A Treasure Trove of Antique Fords Reside in Romeoville

You can easily drive right by the Beller Museum and never even realize it. The unmarked warehouse at 275 Rocbaar Drive contains the private collection of Jordon Beller, a collector of 1928-1932 Ford vehicles. There are 80 vehicles in the collection with even more "suffering from lack of parts," Beller quips. 44 of those vehicles run. Rarities include a '32 open cab pickup truck, '32 panel truck, and '31 ambulance. "They're rare because they didn't survive or Ford didn't make many to begin with," explains Beller. "Some are rare because people modified them to something they weren't, like a race car, so to find one that is untouched and original, that's very uncommon." This is the case with one of his '32 Ford Roadsters: original and unmodified. The collection includes a hotrod built by famous World War II era builders Wes Cooper and Kong Jackson, as well as a fire truck, fuel truck, tow truck and the first car he ever bought as a 14 year old.

In addition to the cars, there is a 25,000 piece library containing newspaper pages with every Ford ad ever printed from 1927-1932, magazine ads both foreign and domestic, speed books, body books, part books, and instruction books. All Ford. Buy why Ford? "I don't know. I started with it. That was my first car," says Beller. "To this day I think that 1932 was the year some of the most beautiful cars were built." His 1932 license plate collection is a tribute to that year, containing plates from all 48 states (Alaska and Hawaii wouldn't be states for another 27 years).

How impressive is this collection? Impressive enough to attract international visitors. "We've had people from Russia, China, England, Sweden, Denmark, Canada, and Mexico," lists Beller. "They're

very interested in the subject matter. To go that far to travel Route 66 and to find us online, they'll easily spend three hours here looking at stuff they don't see at home." Beller loves seeing people enjoy his collection. Whether they are 80-90 year olds that remember good times driving the cars or 10 year old kids who get a kick out of a car horn that goes OO-GAH.

"We can give visitors a good idea of what we know about the cars so they can add to their smarts," explains Beller. "We can debunk some myths or add new stories they haven't heard. If we have an engine taken apart, we'll show them that. We'll show them how we fix the engines so they can be used, preserved, or put on display. Whatever we feel you can handle, need, or want, we'll try and fulfill it. That's what we do."

The "we" in this case is Beller himself along with Tim, Terry, and Al. "When I was younger," Beller continues, "I had the privilege of meeting some extraordinarily helpful older people. Now I want to do the same thing. There's no reason in the world not to." Beller doesn't think spending hundreds of thousands of dollars on restoring a car and saying "Don't touch!" is appropriate. "I like kids to get in there and honk the horn," he laughs.

Approaching 80, Beller is now thinking of the future. "I'd love to find someone who is interested in continuing all or part of this museum. The problem with all museums, even some of the enormous ones, is funding. I'm able to fund this now, but when I go, the funding goes." He's looking to get someone to develop the funding or a more productive way of getting donations to the museum. "The other thing would be to make sure everything I have goes to a caring home. This is a 65 year collection of thousands of things and it would be nice if it could end up in somebody's care and not a landfill."

If you'd like to explore this treasure trove of automotive history, you can call the museum at 331-888-1225 and make an appointment. Tour slots are available Monday – Thursday from 8:00 a.m. – 2:30 p.m. and there is no cost to look around. You can also visit the museum website at bellermuseum.com.