



The Criterion

NEWSLETTER OF THE NORTHEAST CHAPTER OF THE PROFESSIONAL CAR SOCIETY
THIRD QUARTER 1997 GREGG D. MERKSAMER, EDITOR

MEET AT JOE'S:

Noreasters Grace Gibilisco Funeral Home Re-Opening Bash



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host Joe Gibilisco put together a festive, community-spirited shindig with complimentary refreshments and a magic show for the kids by Bunky the Clown. In addition to the eats and entertainment visitors could examine recent upgrades to Gibilisco's 100 year old Victorian landmark building, selected from more than 70 candidates in three states to appear as the "Jimenez Funeral Home" in the major motion picture *City Hall* with Al Pacino and Bridget Fonda, which have tripled the size of the visitation areas and improved access for the handicapped.

The big bash on West Milton Avenue in the heart of Rahway was hard for passers-by to miss, so it attracted several vehicles you wouldn't usually tie to funeral service. These included a lime green hot rod '58 Chevy two-door wagon, the Rahway Fire Department's 1919 American La France pumper ("still runs, still pumps," one of its caretakers assured me) and a circa-1984 GMC armored truck recently



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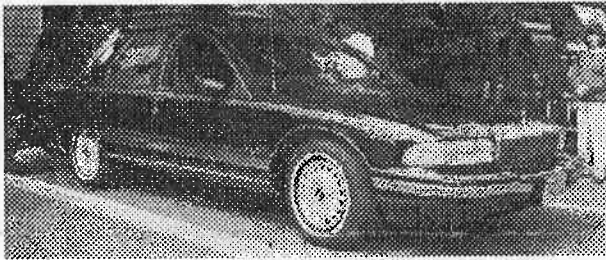
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donated by COIN President Jack Rodriguez to the Rahway Police Department for use as a mobile command post. "We actually weren't interested in the armor," explained Detective Bill White III. "We wanted it because the size of the vehicle was ideal for our department. When we need to do a drug raid twelve officers and their equipment can fit very comfortably in back."

Joined by Joe Gibilisco's unusual 1995 Eagle Necessity hearse, built from a Buick Roadmaster station wagon by stretching the rear quarter panels, the PCS member cars occupied ten prime spaces in the parking area. With Bob Behr's 1949 Flexible Buick ambulance parked right behind it, Dave Wilner's 1850 horsedrawn hearse occupied the place of honor by Gibilisco's front sign.



Host Joe Gibilisco added his own 1995 Eagle Buick Necessity to the vehicle display.

Adjacent to Paul Vickery's 1956 Miller Cadillac ambulance, Craig Stewart's 1978 Miller-Meteor ambulance was next door neighbor to Bill Marcy's 1978 Miller-Meteor limousine-style hearse.

Parked in front of Gibilisco's free-standing casket selection room, the Heine-bodied, glass walled 1965 Volvo P210 hearse brought from Trenton by Will Van Allen and Gregory Miller was another big draw. Across the parking area three Cadillac flower cars stood in a row; Mike Barruzza's '74 Superior, Bill Marcy's 1978 McClain and Dave Wilner's stretched 1997 DeVille, whose construction is chronicled on page three of this issue of *The Criterion*.

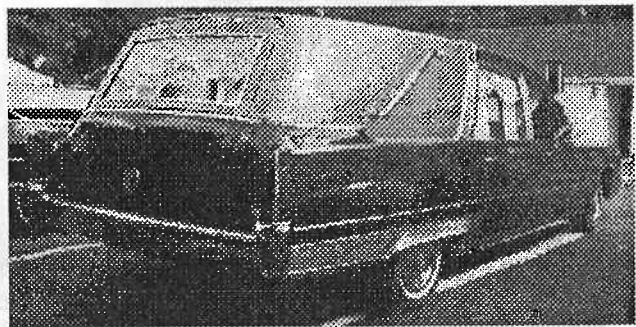
The Gibilisco open house also marked the debut showing of the 1970 Superior Crown Sovereign Cadillac Landau that Jeff & Dale Hedges have owned since spring; it really stood apart with its red paint job and pewter top. "It originally had a Sudan Beige bottom and Cotillion White top," Jeff explained, "but someone tried to give the roof a crinkle finish that



Glass-walled, Heine-bodied 1965 Volvo hearse brought by Will Van Allen & Gregory Miller was a big draw.

never stuck, so I had to strip the entire roof with a razor blade." Those who looked beyond the unusual color scheme found this 68,000 mile car to be rust-free and exceptionally complete trim-wise, down to the ribbed appliques behind the fender skirts and the Superior Crown medallion in the middle of the rear door. "The guy who bought it up here was going to a stock car race in North Carolina, saw it sitting on a lot and fell in love with it," Jeff added. "He took the train down, drove it back, owned it for three weeks, got sick and passed away. I learned about the car in an Estate Sale notice in the Jamesburg, NJ *Auto Shopper*."

The casket compartment was also in fine fettle and full of unusual touches, including a cot hook "for take outs" (but no jump seats) and truly eye-catching Art Deco style polished aluminum torches. "Once I had the car in my driveway, two guys got out of a minivan and started looking the car over," Jeff recalled. "One of them whipped out a card saying he was a funeral director from the Phillipines. If my car was a 3-way I could have sold it right then and there."



Jeff & Dale Hedges' '70 Sup Crown Sovereign really stood out with its red paint & pewter top.

NORTHEAST CHAPTER TO MEET NOVEMBER 2nd

The election of new officers and a planning session for the 1999 PCS International Meet in Lancaster, PA will top the agenda at the next meeting of the PCS Northeast Chapter, which will take place in Sparta, New Jersey on Sun., November 2nd. Hosted by Chapter Secretary Mary Hookway and her husband Jeff, the meeting will begin 1:30 pm at the HQ of the Sparta Volunteer Ambulance Squad. Those that need eats beforehand plan to meet at noon at the nearby Sparta Diner. Here are more detailed directions:

To the Sparta Volunteer Ambulance Squad HQ, 14 Sparta Ave., Sparta, NJ (bldg. phone: 973-729-7560):

Route 80 West to exit 34B, or Route 80 East to exit 34 ("Route 15 North, Jefferson/Sparta").

Route 15 North past "Sparta/Lake Mohawk Business District" exit to "Sparta/Route 517" exit.

Turn left onto Route 517 at first traffic signal.

Go straight at second traffic signal, at third traffic signal turn left onto Sparta Ave.

Squad building is on right beyond Grand Union and Dairy Queen. Park in lot just before squad building, or drive between squad building and fire house beyond it and park in rear.

To the Sparta Diner, 80 Woodport Rd., Sparta, NJ:

Continue past the squad building to the traffic signal. Turn right. (You can't go straight. This is a jug handle you'll have to go around when you return to the squad building). At Y, stay to the left. (Don't go to Lake Mohawk). Go straight at signal, than make your first right into the Professional Quadrangle and the Sparta Diner parking lot.

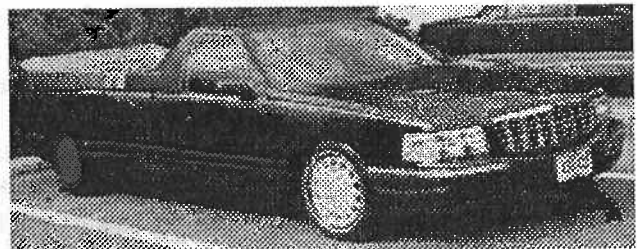
An alternate route directly to Sparta Diner would be to take Route 15 North to the "Sparta/Lake Mohawk Business District" exit, then take Route 181 North. At traffic signal (Pine Cone Lane) go straight. When you see Sparta Lanes and the Theater Center shopping center on right, get ready to turn left into Professional Quadrangle. If you come to a second traffic signal, you've gone too far.



WILNER WELCOMES THE PCS

On July 20th, PCS member Dave Wilner (*above, at right*) invited the Northeast Chapter to tour the Edison, NJ facility where he houses his 110 vehicle livery fleet. His father founded the firm in 1923, and Wilner recalled that he "started washing cars at nine, and went on the road myself in 1952. I remember we'd trade cars after five years that had gone 20,000 miles. We can do that in a year now." His hearses average 14,000 miles a year, while the flower cars do 7,000 to 8,000 miles annually, the limousines 35,000 a year and the sedans a whopping 80,000 miles. "I'd like to make in a year what I pay in insurance," Wilner quipped as he leaned on the stainless steel tonneau of a flower car, discussing other changes in the livery trade. Though he's converted about 20 Cadillacs over the past seven years into flower cars for himself and a few preferred customers, Wilner feels that "the flower car business is not what it used to be. The cemeteries just don't want the flowers anymore."

Wilner had an impressive collection of vintage



Started the week before the PCS visited on July 20th, Wilner had his stretched DeVille flower car ready to show at Gibilisco's in September.

