



# BETTER TOGETHER

DAVE AND KAREN JENNINGS' 1956 NOMAD AND SHASTA TRAVEL TRAILER ARE A WINNING COMBINATION



If owning a vintage car is a great hobby, owning a vintage car and a matching travel trailer makes a great hobby even better. At least that's been the experience of Dave and Karen Jennings of Mission Viejo, who own both a 1956 Chevy Bel Air Nomad station wagon and a matching Shasta travel trailer of the same year.

"With the Nomad and the trailer, it opens up the door for absolutely everyone to come up and start talking," Karen says. "It's a conversation piece."

Her husband, Dave, a big-rig driver for Albertson's, agrees and notes that "Nothing beats the looks" they get when driving the matching vehicles. And that's understandable. The turquoise- and-white wagon and trailer exude eye-catching 1950s

styling that's impossible to ignore. For Dave, acquisition of the Nomad was the fulfillment of a longtime dream dating back to the days when he was a young surfer growing up on the Palos Verdes Peninsula. In fact, a friend's parents owned a '55 Nomad the boys used as a surf wagon.

"They ended up giving that Nomad to my friend," Dave says, and recalls driving up the coast in the classy Chevy. For a surfer in those days, it was a fantastic ride.

Later, Dave moved to Hermosa Beach and recalled seeing surfer Dave Nueva drive by in a turquoise-and-white 1956 Nomad. The sighting proved an inspiration to the young surfer. "I made up my mind I was going to own a Nomad one day," he says. From that time on, the Nomad became his dream car.

THE JENNINGS' MATCHING STATION WAGON AND TRAVEL TRAILER MAKE FOR AN EYE-CATCHING COMBINATION WHEREVER IT GOES. VINTAGE LUGGAGE, FOLDING CHAIRS, CAMPING STOVE AND BEVERAGE COOLER ENHANCE THE TIME-CAPSULE EFFECT OF THE BEAUTIFULLY RESTORED DUO.



But dreams aren't fulfilled overnight. Before he could buy his own Nomad, Dave met his wife-to-be Karen and the couple married in 1978. In the years that followed, buying a home - not an old Nomad - and raising two daughters took priority

In 1993, however, the couple did manage to buy a vintage Chevy wagon but it was a Two-Ten, not a Nomad. "We bought it at All the King's Toys," a dealership in Newport Beach, Karen says. The Jenningses followed up their wagon purchase by joining the L.A. Classic Chevy Club, which not only renewed Dave's contact with Nomads, but also turned Karen into a fan.

"It was all the chrome," Karen says, recalling what she found most appealing about the car. "What attracted me to it was the fact that it was a step above the other cars." The sporty Nomad was the top of the Chevrolet line in the three years it was produced in its original, two-door version (1955-57).

Acquiring their own Nomad was still a ways off, though Dave and Karen did buy a Shasta travel trailer to haul behind their Two-Ten that they used for camping with their daughters.

"Our '57 wagon was white or cream-colored and the trailer was a cream color also," Karen says. "So this is not the first time we've had a matching trailer. We bought it from the original owners, a little old couple who'd had it all of their lives. They went on their honeymoon in it. As we drove off with it they were standing there waving at us."

The Two-Ten/Shasta combination, much like their current wagon and trailer, proved a real attention-getter, Karen notes. "We pulled in to get gas one time and this couple had

followed us right off the off-ramp and wanted to check it out."

Karen says the Two-Ten was nice, but "wasn't a Nomad. It was very much a daily driver. But at the time, that was all we could afford. That was our foot in the door for getting a classic Chevy." When their children had grown, Dave and Karen sold the Two-Ten and trailer, but they didn't buy a Nomad right away. Instead, they got into muscle cars.

"That was Dave's thing," Karen says. A '68 Chevy Camaro SS was the first of several, including an El Camino, a 1967 Ford Mustang and a 1959 Ford pickup. The Mustang was given to their daughter April when she turned 18 and now resides in a museum in Germany, according to Karen, who manages the service department at Mission Pools in Lake Forest. Their other daughter, Laura, bought a 1956 Chevrolet coupe for her first car.

In 2006, the couple finally decided to look for their Nomad dream car. After an extensive search they found it online in Florida. After

flying out and talking to the car's owners - a retired couple - they bought it and had it shipped back. They didn't even drive it before buying it.

"The first thing we did was look at it, and our mouths just dropped to the floor," Karen says. "It was just gorgeous."

Though the car had been completely restored, Dave couldn't resist making some changes. In went a 350 Chevy crate motor to replace the original 265 V8. A GM 700R4 automatic replaced the Turbo Hydramatic 350 the car came with, and the suspension was upgraded. Dave also installed disc brakes in front. His efforts resulted in a capable driver that is as suitable for road trips to Pismo Beach as it is for cruising to local gatherings such as Donut Derelicts and Cars and Coffee.

Acquiring the "canned ham" Shasta trailer was Karen's idea. The couple owned an Airstream at the time they purchased the Nomad, but polishing its aluminum skin took a toll. "Dave would spend a week polishing

the Airstream prior to a rally," Karen says.

Shasta trailers had become a hot collectible in the years since the Jenningses owned their first one, but Karen eventually found one for sale in Norwalk. The couple restored the trailer together, tracking down such items as birch wood to replace interior panels, boomerang-patterned countertop linoleum and Marmoleum flooring. Karen recalls spending many hours hand-sanding the trailer's wood cabinets, and Dave likewise put in much time polishing every fastener and latch. The results speak for themselves.

"We'll drive along the coast and people will be clicking their cameras at us or giving the thumbs-up," Karen says. We know that if we pull in for gas, we're probably going to be there for 45 minutes." Not that that keeps the couple from using their road-going combo.

"Both he and I love getting out there and seeing the country," Karen says. "This summer is our 30th anniversary and we're going to go camping in it. Just he and I." ■



**SPEC SHEET**  
**1956 NOMAD**  
**ENGINE** Chevy 350 V8 crate motor  
**HORSEPOWER** 355  
**TRANSMISSION** GM 700R4 automatic  
**SUSPENSION** Unequal-wishbone independent front; live rear axle with leaf springs and air shocks. Helwig front and rear sway bars  
**BRAKES** Disc front, drum rear  
**CHASSIS** Stock, box-girder type  
**TIRES** BF Goodrich, P215/75 R15  
**WHEELS** 15-inch steel



THE COUPLE SPENT MANY HOURS BRINGING THE TRAILER'S INTERIOR TO ITS CURRENT STATE OF PERFECTION. KAREN PAINSTAKINGLY HAND-SANDED EACH CABINET WHILE DAVE POLISHED EVERY LATCH AND FASTENER. MARMOLEUM FLOORING AND BOOMERANG-PATTERNED COUNTERTOP LAMINATE CAME FROM CALIFORNIA SUPPLIERS. DINNERWARE AND ACCESSORIES ADD TO THE VINTAGE LOOK.

