

Auto Museum : driving excitement

by Jesse Hassinger

Have you driven on Route 690 over the downtown area and seen a white building with large vintage car billboards? Have you ever wondered what that was? I have.

One day I got a phone call from Walter Miller of DeWitt, the owner of this building.

Hearing that I was an aspiring filmmaker, he asked if I would like to film the opening of his new museum.

"What is it?" I asked. He replied that it was a car museum - specifically, the Museum Of Automobile History. I said that I would be happy to film the opening, but where was the museum? He said that it was a block away from the Herald American building, at 321 N. Clinton St. I asked him if it was the building with the billboards on it. He said yes.

"I had always wondered what that was," I said.

Last October I went over to the odd-looking building at 321 North Clinton St., a block away from the newspaper building...and the Dinosaur Bar-B-Q.

If you can believe it, the inside of this building is even more outrageous than the

outside. From wall to wall, from floor to ceiling, from case to case, from door to door, this building is filled with car memorabilia.

There are dozens of partitions in the one main room, each representing a decade of automotive history. On each of these partitions, which go from the floor almost to the top of the 25-foot ceiling, are about 50 to 100 ads, letters, photographs and blueprints of and about cars.

The first partition starts with 1777 (with Leonardo DaVinci's sketches for mobile vehicles). The last one ends with 1994. In between this 217 year history of automobiles are hundreds in incredibly interesting objects.

One of special interest is the partition dated during World

War II. There are numerous letters to American car companies from Adolph Hitler, plus pictures of the German Army riding in American cars.

On one wall there are posters representing car and rebel movies from the 1940s to the 1960s, including "Rebel Without A Cause" and "Easy Rider". On this wall there are also signed pictures of famous stars. On some of the other walls there are steering

wheels, hubcaps and magazines about cars.

In "The Red Room" there are hundreds of model cars in display cases. These tiny models range from five centimeter cars made of sand to three foot cars made of plastic. In between are strange and bizarre cars: a "Flintstone's" car (complete with the whole family: Fred, Wilma, Bam-Bam and Pebbles); a car made of shells; a set of salt and pepper shaker cars; a "Speed Racer" car, and many many more.

Walter Miller owns not only this museum, but almost everything contained within its four walls. He started out as a young boy collecting toy cars and memorabilia. Some people thought him crazy, while others commended his efforts, but no one thought that he would continue collecting into his twenties and beyond.

Car lovers' delight

This wonderful museum is the culmination of his efforts. And what a museum it is!

It's not only for avid car loves, but it is also a history lesson, an art lesson and an advertising lesson combined into one museum. Overall, it is good for everyone from the ages of three on into the golden years of life.

During the opening, Mayor Roy Bernardi gave a speech about the opening of this new museum. When I was filming the opening, I interviewed most everyone there, and more than 75 percent of the people said that they were not really interested in cars, but were very interested in this museum, and would come back.

Editor's note: A junior at Manlius Pebble Hill School, Jesse Hassinger is also an editorial staffer for the MPH Rolling Stone.

About the museum

What: The Museum of Automobile History
Where: 321 North Clinton St., Syracuse
When: Wednesday through Sunday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.
Cost: \$5 adults, \$4 seniors, \$3 children

The trip down automobile memory lane begins even before you enter the Museum of Automobile History. The outside of the building is adorned with memory-provoking ads from a variety of years and car manufacturers.

