

[A lifetime's collection of hot rods and parts heads to auction in Florida](#)

[Kurt Ernst](#) | Jan 15th, 2015 at 8am



Fords stacked up in a Florida warehouse, awaiting the Koepke collection sale. Photos courtesy Yvette VanDerBrink.

When Bob Koepke died in November of 2014, no one, not even his son, David, knew the secrets hidden in the brush of his overgrown Florida property. For nearly 50 years, the elder Koepke had collected parts and bodies from 1930s Fords and 1950s Chevrolets, along with aftermarket components needed to make his own cars go faster. Now in the process of being sorted and cataloged, Bob Koepke's impressive collection of cars, bodies and parts will head to auction on April 11.



Born in Gary, Indiana, in May of 1943, Bob grew up tending to chores on the family's farm. His first car was an old Ford Model A, purchased from older brother Karl for the princely sum (to a high school student in the early 1960s, anyway) of \$25. Though other cars would come into his life, Bob never lost his passion for the Model A; it was, after all, the car that introduced him to the world of hot rodding.



Determined to give his son a better life, Bob's father insisted that he attend college. After graduating from Indiana University with a degree in accounting, Bob headed south to Florida's Space Coast, new wife in tow, to take an accounting job in the aerospace industry. Working for solid employers like Boeing and NASA, his career took off, and for a while the family prospered under the hot Florida sun. Bob even befriended NASCAR and tuning legend Smokey Yunick, who ran "The Best Damn Garage in Town" in nearby Daytona Beach.



Bob Koepke.

A divorce left Bob with custody of his son, David, and as his boy grew older, the two would prowl the swap meets and car shows of the Southeast, always on the lookout for bargains on tri-five Chevy parts or prewar Ford stuff. His work at NASA brought him in contact with astronauts and executives, and Bob developed a taste for both Corvettes and imported sports cars. His collection expanded to include oddities like a 1973 DeTomaso Pantera, disassembled for body repair and paintwork, but reportedly purchased from an astronaut with a mere 3,800 miles on the odometer. The garage held a 1958 Porsche 356 coupe, too, and somewhere along the line, Bob picked up a 1978 Ferrari 308, which David recalls as his dad's daily driver during his wear-a-suit-to-work days.



As the 1980s blended into the 1990s, the enduring prosperity of the space program gave way to the harsh reality of budget cuts, and life for many on the Space Coast began to sour. Bob took an early retirement, and David began college at the University of Florida, but soon made the decision to move back to Indiana, where he found work as a machinist. Though he and his father still kept in touch, the distance between them became, perhaps, more than physical. Busy with his own career and family, David's trips to Florida became more infrequent. When he did head south, his father always insisted they meet somewhere close to David's hotel, as a matter of convenience.



When David got the word last November that his father had died, he came to the realization that it had been 10 years since he'd set foot on his father's property. Arriving there, it soon became apparent why his father always insisted they meet elsewhere. The driveway was overgrown, as was the house, the garage, the barn and the rest of the property, requiring David to cut his way through the jungle that had reclaimed the land using a chainsaw and a machete.

Once David was able to gain entry into the house, his father's transition from collector to hoarder became apparent. Parts were stacked in every available corner of the house, including the kitchen, bedroom and bathroom. In a back corner of his dad's garage, David found Bob's original \$25 Model A, which will not be part of the sale. Along with a 1935 Ford roadster that David recognized as his father's favorite, the Model A will go back to Indiana and remain part of the family.



Enlisting the help of hot rod buddies in Indiana and Florida, David and his crew began the process of clearing brush and trees, a necessary step before the removal of cars, bodies and parts strewn about the property could begin. With much of the inventory now safely stored in a nearby warehouse for cataloging, a full list of cars and components is being assembled. The collection is heavy on prewar Fords and includes several 1932-'34 three-window coupes, a few 1932 roadsters and several 1934-'36 cabriolet roadsters, plus assortments of original and aftermarket parts.



The 1958 Porsche 356 coupe.

For Chevrolet collectors, the sale will feature seven 1955-'57 Nomads, all in various stages of disassembly, along with four 1957 Chevrolet convertibles and a cut-up '55 drop-top. There are plenty of Corvette parts (including fuel-injection components from 1957 and 1958 models) and assorted speed parts to bid on, too, including some signed by Smokey Yunick himself. The 1958 Porsche 356, mostly restored but disassembled, will be part of the sale, as will the 1973 Pantera and the 1978 Ferrari.



The 1978 Ferrari 308, parked alongside the 1973 Pantera.

VanDerBrink Auctions, the company behind the now-legendary Lambrecht Chevrolet sale, will conduct the April 11 event, with cars and bodies crossing the stage first (at 9:00 a.m. sharp), followed by parts. While Internet bidding via Proxibid will be permitted on select lots, those on site will have access to the full catalog of auction items.

A complete inventory list, along with photos and videos, will be posted to the [VanDerBrink Auctions web page](#) in the coming weeks. We'll post more images as they become available, too.