

P.S. I Love You

by Frank Ambrogio

"P.S. I Love You" is a 1934 song written by Johnny Mercer and Gordon Jenkins. I first heard it in 1953-54 when it was a hit by The Hilltoppers. "P.S. I Love You" is also the title of a 1964 song by The Beatles, *but I'm too old to remember that one*. The two songs have different words and music, but the phrase has the same meaning in both.

A dictionary search shows that *love* generally means a profoundly tender, passionate affection for another person. However love can also mean to have a strong liking for or to take great pleasure in something such as art or music. The latter description is the more appropriate one with regard to my 1956 Golden Hawk.

I purchased my second 1956 Golden Hawk (model 56J) Serial # 6031884 on January 22, 1987 from Mason Maynard of Crete IL. Although it was the same year, make, and model as my first 56J, it was a completely different driving experience. With a 3sp/OD manual transmission, dual four barrel carburetor setup, dual point Mallory ignition, Iskenderian solid lifter cam, polished and ported heads by C-T Automotive, and 2-1/4" exhaust, the Mocha & Snowcap White monster was a real piece of work. It was also a lot of fun to drive, well almost!

I first saw the car in Indianapolis IN, at the Studebaker Drivers Club International Meet in 1986. It showed up at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway on the day of the car show. My wife, Anita, and our friends, Jerry & Cindi Shelton, were exiting our rental car when Mason arrived in the Hawk and parked just a few spaces away. We went over to look at it because it was similar to our car back home. Mason said the car was for sale, opened the trunk, and gave me a sheet of paper listing some of the car's features, and the selling price. I wanted to buy it, but felt the sane approach was to spend the money on the 56J project I had been working on back home for the past three years.

The following evening at the banquet, we were discussing the car with others seated at our table. One of those people was Joe Aluise from Clarksville MD who stated, "if that car came from the factory with 2 four barrels, it would be very rare and valuable." At that point Anita leaned over and whispered, "we should buy that car!" Well, this

stunning bit of role reversal left me in shock. What could I say? Remembering my wedding vows to love, honor, and especially obey, I felt a deep, *loving* obligation to pursue the matter strictly in the interest of marital bliss. Yeah, she's a keeper!



Cypress Gardens - 1987 just before entering the car's first show

Mason had already left the meet by Friday, but I spoke to Dick Stewart, also from Crete IL, at the literature swap. He had driven the car and said it was a nice car, ran well, and the price was fair. He followed that by stating the car could use power steering. Little did I know then how prophetic those words would prove to be.

After we returned home, I contacted Mason and we reached an agreement on delivery and price. Six months later, he drove the car to our home in Florida. I never drove the car prior to its delivery. I knew it made it from the Chicago area to Indianapolis and back. I felt if it could make the trip from Illinois to Florida, there should be no problem. So in January of 1987, the car was mine.

I made the purchase, again without driving the car. Since we had agreed to the transaction over the phone, all that remained was the paperwork and monetary exchange. After completing the deal at the license plate office, Mason took me for a demonstration drive. He showed me how to use the overdrive handle to engage and disengage the overdrive on the fly. I've only tried this maneuver when the car was stopped. Since there are no mountains in Florida, I've rarely had the overdrive manually locked out.



Mount Dora FL 1988 - The car's first State Meet

Everything was all I hoped for but when he down shifted from third and stomped on the gas in second gear, I knew this was my kind of car. And it was. Well almost!

Unlike my first 1956 Golden Hawk, this car as I stated, did not have power steering. This revelation became apparent immediately and I suddenly remembered the power steering comments of Dick Stewart the previous year in Indianapolis. My handy dictionary defines Revelation as: *Something revealed, especially a dramatic disclosure of something not previously known or realized.*

That *dramatic disclosure* made itself obvious when I started the engine and turned the steering wheel for the first time. When

Studebaker designed this car, they must have had the *Incredible Hulk* do the test drive! If ever a car needed power steering, this was it! Maneuvering in traffic was manageable but not comfortable. Parking, especially backing into a space at a cruise was difficult, and the addition of radial tires only compounded the problem. Parallel parking was something to avoid completely. I was still happy about my purchase. I simply needed to make one little upgrade, power steering. How hard could that be?

OK, I'm being a little harsh regarding the power steering aspect. I've driven other cars without power steering and I can't say they were any easier to drive than this car. One such car was an ugly, putrid, horrible excuse for a car, Datsun B210 rental which I can honestly say made my 1975 Pontiac Astre feel like a Caddy. Driving my first 56J with power steering and then driving what is basically the same car without power steering, simply amplified the difference.

In my youth, the first five cars I owned lacked power steering. Since I didn't know any better, I didn't miss it. But after driving my brother's 1960 Pontiac Catalina with power steering, I knew I'd never want to own a car without that option. I held true to that desire until I purchased this 56J. Suddenly after all those years, driving a car without PS was much more of a chore than I had remembered.

I immediately began my quest to add power steering to this otherwise perfect car. I felt I could gladly trade a little horsepower for more turning power. I completed the project on March 24, 2000, only thirteen years, two months, and two days since the purchase date.

Searching the parts manuals, I found approximately 60 parts that were needed to make the conversion. Except 3 items, I eventually picked up all of them from vendors such as (the late) Phil Brown, Special Interest Autos of St. Louis, Mulberry Farm, Studebaker of California, A & M Garage, Gay's Garage, Parmer Studebaker, Bill Cathcart, Andy Molnar, Brent Hagen, and Packard Farm.

The biggest problem proved to be finding the steering post jacket and the two shift linkage rods that connect between the steering column and the transmission, part #s 1540209 and 1540211. None of the vendors I contacted had any of those items. Adding power steering required the use of a shorter steering column, which meant using a different drag link, pitman arm, and those two shift rods. The drag link and pitman arm were no problem. Through the years, I accumulated everything else, but the jacket proved elusive and shift

rods were nowhere to be found on the planet.

What it all boiled down to was this. If I wanted to add the original Saginaw power steering setup to a 56J with a manual transmission I would need the correct steering column.



Comparison of the two steering columns.
The top one shows the column with the power steering gear.
The bottom one shows the column with the standard gear.
Photo courtesy of Brent Hagen

The steering column for a manual transmission 56J without PS is 35-3/16" long. The steering column on that same manual transmission car with PS is 30-1/4" long. A steering column from any other 1953-56 C-K bodied car with PS would be the correct length, but would still require some modification if it came from a car with an automatic transmission. Finding a steering column from any other 1953-56 C-K model with PS and manual transmission would require a few parts to be changed. Finding one also proved to be fruitless.

Even if I found one, I'd prefer one from a car that had the T-85 transmission. Otherwise, such things as the gearshift fork for second

& high, and the gearshift shoe (fork) for Low & reverse would need to be changed. Other parts would also need changing, and I just wasn't sure I'd catch them all. At this point, the 56J steering column seemed like my best option so I decided to pursue this avenue. I would still look for a column from a 1953-56 C-K car as a plan B.

Everyone suggested that I find a 56J parts car and take the items from it. No Sh__ Sherlock! Getting the necessary setup from a parts car was my initial thought. It was the most obvious approach. It was also easier said than done. The problem is that the steering column is unique to 1953-56 C-K bodied cars with P/S and manual transmission. Most cars of that era with power steering came with an automatic transmission. Cars with a manual transmission were usually not the top of the line models and most often had standard steering. As an example, a 1955 Speedster with manual transmission and power steering is even more rare than a similarly equipped 56J.

The two rods were unique to 1956 Golden Hawks. No other Studebaker used these items. Of the 786 manual transmission Golden Hawks produced for 1956, only 192 left the factory with power steering. So finding a parts car donor was a challenge. As of early 2015, there were only 24 cars listed in the *1956 Golden Hawk Owners Register* with manual transmission and power steering, a survival rate of 12%.

I thought I had hit pay dirt when in late 1992, 56J owner Tony Laforti of Gordon Buescth IL sent photos and serial numbers of five 56Js resting in a yard along with probably several hundred cars. A review of the production orders revealed that one of those originally had the power steering setup I needed although I couldn't tell if it was still there. I wrote to the owner several times but he never responded. I called one time also, and spoke to "mom". She basically told me to get lost so that pursuit ended with no further progress.

In late 1998, the saga took a new turn. Owner Bob Light of Mashfield, VT, said he had a 56J parts car with the parts I needed, and was willing to sell me the entire power steering setup for \$100. He wouldn't be able to remove everything until the spring of 1999. After waiting for almost 12 years, I told him I could wait 5 months. Finally, I was making real progress. Well almost!

That winter, Bob informed me that he was having a cash flow problem and needed to sell some or all of his parts. He promised

that I could still have the PS setup. At the same time, fellow 56J owner, Yvon Beaudry, of St-Paul D' Abbotsford, Quebec, indicated he needed some items for his own project. So I put the two of them in touch and never heard anything else till a few months later.

During a phone conversation, owner Jack Nordstrom of New Braunfels TX, informed me that Bob had sold everything including the parts car with *my* power steering parts. I contacted Bob who reported he sold the parts car to Yvon, with the stipulation that I was to get the PS setup. I hoped I hadn't stepped on my own crankshaft by putting Bob and Yvon in touch. A letter to Yvon produced nothing and I got the feeling that another opportunity was about to slip away.

I was ready to accept another setback, when roughly two months later, Yvon replied, with apologies for taking so long to respond. We made arrangements to meet at the swap meet at Reedsville PA in November. There, we made the exchange for a still reasonable \$150 and finally, I had everything I needed for the conversion. Well almost!

Bob Light had earlier told me that a former owner had put a floor shift in that car, so the two shift rods, I so dearly needed, were not part of the package. But at least I had the much needed, rare steering column. Suddenly, I had a lot of duplicate parts, but I still lacked the two rods.

I turned my attention to the Studebaker Drivers Club. I contacted Turning Wheels Almanac Editor, Richard Quinn, of Mokena IL, who had been so helpful in the past. Richard sent me copies of the engineering drawings for the two rods, but getting them made was going to be expensive. Owner Jim Bella of North Liberty IN, had checked on this and the cost would have been over \$200 for each rod, with a 3 rod minimum order for each. I think there was also a setup charge.

Now the focus shifted to our local Orlando Area Chapter. Member Jeff Elliott mentioned that Bob Webster, the brother of another member, Marion White, was pretty handy at all sort of things. I thought maybe he could make the two shift linkage rods for me. I contacted Bob, and made arrangements to meet. I showed him the drawings, and asked him if he could make the two rods. He looked at them for a while, and then said, "probably." I left the drawings with Bob and told him to let me know.

In about a month, Bob called and told me to come pick up the two rods. I made the 3/4 mile trip and paid him \$100.00 for the pair. He did a masterful job and they looked perfect to my untrained eye. I finally had everything I needed to add power steering to my little chariot. Well, almost!

Having all the necessary parts was one aspect of the project. Now I only lacked the ability to do the job. I knew exactly what had to be done. I also knew I could not do it. I think this is a good time to tell you a little about my mechanical ability. In a nutshell, I wouldn't know the difference between a rear main seal and the Good Housekeeping Seal. I do understand a little bit about auto mechanics, but that doesn't mean I could do a lot of jobs. I can do normal maintenance, but I'd never attempt something of this nature.

So it was now time for family to enter the picture. In late March, Anita's brother Bob and his wife Sandy, made their annual visit from our home town, Detroit. They had gone to Las Vegas, Sarasota and would spend the last few days with us. Bob had told me several times that he could do the job if I got the parts. The time had finally arrived to either put up or shut up. They arrived about 10:30 on that Thursday and we got started right after lunch.

I had already disconnected the battery and put the car on jack stands. I figured this would make Bob think I would actually be of some help. He checked the items I had on hand, whistled a little, mumbled "hmmm" a few times, and then got down to business.

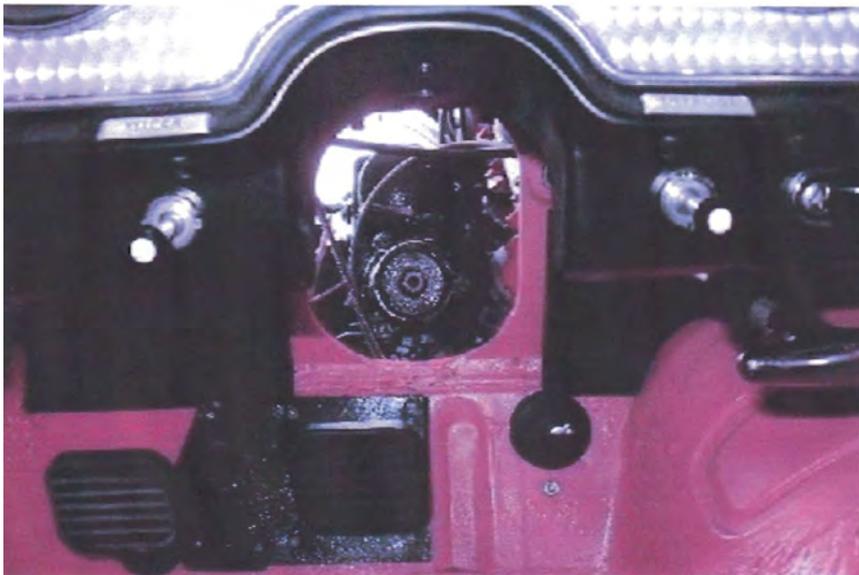
Bob has been involved with old cars since he was old enough to cry. He always had between 10 and 25 cars scattered around various locations of the Detroit area, and was always working on them. He had a crew of friends who worked with him. Between them they could probably do everything required to fix any car including body work and paint. I truly believe Bob changed engines as often as I changed socks.

However, I had never worked with Bob on anything of substance, and I really didn't know if he could do the job with only me to help. I just decided that he certainly had much more experience than I did, so I put my faith in him. *Lead on McBob!*

He removed a couple of bolts under the dashboard, removed the bracket that held the steering column in place, and disconnected the wires for the turn signals and brake lights. Big deal! I could have

done that! So far, nothing too spectacular had happened. Then he slid under the car and began whatever work was needed at the lower end of the steering column. I stayed topside, and fetched whatever tools he needed. After much wrench banging and ratchet clacking, Bob told me to get in the car and pull up on the steering wheel.

Dutifully, I did just that, and nearly had a coronary! Out came the complete assembly, steering column, gear, *grease*, etc. I looked at the big hole in the floor for a moment and thought to myself, "this car will never see the American road again." I just knew it was doomed to spend the rest of its days on jack stands in my garage.



This is the view I was looking at after pulling up the steering column. At this point, I was sure I'd never drive the car again! Photo by Jim Bella

I managed to regroup, and unfazed with everything to that point, Bob pressed on. I too was equal to the task. When he needed goggles, I had them. When he needed towels, right here pal. When he needed wrenches, no problem. When he needed a pickle fork, say what?

I'll be right back, I told Bob and headed into the house. My wife Anita knows everything there is to know when it comes to food and kitchen utensils. I asked if she had a pickle fork we could use and that if it got ruined, I'd buy her a new one. When I returned to the garage,

Bob couldn't look somewhat perplexed. Apparently that little fork from the kitchen drawer was not the same as the one from the tool chest. So, why don't they call them by different names?!!!

I still don't know what role a pickle plays in a car's steering. *I'd been under that car many times and never saw a pickle anywhere!* Bob said a crowbar would be a useable substitute. Still suffering from the confusion of the pickle fork incident, a new thought suddenly raced through my head. As I handed Bob the crowbar, visions of black birds bellying up to the bar and discussing hawks at their favorite tavern, raced through my mind. My mind works funny that way! But, enough about me.

Bob's inability to correctly identify tools properly notwithstanding, we continued on. Off came this, on went that, and methodically, the job was nearing completion. I was beginning to have more and more confidence. I was just so happy that every time Bob needed something, *not gherkin or fowl related*, I had it handy. Well almost!

We hit a final roadblock toward the end. We had to add a second pulley to accommodate the power steering belt. I had the pulley, but can you believe, I didn't have a wrench or socket large enough to remove the bolt at the vibration damper. It was well past dinner time and Anita and Sandy were ready to eat. We all felt this was a good place to stop. We could just finish up on Friday morning.

After breakfast, we went to the local auto parts store and bought the socket. This would prove to be the only part I lacked for the entire job. I felt pretty good about that because Bob was only going to be in town for one more day, and we had other plans, including meeting with other family members and going to the big show at the Daytona Speedway on Saturday. If we couldn't complete the job before Bob left, I wasn't sure I'd be able to do it alone.

While Bob worked on the pulley, I mounted the power steering pump that 56J owner Doug Jackman of Muscatine IA, had rebuilt for me. By then, Bob had finished with the second pulley, and I put the belt in place.

With Bob down under tinkering with the shift rods, and me in the driver's seat shifting gears through the "H" pattern, we were able to get the shift linkage to engage all the gears. Once done, Bob climbed out from under the car for the last time.

I filled the pump reservoir with automatic transmission fluid, as the final step of the process. We started the car, still on jack stands, and grabbing the steering wheel, I rotated the wheel from side to side several times to bleed the lines. We then lowered the front end of the car and 56% of the car's 3360 pounds settled on the front wheels. I was ready for the final step.



It's not evident in this photo from 2001, but the Hawk is now sporting power steering.

I was about to experience the result of a cooperative effort that involved people from six states, two countries, a couple of car clubs, a dozen parts vendors, family members, and friends. I blinked and glanced toward the heavens, said a silent prayer, got a firm grip on the steering wheel, and slowly executed a stationary left turn.

WOW! The look on my face told Bob that success had been achieved. Suddenly the phrase, "*the whole gang pulled stakes and ran*" from those 1950s Bardahl commercials, went through my brain (I think I may need help). After 13 years, I could finally turn the steering wheel without extra effort. We went for a short test drive and everything was in order. *For a moment, I felt like the Incredible Hulk himself.* Driving was not only easy, it was fun. I wanted to just keep on driving. So Brother-In-Law Bob came through on his

promise. *I take back all the unkind things I ever said about him!*

I've now been driving the car for more years with power steering than I drove it without. Yet even today, after all those years of manhandling that steering wheel, I am pleasantly surprised the first time I turn the wheel after startup. Just backing out of the garage is no longer an adventure. I can easily maneuver in traffic, get in and out of parking spaces, and just relax behind the wheel. For sure you have read reports to the contrary, but I can tell you from first hand experience that a 1956 Golden Hawk with power steering, handles just fine, thank you!



In this parting shot, also from 2001, the Hawk is now complete. Full of Vim and Vroom.

I'm so happy that I never gave up on this quest, and so appreciative of all who played a part so I could bring it to fruition. I've always enjoyed driving this car, but now, every time I start it and give that steering wheel a turn for the first time, all I can think of is, *P. S. I love you.*