

Promo Day

By Greg Bruny

As part of a spring tour, a dozen of our VMCCA Northern Colorado Chapter members had the opportunity to see a significant collection of promotional cars. Owned by a fellow VMCCA chapter member (who wants to remain unidentified), this is one of at least four very significant promo car collections in Colorado, with at least one example of most of the post WWII promo cars that were produced. Promotional cars are a small piece of automotive history. They were used to bring customers into dealer showrooms and motivate prospective buyers to test drive new vehicles. For small town dealerships that did not have space for more than one or two real cars the promo versions showed the new models and colors available. And of course, the kids loved them.

Most American manufacturers offered promotional models. They started out in the 1930s as rubber models, over time shifted to pot metal, and then transitioned to plastic in the 1950s and beyond. Promotional models seemed to have pretty much phased out by the early 1980s, but they came back strong in the 1990s. They have been discontinued currently with the last traditional 1/25th plastic promo being the 2017 Corvette convertible.



This cabinet contains mainly Mercurys. The scope of this collection is impossible to grasp without seeing it firsthand. It's truly impressive!



A small segment of the promo car collection that the Northern Colorado Chapter members had the opportunity to see.

The particular collection we visited has been many years in the making and is the result of much time and investment to build an assemblage of this quality and size. The owner has a long and deep interest in automotive history and automobilia; full size cars, models, and literature. His focus on full-size cars has been mainly Ford products, while his model and literature collections cover all makes and manufacturers. He also recently purchased a large literature collection, to add to his already significant collection.

The owner's interest in anything car related began early in life and he already had a decent promotional car collection by the time he went away to college. Unfortunately, his parents sold those for a pittance while he was away, not realizing the value of those, both in real terms and to the owner. That led him to rebuild the collection and expand it many times over, including the recent purchase of a large collection from the East coast. Some of that purchase was added to the owner's collection, and some will be resold or traded, to other promo car collectors.

The models were attractively displayed and, for the most part, were organized by brand of car. Automobile companies did not produce the promos. Several model manufacturers specialized in making them. AMT, Johan, and MPC supplied numerous quantities. Promo cars typically had less detail than 1/24 die-cast cars of later years, such as those made by Franklin Mint, Danbury, etc., but are actually much more accurate in scale, proportions, and colors. Promotional cars typically did not have opening doors, trunks, etc. However they may have included some printing on the bottom of the cars detailing features of that particular make or model of car.

As mentioned, this collection is certainly one of the most impressive and included a very rare promotional car of a 1948 Tucker. As you may recall, there were only 51 Tuckers produced during its short history. Conversely, one of the most common promo cars is the red 1957 T-Bird. The collection includes many other rare and limited-edition models for which the promotional model may be worth more today than the real car cost new.

It was truly a great pleasure and opportunity to see this collection, and we thank the owner and his wife for their hospitality and generosity to us.
(Photos by Greg Bruny)

