

## Our LIL AVANTI

Hi dear, I want to buy an Avanti! Everyone hears about the great deal that got away. Yes, I do have an Avanti for sale, but I sold it 15 minutes ago (for ½ the value!). I figured that if I was looking and let everyone know that I was looking, that elusive deal might come up. And it did.

I was looking for a 1981-1985 Avanti. There were four reasons for this:

1. They generally had all the toys – PW, PL, A/C, moon roof, etc
2. Easy to fix 305 Chevrolet with a four speed automatic
3. Were still the Studebaker design – frame (and mechanicals), body parts and accessories, glass, etc.
4. I could fit – being 5’11”, 230+ pounds meant that I did not fit in an early Avanti without a tilt wheel and original seats.

I was watching the Canadian and US Auto Traders – none seemed to peak my interest. Turning Wheels had a few show up, but they were also in the Auto Trader. E-bay always had Avanti’s for sale but it was questionable about the quality of car offered (I researched a 1984 that was listed as exceptional. When I talked to the owner, exceptional was based on being a 23 year old car with rusted out hog troughs and bad interior). Nope, I wanted to see and touch the car before I purchased it. If I purchased a POS, I want it be due to lack of due diligence on my part, not someone lying to me.

The summer of 2005 was full of car shows and cruises. The Zone Meet in Milton was a show I was looking forward to. I would get the opportunity to see a few Canadian Avanti’s, as opposed to the US ones I see at York, Reidsville and South Bend. At the swap meet, there was one for sale – a 1984 version. I looked, but not that closely, as it was priced out of my budget. A few months later, I looked at the phone number for the Avanti and realized who owned it. The car was in storage, never winter driven and frame/hog troughs oiled yearly. It was difficult arranging to see the car and when I was advised that he was bringing it home to sell, right past Cambridge, I asked if we could meet. Even better, he would drop it off for a few weeks for me to look it over. So in March of 2006, I had a 1984 Avanti in my garage. Good for me, bad for the seller. It was a real learning experience for me. I had my mechanic and body man come over and tell me what it needed. I also found out about the cost of leather interior repairs. But, I was able to take it for a couple of drives and experience it. Yes, an Avanti is what I want. But before I could make a decision on this one, another one came up.

The Canadian International Auto Show (CIAS) was held in February 2006. Studebaker had a small display and although timing was bad, I was able to arrange a day off to staff the booth with Barry Leppan. I sat in a chair right in front of a beautiful silver 1973 Avanti owned by Fred Perry. Barry and I chatted at great lengths about Avanti’s, Gran Turismo’s, and life in general. We also discussed the 1984 I was anticipating seeing once the spring thaw occurred. Barry later staffed the booth with Roland Vardon, who immediately sent me a membership application to the CAO. He also told me about a 1983 that was potentially up for sale, as the owner had died and the son had it. He met with Adam Rowe, took some pictures, and put me in touch with Adam and a viewing was arranged.

## Our LIL AVNTI

I thought I preferred the molded bumpers of the 1984-1985 but this 1983 chrome bumpered car was in excellent condition. It was extremely dirty, as the owner (John Rowe) had not driven the car since August. He went on vacation in the September 05 time frame and was ill when he returned and eventually passed away in January 06. It had issues – interior was very worn, carpeting ragged, mirror loose, paint dull with many stone chips and tires that were almost bald on the front. But, I could see the potential.

Pictures taken by Roland Vardon March '06



The car was in probate – Adam advised that it would not be available for at least 6 weeks (end of May). I told him what I thought it was worth and to think about it. He would call me with his decision. I then called the owner of the 1984 and told him what I thought it was worth, based on what repairs it needed. I am glad he was a friend – he said that my offer was lower than he wanted so no deal – no hard feelings. Adam then called me – after discussing with his sister Linda, they felt it was worth more. I suggested that we meet in the middle, and they agreed. I was happy, as they got what they wanted and I got a car that if I spent some time cleaning up and no surprises, was within my budget. All I had to do was wait for Adam to call me when probate was finished.

I was in South Bend for the Michiana swap meet. I was actually in the Studebaker National Museum, pondering when I would get the call. Suddenly my cell phone rang. Adam was asking do I want to pick it up Saturday? I let him know I will pay him Monday night and drive home Tuesday. The rest of the weekend was a blur.

## Our LIL AVNTI

Monday night finally came. This was the first time Judith would see the 1983. She was not impressed with the 1984 (she did not like the molded bumpers and the condition of the interior). She liked the 1983. So far, so good. On Tuesday night, we would drive home from Whitby to Cambridge. It was not like Roland's trip to pick up his 1963, but for me it was nerve wracking. After adding air in the tires, a litre of oil and some gas, off we went. There were no issues except for some curious looks.

Adam Rowe and Mike



Judith and Mike



Once home, I changed the oil and all filters, as I did not know when it was last serviced. I looked up engine parts for a 1983 Chevrolet Camaro. I scheduled the safety certification for the following Monday. In the meantime, I tried to find something wrong – loose parts, burned out bulbs, anything broken. All I could find was a broken exhaust hanger, which was an easy fix. Andy Morrison of Morrison Automotive is an old friend. He was amazed at the condition of the car and could not find anything wrong. Even the front tires were good. He did recommend that I replace the rear brake shoes, as they were worn at an angle but still passed. After some searching, they were located and replaced.

My next step was cleaning. I spent two days on the long weekend in May cleaning the interior and exterior. The interior will take several more scrubbing – leather does not clean that easily, I found out. The exterior was another story. Hundreds of little stone chips all over the car. I took the car to my body man, Ron Reist @ Royal Auto Body to mix up some touch up paint. I should have polished it first – the first can of touch up paint was darker than the paint on the car after polishing. I then had the paint lightened up and spent 4-5 hours touching up the chips. I then polished the entire car, first with 2000 grit wet sandpaper then cutting compound on an orbital sander. Ron re-applied the pin striping I removed to polish, and then I waxed. First with a pre-cleaner, then final coat. I cannot believe that it is the same car.

Our plans are now just to drive the car this summer, doing maintenance as required. Over the winter, we may do something about the tear in the driver's seat and repaint the car. Or not.