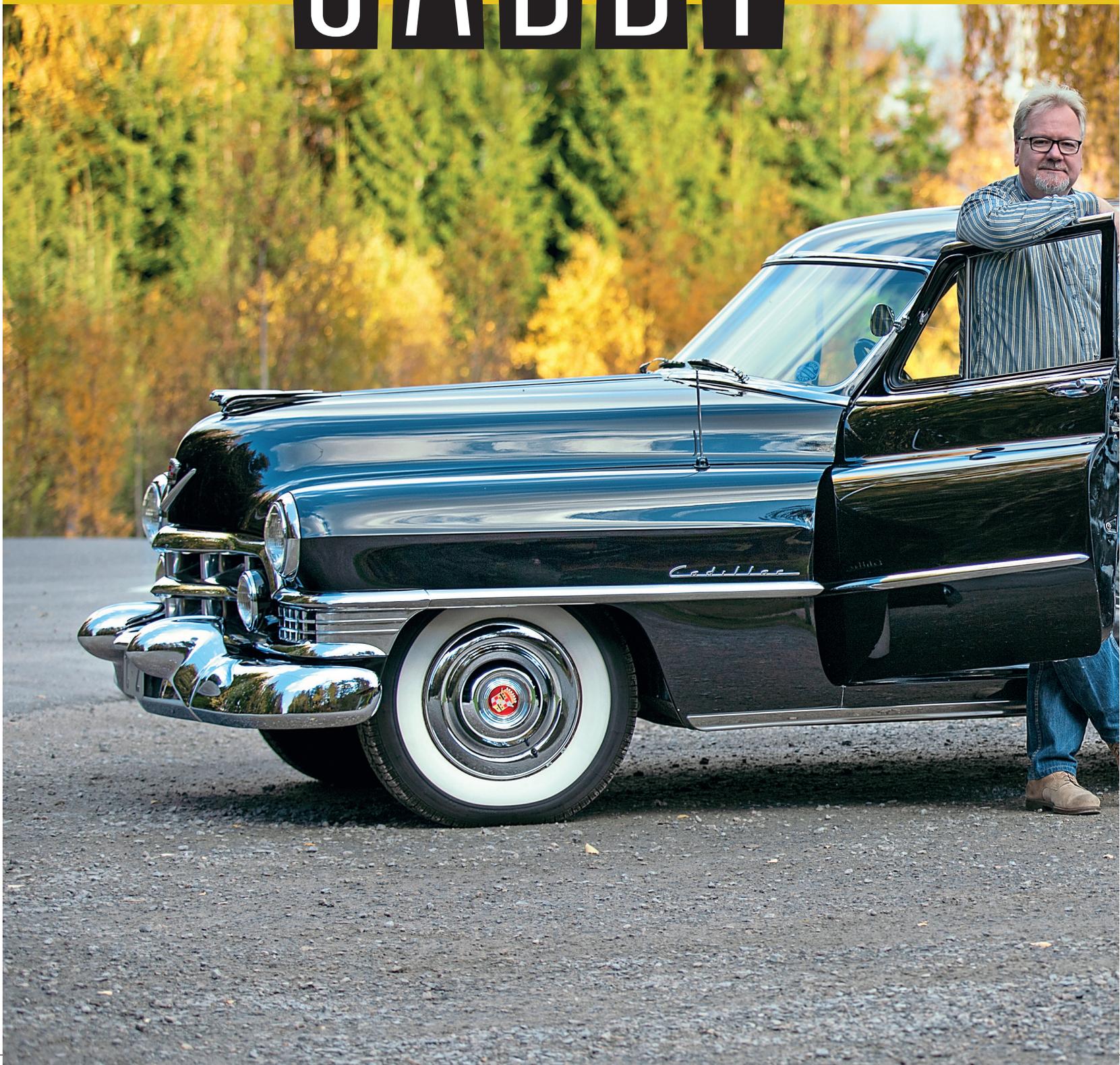
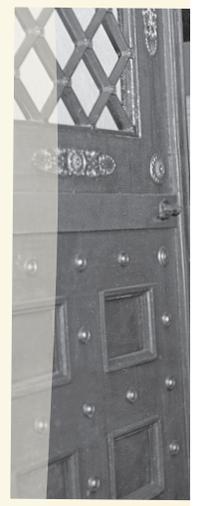


THE KING'S CADDY



Queen Juliana and Prince Bernard of Holland enter the King's Cadillac at the Norwegian Royal Palace during a 1953 state visit.



1951 Cadillac Fleetwood 75 Imperial Sedan

Words: Axel E Catton Photography: Daniel Lee Maas

In a UK exclusive, *Classic American* gets a personal tour of a very special Cadillac with a royal connection; the former state carriage of King Olav V of Norway, a very special 1951 Cadillac Fleetwood 75 Imperial Sedan which has just undergone a \$150,000 restoration...





Glass divider separates the driver from passengers.



After 60 years the limo was finally restored.



Pull-down jump seats fold neatly out of sight.



Elegant clock.



Driver got to enjoy an AM radio.

When thinking about royal conveyances, Bentley comes to mind, Rolls-Royce too. Maybe Daimler, even Mercedes. But Cadillac? What king would be seen in a Cadillac? Well, in Norway this has been a common sight for more than a hundred years now. *Classic American* travelled to Oslo to find out why Norway's first state Cadillac was an electric car.

Throughout his life, Norway's King Olav V (1903-1991) was considered a car guy. His family had close ties to the US, with the American President Roosevelt harbouring part of the Norwegian royal family in exile during the Second World War, so Olav always had a thing for American cars. Not surprising, as so soon after the war, German cars were considered an absolute no-no. Olav's love affair with Cadillac started at the tender age of 10, when his grandmother, Alexandra, spent £62 at London's Cadillac showroom for an all-electric toy car driven by the starter motor of a Cadillac 30. The little roadster had a range of about 12 miles.

Already, as a young crown prince, Olav was driving American vehicles. So it can be little surprise that in 1951, the Royal Norwegian Household ordered a Cadillac Fleetwood 75 Imperial Sedan which the future king kept until his passing 40 years later. Today, this special Cadillac is owned by AMCAR, Norway's largest classic car association, which has more than 19,000 members. AMCAR marketing boss Henning Kjensli has invited us to have a close look at this Royal Caddy.

Once there, we quickly got a hint of how fastidious the folks at AMCAR are about their special car. While we were keen to drive out into the autumn sun to start taking pictures, Kjensli says: "I just have to give it a quick wash" – 45 minutes later we're ready to go. This jet black six-metre long behemoth is undoubtedly difficult to keep clean, so much so, that on occasion, when on tour, Olav's chauffeurs resorted to washing only the King's side (the right side) "as that was all he would see!", smiles Henning.

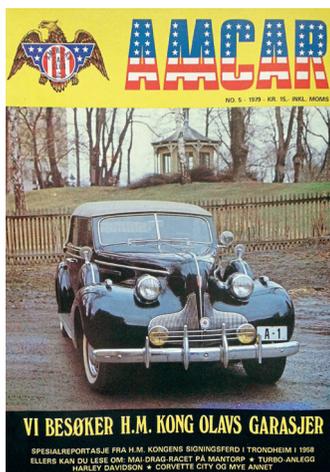
While we're out looking for a suitable location, I begin to feel like a king myself for the first time. Henning and I have found a

snug place on the back seat, I plumped myself on the right – of course – where the king would have sat. Knowing this is the original upholstery quickly gives one a feeling of history coming alive: "Everything you see is original," Kjensli explains proudly, "just as it was the last time the king used it for official business."

Very quickly, I understand why the king kept hold of this particular car for so long. Even by today's standards, this 70-year-old limousine is extremely spacious, comfortable and quiet. To the front is a divider complete with electrically operated window – which we'll keep down for the day as photographer Daniel Lee Maas has placed himself on the passenger seat to take pictures. "There are also occasional seats," says Kjensli and folds out one of them. A rather pointless exercise, though, as the King's legs would have had almost nowhere to go. So, what on earth were they used for?

We're going ever so slightly uphill and our chariot gets slower and slower – after all, it's carrying four 'King Size' men on board. Driver Jon Grasto waits for the three-speed auto to shift into first. The engine howls once and then... majestic silence. The engine has stopped, and doesn't want to start again either. Skilfully, Jon lets the two-ton Fleetwood roll backwards downhill, this time without any assistance from power-steering or -brakes, mind you! Quickly it's determined the reason for our interruption is a rather 'un-Royal' fuel shortage. The local fuel purveyor is summoned and appears immediately, joking: "Will this be premium, Your Majesty?" This model is based on the shorter DeVilles of the same year and has its fuel-filler hidden behind the left rear light; no lockable filler cap needed here. The 331 cubic inch/5.4-litre V8 is no longer the original unit, we're informed. At some point in the late Seventies, the original engine gave up, leaving courtiers searching for an engine for an almost 30-year old car to keep the king moving. The unit now installed is from 1949 and thus is even older than the car.

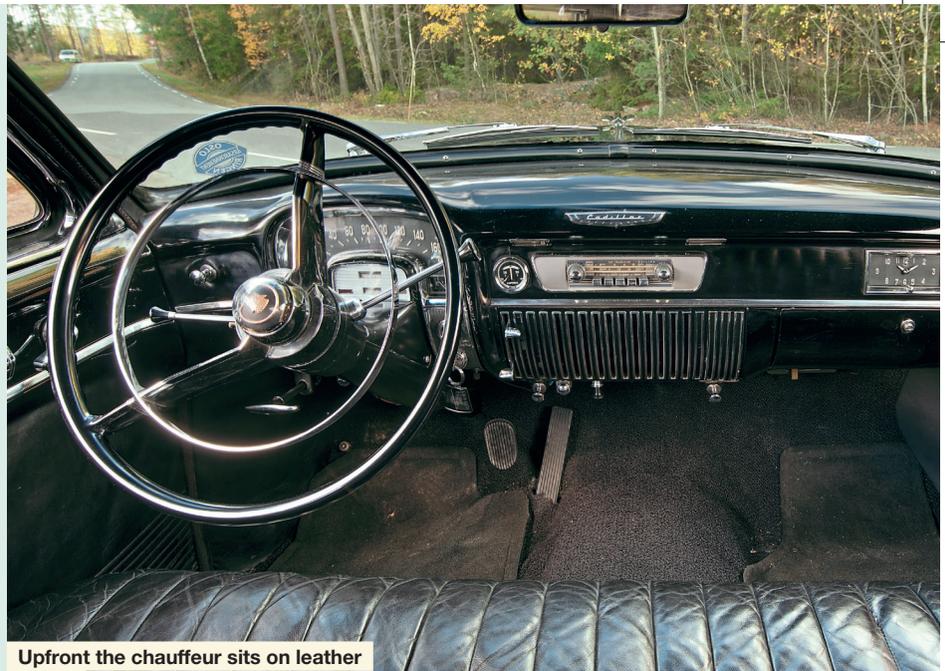
"OLAV'S LOVE AFFAIR WITH CADILLAC STARTED AT THE TENDER AGE OF 10..."



While Jon is busy getting the old unit running again, Henning explains how AMCAR came to own this historic Cadillac in the first place. On June 29, 1951, the Royal Court ordered this Imperial Sedan (body type 51-7533) from General Motors Oslo 'via Copenhagen'. Crown Prince Olav, son of King Haakon VII, was given the registration number C-2 for his car – which after Haakon's death in 1957 changed to A-2 when Olav became king and the Cadillac moved up to being the primary royal transport. For more than 30 years, the monarch used the stately limousine for royal duties across the country, which measures over 1800 miles north to south. Historic images show A-2 performing a variety of duties, sometimes with the white-capped chauffeur on the passenger seat, as "Olav liked to drive himself," smiles Henning. There are unconfirmed rumours that on occasion Olav liked to take out the 75 for a quick trip to downtown Oslo. If true, at least he was allowed to park it anywhere he wanted.

In 1981, the Imperial Sedan got a new stablemate in the form of a new Fleetwood 75, but the 1951 Cadillac continued to be used for the occasional official appearance. It stayed as part of the fleet until the king's death in 1991 when the ageing limo was donated to a US organisation intending to auction it off for charity. In the end, this plan failed to materialise and the car was handed on – free of charge – to the Norwegian-American ex-pat organisation Sons of Norway, who didn't really know what to do with it. In 1994, the king's carriage finally found a worthy home in the Norwegian-American Museum in Vesterheim, Iowa. Over the following 20 years it was brought out every now and then for those town parades that Americans love so much in the Midwest.

When AMCAR's Henning Kjensli came through Iowa in 2012 on a reconnaissance mission for the club's cross-country trip, he heard about the rare Cadillac in the museum. When he was approached about a potential home for the king's Cadillac back in Norway, he immediately made contact with AMCAR headquarters and resident Harry Kjensli, his father. At this point the 60-year-old car was suffering from rust, the chrome was pitted and the mechanics badly needed attention. At the same time, that all-important interior was still in fantastic and original nick. Henning and Harry struck a deal whereby the car would return to Norway (again free of charge) in exchange for the promise to give it the proper love and care – and a full-blown restoration. >>



Upfront the chauffeur sits on leather seats.



331cu in V8 engine is a 1949 replacement.



Three boys admire the king's Cadillac outside the Victoria Hotel in Hamar, Norway, during the summer of 1953.



The king and his motorcade enter the town of Mo I Rana in northern Norway during a nationwide tour in June of 1959.



Queen Elizabeth greets Norwegian Prime Minister Per Borten at his farm outside Trondheim during a state visit on August 11, 1969. The Queen was driven in the king's Cadillac from the Royal Yacht *Britannia* docked in Trondheim Harbor.



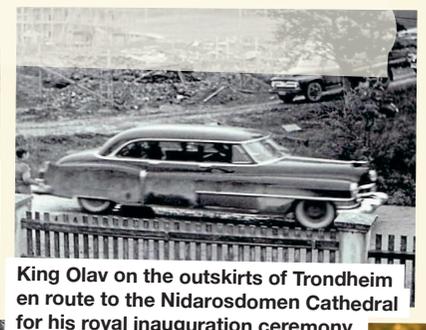
King Olav arrives at Akershus Fortress, downtown Oslo, for a state dinner held in honour of his 70th birthday. Photo taken on July 3, 1973.

"As we didn't have to pay anything for the car, we were able to free the money for a \$150,000 restoration at Bob Ore in Pennsylvania," says Henning. In the summer of 2015, the car returned to Norway where it was unveiled to a surprised public by the Norwegian Transport Minister. "Since then, we have driven the Fleetwood more than 3000 miles on Norwegian roads to showcase this car that is so well known and so loved by Norwegians." Our visit now is the last chance to experience the king's Caddy on the road as it has been deemed to be one of the key exhibits in the newly created Automotive Museum in Lillehammer, north of Norway, opening in the summer of 2019.

Photographer Daniel Lee Maas has finished his work, and I ask Henning if I could drive the royal limousine back to its storage. Just like Olav in his days I try to slide behind the wheel. Well, slide being the operative word here, as you can see in period images that chauffeurs were required to be – well – slim. Because of the division taking up space and the seat being fixed in position, the front bench is actually quite far forward, with space behind the gigantic Bakelite wheel at a premium. Also, being an Imperial Sedan, the driver's compartment is a lot less welcoming than in the regular sedans. Black leather, black dashboard, black steering wheel, one central speedo, that's it. Yes, there are power windows, front and rear, but no air con. But given this car was destined for Norway, this was surely not a great sacrifice.

Waking the 5.4-litre V8 is done by a delicate metal key, while the three-speed auto is selected on the column, just like it was for decades after. The 162bhp engine needs to move more than 2.2 tons, not as easy a feat as it appears. The large steering wheel needs four turns lock-to-lock, which is more like a tanker on the high seas. Even below Norway's top speed limit of 50mph, at over 12ft (3.7 metres) long wheelbase, operating the king's Caddy is hard work. I quickly become familiar with this huge beast and manage to take some of the corners with more speed, resulting in a rather unroyal tilt, as people by the side of the road wave at me. It's a truly regal experience! ★

Oslo. The funeral procession for Crown Princess Martha of Norway, who passed away from cancer on April 5, 1954.



King Olav on the outskirts of Trondheim en route to the Nidarosdomen Cathedral for his royal inauguration ceremony, taken on June 21, 1958. Note: very dirty from driving on Norway's many gravel roads during the Fifties.

