

AUTO BIOGRAPHY: Blues Brothers would love these wheels

01:00 AM EDT on Saturday, May 13, 2006

Jerry Carlson and Dave Rathbun are on a mission from God. Okay, maybe not from God, but they are on a mission.

When they don their dark suits and jump into the Blues Mobile "it puts a smile on



Journal photo / Steve Szydlowski
Coming this weekend: Jerry Carlson, left, of Cranston and Dave Rathbun of Barrington take their "bluesmobile" to parades and events around the country. "Police are the biggest fans of the car," says Rathbun.

everybody," says Rathbun. "The minute they see it they're cheering." Mission accomplished.

The Blues Mobile, actually the Blues Mobile 2, is a tribute car to the Blues Brothers: Dan Aykroyd and the late John Belushi. Painted up like a police car, it has all the bells and whistles including a light bar on the roof and a sound system you can hear a mile away. You may have seen it in the Bristol Fourth of July parade, the Gaspee Days parade or at many other events the pair may be prowling -- and stealing the show.

Carlson says it really doesn't matter that the car is not a 1974 Dodge Monaco like the one in the Blues Brothers movie. It's a 1977 Chrysler Newport with a big-block 383 engine and air conditioning. The air is a must because "those summer parades can be deadly," Carlson said. "As long as it's a Mopar C-body, that's okay."

The big black and white Chrysler has much of the chrome blacked out, and an interior from an Eddie Bauer edition Ford Explorer -- more comfortable for long trips. It also has a GPS navigation system for finding their way around. On the body are a couple of telltale slogans: "To serve and reject" and "Dare to play the blues."

Carlson owns Auto Rust Technicians on Niantic Avenue, Cranston. He plays a mean blues harmonica and has a strong resemblance to Aykroyd, so he takes the part of Elwood Blues. Rathbun, his employee, is Jake. Together they are a barrel of laughs.

The first Blues Mobile, a 1970 Plymouth Fury, was created in 1998 for a Halloween party. That got sold in Chicago in 2003 when Carlson drove it to his niece's high school graduation party. The car bowled everyone over, and it is now a fixture at Rio Blues Music City in Chicago.

Music is a big part of the Blues Mobile experience. Blues Brothers music and other blues tunes emanate from the "killer" Alpine stereo from Sound Effects of Seekonk. It has four outside speakers and three inside, with two stereo systems. Usually Jerry plays harmonica along with the music while Dave drives.

A wireless microphone often adds to the fun. Recently, at the Year One Experience in Braselton, Ga., an event put on by the classic car parts supplier at its plant near Atlanta, Dave made the car "talk" to a youngster who thought someone was in the trunk.

The pair always seems to come back with stories from wherever they travel -- and they go all over the country. They have been to the big classic car Woodward Avenue cruise in Detroit, to Las Vegas, and even Los Angeles. They have been in the New York Veterans Day parade the last four years, and they were a hit at the recent St Patrick's Day parade in Boston. They are going to Bristol, Tenn. this summer for a Dukes of Hazzard event benefiting the Special Olympics, raising money by giving people rides.

"Police are the biggest fans of the car," says Rathbun. "It's like someone respecting them." But he did get a warning ticket in Vermont once for having red lights on the roof (they have since been swapped out for amber lenses). While giving out the ticket, the Vermont police made sure to take pictures of the Blues Mobile from their cruiser.

In addition to charity events and parades, the Blues Mobile hauls the Auto Rust Technicians trailer with a rusted-out '71 Dodge Challenger unibody to various trade shows, including all the Mopar events along the east coast. The company repairs rusted out cars.

Carlson, a native of Detroit and a Navy veteran of the Vietnam War, admits to being 62, but says he's more like 21 in his head. He pretty much tends to business five days a week, but on weekends it's nothing but fun. "The party starts when we arrive," he says.

Car: 1977 Chrysler Newport four-door.

AKA: The Blues Mobile 2.

Owner: Jerry Carlson.

What it's all about: It's a tribute car to the Blues Brothers movie.

What's so unusual: Tricked out to look like a police car with lights and outside speakers, it tours the country for parades, shows and charity events. The car had only 40,000 miles when Carlson acquired it.

Color: Black and white.

Plate: Blues 2.

Auto Biography is a new feature that tells an interesting story about a car and its driver. If you think you have a newsworthy story to tell about your car, write to Auto Biography, Features Department, The Providence Journal, 75 Fountain St. Providence RI 02902 or e-mail projocars@projo.com. Be sure to put "Auto Biography" in the subject field.

The car doesn't have to be a classic or expensive, but it should be somehow unique. The driver must be willing to be interviewed by a reporter about what makes this car special and to be photographed with the car.