

By **DON WILNO**  
STAFF WRITER

Everyone remembers a "first" in their life: first date, kiss, vacation or other landmark event.

But many remember with great passion their first car. It was a special moment to own something of value, and often, it was a crowning moment to have the only convertible or the first Corvette in the neighborhood.

It's that nostalgia that drives Billy Bob's Fast Expensive Cars Inc. of Lakewood, owned by Bob Russo, 47, Marlboro, and Bob Caruso, 50, Lakewood. It also draws people to the 30th Atlantic City Classic Car Event, which opens today at the Convention Center.

Billy Bob's will be taking to the show six cars from the past: two '67 Corvettes, a '68 Firebird, a '69 Firebird, a '65 Mustang convertible and a '57 willow green Thunderbird.

Collectively, the six cars could bring as much as \$350,000 to \$400,000 at auction, Russo said, "because the market for these cars has been wild since 1999."

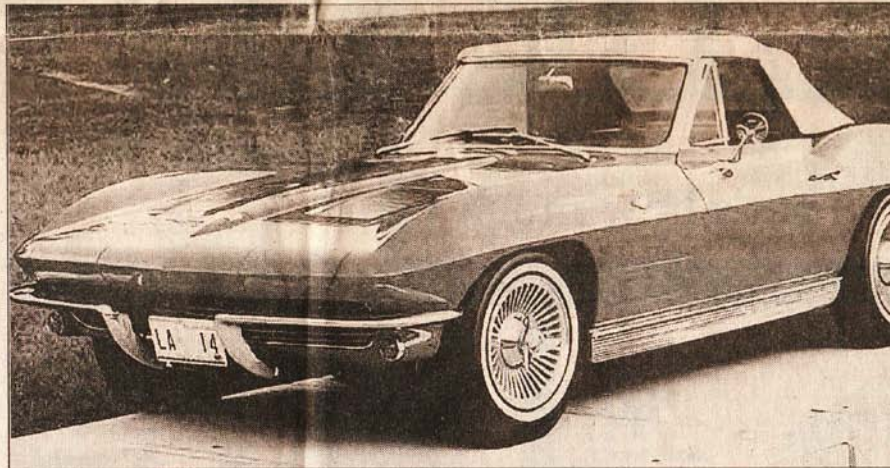
A 1967 Corvette that went for \$50,000 to \$60,000 in 1997 is getting as much as \$100,000 to \$120,000 today, Russo said.

"Prices have virtually doubled," Russo said.

Those who have money want to spend it on such things rather than see it vanish in declining stocks, he observed.

But the nuts and bolts of the business are the people who are looking back at a time in their lives they certainly enjoyed.

"People are buying memories," Russo said. "They are buying with their heart, not necessarily with their head. When you deal with their emotions, you are dealing with their



A 1928 Packard 443 convertible (top) and a 1963 Corvette convertible (above) are two of the cars that will be on display at the Atlantic City show.

## IF YOU GO

### 30TH ATLANTIC CITY CLASSIC CAR EVENT

**WHEN:** 10 a.m.-7 p.m. today, 8:30 a.m.-9 p.m. tomorrow and Saturday, 9 a.m.-7 p.m. Sunday

**WHERE:** Atlantic City Convention Center, 1 Ocean Way

**COST:** \$15 adults, \$3 children 12 and under. Groups of 20 or more: 25 percent discount

**CONTACT:** (800) 227-3868 or [accars@acclassiccars.com](mailto:accars@acclassiccars.com)

heart.

"It's like, remember when we used to sit on the stoop and see a car go by, and say, 'One day I'm going to own that car.' We couldn't afford it then, but now we might be able to afford it."

That's 95 percent of Billy Bob's business, said Russo, who sells to customers all over the country through the Web site [www.traderonline.com](http://www.traderonline.com). The other 5 percent, he said, are se-

rious collectors who know the value of the classic cars.

"Some of the people who contact us, they are just an average Joe. These are the guys who said, 'When I am 40, I am going to buy that car.' Now they want to get something they have always wanted," Russo said.

And they can have it any way they want. Caruso, a 30-year restoration specialist, will make it any color and way you want it.

"We have never spent a dollar on advertising," Caruso said.

Added Russo, "Our business is by word of mouth."

The show in Atlantic City bills itself as America's largest indoor classic car "gathering," with more than 1,000 cars and a 750-booth automotive flea market.

Free shuttle buses will run from The Sandcastle baseball stadium on the Black Horse Pike and from all Atlantic City casinos; parking is limited near the Convention Center.

"The Classics" special auction will be held 7:30 p.m. today at the Trump Taj Mahal Casino Hotel, 1000 Boardwalk at Virginia Avenue, where 60 vehicles will be up for auction, ranging in price from \$75,000 to \$1 million. Preview hours will be from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Bidder tickets, which admit two people, cost \$100.