

# CONTINENTAL RIFT

## Series TGIF

Fred  
Nelson

[www.frednelsonracing.com](http://www.frednelsonracing.com)

As someone who attends most every car event in the Calgary area, I have seen most of what's out there.

It's not uncommon to see a half-dozen of the same make and model at any good-sized gathering.

We know twins Jeff and Gary Staniloff from their annual car show because it's always held the same weekend as Radium. They own the Super 8 in Shawnessy so anyone who isn't making the trek to Radium usually shows up for their show.

They know the secret is to have the only one like it at a show – they nailed it pretty good with this one.

This 1956 Continental sat in a museum in Utah for 20 years. A California car with the much-sought-after black and gold licence plates, it was now for sale.

One of the Ford boys, (Bill) had come up with the idea of building a luxury car to compete with the most prestigious car in the world, the Rolls-Royce. It was handy that his family owned the Ford Motor Company.

To accommodate Bill's dream, the company set up a whole new Continental Division with it's own buildings. A design contest was held and the winning entry is what you see here.

The cars were hand-assembled and to have them sit lower, a special frame was required and the floors lowered. The exhaust system ran between the frame and the rocker panels.

Each 368 cubic inch engine was factory blueprinted and dyno-tested for six hours to ensure reliability.

Interiors were done in luxurious leather and sported full gauges including a tachometer. Remember, this was 1956 and the equipment required to run a tachometer was about the size of a breadbox.

Everything was overkill – several layers of paint, power polished, and each one came with it's own fleece-lined car cover.

Reading the list of celebrities who bought one was a hoot, but for most of our readers only Elvis Presley and Frank Sinatra will be familiar. OK, if you're really old (like me), Elizabeth Taylor also had one gifted to her by Warner Bros. (they make movies).

Since the body had never been exposed to salt, it was totally rust-free. Gary and Jeff dove into the restoration. A shop in Black Diamond stripped it to bare metal and repainted it the correct white color.

A friend in Calgary rebuilt the engine and detailed everything, even the unique cast-alloy valve covers. Although Cruise Controls had not yet been invented, these engines would pull the 5000-lb beast at the cruising speed of 75 mph all day long; the speed limit on Route 66 at the time was 60 mph.

Even at a cost of \$10,000 (equivalent to a 3-bedroom house or two Cadillacs) Ford lost \$1,000 per car. Newspapers were a nickle then, so that was a lot of money. After two years and just over 3000 cars, Ford pulled the plug on Bill's dream. He was heartbroken.

The sprawling buildings of the Continental Division were taken over by one of the other Ford boys...Edsel. He had a real can't-miss product he was itching to get to market. But I digress.

After getting the run-around from two local upholstery shops, Jeff and Gary remembered one of our stories in Autonet. They contacted Darryl, who owns



De Greeve Auto Upholstery. He was able to duplicate the complete new interior in the correct blue color. He also advised them that the exclusive Scottish leather originally used was not practical for automotive use.

There are better man-made leathers available now than any bovine can grow.

Once the car was running, the transmission started acting up. Remember that exotic frame unique to this car? It has seven crossmembers, and to get the transmission out, the engine has to come out...again.

With the transmission rebuilt and back in place, the fuel system presented exactly the same problems as we experienced with the NLRNTV TR7 street rod project after it sat for 20 years.

Lakeview Automotive, who sponsors our stories diagnosed the problem and replaced the

carburetor, fuel lines, installed an electric pump and had their gas tank epoxy-coated.

Now that the car would move under it's own power again, the electrical gremlins were repaired one at a time, then road-tested. Electronic ignition was added under the distributor cap.

Now the car would go like mad, but it had trouble stopping. A disc brake kit was installed in front, which proved to be a wise choice. Plans are to actually drive this luxury liner to the car shows and cruise nights.

Because the exhaust goes out through the fenderwells, the brake proportioning valve had to be relocated and re-plumbed. Once things warmed up, the brake fluid was boiling. The guys at Lakeview are used to these kind of things, and took it in stride. The car is now finished and ready for the 2017 season.

The Ford boys are OK now, too. Lee Iacocca kept the proportions of the Continental, shortened the car up by about one-third, and came up with the first Mustang coupe in April of 1964. Since that time, Ford can barely keep up with the demand.

Fred Nelson is an accredited Calgary auto appraiser who owns and operates Fast Car Appraisals and Nelson Racing. Reach him at 403-242-3856 or [frednelsonracing.com](http://frednelsonracing.com)



403-242-1575 • 425 58th AVE. SE

The Mustang  
& Classic  
Specialists

