



In the original 1927 part of the building, mouth-watering sights await, including Cobra CSX2242 and Allard J2X 3144.

# COMER GARAGE

From a beat-up 6-cylinder Mustang an enthusiast fired his automotive passion to build a collection the envy of many.

**STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY HOWARD KOBY.**

Wisconsin native Colin Comer grew up with the legendary Green Bay Packers and Milwaukee Brewers as home teams, Miller Beer and Harley-Davidson as business icons and Road America as the track where car and motorcycle enthusiasts gathered from all over the world. Yet it wasn't baseball or football that fueled his passion—it was cars.

Comer says that when he was very young he “wanted to be a garbage man because I liked garbage trucks. They were loud, mechanical—and the garbage men always got to pick up all that great stuff.” His first car was a slightly beat-up 6-cylinder '68 Mustang convertible with a 3-speed on the floor. He bought it for \$550. When his mom discovered that her son had



Colin Comer smiles from the cockpit of his '64 Eisert Indy Car.



bought a car without his father's knowledge, she told him to sell it before the elder Comer found out. That he did for a \$250 profit, using a list of other potential buyers provided him by the seller. This triggered Comer's lifelong passion for cars and anything related to automotive endeavors including racing, rallies, restoration and collecting—with a focus on high-performance cars.

"I started working on cars in my parents' garage, fixing up whatever neat machines I could afford. While most people eventually grow out of it, I never did," says Comer with a grin. He used to bring home car parts that he found in the street and surf the newspaper ads looking for cool cars that he could purchase on his meager budget—meaning cars listed in the "parts or whole" section, typically.

After a string of karts and mini-bikes, Comer began his first restoration project, an MGB/GT. He and his dad Brendan went to look at the MG in the dark of night and bought it for \$900. His dad paid half the money and made a deal with his son that if he got good grades in school he wouldn't have to pay the money back. When they finally looked at the MG in the daylight, they discovered it had wood floors and fiberglass fenders but luckily it ran very well. When Colin fueled the MG, most of it leaked out because the tank was rusted through (don't buy a car at night). He repaired it by rebuilding and making parts since he couldn't afford to buy new ones. For a time the MGB was his everyday car, that is until he saw a '69 Alfa Romeo GTV 1750 for sale. The purchase of the Alfa GTV started Comer's passion for all things Alfa Romeo, later leading to his decade as technical advisor for the Alfa Romeo Owner's Club. Comer still has the GTV2000 he bought when he was just 16 years old.

In high school Comer considered becoming an architect because he thought it would be a more respectable career path than that of an auto mechanic. Even so, cars continued to occupy much of his free time. Besides a part-time job at the local garage, Comer also took night courses in auto shop at a technical school. The turning point happened at age 17 while attending architecture classes. A neighbor who was an architect asked him, "What do you like more, cars or architecture?" For Comer the answer was easy: "Cars!"

After high school he worked in dealerships, attending ASE and factory schools learning much as a technician. He repaired and sold cars on the side and bought his first house—complete with a garage—right out of high school, and from



Trophies, trinkets and treasures are highlighted by a '48 Indian Chief.



Comer's '65 "Narrow Hip" 427 Cobra, CSX3134, parks under vintage neon and Woodward Ave. mural.





Comer has owned the '58 Alfa Romeo 750F Giulietta Spider Veloce for 10-plus years; next to it is a beautiful '67 Ferrari 275 GTB/4.



Unrestored quarter midget, a vintage Sun machine and FoMoCo dealership parts department displays are part of the collection's ambience.



Comer's "Bugeye" shares space with Eisert Indy car and B-Production Corvette.



Mrs. Comer's '59 Austin-Healey Bugeye, aka "Kablooie."

this humble two-car garage Comer started a restoration business in 1991. Here he restored everything from muscle cars such as Pontiac GTOs and Mustangs to 8C Alfa Romeos. From engine rebuilds to body and paint, Comer gained the necessary hands-on experience that helped to make him the authority and expert that he is today.

Comer moved to larger headquarters in 1993 and today Colin's Classic Automobiles is located in Milwaukee in a historic 1927 machine factory, which was fully renovated and restored by Comer into an immaculate showroom. His passion in sports and muscle cars has built a reputation of being one of the premier classic car dealerships in the United States. Among for-sale vehicles are Comer's private collection of some 50 museum-quality collector cars ranging from a '64 Eisert Indy car to a Toyota FJ40 Land Cruiser. There are rows of neatly organized muscle cars, sports cars, race cars and classics, all grouped by type and in chronological order, something that doesn't surprise those who know Comer's extraordinary attention to detail.

Entering the collection, many a grown man has gone weak in the knees at a first glimpse of cars like shiny tri-power Pontiac GTOs, a Ford GT40, '53 Allard J2X, Corvettes, vintage race cars, Shelby Mustangs, and two original Shelby Cobras (a silver 289 and a black narrow-hip 427) that are Comer's pride and joy.

His lovely wife Cana has her pride and joy too ... it sits at the head of the pack in the amazing neon lit garage. It's a '59 Austin-Healey Sprite that she races in VSCDA and SVRA vintage events—the ex-Tom Colby car known as "Kablooie" that is claimed to have won more than 200 races. An avid, experienced racer himself, Comer pilots his B/Production '66 GT350 and '65 Corvette coupe frequently, but recently has been splitting his time with seat time in his





The ex-"Bugatti Queen" Helle Nice Type 35 Bugatti, ex-Tony DeLorenzo '69 L88 Corvette and other wheeled gems will make any car nut weak in the knees.




▲ Ferrari "Bimbo Racer" kid's car is for big kids, too.

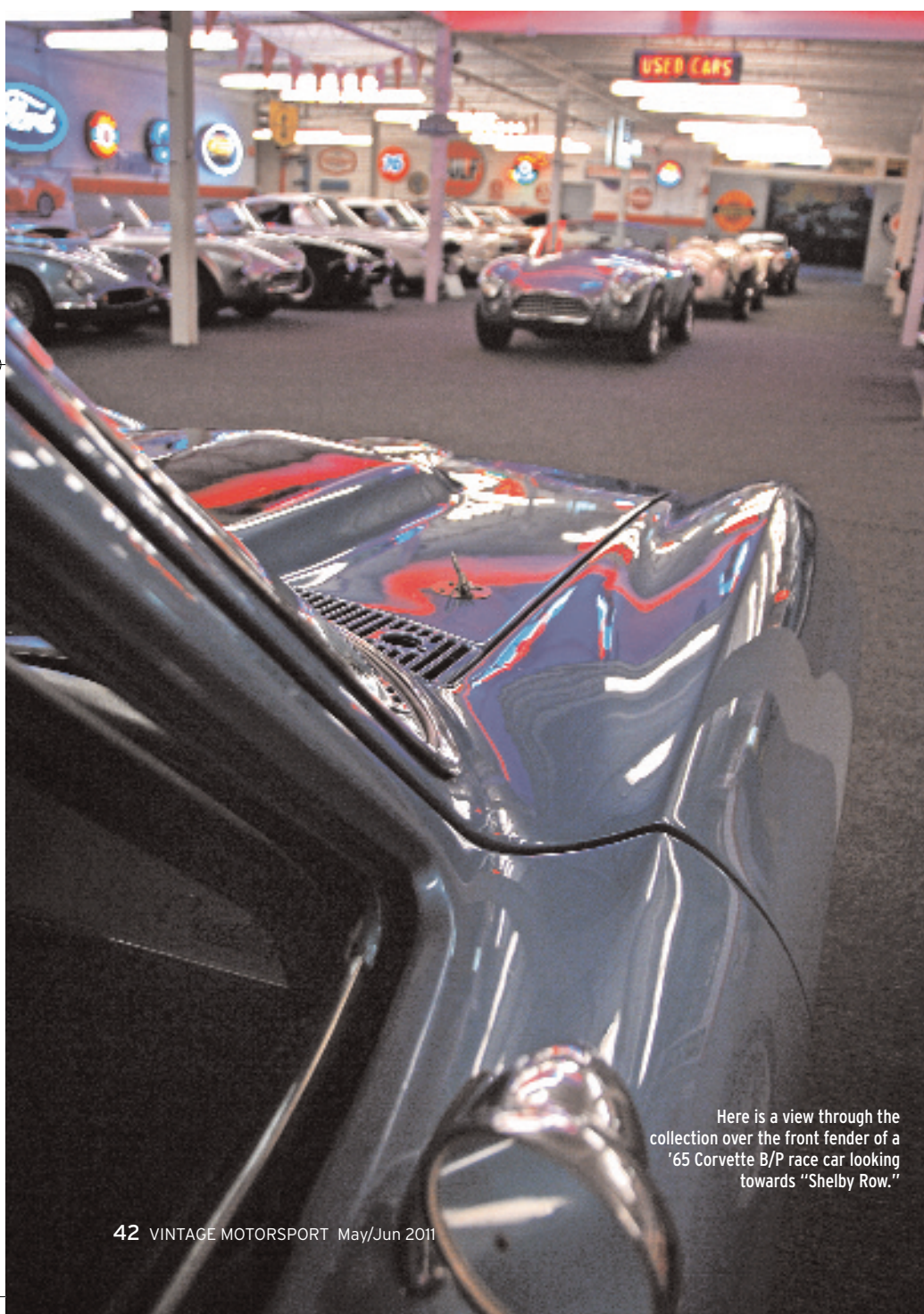
"new" ex-Simon Gregg/'98 Mustang Trans-Am (GT-1) car, which he professes he is "absolutely addicted to." Race season 2011 will see Comer racing the '64 Eisert Indy car after a few setup changes as well. The Eisert is based on the Formula 1 Lotus 18 and Lotus 24 designs. Known as the "Harrison Special," it was raced in 1964 by Canadian Billy Foster and throughout that year was driven by Al Unser, Johnny Rutherford and Ronnie Bucknum. "Stay tuned," says Comer with a big boyish grin.

Between buying, selling, restoring cars with his five-man crew and participating in 1,000-mile road rallies like the Copperstate 1000 with his Cobras and other cars, he is also a regular contributor to automotive publications. He has authored two coffee table books; "Million-Dollar Muscle Cars" and the "Complete Book of Shelby Automobiles" and just finished a third, titled "Cobra Fifty Years" soon to be released and published by Motorbooks.

Colin's Classic Automobiles is a product of years of passion and dedication. Comer sums up his collection by saying, "The main underlying thing that I like in cars is performance. I like something that was the best at what it did. I go to just about every auction, and as a collector, it's a good feeling when there's nothing there that you like more than what you have at home. To me, that means you did a good job building your collection."

When asked what his favorite car is in the collection, Comer ponders the question for a moment and says, "I love them all, so I suppose there isn't a wrong answer. But, at any given moment, the one nearest the door with a full tank of fuel will do just fine."

Spoken like a true car guy. 



Here is a view through the collection over the front fender of a '65 Corvette B/P race car looking towards "Shelby Row."