

produced by Rob Howatson

# freshtraX



## JAY LENO NORTH

B.C. may not have an official vintage car museum, but there is Jim Ratsoy's garage in Richmond. Actually, he has two warehouses on his farm that display Canada's largest collection of vintage cars. » The former dealer has 130 exquisitely preserved jalopies, ranging from a 1906 Stevens Duryea to a 1963 Buick Wildcat Convertible. Tours are by appointment (and for groups of 20 or more only). Admission is \$10 per person. [grandpasoldcars.ca](http://grandpasoldcars.ca)

## THE BOOK

# Tag! You're It!

**B.C. LICENCE PLATES** are not the most eye-catching in the auto world. They lack the clever shape of Nunavut's polar bear tags, the bold colour branding of New Mexico's turquoise centennial plates and the fun graphics of Oregon's Crater Lake specialty version. But what the blue-and-whites lack in visual flair, they more than make up for with a storied past. And with B.C. plate heads celebrating 100 years of government-issued tags this year, Okanagan collector Christopher Garrish recounts it all in his tin-punch drama *Tales from the Back Bumper: A Century of BC Licence Plates* (2013, Heritage; \$20).

From the chaotic dawn of vehicle registration, when motorists fashioned their own out of wood, metal and leather, to the prison-labour era when Oakalla inmates embossed motor vehicle tags, Garrish uncovers bizarre government wrangling behind every enamelled scandal.



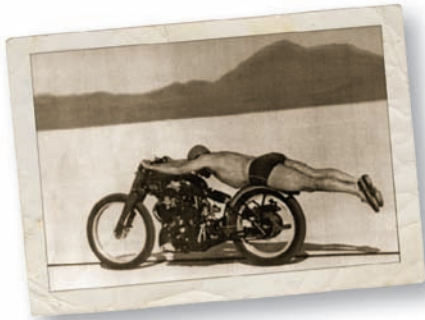
## THE CAR SHOW

# CLEAR-COAT HEAVEN

**B.C. HAS LONG BEEN A MAGNET** for cool wheels, from Canada's first custom car show in 1952 to today's glittering convoy of show 'n' shines now dotting the provincial map. And leading this year's pageantry is the father-and-son production team of Jason and Phil Heard with their transformation of five hectares of the PNE fairgrounds June 22 and 23 into a vintage auto-lover's dreamscape. The Vancouver Collector Car Show Sale + Auction will feature 600 rare beauties, 120 of which will cross the auction block. 604-492-2282; [vancouvercollectorcars.com](http://vancouvercollectorcars.com)



# THROTTLE ROCKETS



**EXPECT TO SEE** all kinds of two-wheel wonders at the Vintage in the Valley motorcycle show August 18 at Chilliwack's Heritage Park, including a 1948 Vincent Black Shadow and 1973 Kawasaki Z1. The significance of this pairing, says event producer Tony Cording, is that the Shadow set a speed record of 120 m.p.h. back in its day that went unmatched by any other production bike until Kawasaki unveiled its powerful four-cylinder, four-stroke sportster 25 years later. Both machines are packed with innovations and continue to draw crowds wherever their throaty growls are heard. [vintagemotorcycleshows.com](http://vintagemotorcycleshows.com)



## REEL WHEELS

**BIKERS GO HOG WILD** whenever the Deeley Motorcycle Exhibition dips into the vault to display even more of its awesome 268-piece collection. This time the theme is "Cycles and Cinema," and the shiny artifacts are dead ringers for famous movie motorcycles such as *Lawrence of Arabia's* fatally fast 1929 Brough Superior and Bruce Wayne's bat-out-of-hell 2007 MV Augusta. Starts June 14 at Vancouver's Trev Deeley Motorcycles. [deeleymotorcycleexhibition.ca](http://deeleymotorcycleexhibition.ca)



Launier's 1955 Chrysler Wagon and Design Excellence Award winner.



THE INTERVIEW

## Shape Shifter

**J.F. LAUNIER'S** cars look like they have been dipped in lacquer, trimmed with liquid mercury and set on fire. They contain vintage tin, but the bodies have been re-sculpted to assume a modern, muscular stance. Ten years ago the rabid gear head rescued a dorky-looking 1951 Kaiser sedan from an orchard and hammered every panel like a Trinidadian drum until the vehicle's lines flowed like water. It won the Design Excellence Award at the Grand National Roadster Show in Pomona, California. Next, the 38-year-old took a highly domesticated 1955 Chrysler wagon, chopped it, dropped it, tapered it and painted it yellow, until the wicked machine looked like a bar of butter that just broke the sound barrier (pictured below). It won the top accolade at 2009's Sacramento Autorama. **»** Working from his Osoyoos body shop JF Kustoms, Launier and his team have generated 40 builds in 10 years and reaped a trunkful of awards. Yet Canada's best hot-rod designer is still an underdog every time he faces off against his American rivals. And it rattles his oil pan that he has yet to win the most coveted custom-car trophy of all, but he has a blueprint for that . . .

**WW** When did you first fall in love with cars?

**JF:** Early on. The tradition around Osoyoos was that kids worked the family farm and received a car when they turned 16. Well, my folks weren't wealthy. So at 13, I sold my dirt bike and bought a battered '51 Mercury pickup from the back of a local car lot. I took the whole thing apart. Didn't have a clue what I was doing. But my dad helped, and, by the time we got it restored, I was old enough to drive it.

**WW** What's your favourite of the awards you've won so far?

**JF:** Trend Setter of the Year at the 2008 Specialty Equipment Market Association (SEMA). I'm the first Canadian to win, so my name's on the trophy along with custom car gurus such as Chip Foose [star of the auto reality TV series *Overhaulin'*]. Also, it's awarded not just for one car but an entire body of work; winners have a look all their own.

**WW** So what's your look?

**JF:** Elegant, clean, low – and loud.

**WW** Is the custom show circuit an emotional roller-coaster ride?

**JF:** Yep. One minute the judges are

fawning over your baby [the 1955 Chrysler wagon J.F. calls R'Evolution] at the Detroit AutoRama. Next minute you're at the Barrett-Jackson auction in Scottsdale, because previous sales and the auction organizers suggest the car is worth a half-million – and it would be nice to be paid for some of the 11,000 hours of work and \$170,000 in parts sunk into it. But it only sold for \$187,000. Everyone was stunned. I'm *still* stunned. That was in 2008.

**WW** Is Osoyoos good for the shop?

**JF:** It's great for raising a family, but challenging for our shop. American judges, for example, seem reluctant to give trophies if you're from out of town. Hopefully that will change in 2014 when we make our third run for the Ridler [the Super Bowl of custom cars] at Detroit's AutoRama, this time with a '63 Buick Riviera: a four-seater luxury car we're morphing into a two-seater sports coupe.

*Launier and a bevy of his four-wheeled masterpieces will be at Osoyoos's only car show, Cactus Jalopies, June 8 on the beach. 250-498-9199; jfkustoms.com*