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For David Jacobson, 'petroliana' is a gas



PHOTO BY ELISA DRAGOTTO

David Jacobson amid his automotive memorabilia at Collector Car Showcase.

By George Wallace

To an Englishman, it's a way to get from point a to point b. For a Detroit factory worker, it's a paycheck. But for Oyster Bay's David Jacobson, owner of the newly opened Collector Car Showcase, a car's something much more.

"Cars speak to the history of our culture," said Jacobson, a native of the area and a man who has been collecting cars and "petroliana" — car related memorabilia — for two decades. "They tell our American story. They tell who each of us are as individuals. And they're beautiful to look at — as an art piece, a machine, or a work of engineering."

Situated at the gateway to Oyster Bay village, Collectors Car Showcase is a remarkable venue to discover all that. The 18,000 sq ft, two-story space contains a museum-like collection of cars and car related materials and has been made over with the kind of loving attention that goes beyond nostalgia or token interest. From floor to ceiling, the remake betrays Jacobson's tremendous passion for the contents.

"We put in these hardwood floors, authentic lighting from the 1940s," he said. "One hallway's been made over into an old city street. We haven't done some typical 50s roller skate American Graffiti thing, we're trying to represent a range of eras that were influenced by cars."

The origins of the enterprise are straightforward. Jacobson's 20-year collection, which began one year when he was traveling down the Pacific Coast Highway in California, outgrew his storage capacity.

"At first I thought I'd open up a collector car dealership, but then I wondered, what if Long Island had its own car museum?" he recalls. "Right here in Oyster Bay, where the car culture is tremendous? Just look at the way people come from all over the island to our Cruise Tuesday Nights. "

After securing the building at 85 Pine Hollow Road about two years ago, he was off and running to realize his dream of creating a "showcase of imaginative achievement in engineering and design."

And this month when he opened the doors, Jacobson discovered he wasn't the only one around with his vision. "As

soon as I started bringing my stuff in here, people started knocking on our door,” he said. Some people wanted to donate objects they had, or allow them to be put on display at Classic Car. Others just had to come in and look at the array of materials.

“Astonishing” may sound like an exaggeration, but a stroll through Classic Car Showcase justifies the use of that word. Inside are Porsches, Jaguars and Corvettes, muscle cars, roadsters, motorcycles and bicycles. There’s a mint condition VW bus, a Porsche tractor, and even the old Mets bullpen car.

Meanwhile the walls are adorned with vintage service station signs, and the collection includes advertising from soda companies to automobile manufacturers.

Of particular interest are the old gasoline pumps. Some are familiar as an old family photograph, others exotic as a Hollywood prop for a Buck Rogers movie. Among the most impressive? The Wayne 490, the “finest visible pump ever designed,” and referred to as the Roman Pump due to the classic architectural fluted column design.

History. Culture. Art. Engineering. And there’s more, says Jacobson.

“When a person sees one of our cars, they think about friendships, and relationships,” he said. “I created Collector Car Showcase as a labor of love. But I can’t tell you how many friendships I’ve already made because of it.”

Collector Car Showcase — “New York’s Petroliana, Memorabilia, and Automotive Exhibition” is open for visitors, for car lovers who want detail work on their prize vehicle, and there are plans additionally to put on special exhibitions and host private functions as the year progresses.

For more information, visit their website at <http://www.collectorcarshowcase.com>.