

# Nutz Letter

Fordnutz Cougar club is dedicated to the preservation of all Cougars and "Orphan" Ford and Mercury Vehicles

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Please send your articles for the Nutz Letter C/O the club address.

**NEXT NEWSLETTER DEADLINE IS DECEMBER 15th, 2000**

## Jeff and Carol's 1968 XR-7 Sunroof Cat



Left, Jeff and Carol's pride and joy at the 2000 CCOA West National show in LA, Cal. Right, the sunroof cat at the 99 Crème De Cougar show in Maple Valley, WA.



### Story by Jeff Bingaman, photos by Scott Ferguson

My wife, Carol, and I were looking for a car for her, since I had a 1955 Ford pickup that I played around with. Like practically everyone else, we first thought of a Mustang but realized there were an awful lot of them around. We happened to notice a couple of Cougars running around town and thought they were pretty cool. I started looking in the paper and within a couple of weeks saw a '68 Cougar advertised for \$2000 U.S. We decided to take a look and were a bit surprised when we arrived to find it sunk down in a muddy backyard with no front suspension, wheels, tires or brakes. It had been recently painted but the interior, glass and trim had not been installed. The engine was just sitting on the motor mounts in short block form, -not running of course. Most of the nuts, bolts and other fasteners were in a collection of unmarked jars and boxes in the trunk. It had 2 things going for it. It was red and it had a factory sunroof...that's it. We made an offer of less than 1/2 the asking price and it was promptly accepted. After having the car towed home, I started working on the brakes and suspension but quickly realized that it would take me a very long time to reassemble the car so I called John Benoit of Cascade Classics and arranged for him to get it road worthy for us. John got the car on the road and we drove it around during the summer of '96 having a blast, but decided to do a few things to improve it. Over the winter of '96-'97, I replaced the hubcaps and whitewalls with styled steel wheels and raised white letter tires. I also changed the interior to black from the ugly white with saddle blanket inserts that had been installed back in 1976. Throughout the next 2 winters, we made further improvements by replacing chrome and stainless steel pieces as well as some of the engine accessories. In the summer of '98, I had passing thoughts of a new paint job. I was talking to a friend and Cascade Cougar Club member, Chris Osborne, who said that he would like to paint another car, since he hadn't done one for several years. I mentioned to him that I would like to have my car repainted. He proceeded to look over my Cougar, and after giving it a good once over, Chris told me he didn't think it was necessary to paint the car right now since it was a pretty good 7 footer. He acknowledged the problems like small amounts of rust on the lower door corners and lower front quarters but it wasn't significant. There were also small bubbles on the hood and around the sunroof opening but once again, not significant. I wanted to paint the car because of the rust but mainly because it had been repainted the incorrect shade of red and I wanted it back to the original T code Cardinal Red. We talked for awhile and I decided to go ahead with a scuff and shoot along with minor rust repair. Immediately after the final car show of the season in September 1998, I partially disassembled the car and we towed it down to Chris's shop where he finished the disassembly. We decided that it would be easier and would take less time to have the car media blasted rather than hand sand it, so off it went. I think you can see where we were headed from here. The simple scuff and shoot I mentioned earlier had obviously taken a wrong turn and was headed off toward a total restoration. An interesting bit of information came from the blaster; he told us that the previous owner had painted the car with no primer

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*(Feature Feline Continued from page 1)*

underneath. I guess that explains the rust bubbles under the paint after only about 5 years. After the car had been stripped, we found a fair amount of surface rust on the hood as well as pinhole rust along the front edge under the hood mouldings and under the Mercury emblem on the deck lid. The quarters were in great shape except for the lower front and rear of the wheel well opening. The prior owner had removed the vinyl top but they warped the rear panel and the lower edge of the C pillar when they welded the holes shut. The roof was pretty warbled and creased which we attributed to the stress of the sunroof on the roof panel. That explains why the vinyl top was packaged with the sunroof in 1968. Over the winter months, Chris cut out the rust in the doors and quarters and welded in new metal. I found an original paint hood and deck lid at Cascade Classics with no rust, since forming new metal to repair the rust on those pieces would have been too difficult. Chris continued with the body work while I was refinishing all kinds of parts and pieces at home and generally doing the grunt work while he got to do the fun stuff. During this time, I sent everything out to be re-chromed and was amassing new parts for re-assembly. We added a GT-E hood scoop and XR-7-G exhaust cut-outs and tips. These were the only modifications we made to the car and I've attempted to keep the rest of the car entirely stock including the proper finishes on all parts and all decals and fasteners are correct. After Chris finished massaging the body, he began on the doors and other removable sheet metal while I went to work on the wiring harness spending about 16 hours with a can of MEK and a rag removing 30 years of grime and over spray. Chris did a marvellous job on the body work using a skim coat of plastic filler over the sheet metal work. All the sheet metal was nearly perfect now and he shot the body with PPG DP 40 primer/sealer and then with multiple coats of PPG K-36 primer and began block sanding for what seemed like months. After the body was arrow straight, he sprayed another coat of DP 40 as a sealer and used DP 90 on the engine bay which is an almost perfect match to the semi-flat black they used at the factory. He then laid down 2 coats of PPG Cardinal Red basecoat and 4 coats of clear. Following the clear, he colour sanded the body then buffed and polished the paint to remove all the orange peel. By this time it was April 1999 and we were trying to finish in time for a Show in May so we furiously began the re-assembly of all the door and window glass, weather stripping, engine and transmission, interior, emblems and trim. I had been trying to locate a good dash pad for quite some time with no luck. I decided to install the old one since it wasn't totally trashed and wouldn't you know it, 2 days after I installed the old dash pad, another Club member called me and said he had found a perfect pad for me at the local swap meet. We made a deal for it and I promptly tore out the old dash again and replaced it with the new one. I polished all the stainless and anodized aluminium trim as we went along and finished the car in mid May. This left 2 weeks to work out the bugs before we took the car on a 500 mile round trip to Richland WA for the Pacific Northwest Mustang Show. Unlike most restorations, we didn't encounter any major catastrophes, which speaks to Chris's talent as a restorer of vintage cars. The only problem we had was with the turn signal switch. We didn't pull the column during the restoration, deciding instead to wrap it with plastic. The plastic apparently worked its way behind the steering wheel over the course of the restoration while we were moving the car around the shop. When we drove it outside to take some pictures, Chris noticed some sparking from the column. He pulled the wheel and found a big wad of plastic wound around the turn signal switch that had broken from the pressure on it. \$100 bucks and a new switch later and I was on the road with operational sequential turn signals. Chris ended up spending about 300 hours on the car and I probably spent near that myself over the 8 months it took us. The end result is well worth the effort and money that went into the car, although I worry much more when I drive it now compared to the amount of worry before the restoration. I've put about 7000 miles on the car since we finished it and so far have no rock chips! When you drive the car you take your chances but I'm willing to trade a little worrying for the thrill of driving my Cougar.

**Editor's note:** Jeff and Carol Bingaman have attended many shows with their Cougar and often win awards. They trailered the car down to the 2000 CCOA West National show in Los Angeles where the car not only won first in it's class, but also won Best of Show. This car also won first place for 67-8 XR-7 at the Fordnutz Claw In show in August.