

The excitement and glamor of the Mercedes comes to life in this large painting which Tom Hale recently completed. As a full-

time artist now, he has more time to work on major commissions such as this.



Tom Hale stops beside the original painting of "Duesenberg 1934." This was made into prints, done in an edition of 950, signed and numbered.

Artist shifts gears and cuts loose

By Corinne Abatt
staff writer

TOM HALE, WHO CLOSED the door of his office at American Motors for the last time almost two years ago to become a full-time artist, said, "I love it."

"I've never felt better in my life. Virtually everything I do has a purpose to it. It's nice to devote all of your time to creating something. Freedom of choice — it's hard to put a price on that, it's the most valuable thing in my life."

He is relaxing in the living room of his Farmington Hills home where he has his studio, reading his feet, in dock shoes, comfortably on the broad wooden dock coffee table.

His wife, Mickey, is making coffee. Sidonia, the long-haired gray cat, who travels with them to art shows around the country, is curled up beside him on the couch.

His paintings cover the walls of

the house. While he may be most familiar as an artist who does paintings of cars, his range of subjects covers a good portion of the American scene.

His paintings of cars are a world apart from the common catalogue variety. Hale zeroes on the romance, the beauty, the wizardry and excitement of the automobile at its zenith. In them he balances his expertise in technical and design detail with his substantial skills as an impressionist painter.

IN THE FRONT HALL, in a gold frame matted in rich yellow ultra suede, is "Chrome," the watercolor which won the Gold Medal of Honor in the American Watercolor Society's 1980 exhibit in New York City. It was reproduced on the cover of Yankee magazine that same year. This, like many others, is available as a limited edition print.

Just this spring Hale reached a goal he had been working toward



Tom Hale's line of Rolls Royces hits a peak of elegance that would be hard to top.

for 13 years. He was one of six artists from North America selected for membership in the prestigious American Watercolor Society, AWS, whose total membership is less than 550. His painting, "High Winds," was a medal winner in the

Society's show at the Salmagundi Club of New York City which closed earlier this month.

He maintained the combination of designer in the auto industry and freelance artist for 13 years.

"I never planned on being an artist," he said. "I always wanted to be a car designer." He paused and then continued, "but, not being used creatively made me very restless. To release that creativity, I just started painting. It became a release for me and gradually it took on a life of its own. I was never planning a second career. Automobiles always fascinated me — since I was nine years old, there was nothing I wanted to be but an automobile designer."

HE SMILED AS HE considered the paradox. "Now, I find that everything I do with art, which I never planned, has been exciting and enjoyable."

One of these art shows. He does about 12 to 14 a year, filling the van with paintings and driving with Mickey (and Sidonia) to as far as Arizona and Florida and as close as Shale Park in downtown Birmingham for Art in the Park, one of his favorites.

"Physically it's a lot of work, more than the public dreams of. I carry all the equipment to set up a 10 by 12 foot room of art with weather protection."

"Yet, there's a sense of adventure in doing art shows that I've never experienced from anything else. I feel like I'm participating in life — it's very immediate."

"It's a little scary when you start doing it," he said. "Art is very personal and you may be very vulnerable to people when they come walking up (to your display) saying, 'ugh, I don't like these.'"

But, as distressing as such a comment may be to artists new to the field, Hale said the rewards are many. "It excites me to see all the opportunities out there."

He has met people from all walks of life whom he would never have known otherwise and made friends with artists from many parts of the country. In the process, he has sold a lot of art and received many commissions.



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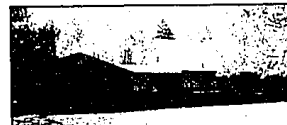
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