

Member Car of the Month

1951 Ford Convertible

Jerry and Christie Bowen, Columbia, TN

By Jerry Bowen

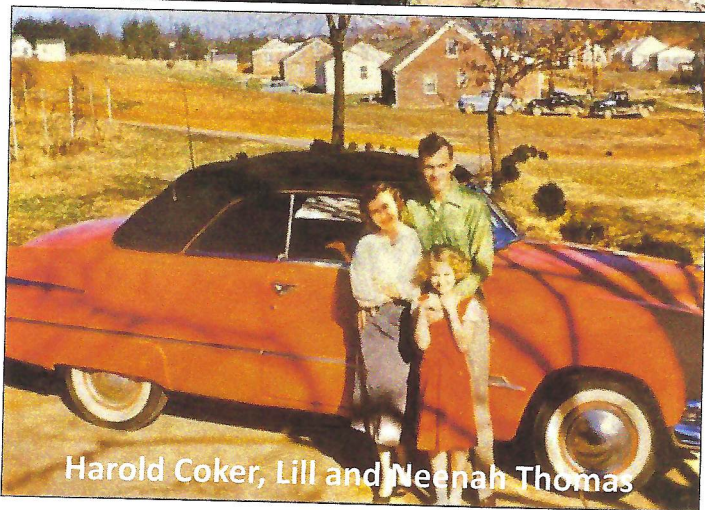
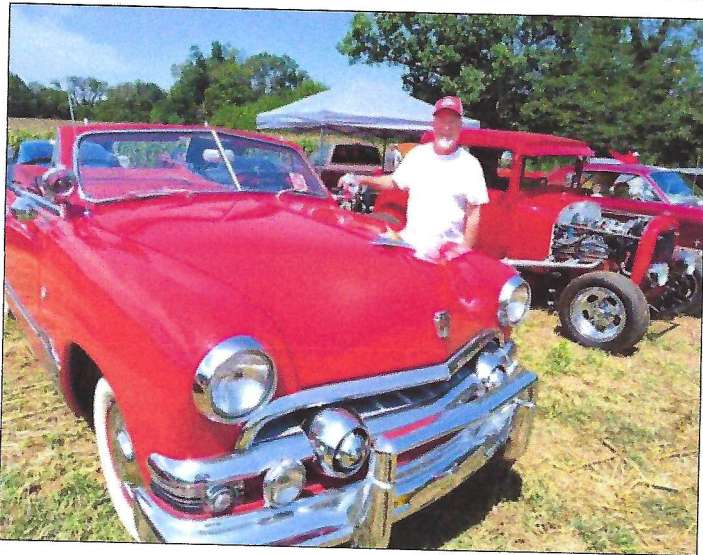
One of the most important things about any antique car is the stories that come with it.

This 1951 Ford Custom Convertible has been in our family many, many years. My father-in-law bought the car in March of 1989 from a fella out of Kentucky named Gary Curry. It was his second '51 Ford convertible.

My wife Christie's parents' names are Harold and Lill Coker. Harold is the founder of Coker Tire Company. He was the owner of several BF Goodrich modern retail tire stores in Chattanooga, Tennessee. He moved from Athens, Tennessee where he worked in a tire store to Chattanooga to open a store of his own when Christie was small.

Being a car collector and a tire dealer it was natural for car friends to ask him if he could find this or that tire for their own antique cars. He began to look for new "old stock" tires. The love of cars and needs those friends had for hard to find tires is the reason he started his vintage tire business. Enough of that, lets get to the convertible!

Before he and Lill got married, Harold drove a red 1951 Ford Custom Convertible. The picture shows Harold and Lill in



Harold Coker, Lill and Neenah Thomas

the fall of 1951 beside the car along with Lill's younger sister, Neenah. Lill and Harold married on Sept 6, 1953, and drove the '51 on their honeymoon. Children began coming the following year and the convertible was no longer an acceptable "family car." He loved the old '51 but it was wise to sell it for a more practical vehicle. Harold dreamed of having another one in the future.

Harold always told Lill that one day he would buy another '51 Ford convertible and this time he would put every bell and whistle on it that he could not afford the first time. In 1989, he bought a rough car in need of some love. They planned to have a 50th wedding celebration and renewal of wedding vows in 2003. He wanted to drive away from this renewal of vows in the same fashion as 50 years before. This red convertible is that car.

Harold left the car in as original condition as possible except for the paint, top accessories and new leather interior. Harold and Lill's marriage lasted 62 wonderful years before his passing. At that time, there were a few cars that were very important to my wife. They included a 1935 Ford Phaeton, the car in which she learned to drive on the family farm and this '51 Ford convertible. As she always says she obtained them the old-fashioned way...she inherited them.

Christie and I took possession of some of Harold's cars when he died in November of 2014. We have maintained, driven and loved the '51 ever since!



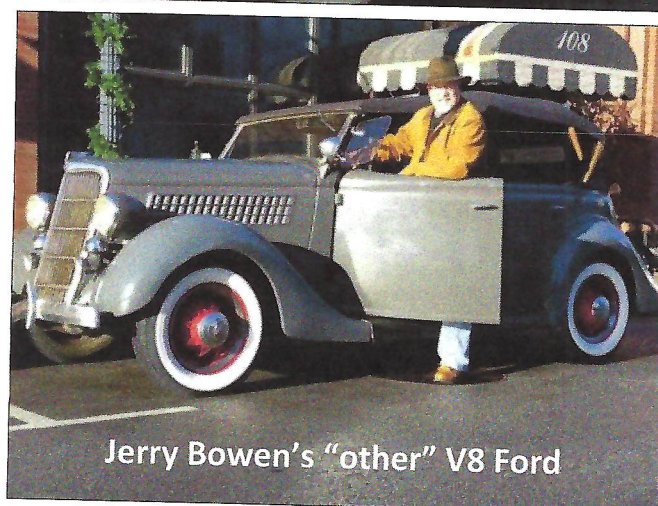
Before Restoration



After Restoration



Harold Coker and his '51 Convertible



Jerry Bowen's "other" V8 Ford