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Gilmore Heritage Auto Show: Woody Wagon joy rides

Despite the bumpy outing, the grind of the stick shift and the lack of power brakes and steering, vintage Ford Woody Wagons have a celebrity status among car enthusiasts.

By Brenda Rees
Special to the Times



David Holmes

A one-of-a-kind "camperized" 1946 Mercury Marmon-Herrington Woody. This and a dozen other Woodies along with 45 other vintage cars at the Gilmore Auto Show this Saturday at the Farmers Market in Los Angeles.

Motoring around Santa Monica with Dougger Anderson is like taking a drive with Angelina Jolie or George Clooney, except it's the car, not the passengers, that has the celebrity status.

"Hey, how you doing?" chimes Anderson as he waves "hang loose" to a guy snapping a cellphone shot of the pristine maize-colored Ford Woody Wagon -- one of the quintessential old-school "cheap" beach cars with wood paneling that were perfect for hauling surfboards and buddies -- as it idles at a red light.

"What year is it?" hollers another fellow along Ocean Boulevard.

"It was built in 1946, the same year I was," Anderson shouts back with a grin.

Despite the bumpy outing, the grind of the stick shift and the lack of power brakes and steering, the Woody ride is more than just a grown man showing off his expensive toy.

"It reminds me of what being in Southern California is all about," says Anderson, who surfed his youth away at Dana Point. "It represents the carefree beach days, the smell of Coppertone, the Beach Boys. I bought it for the joy of the image it projects. It just makes everyone happy."

Anderson joins owners of a dozen other Woodies -- along with 45 other vintage cars, including an extremely rare 1902 Autocar Tonneau convertible -- at the Gilmore Heritage Auto Show this Saturday at the Farmers Market in Los Angeles. The "Knock on Wood" exhibition, a smorgasbord of classic surf cars, features wood-sided wagons from the '30s, '40s and '50s.

Another one-of-a-kind car on display is a "camperized" 1946 Mercury Marmon-Herrington Woody. Current owner Dave Holmes of Santa Monica was so enamored of the adventurous and classy vehicle that he sold two vintage cars -- a 1942 Ford Woody and a 1959 Corvette -- to buy it.

"I like stuff that's unique, and this car is like driving around in a museum," Holmes says. His Woody was first owned by Donald Bleitz, a preeminent Southern California ornithological photographer.

Traveling the Southwest to photograph local birds from the mountains to the deserts, Bleitz transformed his simple car into a practical overnighiter: The back seats were removed and a folding aluminum cot was stowed on the interior roof. An extra gas tank was installed along with a stainless steel, cork-insulated ice chest for film and food. A dashboard button dispensed drinking water from a supplementary water tank. And the roof rack, which doubled as a photo shoot platform, was modified with extra ribs; folding metal steps were added on the rear.

Holmes encourages car-show visitors to view each vehicle as a time capsule. "They couldn't help but make things stylish back then," the retired schoolteacher says. "Every old car has something you don't see in today's cars: authenticity and flair."

GILMORE HERITAGE AUTO SHOW

WHERE: Farmers Market, 6333 W. 3rd St., L.A. **WHEN:** 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday **PRICE:** Free
INFO: (323) 933-9211