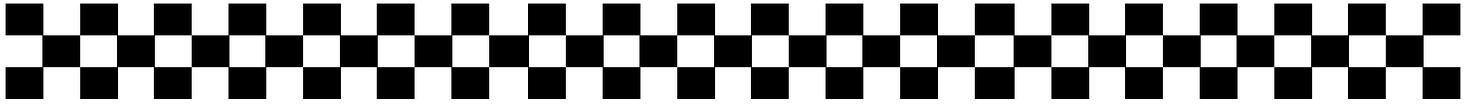


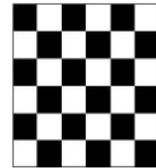
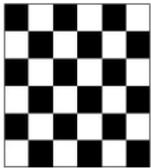
THE CHECKERBOARD

# NEWS



**“A Checker Owner Is Never Alone”**

**Winter 2010**



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(A Not-For-Profit Corporation, incorporated in the State of Indiana)

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#### "Cab Driver"

Words and Music by C. Carson Parks  
Official theme song of the  
Checker Car Club of America, Inc.

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Submissions can be emailed to [jweinhoft@checkercarclub.org](mailto:jweinhoft@checkercarclub.org) or mailed to the editor's address listed above.

# GREETINGS FROM THE EDITOR

January, 2010

Enclosed in this issue is your annual renewal notice. Please take a few minutes to fill out and send in your renewal. Also included in this issue on page 7 is information about the 2010 National Convention in Lima, OH.

As promised, starting on page 4 is a story about the 1983 Checker at the National convention. Immediately following it, on page 6, is a story about what might have been the 1983 Checker.

On page 8 we've included some interesting history on the importation of Checkers into Finland. This story was originally published in the Finnish Mobilisti Classic Car Magazine. Joe Fay came across the story and struggled through the process of translating it into English. Hopefully, we haven't mangled the story too much in the subsequent editing. I'd like to express thanks to both Mobilisti editor Jan Enqvist and Joe Fay.

Continuing our effort to bring relevant restoration and preservation information, we have two stories. The first story, on front frame cross member repair, is by Herman Pfauter on page 14. Herman, thanks for sharing your experience. The second article, on page 16, is about newer oil and how it could affect your old motor.

I received a good response to requests for articles. I want to thank all the people who took time to share their stories. If your submission is not in this issue due to space limitations, be assured I will include it in a future issue. Having said that, we can always use more articles. You can help by contributing articles and photographs. Don't worry about the structure; just get the content into the article and we will edit it for you.

Ideally, submissions will be in electronic format, although we also accept hard copy by mail. Photos should be original. All electronic submissions should be sent to: [jweinhoft@checkercardub.org](mailto:jweinhoft@checkercardub.org)

We improve by comments from our readers. If you like what you see, tell us. If you don't like what you see, tell us also. I can be reached at the address on the left or by phone: (Home) 217-744-2986, (Verizon Cell) 217-494-2986  
John Weinhoft

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**Ab out the cover ...** 1983 Checker on the portico at the Ayers Building, Los Angeles County Arboretum (which is actually in Arcadia, CA) during the 2009 National Convention. Photo by the editor.

# FROM THE PRESIDENT

January, 2010

Well 2009 is over and what a year it was. In July we went to Los Angeles to view a 1922 Checker but also a one of a kind 1983. Joe Pollard and Kathryn put on quite a show.

This year we also made a few changes on the Board. Ben Merkel stepped down from the Vice-Presidency to Director. Also Joe Fay asked to be removed as a Director and was replaced by Gary Lohsen. If you would like to serve on the Board, just let me know.

Tony Mattern said at the end of the year we have some money in the bank. However, before you get some big ideas on spending it Tony, John Weinhoef, and Matt Fry will need to update the website and upgrade the computer programs for the club. (Ed. note: and to pay for this issue of the newsletter ...)

Have you made plans to attend the National Checker meet? It is being held in Lima, OH in 2010, Springfield, IL in 2011 and Kalamazoo, MI in 2012. This is a variety of venues with more exposure, more and new people, new friends - all a great way to ex-

pand our interest and love in Checker.

This year our host hotel in Lima, OH will be the Howard Johnson. Rooms will be \$59.00 per night and, if you would like a microwave and/or refrigerator in your room, ask when you reserve your room at no charge. The code for this special rate is : CCCX.

Most lodging in Lima for that weekend is sold out. There is a large Harley Davidson event in town we have to compete with. This hotel is sold out if we include our 35 (maximum) number of rooms. So on Thursday, June 17 we have 20 rooms available; Friday, June 18, 35 rooms and Saturday, June 19, 35 rooms. All rooms not reserved and left over will be released **May 17, 2010**. So here's the deal: **BOOK YOUR ROOM NOW**. Phone # 419-222-0004.

Hope to see you all in Lima in June.

If you have a comment, question or even a criticism feel free to contact me. My address and email are on the inside cover. Home phone: 269-782-0635, Cell phone: 269-462-3444.

Ron Leatz

Below: Ron Leatz driving his Checker last fall. Photo by his wife, Ann Leatz.



# 1983 CHECKER by John Weinhoef

In the Fall 2009 newsletter article on the National Convention in California, we teased you with a reference to, and photo of, a 1983 Checker. Since the assembly line was shut down in July of 1982, how can this car exist?

Like all good mysteries, there are a couple of different versions of how the car came to be. In compiling this story, the author was forced to rely on mostly hearsay and oral history. However, the people I talked to, and their sources, should have known the story. But there is no official confirmation. And there is still one major mystery: why was this car built for this person?

Starting at the end, the car clearly exists. It does have a valid 1983 Checker Motors VIN. But it is

Manufactured, Neil Rosenstein, May, 1983". Which leads to one of the first anomalies about the car; the build plate states a manufacture date of 1/83 with a model of A-12. A second anomaly is the actual VIN; it says an E model and #000003 even though only one car was built in 1983 (to the best of my knowledge at this time).

The current owner has had the car for quite a few years and has restored the car to a high standard.

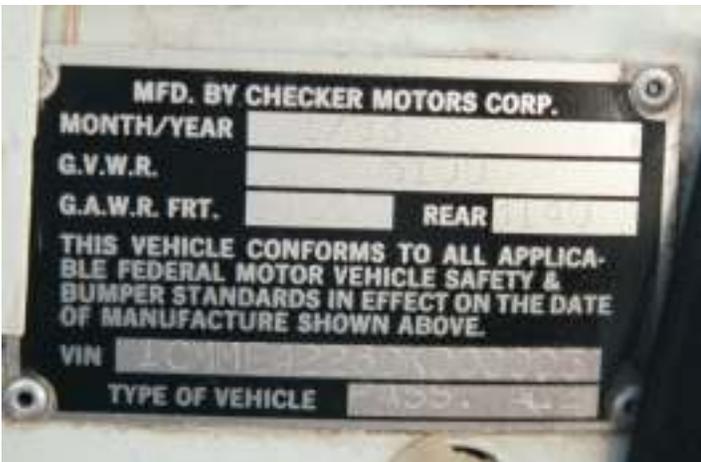


In addition, the car has been repainted white from its original red paint (see back cover).

Joe Pollard has known about this car for years but no one would believe it without seeing the car. And until Joe arranged to borrow the car for the 2009 Convention, very few people had seen the car.



Now we get to the back story. According to the information I could gather, the car was built from spare parts in 1983. Supposedly, three employees assembled the car in the old Cab Services building. I had the opportunity at the 2009 Gilmore Checker Motors event to talk to one of the three people involved in the construction. One of my sources had previously



not exactly a normal A-12E model. While it is on a 129 inch wheelbase frame, careful examination of the photos will show the car was built with a 9 inch wide 'B' pillar and normal sedan rear doors. It also is very fancy when compared to standard Checkers and is in the same class as some of the cars custom built for CMC executives and family members.

In the car's glove box is a brass plaque. It states: "Checker Custom Limousine, Final A-12E



talked to one of the other people involved in the assembly. For the most part, the details agreed. The only major discrepancy had to do with the assembly location; one person claimed all the work was done in Kalamazoo, the other person said some of the finish work was done in Chicago. Both agreed that the 9 inch 'B' pillar was the result of not having any left over 'E' model rear doors. And both also agreed the finish level in terms of upholstery and trim was to a very high quality, equal to the levels used for company executives and other special customers.

When the current owner had the car restored, it was done to at least the same level, duplicating the original style and material selection. It appears the brass plating was an addition during the restoration. I shared my photos of the 1983 with one of the original builders and he agreed the finish level looked the same as when it left the "factory".

Lending some credence to this hand assembly story is the fact there were a lot of spare parts in the old Cab Services building during the 1980's. As I am writing this article, a completely original untitled 1982 body and frame is for sale on eBay. While I haven't asked the seller, I assume it was found when the entire plant was inventoried. The story associated with this "body in white" is that it was on the assembly line behind #02000 (the last A-11 Taxicab) and pretty much just left there since it wasn't needed at the time. It is possible there was more than one body left on the assembly line in case one of the final cars were damaged during assembly or shipment ... so that might be where the A-12E body for the 1983 came from.

There are still a number of unknowns about this story. But the car is clearly an interesting piece of Checker history.



The three photos above show the car "as found" by the current owner. It was solid but needed cosmetic attention. See the back cover for a better idea of the original color and condition when found.

ID plate & "current" back cover photos by the author; original "as found" photos supplied by Joe Pollard and presumably taken by the current owner, all other article photos by John Baer.



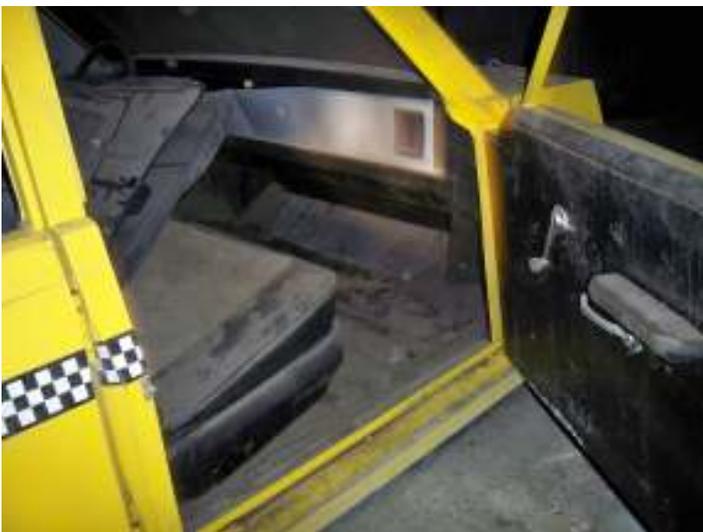
# 1983 CHECKER—TAKE 2

by John Weinhoeft

It is common knowledge that during the later 1970's and early 1980's Checker Motors investigated the possibility of building a new body style taxi using a GM sourced chassis or sub-frame assembly. A few photos of various styling exercises have been previously published. The following photos were recently sent to me by Joe Pollard; the photographer is unknown.



It is the general consensus that these photos are of the Autodynamics / Checker interior buck built in the 1981 / 1982 timeframe. By the time this buck was made, the design direction had shifted away from X body Chevy Citation components to A body Chevy Celebrity platform.



Where these photos were taken is unknown, as is the current location of this model. But, like the 1983 on the previous pages, pieces of Checker history keep popping up. If you know more about these photos, we would love to hear from you.



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## CHECKER PLANT GOES DOWN

by John Weinhoeft

After the sale of the various GM assembly lines, the doors were closed on Checker Motors in July. Sources report that, since that time, the plant was scoured for usable / marketable material. A few items were found hiding in corners but there were no major stashes of forgotten parts. Whatever was found was removed from the plant. On December 4, 2009 it was reported the plant was in the process of being razed. The planned disposition of the property after demolition and cleanup is unknown at this time.

The club is saddened to see the end of an automotive icon. I am thankful that both Joe Fay and myself took the time for a last swing past the old plant in late September of 2009.

Surprisingly, the company web site is still available at [www.checkermotors.com](http://www.checkermotors.com)

# GOLDEN ANNIVERSARY CHECKER

by George Muehlbauer

My "Golden 1972 Anniversary Marathon was first featured 10 years ago in the April 1999 issue. I was in need of a new car and selected a Checker since I lived near the suburban Buffalo Airport and saw many Checker cabs serving from downtown Buffalo to the Airport. When I went to the auto dealer he showed me a picture of the special colored Golden Car for an



additional cost of \$33, so I decided to "GO Golden" with a 2 month production period.

Shortly after, my father purchased a new Chevrolet but he felt he was offered too a low trade-in, which I agreed with, and I purchased his old car from him. I felt I could not cancel my "special Checker purchase" and thus my wife could use the Checker, which was only needed by her occasionally. When driving the Golden Checker we received many questions about it being different, so in May 1974 I wrote Checker and received a letter (below) stating approximately only 45 were made. After that I changed employers and received a company Blazer to drive for work and pleasure with my paying for the gas. So over the years the Checker has been in minor use and only in the summer. Today it's mileage is just 5,650 and the only parts replaced are the battery (3) and new Michelin tires in 1998. Felt it was time to use the original tires on another vehicle in need. Also it may be noted I added several gauges inside (photo below). All photos by author.



# 2010 CONVENTION PLANS ANNOUNCED

The 2010 National Convention will be held Friday, June 18 through Sunday morning, June 20 in Lima, Ohio. It will be at the newly remodeled Howard Johnson Lima, 1920 Roschman Avenue, Lima, OH, 45804, phone 419-222-0004. The hotel is conveniently located immediately off I-75 at exit 125-A.

20 rooms have been reserved for Thursday night, June 17 and 35 rooms for Friday, June 18 and Saturday night, June 19. (A few rooms have already been booked.) To reserve your room at the discounted rate, you must call the hotel directly at 419-222-0004 and specify code "CCCX" (Checker Car Club) to get the special \$59 a night rate. If you want a fridge or microwave in your room, ask for it when making your reservation ... no extra charge but you must ask for it. Check-in time is 3:00 PM and check-out time is Noon.

There are multiple events going on in Lima, OH the weekend of the convention, including a Harley-Davidson event. **Rooms MUST be reserved before May 17, 2010.** Any rooms not claimed will be released on May 18 and there is already a waiting list for the Harley group ... so if you don't reserve a room, you'll be sleeping the back seat of your car. Don't say we didn't warn you!

The traditional Saturday night dinner will be held at "The Barn Out Back" and it will be a buffet for \$17.95 per person, all inclusive.

Details are still being finalized for plans to tour either one or two Lima automotive manufacturing facilities. One of the tours is definitely scheduled for Saturday morning but exact times are still being determined. If the other tour happens, it will probably be sometime Friday. More details coming soon, both here and on the web site. The Spring newsletter will have a registration form for the convention.

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## ERRATA:

One of the captions on the back cover of the Fall 2009 issue was incorrect. John Baer, the photographer, pointed out that the photo is not of Pete Talenca as stated but is actually a friend of the photographer from San Diego, John Lawrence. When John Baer pointed the mistake out, John Lawrence got on the Internet and found a picture of Pete ... he agrees there is a definite similarity !!!

# CHECKER A2 1949: A NEVER-ENDING STORY

By Kimmo Koistinen. Originally published in Mobilisti Classic Car Magazine. Translation by Joe Fay and additional editing by John Weinhoef. Used with permission from Jan Enqvist, Editor, Mobilisti Classic Car Magazine. Any errors in transcription or translation are not the fault of the original author or publisher.

On a beautiful afternoon in Helsinki in 1951, a tired old taxi pulls up in front of the Savoy restaurant and two gentleman enter the cab. Transport Board Chairman Erik Von Frenckell and a young associate, Onni Hiltunen, are returning to work after having lunch. The two men settle in the back seat, wondering aloud they discuss the condition of the taxi. The pain-



fully bright sunlight shone on the dull finish of the old cab.

The taxi driver chimes in. He is aware of the situation, but when the import/export license's are not issued by the Finland government, not even to professional taxi drivers, it is hard to measure up with old equipment. His taxi is already more than 20 years old

When the driver discovers his passengers are truly interested, he continues: even importing used American cars would be a better alternative than continuing to use these ancient chariots, particularly with the upcoming 1952 Olympics. Although they all still looked OK, they're getting worse.

The discussion inspires both Frenckall and Hiltunen and they come up with a great idea: why not import used taxis to Finland? An influential Minister with the Socialist Party, Hiltunen urges his colleagues on the possibility of working with taxi drivers to put in an application to the Ministry and the Agency for a license to import a large number of used cars. The Ministry would certainly be receptive to such an important issue.

The drivers raised the issue of which professional associations or companies would lead the transaction. The only suitable organization to lead the project seemed to be AAL, AH Ltd. (Car Owners Association).

The government promised licenses would be available for U.S. manufactured used cars. AAL's Executive Kalle Järvinen, an automotive engineer, and his deputy, Paul J. Heikkilä, were brought in to run the project. They reached out to their Swedish colleagues in order to understand the Swede's views and experiences with late model American cars in order to help determine the best solution for Finland taxi drivers.

The Swedish view of a pure purpose built design for a taxi was that the Checker would be the best solution. It would not be the cheapest, but it would offer much value for money. Additionally, unlike other manufacturers, Checker also owned a taxi company, so the used equipment should certainly be readily available.

Checker's had never been sold in Finland. But in Sweden and other Nordic countries Checkers had been imported after the war. The Finns highly respected the Swedes and felt they understood the Finland market conditions.

To the Finns, the name alone, Checker Cab Manufacturing Corp., already exuded a prosperous and successful America company.

## The Finns Buy 500 Metropolitan Used Taxis, Cheap

In March 1951, AAL sent inquiry letters to the United States with the goal of finding a source of used Checkers. The most promising contact proved to be Checker Cab Manufacturing Corporation and its subsidiary, Checker Cab Sales and Parts Corp. Checker forwarded promotional material including pictures of the new 1951 model A4.

AAL's project team reviewed the material. It was clear that the cabs would be available, only a few years old and very inexpensive. They could be purchased for less than half the price of new ordinary Americans cars. Finnish taxi drivers were thrilled: new steel, purpose-built taxis, and only two or three years old!

The only problem was in Finland. More than 700 taxi drivers had sent in applications to make advance payments, but the state only had 500 foreign export licenses for a maximum of 500 used taxis, more than enough to cover the required 350,000 DM advance required for purchase. It was now time for the project team to fly to the United States to finalize the transaction and look more closely at the fleet.

The team went to Checker's headquarters in Kalamazoo, Michigan, and Checker's taxi operations center in Chicago. There was initial confusion at Checker because the project team was too excited. The professionals at Checker viewed these taxis as old cabs - rudely expressed - almost a hazardous waste. The cabs were operated 24 hours a day with years of relentless city driving, they smelled and were covered in dents, which was not typical of vehicles sold in the US used car market.

Unlike other American automobiles, in the U.S. Checkers were viewed as industrial equipment; they were not even sold in the normal new car consumer market to civilians. They had a solid partitioned wall separating the cockpit and passenger cabin. The interior was not particularly attractive or luxurious. In the 50's the American car market was entering the burgeoning horse power race; Checker was already a little behind. Well preserved used Checkers were extremely rare. For this reason, Checker typically sold used fleets for scrap metal rather than spending their efforts in trading used Checkers to civilians.

In came the Finns. At last, an economically rational way to get rid of used Checker fleets; even the timing was perfect! The Korean War would be ending soon, resulting in the end of rationing raw materials. This would allow Checker to actively renew its city taxi fleets.

If the Finns would be happy to modify their foreign exchange laws, the transaction could be completed. Finland ultimately did abolish exchange control, and then began to receive new export items, as was done in other Scandinavian countries.

### **State Of Condition**

Based on the original prospectus, the Checker taxi did fit the bill. The results of the journey to America by Järvinen and Heikkilä yielded significant interest

in 1946 - 49 Checker Model A2s. A2's were older but almost identical in appearance to the new Model A4.

By using Checkers, there was little change in the original idea, but the Finns would have to be willing to compromise on the higher mileage vehicles. Certainly professionals knew what they were doing. At this stage, the situation had already begun to slip out of the control of the Finnish taxi drivers.

A deal was negotiated; Checker Cab Sales and Parts Inc. would sell 500 1947 - 48 Model A2's for \$552.66 a unit. This included the price of the car, service, preparation and six Firestone tires (four new and two used).

Taxicabs were stored at Checker's garage in Chicago, many before their planned decommissioning. Each car would have dents removed and paint refurbished, in order to satisfy the Finnish taxi buyer representatives. If the taxi's engines were run more than 15,000 miles since the last major maintenance, then the engine would be overhauled. Checker was also



required to fix other mechanical items if necessary to make the cars fully operational. The buyer's representative was required to approve each car prior to shipment.

In the agreement with Checker, car's total mileage was not stated. Finns paid DM 350,000.00 in advance for a total of 500 cabs to AH Ltd. the ex-

porter, DM 700 per cab. Additionally, the taxi drivers were to pay the state for duties, taxes and other charges, which would be determined when the car arrived. Checker received \$242.50 for the car, \$90.00 for the tires, \$98.78 for repair materials, and \$121.38 for services. Curiously enough, even though the cars mileage and year models varied, AH Ltd. priced all 500 Checkers as equally valuable.

Checker promised, at the very least, all the cars were in good condition and only in need of petrol before driving off the docks. Checker made it quite clear to buyers that advance payments were for older A2's, not newer A4's. It was noted and promised that the cars would be an older 1947 model year.

Although everything still looked good, the deal was starting to get out of control.

### **500 Checkers And The Possibility Of Failure**

Now think about it, how would you feel on this day, you and 499 professional brothers pool together all your hard earned savings and as a group, buy 500 used city taxis some 6000 kilometers away from your home, sight unseen? It would be quite unlikely that all 500 contributors would be happy; with the luck of the draw, your car may be worse than the other taxi driver on line in front or behind you.

Järvinen and Heikkilä signed a definitive deal in August 1951. They chose all the cars, and oversaw the renovation. Checker had taken for granted that Finns could understand that they have obtained very old equipment, driven by rough drivers who had driven these cabs up to three shifts a day throughout the Chicago winters and summers. Yes, strong structures but the future investment was for old taxis with somewhat negligent care.

In the long run, a deal for old cabs combined with foreign exchange controls changes, was a temporary solution set up for the Olympics. Also, considering the fact that driver expectations of the ultimate price, age and condition of the Checker would be intrinsically higher than the reality of the situation, trouble lay ahead.

The Finns Car Contracting company was in a risky position. AH Ltd. had elected and sent representatives, Järvinen and Heikkilä, very rich individuals

themselves, they traveled abroad to complete the export transaction. Maybe they seemed sympathetic to 500 drivers requirements, but had they ever bought a used car before this transaction?

After first 55 cars were renovated, Järvinen and Heikkilä approved the vehicles. These same representatives decided to consign them to Finland by boat and in a manner which is not normally used in transatlantic freight shipping.

It was an extremely inexpensive solution to place the Checkers on the deck of a small cargo ship, sailing under the Dutch flag, named The Prince Willem III. Experts know the cost of speed in the Atlantic, but this solution on a slow boat also required at least two gentle intermediate unloadings on the European side.

On The Prince Willem III, the first 55 Checker got to experience the full fury of Atlantic autumn. Packed too close together and wrapped loosely, each Checker rocked against each other for weeks, using only the salt water to help reduce friction.

The packing was so bad, in Rotterdam, at one of the intermediate unloading of the Checkers, some witness reports suggest that up to three Checkers were piled on top of each other. Many Dutch observers thought the Checkers were imported scrap iron. Additionally, at the intermediate connection all the cars were left out in the elements for long periods of time with little caretaking.

By late October most of the fleet had already been severely damaged: millions of deep scratches, missing parts, and widespread rust. At this point, the sinking of the ship at sea would have been much more merciful for the project in terms of the solution.

### **Scandal! Finnish Been Deceived!**

When finally seeing the first shipment of Checker, the taxi drivers were, of course, very disappointed. Nearly all of the cars were missing more than gasoline in the tank. Even if the component could be located, it may not be profitable or possible to put the cars in order. Even though the technology was not exotic, there were no spare parts available; foreign exchange rationing in Finland had depleted inventories. The dented bodies and missing parts were only periph-



rived; these Checkers received the same gentle treatment. Unsuccessful consideration was given to make a claim for compensation from insurance companies for "sunken cargo". Disappointed subscribers formed Checker-Committee to represent their interests when AH Ltd. appeared to be way out of line. AH Ltd. leadership was still unable to explain the obvious issues honorably. Taxi drivers challenged AH Ltd.'s rights; the crisis deepened.

Assistance was ultimately received by AH Ltd's Managing Director Neil Tammilehto, who managed the problems throughout 1952. The situation gradually moved to a sounder footing. Neil Tammilehto accused the seller of the goods (Checker Cab Manufacturing) of shipping cars not in proper condition and demanded compensation of free replacement parts. Spare parts were in some way a goodwill gesture, a professional level of achievement for Tammilehto; there was still a long way go to resolve the problems.

From Checker Cab's perspective there was surprise and regret; what did the Finn's want, after all, they had accepted all cars? Why do they blame just Checker, the vendor? Why not go after the transportation company for the damages?

Ultimately the promising, far-reaching business project was doomed to failure from the start. Individuals of character throughout Finland were now under threat of lost reputations. To add insult to injury, Sweden had just completed the purchase of a hundred new Checker A4s during the same time period!

### **The Truth Is In The Details**

As the then Minister of Trade and Industry, Penna Tervo had already pointed out in December 1951 to Parliament's investigation findings, the situation was not as bad as initially thought. An investigation of the Checkers indicated that below the surface of dented rusted bodies was sound technology.

A delegation consisting of the buyers were told by the minister that 75 - 80 percent of the Checkers had engines in perfect condition, while the remaining 20 - 25 percent would require at least some engine repairs; a few might be opened and require a complete overhaul. The Minister of Trade also reported that

eral to the dollar dreams on the other side of a wall.

Throughout November the people of Helsinki seemed to know the story of "junk" more than Checker Corp. or the taxi drivers themselves. "Taxi drivers have been cheated" was discussed and argued. The shuttle damage and significant wear increased in the eyes of different levels and experts. Many thought the real value of the cars was hundreds lower than the trade deal that had been agreed upon.

Parliament launched an investigation to determine if funding was too low. Additionally, Parliament needed to understand the consequences and the responsibility of the Ministry for licensing unqualified entrepreneurs (AH Ltd.). Everything combined made this an outright scandal and ripe for the political games played in Finland.

AH Ltd. was not yet able to explain the condition of the cars, but blamed the panic, of course, on the seller Checker Cab Manufacturing. When buyers demand their money back, it was no longer so simple: all 500 cars had been paid in time-trade letter of credit, which did not help the matter.

AH Ltd. had proposed a compromise, a price adjustment for Checkers in good condition according to the customs inspections. In winter a new shipment ar-



body panels in poor condition in the worst cases were clearly caused during the sea voyage and not Checker's fault. Overall, the average of the first batch of 55 units required repairs of DM 100.00 which was a lot of money, but did not make the total price intolerable.

The buyer delegation had told the minister that the initial experience of the Checkers when compared to other Finnish taxi was very good. The Minister's report was a sensible starting point in respecting all parties points of view and to develop a settlement.

Initially, the first group of about 80 drivers had wanted to cancel the trade, but seventy of them changed their minds after examining the cars in more detail. The Finland car shortage was a reality and the state of condition of the Checkers actually hit a bull's eye.

Solidly built and a very roomy car, the Checker easily carried up to nine people. No other reasonably-priced competitor in the Finnish market could make that claim. Upholstery used in the Checker was very high in quality. The vinyl made a good impression with passengers. As long as the spare parts were received and the taxi drivers surveyed accepted the states seating parameters officially at eight people then every-

body should be happy, yet this yielded some unexpected problems.

In the spirit of cooperation, spare parts were reasonable priced. Without valid replacement parts, maintenance operation of the cabs would be difficult. The Licensing Board was charged with the responsibility of insuring parts were available by granting licenses to import parts. Checkers were simple to maintain and repair; sheet metal parts could even be changed very quickly and conveniently.

The Finns, however, were going to face unfortunate surprises. The problems were challenging and deemed unfair. Significant delays existed in the early stages of the projects for the group of taxi drivers receiving the first shipment of cabs. Checkers were idle waiting for parts; drivers meanwhile were faced with finance payments. This put taxi drivers in a very delicate financial position: they had to make their required loan payments yet they were not generating any fares.



Nevertheless, by the Spring of 1952 most of the cars had been delivered and were ready for the summer. The Checkers served the Olympics, exactly as planned.

When the state had assessed the total amount of import tax and duties, AH Ltd. called the initial purchasers of the taxis for 60,000 MK as final payment. It was actually less than the initial 150 000 MK estimate but still overpriced. The Taxi drivers refused to pay the additional fee. AH Ltd. was not very eager to demand money through the courts.

Formed by the initial purchasers, the Checker-Committee recruited the well-known retailer of used cars, S.P.J. Keinänen, to procure parts. Keinänen in-



vested his own money and went to the USA to visit Checker and negotiate a spare parts price list and to investigate the overall fiasco generated during the early phase of the project.

Keinänen came back with promises of a formally priced spare parts list and a clear conviction that the Finns had to be partnered with their representative. Checker agreed that the buyers were in a difficult situation with an understanding of their attitude to condemn any vendor in the world court.

Checker was equally disappointed by the experienced of having their name on list of shame although quite short. Despite this, Checker was still very willing to sell new and used cars to Finland and to seek business and financial support to make up the framework of the Finnish field organization.

### Licensee Checker Ltd. Hits A Brick Wall With Fatal Consequences

Nearly eight years after the first cars arrived in the country, Checker Company Executive Director Michael Sokoll sits in his father's office shortly after the creation of Checker Ltd. Checker Ltd. was owned jointly by S.P.J. Keinänen and Checker Corp.

To bring attention to Checker, Sokoll put a black A6 and three A4s on display in the yard of Adlon's castle. Interestingly, the A4s were refurbished for the Finland market

Later in the year 1954 life of the Finns seemed to be a very reasonable and acceptable. Checker Ltd. bought stylish space on Stockholm Street. Additionally Checker Ltd. planned to build a spare parts inventory. At last the spare parts problem would be solved. Another part of the business plan was to import new and used Checker taxis.

In 1954 some 450 Checker were still operating and were considered to be tools by their respective owners. Spacious rear compartments were even able to carry a motorcycle, as long as the front wheel was removed. Smooth running Continental six cylinders were relatively modest in performance and fuel economy.

The Licensing Board, however, put a wrench in the gear works. Currency values slipped year after year, while the Finland economy slid into an even



deeper recession. The situation became complicated when a key shareholder in S.P.J. Keinänen, Co-Bots, went bankrupt. Combined with the memory of the Checker scandal, the Licensing Board received additional reasons not to grant import licenses to Checker Ltd.

Patient, Checker Group renewed its bid again in 1957, but Checker Ltd.'s funds began to run out. Checker Ltd. was not selling any cars.

The company went into cost cutting mode. At the last minute Checker Ltd. received a promise for a 50 cars import license. However, something went wrong and the transaction got stuck in the Licensing Board bureaucracy. With demands from creditors, the game was over in the autumn of 1957.

Research into Finland's 1960 registration statistics found as many as 72 Checkers were still running. Not quite as bad as all the stories; more than 10 years old, these former Chicago Taxicabs were still running. Despite the success of the deal, whole or partial, the Checker Fiasco was somehow a strange, bitter story with no clear end point.

**Ed Note:** Checker exported to a number of countries successfully, notably Sweden, Switzerland and the Middle East including Israel. The major difference is those export operations were new cars and either Checker operated or a partnership with established local firms so Checker could control the quality of both shipping and after sales service. Neither was the case of the Finnish "adventure".

... continued p 17

# SAVING AN AMERICAN ICON

by Herman Pfauter

As almost any Checker owner knows these wonderful vehicles have a few shortcomings, which sometimes make it difficult to keep them in roadworthy condition. No problem with engine, transmission, axle, brake, steering and other vital components, as they were usually sourced from one of the major manufacturers such as Chevrolet and are still available today from almost any parts store.

But try to find a NOS frame cross member and you will search in vain. I have no idea where the remaining parts ended up after the Kalamazoo factory closed for good last June. Today nobody seems to have any left.

One would think that a part like the front cross member of the frame should be easy to find because it was usually damaged in even minor front-end collisions. Also, its design was so deficient that water and road dirt could enter the hollow tubular structure. The drain hole is very small and gets plugged up easily. Rust then destroys the cross member from the inside.

On my Checker, a 1971 Marathon A-12, I discovered the problem some time ago. The vehicle, which I bought new in 1971 in Chicago, was used there as my personal transportation for the first 4 years of its life. After that I drove it to California where it sat in my garage for another 10 years.

In 1986 I began the restoration. But I didn't pay much attention to the front cross member. Only recently I noticed some rust holes developing. Upon further investigation I found that the cross member was completely rusted through along its lower side and around the anchor points for the lower suspension A-frames right and left.



What to do? Replacement by welding a new piece in place looked easy enough. But all my calls and inquiries brought no results from the various sources I contacted. Realizing I was alone on this one I talked to a welder in town who is known for his superior craftsmanship. All attempts to find a local shop which could bend 2 1/2" steel tubing were unsuccessful. Some in Los Angeles could bend such tubing but the costs were prohibitive due to high set-up charges.

We finally found an easy solution I would like to share with other Checker owners who may have encountered the same problem. Here is what we did:

- 1) Put the vehicle on a hoist.
- 2) Remove the front bumper
- 3) Fix the front suspension lower A-frames temporarily to the frame.
- 4) Remove the 2 large bolts which attach the A-frames to the cross member. They were also severely damaged by rust and needed to be replaced.
- 5) Next, cut out the old cross member from between the frame rails.



- 6) Then cut off a piece of 2" square tubing approximately 31" long and with a wall thickness of 3/16" (.188").
- 7) Weld steel plates on both ends with triangular reinforcements.
- 8) Using the old cross member as a template, drill the 2 holes for the A-frame connection.

9) Weld the new cross member in place between the frame rails.



10) Last, use a rust-resistant primer/paint like Zero Rust to protect the new part.



**ALWAYS MEASURE TWICE BEFORE CUTTING!**

If you are careful enough you don't even have to move or disconnect the brake and fuel lines which run along the cross member. Use 2 cable ties to attach them again to the new cross member.

Unless your front end was out-of-alignment before, there is no need to align it again.

The entire job took about 3 hours and the total charge was \$400.00 - quite reasonable in high-cost California. And my Checker is better and stronger than when it was new - at least as far as the front cross mem-

ber is concerned ...

The photos show better than words what was done.

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## INTERESTING CHECKER ITEMS ON EBAY

by John Weinhoef

Anyone who is seriously interested in Checkers probably has a permanent search set on eBay. I do. Recently some very interesting items have come up for sale. I'm assuming from the descriptions that these items were found when the plant was searched.

There is a 1982 "body in white"; that is, a bare body that was built but never used. It comes with a frame. According to the story with the ad, it was on the assembly line behind # 02000 and never used.

Then there is the CMC Board Chairman's car, a triple black 1982 that has been refurbished every year since it was built. The part I found most interesting about this car is that it has had a larger V-8 with TBI fuel injection retrofitted during one of the refurb.

And there are two extremely low mileage cars, a red "test mule" and a custom built gray over blue limo. I would love to have either of these cars but, on a pension, they are way out of my price range. I believe both of these cars are from the collection formerly stored in the Cab Services building.

I have been in contact with the seller and he has promised an article on the history of these cars. The seller also has a web site, checkericon.com, where other items are available. Currently the cars and some lamps made from taximeters are being offered. The site implies that T-shirts and blueprints will be available soon. It will be interesting to see what else might be offered.

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## R.I.P., BEN PERLIN

Most of us knew him as CheckerBen or maybe just the guy who made the gas tank sending units. Ben was also a devoted husband, father, inventor, affordable housing advocate, and many other things, including a Checker lover. We'll all miss him. I know I'll miss the hours long conversations I used to have with Ben ...

# YOUR MOTOR OIL MAY NOT BE PROTECTING YOUR OLD MOTOR

By John Weinhoef

In the last ten years or so, the car companies have changed the lubrication requirements for new motors. Oil companies have followed, creating new types of oil for the newer motors. It used to be that the new oils were better than the old oils for the old motors. But this is not always the case today. New oil may actually be shortening the life of your classic's motor!

The big difference between older oil classifications and newer classifications is the amount of additives included. These additives include such "pollutants" as zinc, phosphorus and sulfur. Originally, these materials were added to protect cam lobe surfaces where "flat" lifters were used. In other words, almost every Chevy motor made before the mid 1980's.

Starting in the mid-1980's, the car companies were looking to improve horsepower and fuel economy by cutting the amount of "drag" inside the motors caused by one surface rubbing up against another surface. They were also starting to use more radical cam designs with higher lift, increasing the amount of force the cam lobe and lifter must sustain. We'll skip all the technical details, but because of their relatively small size and large amount of movement, the cam lobes sustain much higher forces than any other part of the motor, as much as 100 times greater than the crankshaft when measured in PSI.

As any long time street rodder can tell you, higher lift and increased force leads to cam lobe wear on flat tappet cams. The typical hot rod solution to this problem is "roller" lifters. That is exactly what the car manufacturers did; they changed existing motors and designed new motors to use roller lifters.

Once roller lifters became common, the need for the "polluting" additives went away. Both the roller lifters and the cam itself could be made of a harder material and, since the surfaces now "rolled" against each other, the wear was much less. Without a clear need for the additives, the oil companies proceeded to remove them from normal automotive oil. The one exception was diesel oil; it still retained the additives due to the higher pressures sustained in diesel motors.

The other change is in the viscosity recommendations. To refresh your memory, oil is primarily rated by two numbers. A rating such as 10W30 used to be normal. These days, 5W20 oil is the norm. The first number is the viscosity (or thickness) of the oil when cold; the second number is the viscosity when the oil is hot. The reason for two numbers is simple physics: hot parts are larger than cold parts (remember your high school lab days; heat expands, cold contracts). The new motors are built with much closer tolerances (less clearance), which requires "thinner" oil. So the recommendations changed to use lower viscosity rated oil.

The other rating used to describe oil is a letter designation, such as SE, SF, SL, SM etc. These designations are used by the manufacturers as a description of the type of lubrication needed by a specific motor. It should be noted that the lower amounts of certain additives started after the SG designation and really dropped in zinc and phosphorus levels starting with the SL designation.

Most of the letter designations are obsolete. Here are some of the various designations and the years they are applicable to:

## Obsolete Designations

SE - 1971 through 1980

SF - 1981 through 1989

SG - 1989 through 1993

SH - 1994 through 1996

## Current Designations

SJ - 1997 through 2001

SL - 2001 through 2004

SM - 2004 through current

Various oil companies will tell you the newer designations automatically include the older designations and you can use the new oils in older engines. But the fact is the oil composition in terms of additives is different, and not always for the better if you have an older engine.

It was previously mentioned that diesel oil didn't really change. So why not just use diesel oil? Some people do. The biggest drawback of diesel oil is the large amount of "detergent" it contains, which diminishes the wear protection somewhat. Diesel motors are designed to take this into account. If you were to

use diesel oil in a gasoline motor, you should shorten up the oil change interval. As diesels are required to meet cleaner pollution standards, expect the oil companies to remove the various additives from diesel oil.

Until now, all the discussion has covered “normal” motor oils. “Synthetic” motor oils are an alternative to normal motor oil. Synthetic oil is specially engineered to be “slipperier” and to handle higher loads. It can be used in both gasoline and diesel motors in place of normal oil and provides a very high level of protection, but it is much more expensive than normal motor oil. Another drawback of synthetic oil is older motors built to “sloppier” tolerances may start burning oil. At the price of synthetic oil, that is not desirable.

So what is a classic car owner to do? The answer, like always, is “it depends”. If you’ve replaced your original motor with a late model roller cam design, the new oils are fine for you. If you still have a flat tappet cam, the amount of miles you drive is a factor. If you only drive a few miles a year and change oil every year, it probably won’t any difference. If your car is a “daily driver” piling up lots of miles and you use normal motor oil, you should probably consider an oil additive to protect the cam; it’s cheap insurance. Or you can use synthetic oil. The major drawbacks to synthetic oil is it’s high cost and possible leakage issues in older motors.

Personally, in my Checker I have a new roller cam motor (1990 vintage) but I still use synthetic motor oil for maximum protection and change oil every 5,000 miles, which is on the low end of the recommendation for synthetic oil. (The new motor was originally started up and broke in on synthetic.) I also have an old Dodge with a flat tappet cam. Since I only drive it 2 to 3,000 miles per year, I use normal oil rated at 10W30 and change it once a year. Occasionally I toss in a can of oil treatment additive intended to be used at specific mileage intervals.

The best advice is to use a high quality oil and filter, and change both frequently. If you drive only a few miles every year, change it once a year regardless of miles. If you don’t mind the cost, use synthetic oil.

**Ed. Note:** this article was compiled from a number of sources. It is an attempt to take a very complex subject and simplify it in layman’s terms. I have deliberately avoided specific mention of any particular brand. You can find additional information on the internet and from various makers of both oil and oil additives.

## FINLAND CHECKERS ...

The following photos were taken by Sami Lassila in May, 2004 and show the current fate of some of the imported Checkers. You can still see checkered stripes on the hoods in two of the photos. And one of the A-2’s was converted into a pickup.



## CARS FOR SALE:

**1976 Checker Sedan \$11,999** - For more information and 50 HD Photos and Video please visit: [automotiveadbuilder.com](http://automotiveadbuilder.com) Located in NYC / Staten Island. Phone **917-337-7771**

**1966 Checker Marathon \$7,999** - For more information and 50 HD Photographs please go to: [automotiveadbuilder.com](http://automotiveadbuilder.com) Located in NYC / Staten Island. Phone **917-337-7771**

**1977 A-12 - 38,000 miles \$24,000** - The front seat tells you just about everything you need to know about the mileage on a Checker. By 100,000 miles, the driver's seat on a well kept Checker is starting to crack. When you see one in this condition, you know it's a nearly new car. The owner purchased this car for his retirement when he was 65, but then the bank hired him as a consultant and he worked another 10 years before he really retired. When he finally started driving it, he did less than 2,000 miles per year. We know this because we have the build sheet with his name on it. And because he was a bean counter, he kept a notebook, so we have dates for nearly every fill-up and oil change. Located in Hayward, CA. Phone **510-589-7410** or email [bill@tallgrass.net](mailto:bill@tallgrass.net)

**1981 A-11** - 36k original miles - very good condition - no rust or body damage/repair—V6 3.8 Liter. Located in Duluth, MN, \$14,000 firm. Phone **218-727-8873** or email [wlong@d.umn.edu](mailto:wlong@d.umn.edu)

**1976 A-12 - 105,000 miles \$14,000** - Super nice A-12. Front and rear seats freshly redone with stitching to match factory design. Excellent condition throughout. Nearly all service records. Only driven occasionally by a very small old lady from San Leandro...(really!). Located in Hayward, CA. Phone **510-589-7410**

**1962 Checker Marathon 4 Door Sedan** - automatic, one owner, not a taxi, 27306 miles, 6 cylinder, Continental overhead valve engine, rebuilt carburetor, new fuel pump, 4 new tires, motor runs rough (no power), good paint, some extra parts. Garaged for last 25 years. I can no longer work on it due to back and leg problems. I would like it to go to a club member who appreciates old Checkers. Asking \$5,500 or make offers. Located in central PA **570-672-9767**

**1978 Checker Taxicab** - Was a taxi. Purchased new in Phoenix, no rust ever. Chevy 6, auto, A/C, P/S, P/B, body & paint work completed. Located in Phoenix, AZ. \$5,900 obo Ed Torel Phone **602-768-4156** or email [bkset@live.com](mailto:bkset@live.com)

**1981 Checker - Less than 70,000 original miles!** - This car has over \$22,000 invested, brand new 350 crate motor with 0 miles, rebuilt automatic transmission, over \$3,000 in new parts from Joe the Checker Guru (new chromed bumpers & Grill), re-drilled door hinges and more. Times are hard and money is gone, if you're looking for a 1/2 completed project car than this is your lucky day. Please feel free to ask any questions you have, the car is currently located in Park City, UT with my parents in a heated garage while I'm living in LA. Price - Make an offer !!! Phone **435-901-0262** or email Nick at [nickbreton89@gmail.com](mailto:nickbreton89@gmail.com)

## RENTALS :

**Worldwide Checker Rentals** - Worldwide Checker rentals for the movie industry, television industry, and promotional projects. 30 years experience. References available. Email Joe at [sales@checkerparts.com](mailto:sales@checkerparts.com), visit [www.checkerparts.com](http://www.checkerparts.com) or phone: **818-999-1485**

**THECHECKERGUY.COM** - NYC area Checker Taxi and vintage car rentals for film, TV, events, weddings, etc. Check our site: [www.checkerguy.com](http://www.checkerguy.com) or call **646-284-1939** or email [checkguy78@yahoo.com](mailto:checkguy78@yahoo.com)

**Film Cars and Vintage Checker Taxicabs** - Commercial Rentals and Weddings a specialty in the general NYC region. Visit [www.filmcars.com](http://www.filmcars.com) for photos. Classic Checker taxicabs as well as vintage automobiles from the 1920's thru the 1970's. Phone Peter at **718-748-6707** or email Peter at [peter@filmcars.com](mailto:peter@filmcars.com)

## DETAILING SERVICES:

**Ben's Automotive Painting Service** - Specializing in the painting of Checker Motor Corporation Hood Emblems and Hubcap Emblems. For more information, please phone **207-847-3218** or email: [bspaul41@yahoo.com](mailto:bspaul41@yahoo.com)

## PARTS FOR SALE:

**CHECKER**  
**PARTS**

New weather strip, windshields, gauges, front end parts, fenders, decals, lenses, gas tanks, more. We have a Checker only wrecking yard. Visit us at [www.checkerparts.com](http://www.checkerparts.com)

**1978 Checker Parts** - 2 used windshields in excellent condition. 4 doors complete, no rust. left & right front fenders, fair condition. Good trunk lid. Located in Phoenix, AZ. Priced to sell. Ed Torel Phone **602-768-4156** or email [bkset@live.com](mailto:bkset@live.com)

**1964 Auto Trans** - Was bolted to a Perkins, condition unknown, \$50. Toronto, Ont, Canada. Phone Larry **416-762-4562** or email [p.priorities@gmail.com](mailto:p.priorities@gmail.com)

## CLUB MEMORABILIA:

Club logo belt buckles \$8.00, Logo patches \$2.50, Window decals \$1.50. All shipped First Class, Postpaid. Contact Don McHenry, 469 Tremaine Ave., Kenmore, NY, 14217-2537

**Literature For Sale** - Checker Cab Photo History - book by J. Hinkley \$15, 1963 Sales Brochure #B101, 12 pgs, \$10, "New Power Comes To Checker" 1964 brochure, \$10, Parts Catalog Nov. 1963 Models A11, A11L, A12, A12L, A12W, photocopy in binder, 336 pgs, \$65, Parts Catalog Supplement 1 Models A9, A9L, A10, A10L, photocopy in binder, \$20, Checkerboard News Spring 2006 through Summer 2009, 10 issues, \$25. All plus postage. Contact Andrew Harvey **814-226-6956 evenings**

## CARS FOR SALE:

**1965 Checker** - I am selling my first Checker, good glass & windshield, decent doors and fenders, floor, trunk and rockers properly welded and repaired, hood rough, has 283 Chevy motor, auto trans, newer Dana rear axle, good project car ... too many projects, must sell ... has been in inside storage for 20 years \$1,500. Toronto, Canada. Phone **416-762-4562** or email Larry at [p.priorities@gmail.com](mailto:p.priorities@gmail.com)

**1978 Checker Marathon** - factory power sun roof, A/C, power locks, new V-8, auto, opera windows, bumper guards, chrome package, jump seats & more. Needs landau top & interior work. Strong runner, body & paint completed. Located in Phoenix, AZ \$6,900 or best offer, possibly trade for tin woodie station wagon. Ed Torel Phone **602-768-4156** or email [bkset@live.com](mailto:bkset@live.com)

**A12W8M-5101-9284** - 69 Aerobus. New 283 GM Motor, 350 Turbo transmission, 4 Barrel Holly carb, original gear box, original hub caps, new brakes, bearings, brake calipers. Needs glass, new upholstery, electrical hooked up. Make offer, located in Farmington, NM. Phone **505-324-9904**

**1981 Checker Marathon A-11 Taxi** - 1981 Checker Marathon Taxi Cab with an automatic transmission and an odometer showing 38,000 miles. This Marathon is equipped with the original GM 3.8 six cylinder engine that runs & drives perfectly with: Used Year Appropriate Checker Hubcaps, New parts include running lights, side markers lights, Two Tier Taxi Lamp Multi-Functioning, Headliner, Starter, Alternator, Window Channels, Window Sweeps, Weather Stripping, Control Arms, Tires, A/C lines, Refurbished Radiator, Refurbished Gas Tank, Fuel lines, Fuel filters (all three), Brakes, Turn Signal Coupling, Tail Lights, Battery, Motor Mounts, Steering Coupler, Alignment, Oxygen Sensor, Catalytic Converter, Smog Certificate, Air Vents, Heat Vent, Glove Box, Sending Unit, Paint, Interior, Checker Ribbons, Rate Card Decals, Door Decals, Sun Visors, Dash Board and Back Dash, Carpet, Floor Mats. Rebuilt Engine, Transmission, Carburetor, Refurbished Radiator, Gas Tank. Located in Reseda, CA. If you have any questions please email me or call me at **818-609-0777**. To view, call for an appointment. This is the finest Checker Taxi you could buy. Price: \$19,999

**1976 Red Checker \$14,999.99** - Just restored and completed. Over 200 HD Photographs of this process from start to finish, with all documentation. Located in NYC / Staten Island. Visit [automotiveadbuilder.com](http://automotiveadbuilder.com) Phone **917-337-7771**

**1982 Checker Marathon** - 62k original miles very good condition. VIN 1CMMS4223CK001802. Always garaged looks and drives great. Located in Flushing, MI. \$12,000 [fel1903@yahoo.com](mailto:fel1903@yahoo.com) or Frank **810-577-9400**



Above & Below: Quite an upgrade from the standard Checker interior. Lot's of brass plating was apparently added during the restoration. The nine inch 'B' pillar clearly visible in both photos. Also notice the custom jump seats.



Ben Merkel (above) checks out the back seat of the '83.



Joe Pollard consulting with Ben Merkel on the '83.

## 1983 Checker !



Sun roof and TV weren't exactly standard factory options.



Above: "As Found" condition in original red paint and land au vinyl roof



It's licensed. Note the brass plated tail & backup lights.