened the engine hood and found the optional oil filter as well as a generator ventilator. Most of the ventilators were discarded by mechanics of the day because their usefulness was questionable.

The car has been virtually trouble free. Parker did have the engine overhauled in 2001. The six-volt battery has been replaced, a simple task made difficult because the battery is located beneath the floorboard under the driver's feet.

Compared to earlier LaSalle's this 1939 model is quite open to the passengers because the glass area is 27 percent larger than the 1938 models.

The 1939 LaSalle sedan was 3,740 pounds of luxury available at the bargain price of \$1,320. For that price the buyer got a baby Cadillac with a 322-cubic-inch V-8 engine that delivered 125 horsepower. A mere 1/8<sup>th</sup> inch smaller bore is the only difference between the LaSalle's engine and that of its big brother.

LaSalle's were popular from beginning to end, and today continue to be desirable collectibles.





