

# spring... ON THE ROAD

BY ROXIE MURPHY  
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BELLE — In 2004, Johnny Johnson purchased an all-original, 1980 fire-engine red, two-door Chevrolet Corvette from local car enthusiast Mark Wiggers.

By all-original, he meant “needs work.” By fire-engine red, he meant “butt ugly.”

By two-door, he meant “special edition.”

“I watched them as I grew up and thought they were pretty neat,” Johnson said about his choice to purchase and restore a Corvette. “It’s the only one that you can put anything behind the back seat. That is the appeal for most people.”

Johnson bought the car from a friend who couldn’t work on the machine himself.

He bought the car in Washington, Mo.,” Johnson said. “He wanted it for the prestige. He was too big for the car. He’d drive it down the road and his head would stick out four or five inches above the T-tops.”

By the time Johnson purchased it, the Vette needed some work.

“It was as original as original could be,” he said. “It needed everything because it had sit. It was literally a time capsule.”

The vehicle had been left mostly untouched from 1980 to 2004. When Johnson popped the hood, he came face to face with a 185-horsepower, 350 cubic-inch motor with California pollution air quality control parts.

“The brakes had to be gone through, the radiator needed replaced, anything at required water or oil had to be replaced in it,” Johnson said. “When they sit like that they just deteriorate.”

While he loved the year and style of the car, he wasn’t in love with the color.

“The original color was Chinese Red or fire truck red,” he said. “I called it barn red and butt ugly in my opinion.”

Johnson tried to use wax at first to bring the color out.

“It’s a fiberglass car and the paint was so old, I could wax it and it’d look good for a day or two, but the paint would suck up the wax and it was a waste of six hours of work,” Johnson said.

Just like that, Johnson knew where he needed to start.

“I didn’t do any restoration pictures,” he said. “I was too greasy and in a hurry to do the step-by-step. Now I wish I had.”

Instead, he started collecting pieces and systematically replaced items.

“You do one thing at a time and it ain’t so bad,” he said. “Just don’t want to take off very far down the road.”

When he jumped in, he dove in. Johnson replaced all the brakes, motor, transmission, radiator, and interior. He also made horsepower adjustments under the hood.

“Now it has a regular ‘73 Corvette 350, 220 horsepower motor,” he said. “It’s still a Vette motor, just no pollution stuff, and an older model motor.”

The addition of the aluminum radiator and electric fans was the only other change under the hood.

“If you want to race, we’re on,” Johnson said. “Comfortable at about 83 miles per hour, but it’s geared so low in the back, I don’t want to run it past 90.”

The only thing still original to the car is the interior black carpet. Johnson is collecting pieces to replace the interior.

“All the interior is black,” Johnson said. “I’ve got pieces of it here, but I’m not putting it in till I get it all. Pockets, door handles — when you tear into that, you want to do it all at one time.”

His ultimate goal is to restore the original glory of the Vette.

“If you look at the car, it looks like it did originally. Except for the hood.”

This style of cowl hood was originally built for a Stingray.

“It was a birthday present from my wife,” he said. “The Stinger hood was



## Johnson’s Viper Red Corvette

JOHNNY JOHNSON stands behind his 1980 Corvette which he purchased in 2004. The cowl hood (lower right) was a birthday present from his wife Teresa. Hanging inside Johnson’s garage is another present from his wife (inset below) a sign with his name, year of birth and where he was born.

style for a ‘63 Stingray. They re-manufactured it and it turned out great.”

Johnson said the hood is a point of contention among Vette enthusiasts.

“You can get about any style you want, but most people that have Vettes don’t like it,” he said. “If you look at this hood and the original hood, this one is better.”

The radio isn’t original either.

“They are terrible about road bumps and radios get vibrated and beat to death,” Johnson said. “I put a Walmart

job is about 15 years old, and it is starting to show its age. Fiberglass is different than metal and the paint ages different. It’s just a different shade of red in the right light.”

Johnson chose to brighten up the car with Viper Red.

It doesn’t matter that the T-tops leak a little when it rains or that fiberglass needs more TLC than metal cars.

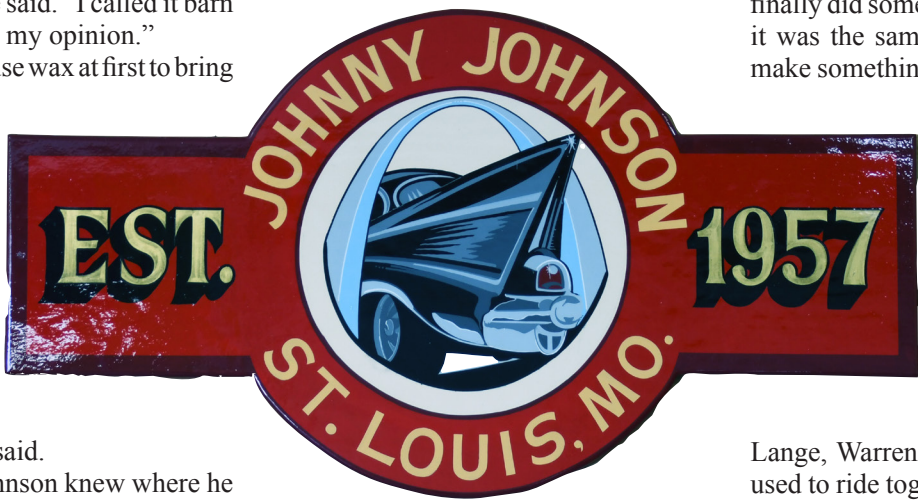
“It turns heads still today,” he said. “I remember looking at this car when it finally come out on the market and thought ‘they finally did something right. From ‘68-’82 it was the same body style. When they make something right, they don’t change it a whole bunch. But if you put this one next to a new one, they will say the new one isn’t a Vette.”

When Johnson first completed his car, a group of buddies in Belle loved to ride together.

“Mark Wiggers, Jeff Lange, Warren River, and Mark Henley used to ride together,” he said. “All Vette owners and we all run around together for a couple of years. At one time, it was pretty neat to see us all running through Belle.”

Johnson said at this point he is past wanting to enter the cars in shows, though he appreciates the people he has met along the way. His wife, Teresa Johnson, said now it’s all about passing on the love to the next generation.

“You gotta keep the gear heads going and start them when they’re little,” she said.



cheapy in this one. Can’t hear the radio anyway with the road noise. The only time you’re gonna hear it is pokin’ around town or cruising at the park.”

Other than the hood, Johnson said the car is basically factory-built.

But the upgrade that made the most difference was from Bernie Kolb’s paint shop which now resides in Linn.

“Bernie said when he painted this car it turned out 100 times better than what we thought it would,” Johnson said. “The paint



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“The spider looks for a merchant who doesn’t advertise so he can spin a web across his door and lead a life of undisturbed peace.”

— MARK TWAIN



**WHEN JOHNSON** first purchased his Corvette he drove with a group of buddies from Belle and the surrounding area who had Corvette. He is pictured below with his son Logan when he first took ownership.



## Four signs it's time to replace your tires

Inflation has been a hot topic for several years, as the cost of everything from groceries to gas to housing has increased considerably since 2019. Cars are no exception to that phenomenon, and anyone who has purchased a new car over the last half decade likely experienced some sticker shock when they started their search for a new vehicle. Data from Kelley Blue Book indicates the average cost of a new car was \$37,590 in 2019. By 2023, the average cost had risen to \$47,899. That marks an increase of more than 27 percent in a four-year period.

Cars are indeed a significant investment, which underscores the importance of vehicle maintenance. Maintenance is more than just tending to what's under the hood. Tires also require drivers' attention, as aging, damaged tires pose a safety risk that also compromise vehicle performance. Tires are easily overlooked, but the following are four signs tires need to be replaced.

1. Worn tread: The automotive experts at AutoZone® note that tread depth is the most prevalent indicator that a tire needs to be replaced. AutoZone® notes that tread depth should always be at least 2/32 of an inch throughout the tire. Depth should be measured across the tread and around the circumference. If the tread is at or below 2/32 of an inch, the tire should be replaced.

2. Bulges, gouges or cracks: Geico® notes that a deflated tire bulges at the sides, and that can compromise the safety of everyone in the vehicle. AutoZone®

says bulges occur when air gets between the inner liner and outer rubber layers, which can happen after hitting a curb or driving over a sizable pothole. A gouge or cut that is deeper than the outer layer of the tire also necessitates replacement.

3. Poor grip: Drivers may be able to feel certain tire problems, including poor grip, while driving. In such instances, tires may feel as though they are slipping. The tire experts at Firestone note that low tread can reduce tire traction and cause wheels to slip, which may be more noticeable when accelerating from a stop or driving on wet roads. Drivers who feel their tires are slipping can test the tread and replace tires that are low.

4. Vibration: Vibration is another is-

sue drivers may feel rather than see. And identifying the cause requires noting where the vibrations are felt. Geico® notes that a feeling of vibration or thumping that feels like it's coming from under the seats may indicate the tires are not balanced. A suspension issue could be to blame if the steering wheel feels like it's vibrating. Either feeling should be brought to the attention of a mechanic immediately.

Tire issues affect vehicle performance and compromise the safety of drivers, their passengers and fellow motorists. When vehicles are not performing at peak capacity, drivers should not overlook various tire issues as a potential cause of such troubles.

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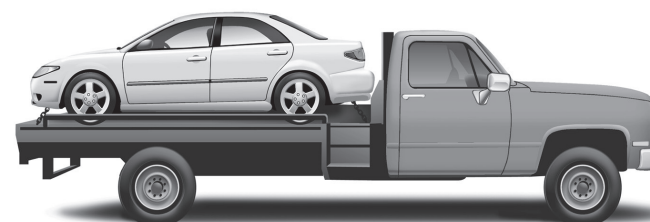
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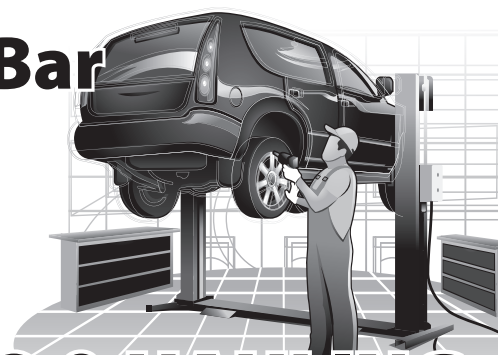


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**Belle and Linn locations**

# 1947 Bentley finds central Missouri home

BY Colin Willard  
ADVOCATE Staff Writer  
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ST. JAMES — Some owners treat their old cars like any other antique. Perhaps they display the cars in a garage and only get them out for special occasions.

“It’s a driver for me,” Steven Duchschere, who lives near St. James said about his white 1947 Bentley Mark VI. “It’s a driver. The inside is original 1947 interior and it shows.”

Although Duchschere’s antique Bentley sees weekly drives into town, he is still mindful of the car’s condition. During a bumpy ride in the car last week, he avoided dirt roads to keep the vehicle as clean as possible.

The Bentley has made at least one cross-country trip to settle in Missouri. Duchschere said he bought the car from a dealer in Texas about seven years ago when he lived in Oregon. Although he does not know much about the car’s journey before it came into his possession, the vehicle identification number indicates it was manufactured in 1948 despite being a 1947 model.

“It’s a beautiful car,” Duchschere said. “I just like the look of the car.”

Duchschere compared the look of the car to that of Rolls-Royce models from the same era. The history of Rolls-Royce and Bentley is closely intertwined with the two companies eventually falling under the same ownership. One of the details that sets the brands apart for Duchschere is the logo adorning the grill.

“The flying ‘B’ is a little more subtle,” he said when comparing it to Rolls-Royce’s flying lady ornament.

A few years ago, Duchschere decided to leave Oregon and move to the Midwest to be closer to his son’s family in St. Charles. He spent his youth traveling the country while his father managed hotels. In 2013, he retired from the film industry after a lengthy career as a gun specialist and set decorator whose work includes Steven Spielberg’s “War of the Worlds,” the first two “Tremors” movies and all nine seasons of “The Office.” When it came time to pack up and move, the Bentley had to make the trip with him.

Bentley models are notable in the United States because they are British

import cars. The Mark VI was in production between 1946 and 1952 as the first luxury car produced by the manufacturer following World War II. Between the car’s luxury status and a postwar steel shortage in Europe, only about 5,200 were produced during the model’s seven-year run. According to a 1971 article by the British magazine Autocar, market analysis showed that in 1951, a three-year-old Mark VI that had driven more than 10,000 miles was worth £5,335 when it cost £4,038 new because of both the model’s popularity and the shortage of cars created by the lack of steel.

“I always liked British cars for some reason, even though they’re a pain in the butt,” Duchschere said. “They always had problems with Smiths Instruments and things like that.”

The Bentley Mark VI models had many features, some of which present a stark contrast with today’s cars. Although saloon-style vehicles (the British terminology for “sedan”) are still popular today, the Mark VI had a different take on the four-door look. The front doors are rear-



hinged coach doors, as the manufacturer describes it, or “suicide doors,” as slang describes them. The nickname originated because of the tendency of rear-hinged doors to pop open from aerodynamic drag while driving. Seatbelts were uncommon during coach doors’ height in popularity. The Mark VI did not feature seat belts though it did include a sliding sunroof, a windscreen with hidden electric defrosters and demisters and provisions for a radio. Other interior features included

footrests and collapsible writing desks in the backseat. “They’d be laptop desks today,” Duchschere said while unfolding one of his Mark VI’s writing desks.

The 1947 model Duchschere owns is the third Mark VI he’s had over the years. He also had 1948 and 1952 models at other points in his life.

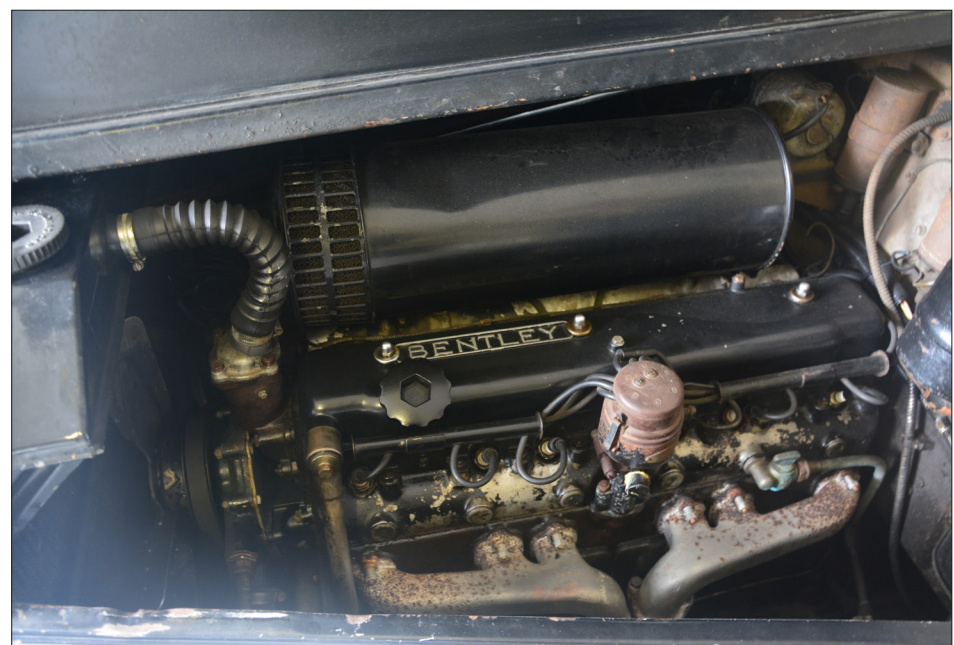
“I saw it online,” Duchschere said about the car he owns now. “I hadn’t had one in a while... I probably paid a little too much for it.”

Although cars have always been more of a hobby for Duchschere, he said he can fix most issues with the car through tinkering.

If the engine needs work, he handles it. He said in the future, he may decide to restore the original interior, which has become worn after more than 75 years.

Regardless of what’s in the interior, Duchschere said the people he encounters while driving the Bentley usually have something to say about it when they see it.

“Most people, when they see it, they smile,” he said. “They wave, or if I’m stopped at a light, somebody next to me will say ‘beautiful car’ or ‘nice car.’ I like it.”



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