

Collectible and Classic Cars

Viva the Classic!

The love of antique, classic and vintage cars began in the United States around the 1940s and was followed by worldwide enthusiasm. In Israel today there are several hundred active collectors of classic vehicles, one large well-established club, plus several sectorial clubs, and all contribute beauty and style to the scenery as they drive their antiques on the country's roads. This is about a unique hobby, the people behind it and the cars that turn people's heads. By Iris Lackner

Ford Thunderbird 1955





Pontiac GTO 1965

We're all familiar with collectors of stamps, works of art, dolls and knickknacks. But collectors of cars – particularly classic, special and impressive cars – are less of a common sight. Unlike stamp collecting, for example, which is a one-dimensional experience that does not take up too much space at home, car collecting as a hobby is multi dimensional, practical and takes up plenty of space at home, or rather in the yard.

Israel, as small a country as it is, has good reason to be proud. We have two classic car museums, an active members' club, several sectorial clubs and 1500 individual car collectors.

These impressive data can be traced back to The Five Club, established 28 years ago by a group of classic car collectors (some referring to their cars as "antiques") who wanted to get to know each other, give and provide each other with help, advise each other and display their vehicles. The club was set up by the organization of Israeli drivers. The first convention was held at the Sharon Hotel, Herzliya and from then on the club was on its way, led by Zvi Rechnitz, who actually started it from scratch. Until then, there had been no automobile clubs in the country.

What type of car is considered a collectible?

ZR: The Hebrew term is "*rechev asfanut*," which means a collector's vehicle. In Israel, to qualify as a collectible, a vehicle must be at least 30 years old (from the year of manufacture) and its owner must apply for a license designating it as a collector's vehicle. A classic can be a motorcycle, a sedan, a station wagon, a bus, a van or pick-up whose total permitted weight is

up to 12,000 kg. A classic bus may carry up to six passengers only and a van or pick-up may not carry cargo.

Classic vehicles are subject to several limitations: they may not travel between 7 a.m. and 9 a.m. on weekdays (Sunday through Thursday that are not holidays) and they may not be used for business/work purposes by their owner. The vehicle must carry the "honorary" license plate indicating it's a vintage car and a collector's item, as is customary in the United States, and importing a passenger car with a diesel engine or a right-hand drive is prohibited.

The Five Club

The Five Club is named for the "really old" automobiles with a license plate number of five digits only. According to the club's Spokesperson Benni Haspel, who is a veteran vehicle collector and owns a beautiful Mustang, the following vehicles may be imported: Category M1 passenger cars; motorcycles; vans or pick-ups up to four tons; trucks up to 12 tons; buses.

Is there a limitation on the number of collectible automobiles that a person is permitted to import?

BH: You're allowed to import vehicles so long as you do not use them for commercial purposes. Commercial importing of collectible vehicles is prohibited.

How was the definition of a collectible vehicle determined?

BH: In Israel, a collectible car is defined as one that is at least



Aston Martin DB2 1950

30 years old. In the United States it is less. In principle, each country has its own criteria. However, when this definition was formulated in Israel, it was based on some studies that arrived at a reasonable average.

What is the difference between an outdated, or old, vehicle and a collectible vehicle?

BH: An officially old vehicle is any vehicle – except for a tractor, a truck-trailer or a bus – that, at the date of renewing its license, has reached 19 years from the date of manufacture.

What is special about the activity of The Five Club?

BH: In addition to all the technical aspects and the exchange of information about automobiles, it has morphed into a social club as well. This takes place mostly at our Friday get-togethers. The central activity is at the Nokia Arena in Tel Aviv, but events are also held in Rehovot, Ra'anana, Lev Hamifratz (Haifa), and near Amiad Junction in the Upper Galilee. We are in touch with similar clubs abroad, and club members have created their own groups according to types of vehicles. Today, we represent Israel at FIVA [The Fédération Internationale des Véhicules Anciens], the international federation of vintage and classic cars.

Where does your club's name come from?

BH: It comes from the fact that, at the time it was established, old cars - 25 years or older - had five-digit license plate numbers.

How many collectors are there in Israel and how does the figure compare with the rest of the world?

BH: Compared to the United States we're quite a small group, but compared to Europe, we're fairly developed. It's all about organization. We are very well organized. The club presently numbers 700 members, and I must say that the quantity contributes to quality.

What is the club's greatest accomplishment?

BH: Helping to pass the regulation for the registration of collectible vehicles. The club succeeded in obtaining lower registration fees for all antique vehicles, not only for club members. We fought the Ministry of Transport about this and eventually won.

What makes a man want to be the owner of an antique car?

BH: First of all, probably a feeling of nostalgia, a longing for his own or his parents' past. In addition, there is nothing like the feeling you get when driving it... people's admiring looks... their reactions make it something special.

What is the profile of a typical antique car collector? Is there anything unique to this group?

BH: These are people who look beyond practical needs. It's not just a car with which to get from point A to point B. There's the matter of esthetics, beauty, nostalgia. This is a closely knit group. People help each other, learn from each other. In fact, we are all big kids with a toy. This is also a craze that demands loads of money, effort and investment, but you get a lot out of

it. The entire family takes part. You can't do it without logistic cooperation. But you have to maintain a balance. We have two women collectors among us, whose husbands come along for the ride.

So far, have there been any changes since the club's inception?

BH: The standard has gone up in many respects. The ability to import has increased, and this is reflected in the types of vehicles being collected and their prestige. We also have collectors of motorbikes, who are a group in itself within the club.

How does the Five Club contribute to the community?

BH: The Five Club also engages in activities for the community. Club members have adopted the school for automobile mechanics in Zrifin, where they give lectures, contribute to the library and generally enjoy imparting their love for old vehicles to the younger generation.

A Traveling Hunk of Steel

The only type of old car which can be imported by an individual is a collectible. Israel's collectors explain that it is often cheaper to simply import a vintage car, than invest in renovating it once it arrives.

Zvi Margalit, a collector of antique automobiles from Ashkelon and a member of The Five Club, began importing old cars 15 years ago: "I currently own a Dodge Coronet (1952), which I've had for 4 years, and a Chevrolet Malibu (1965) which I acquired two years ago. Before that I had others, but sold them, upgraded, and that's how things keep rolling along."

Margalit is a driving instructor, "so that I spend all my time among cars. I derive satisfaction from taking a hunk of steel and seeing it on the road. The financial investment required is significant, so I embarked on this hobby only when I felt I could afford it financially.

There's a lot of satisfaction in this occupation. I come home from work every day around 9 p.m. and at midnight I sit at the computer to look for spare parts for various cars. You can well imagine what happens when I find a suitable part; it's a real joy; satisfaction that's difficult to describe. I've passed this love on to my younger son, who is now 28 and with whom I share this enjoyment."

Aston Martin DB MARK 3 1957



Dodge Charger 1966



Alfa Romeo (competizione) 750 1955



Citroen DS19 1960





Cadillac Cyclone Concept 1959

Automobile Clubs in Israel

In addition to the Five Club, similar clubs in Israel are IVC in Ramat HaSharon, sectorial clubs dedicated to specific cars like the VW Beetle or the Alfa Romeo, and a few small groups. In Ashdod there's a garage that renovates antique cars.

What began in the U.S. in the '40s quickly spread to the U.K., where it developed in different directions, according to manufacturers. In Israel there are dozens of makes of cars, the largest number of which are British-made - left here from the days of the British Mandate - and American-made vehicles, which enjoy the advantage of being not very expensive to import, compared to other cars. Also, the maintenance of cars from the '50s and '60s is pretty simple.

In terms of figures, the leading manufacturers whose cars are collected in Israel are Ford, Chevrolet and Mercedes. But there are also a good number of Aston Martins and Rolls Royces.

A Moment of History

In the years 1958 to 1981 three types of passenger vehicles were manufactured in Israel: Rom Carmel, Susita and Sabra. The design was by a British company and was specifically adapted for Israel. Later on, an extensive industry of truck and bus manufacture developed in Israel.

The Museum at Tefen

The collection of automobiles at Tefen Industrial Park (part of a museum that also includes art and heritage) consists of 40 vehicles of models manufactured from the beginning of the 20th century until today. It is a private collection belonging to industrialist Eitan Wertheimer. This rare collection, the largest of its kind in Israel and one of the largest in the world, reflects part of a world view that illustrates to visitors the development of industry both in Israel and around the world, and in the automotive industry in particular.

The collection includes, inter alia, three classic cars: the 1965 Ford Mustang, the 1957 Chevrolet, and the 1974 Alfa Romeo. The term "classic car" does not refer necessarily to an antique car but rather to a car of unique design, "character" and capabilities.

What is common to all the vehicles on display at Tefen is that they were all actually driven in Israel. Some of the cars underwent long, complex and expensive restoration work. They were first located, then purchased, picked up from the junk yard in bad shape, with disintegrating metal chassis, and ended up shiny, impressive and fully functional. Needless to say, such restoration work requires thorough knowledge of automobile mechanics and intimate familiarity with the automobile industry. The collection includes American and European cars from the 1930s to the 1980s. In addition, on display is one Israeli car, the 1960 Sabra by Autocars, as well as Bigfoot, individually assembled in Pardes Hanna-Karkur.



Lincoln V8 1930

The Automobile Museum on Kibbutz Eyal

In an old structure on Kibbutz Eyal there's a hidden treasure - a collection of rare classic cars, lovingly and carefully renovated, with emphasis on the original look. Most vehicles in this collection are beautiful British cars from the 1930s and '40s. Two of the unique cars are a 1946 Jaguar and a breathtaking 1930 MG sports car made of wood and fabric. The man responsible for this unique museum, Uri Sahar, has also assembled an impressive library with books about the cars on display.