

James Lohr

ITC Western District Advisor

My wife, Amy, and I have been members of ITC and the Mid-Atlantic Thunderbird Club (MATC) since 2011 and attended our first ITC convention in Wilmington, DE, in 2012. We lived in Ellicott City, MD, at that time. We met, married, and reared our two daughters there beginning in 1984. I was an Aerospace Engineer for NASA at the Goddard Space Flight Center in Greenbelt, MD, for 27 years managing the development of multiple scientific instruments and spacecraft for solar physics, earth environment, interplanetary, and communications missions.

I have always had an interest in automobiles. Even pre-school in the mid-1950's, I knew all the brands and models and Thunderbirds with their futuristic high style were always my favorite. In the fall of 1965, my parents went to Rockenfield Ford in Cincinnati, OH, where I grew up, to buy a new Galaxie. While they were negotiating with the salesman, I checked out the show room. I was 10. The 1966 models had just recently been released and there was a fully loaded Town Landau on the floor: Nightmist Blue Metallic paint, white vinyl top, and dark blue metallic upholstery. I climbed into the driver's seat and was absolutely enthralled with all the gauges, buttons, and levers. The key was in the ignition so I switched it to accessory and had the time of my life trying out the Stereo-Sonic tape player (new for Ford in '66), overhead safety convenience panel (also new for Thunderbird in '66), sequential turn signals, power windows and vents, power seats, you name it. Obviously, it made quite an impression and I never forgot it.

Fast forward to 2010 and I started to get the bug for a classic/collector car and started looking on the web. I looked at ads near and far from where I lived thinking I would focus on getting a good one. That is when I joined MATC and ITC. I also met Jim Wulf, one of ITC's Technical Advisors, at the annual Antique Automobile Club of America's annual show in Hershey, PA, in 2012. I thought I found a '63 convertible in NJ on the web and Jim Wulf and Mike Melnyk met me and the vehicle owner's at a parking lot. It just goes to show you that ads on the web are not always what they look like. Jim as an expert on Bullet birds quickly sized it up and recommended against it particularly due to poorly repaired damage to the rear quarter and significant amounts of body filler. Disappointed though I was, it was sage advice. Jim and I met again at the convention in Wilmington where there was a triple black '66 convertible fully loaded that belonged to Joe Zentgraf who also belonged to MATC with me. Jim checked it out and said it was rock solid. Joe had been after me for a couple of months to buy his car. He had bought it and fully restored it. After it won a first place at the convention, I was hooked. A couple of weeks later it was mine and I have had it ever since.

I retired at the end of 2017 and moved to Florida for a couple of years. That didn't turn out the way we expected and through a combination of circumstances ended up moving to Marana, AZ, in December, 2019. When the call went out for someone to serve as Western District advisor, I volunteered. I am looking forward to finding and getting to know my fellow T-bird enthusiasts here in AZ and the rest of the western district.