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The Legacies of Two Volvo Shops

BY MATT LEROUX

I'm a parts guy. My hobby and "side hustle" has evolved over the last 15+ years into more than I ever envisioned. That growth has come about in no small part thanks to retiring shop owners who liquidate their inventory when they close shop. In my last Rolling article, I recounted some of the big "scores" that have come from such shops. With each large lot I buy, my business grows in its demands on me and on the range of parts I have available for my customers.

The fall of 2021 brought two significantly large lots, filled with exciting new-old-stock, rare accessories, and well-preserved used parts. This is the story of those lots and the places they came from.

Ashely Motors

Paul Ashley opened Ashely Motors in Warrentonville, N.C. in 1973. It was an independent shop and he serviced a variety of cars, but he was a Volvo specialist. It is hard to imagine that the shop survived in the rural mountains of North Carolina in the 1980s, let alone when the shop began.

Paul was a man of many talents, in addition to mechanical and body work, he repaired radios, restored pianos, and was an audiophile. He even built a special listening room on the back of the shop. In fact, the repair shop was a series of rooms that were added on through the years, filled mostly with Volvo parts.

Paul passed away in 2012 and the business was closed down. The shop was left largely undisturbed for nine years, then his sons sold it to relatives, including the family home on the same plot.

Paul's son Jerry had worked in the shop beside his father for a decade and has a lot

of memories attached to the old building. A year after the sale, he was receiving pressure from the new owners to clear out the building. This was something he had intended to do, but then the pandemic hit. There were probably sentimental attachments as well that kept him from getting started.

When I received my first email from Jerry, he stressed that he needed to empty the building and that the task was overwhelming. He had already been forced to scrap about 200 cars in an effort to clear the property. (Boy, I wish I could have been there to pick parts off of them!) We talked on the phone and he sent me some pictures of the shop.

There were several rooms filled with parts on shelves and piled on the floor. I could see lots of those famous blue boxes, indicating Genuine Volvo NOS. Jerry suggested I rent a large U-Haul and we discussed pricing.

At this point I said, "I don't know how se-



Jerry Ashley and I outside the Ashley Motors shop in Warrentonville, North Carolina.

riously to take myself (referring to my parts business), but I guess I should go down there and get it." This kind of decision making still feels new to me as an entrepreneur, but it seemed if I was going to continue this busi- ▷

The pictures Jerry sent me showed shelves filled with parts. It turned out to be just the tip of the iceberg.



ness than I better buy up inventory when I had the chance. In my experience, I find out about these shops once every three to four years, so I needed to jump on them when I could.

My best friend from college, Jack, and I stuffed as many flattened boxes as we could fit into his small hatchback and booked a hunting cabin for lodging in nearby Mouth of Wilson, Va. and headed south from Ithaca. (Yes, you read the name correctly.)

On the night we arrived, it was raining like crazy. We discovered the super twisty roads you find in the mountains on the North Carolina/Virginia border and wandered our way to Ashley Motors for a preview. It became clear that packing up all the parts would be a huge amount of work. The following morning, we met Jerry and went to work. Serendipitously, my wife's friend lives nearby, and I was able to hire her teenage sons to help.

That day is a blur. It mainly consisted of Jerry and me running from room to room, unearthing parts from shelves, stacks, and piles, and deciding what to take. Then helpers would fill boxes with everything that I had identified. All boxes were then brought to Jack who photographed, neatened up, and taped them shut. In anticipation of getting the boxes back to my shop at home, we wrote a unique alphanumeric code on the outside corner and inside flap of every box. This way, in the future, I could review pictures at home and easily locate any box I needed.

It was an ingenious idea that has served me well. It saves me from opening and searching through hundreds of boxes to locate an item. In due time, every item will be cataloged with a location code, of course, but this at least serves as a guide until that is complete.

As we worked through the building, Jerry quipped that his father was a hoarder. I don't think that is quite accurate, however, since all the parts were for his business. He was,

The U-Haul truck was full when we arrived back home at my shop after the North Carolina trip.



Two boxes showing our labeling system. I don't know exactly what is in each box, but I can get an idea by reviewing the pictures we took as we packed.

perhaps, inefficient. There was a staggering number of parts in that building and duplicates of many items. Even though there were also lots of used parts, some broken and not really worth saving, they were all related to his work. It seemed Paul must have ordered parts, then lost track of where he put them and ordered some more. Since he and Jerry also did extensive body work, there were several pieces of NOS Genuine Volvo sheet metal, particularly for the 140, 164, and 240.

Packing up the parts at Ashley Motors was overwhelming. We worked as fast as we could to pack boxes and fill the truck. All told, we spent 56 man-hours in a day and a half. Throughout the day, I made thousands of split-second decisions whether to take or leave a part.

You never know what you are heading into in these situations. Jerry turned out to be a terrific guy. He was patient, generous, and young at heart. By the time we were ready to head out, we had spent a lot of time working, talking, eating, and laughing with Jerry. He even dug out his 70s era R-Sport jacket and gave it to me. I am pleased to say that he and I are still in touch regularly. Also, the assortment of parts was wide and deep. I ended up with great NOS from the rare, to the ordinary, and lots of things that make old cars look good again, such as trim and light lenses. Jack and I will be cataloging these items over the next year and uploading them to the store on my website each month.

Foreign Affairs

So much for hearing about these lots only once every three to four years. Just a few short weeks after getting home from North Carolina, I received an email from my friend Duncan LaBay notifying me of another closed shop looking for a parts buyer.

Foreign Affairs on Cape Cod, Mass., had a nearly identical story to Ashley's. Steven Hobbs, who started the shop in 1980, had

passed away about a year ago. His son, Cameron, had sold the building and needed to empty it out for the new owners.

I had already rented and filled a 20 ft storage container with the parts from North Carolina. I consulted with my advisors (my wife and my friend Jack), assuming they would tell me that I was nuts to even consider another lot. To my surprise, they both told me that I should inquire to learn more. A call to Cameron went well and he texted me some pictures. They could have been from Ashley Motors. They were so similar! After some back and forth to get a sense of what was there and the pricing, we made the decision to go to Cape Cod.

This time, we brought more help. My wife, two sons, Jack, his wife, and nephew all agreed to go. I purchased boxes and began coding them at home in preparation. Just as we had in N.C., we drove out and had a quick preview the evening we arrived. At first glance, I was pretty nervous. Foreign Affairs was a much smaller building and not packed as full.

The next morning, we showed up ready

A warm glow from inside Foreign Affairs as we were loading the truck.

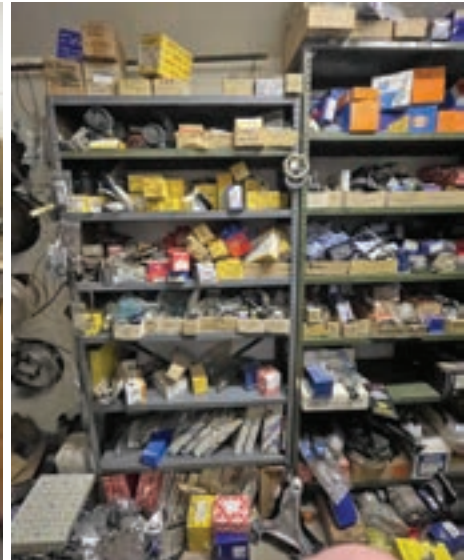


to work. I had mentioned to Cameron that I am not a morning person. When we arrived, he had set up a table with fresh coffee and some amazing donuts, a first class move in my book and a great way to start the morning.

We began sorting and packing and the familiar game began, with me running around making decisions and telling people what to pack. Soon, Cameron's sister, Gemma arrived to help. With all hands on deck, and more experience, things went faster than in N.C. By 4:30 in the afternoon we were wrapping things up and securing the load inside the truck. All day I had been eyeing a Bosch cabinet mounted to the wall. I asked if I could take it too. Cameron explained that his father had moved that cabinet from shop to shop through the years and told me I could take it, as long as my intention was to keep it. I assured him I would look after it and the first thing I did when I got home, after unloading the truck, was to start cleaning the cabinet on my living room floor.

Like Ashley's, Foreign Affairs proved to yield a huge number of NOS and used parts, including many NLA parts, and my fears were relieved. Also, like Ashley's, the family members selling off the parts were warm and friendly.

These two shops were the first time I bought out shops due to the death of the owner. In the past, I have always bought from retired owners. While packing up the contents of these buildings, I was keenly aware that I was disassembling the memories held dear by the respective family members. The parts themselves were not important to these folks, but the collective place and everything it was made up of certainly gave them a portal to fond memories of their fathers. As we worked, they discovered things they had for-



The pictures from Foreign Affairs looked exactly like Ashley Motors.

gotten and told me the stories that were rekindled. While I am thrilled to get this inventory and move it out into the Volvo community, the legacies of these men and the stories of their entrepreneurship are the treasures that I got from my trips. I am honored to have had these experiences. And the R-Sport coat and Bosch cabinet are great items that hold special meaning for me now.

These two trips were the first time that I had help packing parts without seeing all of them for myself. I look forward to opening the boxes as we inventory and discover what's inside. It is almost like being a kid at Christmas when I open each box.

The BlackVLV webstore launched in September 2021. So far, about 2,500 parts are available for online purchase, out of the

6,000+ part numbers that we have cataloged. New items are added every month. I hope, as you read this article, your mind jumps to parts that you are looking for. Anyone is welcome to email me anytime for a round of, "Do you have part X?" For NOS parts, BlackVLV lives and dies by part numbers, so we can give you the fastest response to inquiries that contain part numbers. I have a great selection of "cool" parts, but I also have a broad selection of the ordinary stuff like ball joints, brake rotors, exhausts, and fuel filters, to name a few. Please consider BlackVLV for any parts you need for your 140, 164, 240, and 700/900 series cars. ■

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The Foreign Affairs pack-up in action. Notice the Robert Bosch cabinet on the back wall.

