



of service out of the Willys before it was sent to Western State Hospital (also in Pennsylvania) and then eventually to Haverford State Hospital.

By the time it arrived in Smazik's life, it had traveled a mere 21,000 miles, an odometer reading that he says is not uncommon for fire vehicles, especially those which operated on campus and which were not required to fan out across a rural area to beat back the flames of house fires. "It's not unusual to find 40 year-old trucks with only 7,000 miles showing," he said.

The story of exactly how this particular Willys truck joined Mark's fleet of vehicles is a long and interesting one that is filled with a number of events which together eventually drew him towards snagging a fire vehicle of his own. Like many people in the hobby, Mark was introduced to the wonders of classic cars through his father, who had always been interested in owning unusual automobiles that were seldom seen at shows or on the streets. The joy of rolling onto the field in a one-of-a-kind car or truck rubbed off onto Mark at an early age, and the first vehicle that he himself restored was a 1921 Franklin.

A fire truck is certainly an unusual collector vehicle, but Mark's decision to find and eventually restore this type of truck was strengthened by his



## The Smazik's '58 Willys Fire Truck

By Benjamin Hunting Photos John Parfi

Fire truck collectors are a special breed, a unique group of individuals who can appreciate the functional beauty of these life-saving machines. Part of the fun of fire truck ownership is the "one-of-one" aspect associated with many of the rare firefighting conversions that were done in the 1940's and 1950's by fire departments who used a wide variety of different truck platforms to get the job done. Mark Smazik's 1958 Willys fire truck is an excellent example of just how rewarding antique fire equipment can be.

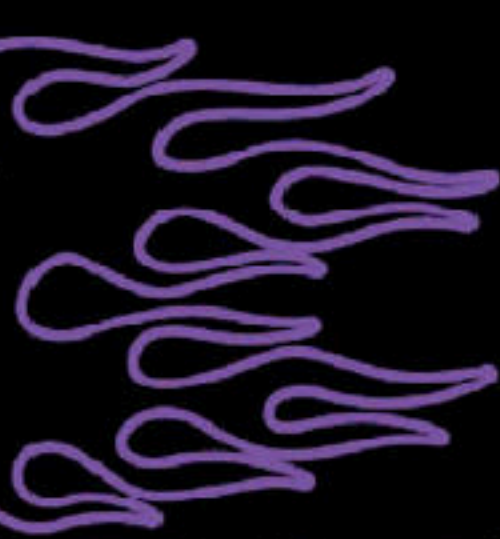
Mark's fire truck started life in 1958 after it was ordered by Woodville State Hospital, Pennsylvania in chassis cab form so that it could be converted to a fire fighting vehicle by Howe. Based in Anderson, Indiana, Howe was one of the oldest and most experienced builders of fire apparatus in the United States. Woodville State Hospital got many years

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tory as a firefighter – all that was left was for the seed of the idea to be planted in Mark's mind. Ironically, it was while trying to persuade his father to buy a fire truck that Smazik ended up being convinced that this is what he himself needed to do.

"I said to my dad one day, hey, why did you never have a fire

truck of your own? They look great, lots of chrome, nice letter, etc." Mark recounted. "He replied that they had never interested him but then he almost dared me to go out and get one myself." This was when Smazik made the "smartass" decision, in his words, to prove to his dad that yes, he could go out and get a fire truck and have a great time doing it – a decision that would lead to the eventual 1958 Willys find.

"15 years ago, I had seen a Willys fire truck driving alongside the highway at a chemical plant I used to pass from time to time during my commute," Mark said, "and I always thought that truck looked great." With the truck and Jeepster gone to rustle up the cash for a down payment on his house and a soft place in his heart for Willys – not to mention a couple empty spots in his garage – Mark talked the idea over with his wife and ended up posting some want ads in national publications looking for what he thought would be a very difficult to locate Willys fire vehicle. So specific was his search that he even included a black and white photo of exactly the vehicle he was looking for.

The response to his want ads was almost instantaneous. Seemingly before the ink had dried on the page, Smazik received a phone call from a gentleman in Pennsylvania who claimed to have the truck he was looking for. After a few phone conversations, Mark had the man send him photos in the mail that indeed showed the Willys

fire vehicle he had been coveting. A trip to Mechanicsburg that fall with his trailer had him coming home at long last with a fire truck of his very own.

Mark says that he was fortunate to find a very complete vehicle. Only a few items were missing from the original equipment that was on the Willys, and overall there was very little rust. The only real rot was found in the water traps created by the cabinets that had been built around the rear fenders. The truck's restoration ended up being a lot more detailed than he had originally planned – instead of touching up the truck's paint himself, he was persuaded by a friend who owned a collision repair shop to let them handle a full re-spray so as to provide the best possible color coverage. Smazik stripped down and sanded the truck prior to sending it out for paint, and was extremely happy with the results. The cabin interior was kept original Willys in every way.

The gold leaf, lettering and striping on the outside of the truck were done by Bob Behounek of the Chicago Brushmasters – the same Bob Behounek who did such an excellent job on the Gearhead News Panel Truck. Bob was so meticulous about the job that he actually photographed and did rubbings of the original door work so that he would have a pattern from which to replicate the original scripting down to the last detail when performing his own lettering work. Mark says that Behounek was even able to replicate the tiny arrowheads at the leading edge of each of the stripes, and that he was a wealth of information about the historical lettering and fonts used on the Willys truck.

Mechanically, Mark decided to pull and freshen the original 226-cubic inch Hurricane straight six-cylinder engine that came with the fire truck. The Willy shifts through a three-speed transmission that offers a high and low range transfer case. In keeping with his desire for authenticity, he also elected to completely refurbish the truck's front-mounted 750-gallon per minute Waterous pump, which now functions as well as it did the day the vehicle was originally converted. Although the truck only offers storage for around 150 gallons of water, the pump is serious business, capable of significant throughput when connected to a larger tanker truck or a fire hydrant.

Mark loves to drive his fire truck, but is quite selective about where he chooses to do so. "The rear of the truck is a lot wider

than the cab, which makes it difficult to navigate in modern traffic," he said. "I have had a lot of trouble locating period correct side mirrors, which means that almost every lane change is a leap of faith." Smazik prefers to take his Willys to shows and cruise nights inside his enclosed trailer, which offers just enough room to winch in the 6,000 lb fire fighter. The truck has made it to several fire equipment specialty shows, and has scored at least 380 points out of 400 in American Automobile Club of America (AAACA) judging, earning it a Senior first place award – an impressive accomplishment from an owner who considers himself an amateur hobbyist. Mark rarely encounters any other Willys fire vehicles of the same vintage when he does his rounds of the show circuit, which fulfills his longstanding desire to have one of the least common trucks around.

Perhaps the most special aspect of Mark's 1958 Willy's fire truck can be found in what is emblazoned on the side of each door. In place of the original Woodville lettering is a new inscription for "Melville State Hospital." This is a tribute to Smazik's daughter Melanie, who has been a huge fan of the truck ever since it was first brought home when she was only five years old. Over the years she has evolved into the truck's caretaker, playing a huge role in the detailing, preparation and loading of the truck before shows and serving as a resource



Melanie (right) at the 2010 Route 66 Car Show in Berwyn



vehicle that he himself restored was a 1921 Franklin

A fire truck is certainly an unusual collector vehicle, but Mark's decision to find and eventually restore this type of truck was strengthened by his own personal connection to the Willys marque. The first father/son build that he ever undertook was on a '49 Jeepster, which had initially been intended as Mark's high school ride but turned out far too nice to be trusted to the adolescent attendees at the local place of learning – especially since a Jeepster is essentially impossible to keep locked. This led Mark to locate and restore a '61 Willy's pickup (coincidentally, with the same type of cab found on the fire truck he would later purchase) which served as his daily driver for several years.

Time marched on, and in 1979 Mark and his father moved house in order to find more storage space for a growing car collection. Driving down the street in his newly adopted town one day, Smazik noticed a help wanted sign in the window of the local fire house and he ended up spending the next 11 years as a member of the area's volunteer fire department. This was a great experience and a very happy time in Mark's life, and one which certainly pre-disposed him to a hankering for a fire truck of his own one day.

With motive now clearly established – a link to the Willys brand, the love of unique and unusual vehicles and a long his-

for those curious about the vehicle by answering their questions about it.

"Melanie is the heir to an eclectic collection of unusual classic cars and trucks," Mark said. "The Willys is like a part of the family – we've put so much into it – and my father and I have done our best to instill the same spirit in my daughter that has helped us keep the collection going over all of these years." It would certainly appear that thanks to Mark's efforts, the Willys will be in good hands for many, many years to come.