

# STREET SCENE

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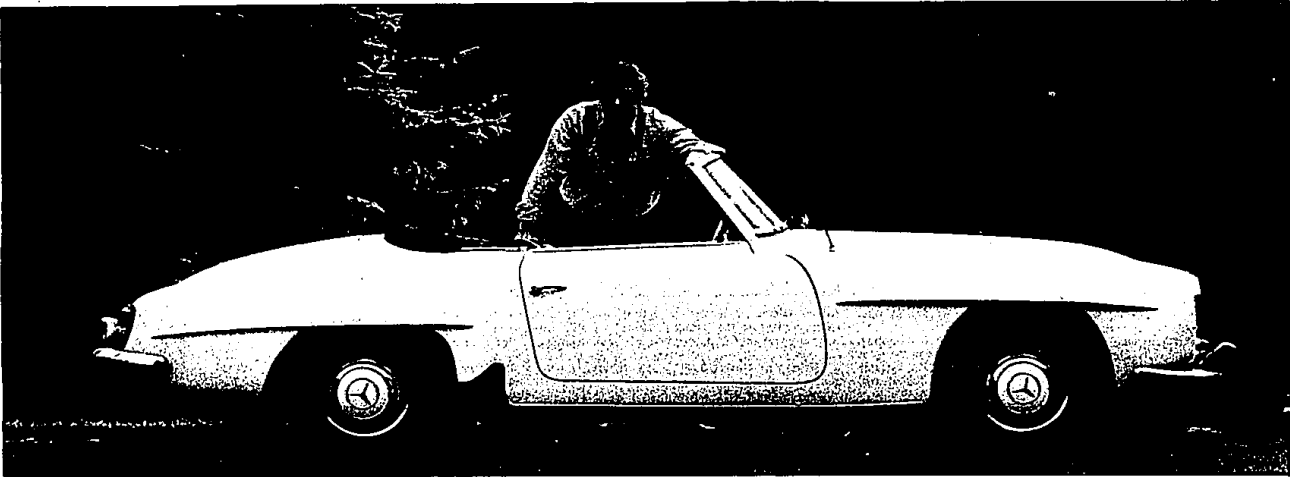
## Birds of a feather

As the temperature continues its steady decline down the thermometer to winter cold, so the birds are continuing their annual fall trek south to warmer weather. Sandhill cranes are just one species of migratory birds that stop off in Michigan for a brief hiatus. See Page 6D.

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RANDY BORST/staff photographer

Jim Vik of Farmington Hills bought his "dream" car, a Mercedes 190 SL convertible, in 1986, paying "in the ballpark of \$12,000." The car, which also has a hard top, "is the little roadster I've always wanted, ever since I was a little kid."

By Janice Brunson  
staff writer

In its heyday during the late 1950s and early '60s, the convertible was the preferred automobile of choice for thousands of drivers who seemingly asserted a "U-be-U" individuality in their choice.

"If you wanted to be different or sporty, the convertible was the car to buy," said Ray Windecker of Livonia, who coined the U-be-U phrase. Windecker is a 41-year veteran of the auto industry who now works for Ford Motor Co.

The peak year for convertibles was 1963. Of 7.7 million automobiles sold in the United States that year, 540,000 had folding tops. Seven percent of all cars on the road were convertibles.

But by the late 1960s, the scene was rapidly changing. Buyers who took pride in driving something different had a whole new array of exciting selections, a veritable cornucopia of imported and American-made coupes, pickups and sports cars.

The convertible plunged in popularity, almost gone from the U.S. market by 1973. Cadillac was the last to end production, discontinuing the El Dorado convertible in 1976 after manufacturing 14,000 that year.

By 1980, there were fewer than 50,000 licensed convertibles in the United States. An estimated 20,000 of those were imported Fiat.

**THE JET BLACK**, 1969 Ford Torino is in mint, original condition.

Catherine "Katie" Ascencio, now 20 and a student at Oakland Community College, bought the used car four years ago while a sophomore at Redford Union High School. She labored long hours at after-school jobs to pay for it.

"It's my baby," she said. "The minute I saw it, I knew it was the car for me. I always wanted an old convertible. I love it."

She parks the car in winter. Storage is something of a problem. She must rely on relatives with an empty garage or pay the cost of storage, sorely stretching her already limited budget. But Katie considers the sacrifice well worth while.

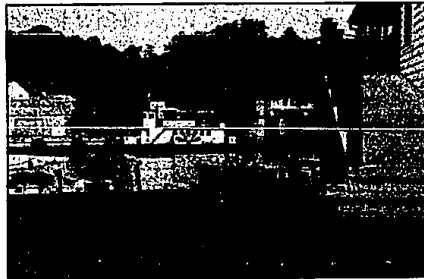
"I'd never sell it," she said. Katie's devotion is not unusual among convertible lovers. And their numbers are rapidly increasing.

This fiscal year, 155,000 drivers in the United States and Canada bought new model convertibles, 18 percent more than last year. Sales are expected to top 190,000 in 1989. The majority of models sold are American-made.

U-be-U individuality, the culprit accountable for the demise of the convertible, has once again reared its head. Buyers are clamoring yet again for something different, and convertibles fit the bill.

## Convertibles

It was 'love' at first sight



MICKY JONES

Port Stanley is definitely a place where you should slow down and live on 19th century time.

Auto analysts first noticed the trend in 1980, buyers pestering dealers for convertible models. U.S. manufacturers responded. The first model in six years hit the market in 1982, quickly followed by a succession of others.

Nick Vitale, a sales manager for Joe Panlan Chevrolet in Southfield for 10 years, recalls those first inquiries and the changes since.

**"THIS YEAR**, (the availability of convertible) Corvettes dried up all over the country. We had to go as far as Texas to find some," he said. In fiscal year 1988, Panlan was one of the nation's leading Chevrolet dealers in convertible sales, selling 20 Corvettes and 10 Cavaliers and Camaros.

Today's buyer is reflective of those from yesteryear, "free spirits," according to Vitale and others in the industry.

They are also younger, better-educated and more affluent than the average buyer. Most live in the northeastern United States, many in the Great Lakes region. Only 10 percent seriously considered buying anything other than a convertible.

"They know exactly what they want and how much it costs," said Mark Cowell of Birmingham Imports who sells high-priced used and new imported sports car convertibles like Maserati, Rolls Royce, Mercedes Benz and Jaguar.

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## Take your pick

By Janice Brunson  
staff writer

Late last month, Jaguar's new V12-powered XJS convertible, the first convertible produced by Jaguar since 1974, went on sale in the United States at a suggested retail price of \$56,000.

The car is the latest response by auto manufacturers to a growing love affair between drivers and convertibles that has reignited this decade.

U.S. manufacturers first responded to the new affair in 1982, giving rebirth to American-made convertibles. Models now available include:

• **Chrysler LeBaron** — Introduced in 1982 and redesigned in 1987, only American model manufactured entirely in-house. Features all-power lined top, back window with heated glass and standard air bags. Suggested retail price: \$14,495.

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R.U. Syrius

Karlos Barney



"Excuse me, Doctor, can you help me pick my nose?"

## Port Stanley: life in the slow lane

By Iris Sanderson Jones  
contributing travel editor

If you ever watch Bob Newhart on the NBC television series "Newhart," you will recognize the scene as you enter Kettle Creek Inn: Gary or Jean Vodova standing behind the small registration desk, a few guests enjoying drinks in the tiny dark wood bar, and another curled up with a book in the garden room across the hall.

The Newhart Inn is in some unnamed place in New England. The Kettle Creek Inn is in the little village of Port Stanley, Ontario, Canada, on the north shore of Lake Erie, 125 miles from Detroit. It is half hour's drive south of London.

Life always seems to be centered around the lobby. At Kettle Creek Inn, the rest of the action is down the hall in the dining room or upstairs, where 10 simple guest rooms are lined up on either side of a single hall. The rooms are clean, contemporary and spartan, with



STEVE JONES/staff photographer

Catherine "Katie" Ascencio paid \$3,500 four years ago for "my baby," a 1969 Ford Torino. A high school student when she bought the car, Katie worked after school for two years at Doughnut Town in Redford Township and Burger King in Livonia to earn the money.

down-the-hall bathrooms, containing showers, bathtub, sinks, sauna and toilets.

Gary and Jean Vodova look very much at home here, joshing with guests, running back and forth to perform some small service, but they never really intended to be in the inn keeping business.

Jean was a school teacher from Nova Scotia, on her way by train to a teaching job in the Canadian prairie city of Medicine Hat, when she met Gary, who had just left Michigan Tech for a Toronto law school and was working a summer job as a train conductor.

**THEY SETTLED** in St. Thomas, a 15-minute drive north of Port Stanley, for 18 years. One day they decided to make an investment to cushion their future retirement needs, a dilapidated old hotel being renovated by a group of investors in Port Stanley.

It looked like a good investment, one that would allow them to go on

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