

COLLECTOR CLASSICS

Whippets, namesake car share love of speed

West Vancouver man owns 1929 roadster and a trio of fast dogs that love the ride

ALYN EDWARDS



It's five o'clock in the afternoon and the whippets are standing at the door ready to be loaded into the Whippet.

This is the routine for West Vancouver's Lawrence Harrop, whose long interest in raising and breeding whippet dogs led to the purchase of the obscure North American car.

In the late-1920s, Whippet cars built by the Willys Overland Company of Toledo, Ohio and Toronto were the smallest, lightest and fastest low-priced cars offered for sale. Thus the name Whippet for the sleek canine racers — the world's fastest accelerating dogs that can reach a speed of 60 km/h.

Every day at five, Lawrence lifts his three whippets into the rumble seat of his 1929 Whippet roadster and drives the three blocks from his West Vancouver home to Ambleside Park. There, with the city of Vancouver and its famous Lions Gate Bridge as the backdrop, Lawrence camps out and the whippets do what they like best, run.

"They always know when it's time and remind me every day," Lawrence says while picnicking on the beach with his Whippet roadster and his three generations of prized whippets.

The dogs came first 35 years ago with Willy given to him as a Christmas present. Whippets, like their greyhound brethren, are often raced, and Willy was a "rescue dog" that had run its course racing and was otherwise unwanted.

As Willy aged, Lawrence was ready for a pup and so Tess came into his family.

"Tess is a remarkable dog



Lawrence Harrop sits with his three whippet friends and their favourite ride: a 1929 Whippet roadster.

PHOTOS: ALYN EDWARDS

that can cover 200 yards in 10 seconds. She has been one of Canada's top 10 competitors in lure racing for four years," Lawrence says.

Mocha came later as Tess's pup. Four years ago, he bred Mocha and kept her pup named Ashley. His three girls are whippets who love rides in the rumble seat of the Whippet roadster. With their caregiver Lawrence, they are fixtures at Ambleside Park and local car shows.

"If I had a dollar for every photo that's been taken of the dogs with that car, I would be a very rich man," their proud papa enthuses.

Lawrence, who grew up on a grain farm in Saskatchewan, has always loved cars. He turned his early career as an operating room nurse into a business selling minimal invasive surgical equipment to doctors and hospitals. He didn't know there was a Whippet car



The whippets love to ride in the rumble seat of the 1929 Whippet roadster. Their owner takes them to run daily at Ambleside Park.

until just a few years ago.

"I was browsing the Internet looking for all things whippet when I came across the car," he says.

And so began his search for his own Whippet automobile, which he describes as part cause and part challenge.

"I searched all across North America and found one in

Ontario that was in pieces."

Lawrence then contacted the Vancouver Chapter of the Vintage Car Club of Canada for assistance.

That led to Burnaby machinist restorer Jimmy Harrison who had completed an off-frame restoration on a very rare Canadian-built 1929 Whippet roadster powered by its original six-

cylinder Continental engine. He had found the car all apart in Prince George. A deal was made and the roadster became the newest member of the Harrop whippet family.

Whippet cars had a short but surprisingly successful history. Introduced in 1927 as a small four-cylinder car, the next year's small lightweight models featured a more powerful six-cylinder engine. It was advertised as "the world's most powerful six cylinder automobile."

Sales of Whippet cars in 1928 were only eclipsed by those of Chevrolet and Ford, making it North America's third best-selling automobile.

The Canadian Willys-Overland plant in West Toronto built Whippet cars, including right-hand-drive models for export to other countries, including Australia and New Zealand where motorists drive

on the left side of the road. But the Depression caught up with many manufacturers, including Willys-Overland and production of the Whippet automobile ended in 1931. Willys managed to weather the 1930s with production of six- and eight-cylinder cars.

The company's fortunes were revived with wartime production of its famous Jeep — an acronym for GP (General Purpose) vehicle.

Lawrence Harrop's fascination with the Willys-built Whippet automobile led to the purchase of second collector vehicle that has historical meaning in his life.

His teenage summer job 50 years ago was working at a service garage on the Trans-Canada Highway outside Indian Head, Sask. He drove a red Jeep FC150, a very unusual compact four-wheel-drive truck built by Willys from 1956 to 1965.

FC was for Forward Control denoting its cab-over engine design. The model Lawrence drove had a wrecker winch on the back for pulling vehicles out of ditches and had a front-mounted snowplow for winter.

Again browsing the Internet, Lawrence spotted a photograph of a 1961 Jeep FC150 at a car show in Ontario. He tracked down the owner and convinced him to sell the rare restored truck.

Now the three whippets have alternative transportation for going further afield in enclosed comfort.

And while the whippets love to ride in the rumble seat of the Whippet roadster, they are equally at home in the back seat of the family Jeep truck.

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