

SPOTLIGHT on Cuban Oldsmobiles



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Mechanically trained since he was 11 years old by a man who had maintained an Oldsmobile 98 belonging to a girlfriend of Fidel Castro, thirty year old Fabio Pinero is indeed a mechanical genius.

He purchased this car in Cruces, Cuba two years ago for \$9000 and gave it the best frame off restoration any Cuban can without the advantage of eBay, Fusick, local auto supply or hardware store.

He completed body work and painted it himself in his garage without the advantage of a paint booth. New upholstery was installed with clear vinyl over white vinyl and tweed. Cuba does have skilled upholsterers. Port-a-walls adorn new Cuban-made 760 x 15 bias ply tires.

The engine is where Fabio's Cuban ingenuity was employed. When he bought the car the 324 engine had pistons from a Russian Volga and a two barrel carb from a GAZ Russian truck fitted on the stock 4 barrel manifold with a crude two hole adapter plate.

A rebuild of the 324 started with a set of stock pistons, wrist pins and rings brought in by a relative from the states. Yes, it is true, a 324 Olds engine will run nicely with a 1960 Land Rover timing gear and chain. The valve train was refurbished with Mercedes valves fitted to freshly machined oversized seats. All but 100 octane gasoline sold in Cuba is leaded so no need for hardened valve seats. Add Chevrolet lifters, Cadillac



Fabio's '55 is the Mothership of his havanacartours.com. He charges \$30 an hour, not bad in a country where the average doctor makes \$60 a month.



Fabio's 1955 Ninety Eight

By Bill Goodnight



Fabio Pinero's 1955 Ninety Eight is an exceptional car for Cuba. Fabio accomplished this two year restoration without the advantages of Fusick, eBay or classic car salvage yards.



Did you ever adjust your valves by lengthening the push rods? The process starts with careful measurement.



Then the lengthening is accomplished by peening the push rod using a GMC 235 crank and flywheel as an anvil.

pushrods and stock 324 rockers and you truly have a United Nations engine.

In order for the Cadillac pushrods to fit, Fabio had to grind them to length. This results in unusual wear in the pushrods which requires frequent valve adjustments. The only way to adjust the valves in this imaginative valve train is to adjust the pushrod length. When Fabio notices a drop in vacuum, he pulls one plug at a time while watching the vacuum gauge to find the offending cylinder. Then the pushrods are removed and peened on a GMC 235 crank and flywheel which serves as an anvil to increase their length. He desperately wants a set of adjustable rockers to relieve him of this frequent chore.

The distributor has a stock Olds body with a Russian GAZ cap and rotor. The Olds shaft was modified to accept the Russian rotor. I swear the Russian cap and the stock Olds cap are indistinguishable (see photo). Charging is supplied by a Russian tractor alternator. Believe it or not, the car runs and sounds great—like an Oldsmobile!

In a country where the average monthly income is \$20, a tour of Havana in Fabio's "98" commands \$30 per hour from foreign tourists. He estimates that with this business, in two years he can recoup his original purchase price and cost of restoration. How many of us can say that?

If you are planning a trip to Cuba an initial outlay of a hundred bucks will earn you a very entertaining and informative introduction to Havana with Fabio.

Check out Fabio's website at havanavintagecartours.com

—Bill Goodnight (#5196)
Boise, Idaho

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On the Malecon in Havana



Distributor comparison: 324 Oldsmobile with Russian GAZ



Fabio calls this his eBay.

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Author Bill Goodnight with Fabio in Havana

A rare sight in a Cuban Olds: a stock engine with Mercedes valves, Chevy lifters, Cadillac pushrods and Land Rover timing gear and chain



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