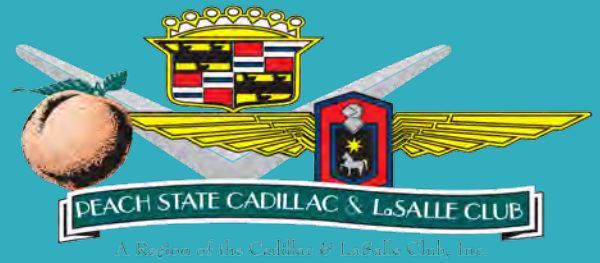


The
TAILFIN

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Take a Ride through the Cadillac Years



PG. 8

ATLANTA STEEPLECHASE DETAILS



PG. 27

OUR ANNUAL CHILI COOKOFF RECAP



PG. 19

 CADILLAC ELECTRICAL ENGINEER: 1950S - 1980S

Wally Barth - A Career with Cadillac

In the February TAILFIN we ran a piece introducing Sandy Barth's dad, Wally, who worked at Cadillac Motor Car Division in the 'Fifties through the 'Eighties. This month we delve a little deeper into Mr. Barth's memoirs from his days before and during his career at Cadillac. Meanwhile, we will share a few "growing up in Bloomfield Hills" stories shared by his eldest daughter, Sandy. You will recall that Sandy is a proud owner of a marketing & creative services business here in metro Atlanta. Oh, and she is our TAILFIN editor extraordinaire, a CTS owner, and Peach State CLC's Secretary. Call her our Cadillac Gal! *(All photos by Herman, Wally and Sandy Barth)*



When Wally Barth graduated from basic training in 1944, Uncle Sam took away his Enfield and handed him a typewriter. This weapon he called a "mill." They taught him high speed radio operations and Morse Code, and assigned



him to the 3101st Signal Service Battalion. His mates were headed for Europe... and soon enough, the Battle of the Bulge. By all accounts he got the better duty station. Wally swabbed decks during a stormy cruise through the South Seas on a Kaiser-built victory ship, surviving a three-week crossing to Melbourne. There was no time to hunt for wallabies: A day and a night in the harbor; then off to Calcutta. A truck-and-train ride north dropped 19-year-old Wally into a mosquito-infested holding camp where he slept on a rope bunk and sweated out the days. In early '45 he rode up the Brahmaputra River through Assam, and along the Burma Road - he says he was astonished by the debris left in their wake by the retreating Japanese military. White-knuckling a flight over the Himalayas in a C47 transport, Wally had time to think, "Maybe those guys in Belgium didn't have it so bad after all..." Wally crossed "the Hump" and served as a radioman in Lashio and Bhamo (Burma). Then, back to Calcutta to wait for the end of the war.

Once he had his "45 points" he made his exit for the States. His ride home was aboard the General Hersey, another well-worn victory ship. The Hersey broke down near Ceylon, then again at Alexandria steaming through the Suez Canal. As Barth entered New York harbor he missed seeing Lady Liberty. (He was swabbing decks again.) After a train ride to the Midwest he was discharged in May '46 at Camp Atterbury in Indiana. A short ride by Greyhound bus returned him home to his folks in Michigan. Wally claims to be a day older than he would have been had he stayed home, since he had sailed around the world in a westerly direction... We'll take his word for that, won't we?



Wally Barth - A Career with Cadillac

(Continued)



*Staff photoer at
The Michigan Daily (U of M).*

My earliest memory is of a neighbor inviting my parents down the street for a cup of coffee. Dad said he'd bring his own... so we all piled into the silver Cadillac, and dad balanced his cup of coffee on the hood. He drove it down the street while I peered over the dash at the china cup perched precariously above the grille. What a super-smooth ride. What a show off!

-- Sandy



*Rolling off the line at the
Cadillac Tank plant in Cleveland.*

Wally chose electrical engineering at the University of Michigan, courtesy of the GI Bill. He worked summers cleaning and painting windows, and finally caught on at Borden's Dairy – where the perks included all the milk and orange juice he could drink. Hard labor taught our boy the benefits of a college education, so he redoubled his scholarly efforts. While studying engineering he was a stringer for the Michigan Daily and photographic editor of the year-book, the Ensian. He snagged his degree in June 1950 – without debt, due to Uncle Sam's (and a nation's) gratitude. Now, for a job!

Pontiac Motors was advertising for a draftsman, so Wally drove over there in his “new” ’41 Ford coupe. Because they insisted on an experienced draftsman the Pontiac folks suggested Wally try Cadillac Motors in Detroit. Wally “hightailed it” over to Cadillac that same day, sparing himself a life centered on the Chief. By September he had his job at Clark Street, writing and editing engineering releases and change notices. Exciting stuff? Not so much, but sufficient for him to invest in a new car! This time he bought a green Plymouth sedan with a gasoline heater for \$1700. He roomed with a widow and her son for \$10 a week. Wally said Les Murray at Cadillac “took pity” on him, and hired him for the EE department to work on control boxes and switches. Wally was on his way! He learned to design wiring harnesses from Joe Babin, who later hooked him up with an interview with Chrysler – but Bob Templin talked him out of it, saying that Cadillac held greater potential for his career. So Wally stayed on with the Standard of the World, and never left it. One of his Cadillac mentors also had a pilot's license, and kept his plane where Ed Cole kept his plane. Wally got a chance to fly on occasion, and those flights took him to Ohio.

Momentum was building for the war in Korea, and he found that Cadillac was opening a new tank plant in Cleveland. They were converting a bean storage facility (that's correct, beans) for the Commodity Credit Corporation into a production line for “Walker Bulldog,” M41 Light Tanks. The Bulldog had a 76mm gun, a 6-cylinder Continental gasoline engine, and a Detroit Diesel auxiliary engine/generator. Later, they also built an open-turret model, the M42, to carry twin 40mm anti-aircraft guns. Still later the plant built aluminum 50 mm cannon carriers named the M56. All these vehicles had to be updated to meet Cadillac quality and production standards, and Wally fit right in. He worked on all these tanks' electrical systems except the gun controls, which meant he was responsible for overall wiring, lamps, instrument panels, batteries and generators. And, to bring it full circle to his old Army days in Burma, Wally Barth managed radio equipment and interference suppression for Cadillac's tank plant (left).



Wally Barth - A Career with Cadillac

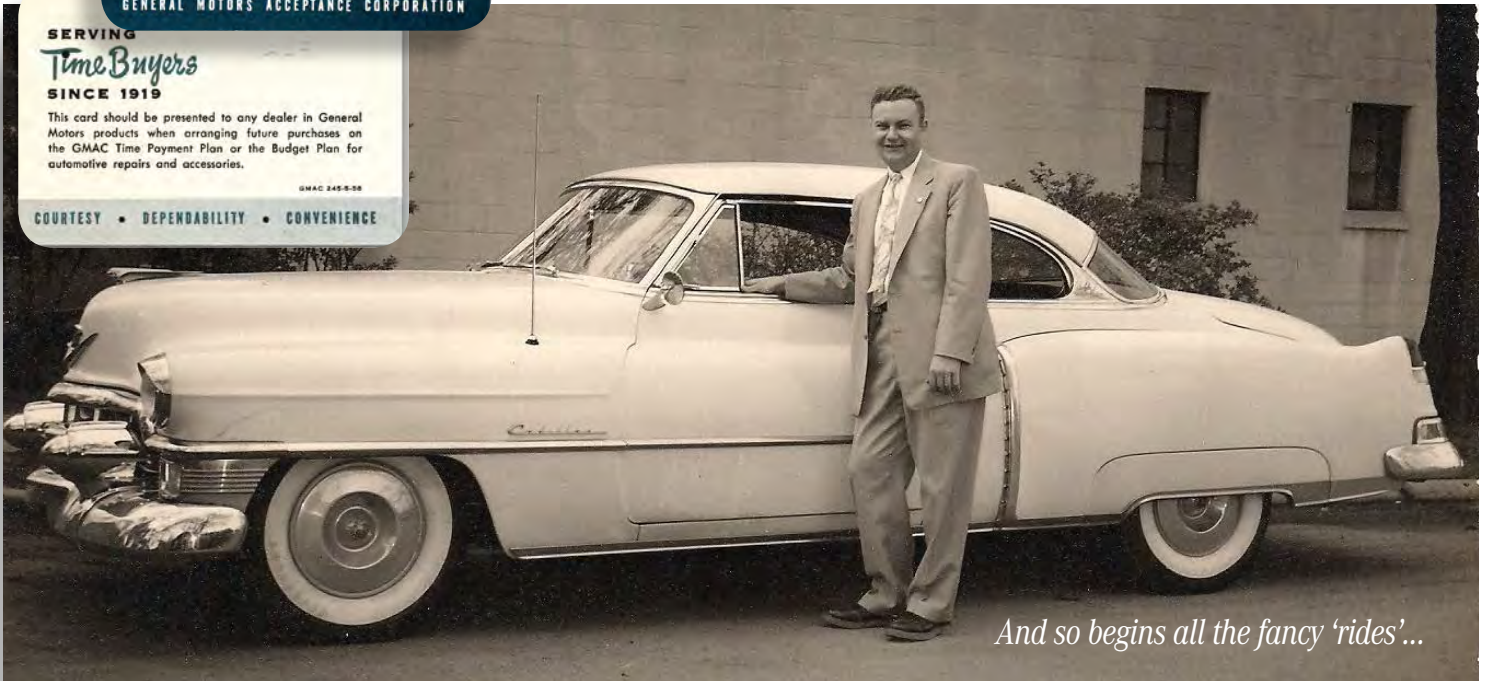
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And so begins all the fancy 'rides'...



In '53 Wally was promoted to Senior Project engineer, putting him squarely on the "A Roll," which meant he could buy a new Cadillac at a 25% discount. We're talking "big time!" He promptly sold his red Ford and bought a new blue Coupe Deville. You might be wondering which Cadillac our Bachelor Barth bought in '54. It was a red convertible with a red leather interior, of course. Wally called this his "traffic stopper," and we know you know what he meant.



Wally Barth - A Career with Cadillac

(Continued)



Roberta Butler was an executive secretary at the Cadillac tank plant when Wally met her.



Wally met and dated his future wife Roberta (Roe) at Cadillac that summer, and by the fall of '55 they were married. Their honeymoon took them along Route 66 past the Grand Canyon and Las Vegas to LA and back. Now, that's TWO "Car Guys!" The Barths set up house in Westlake, OH, near the tank plant. In '55 Wally developed the cold starting kit for both the M41 and M42, using 30,000BTU/hour gasoline heaters manufactured in Cleveland by another firm. The tanks had to be able to start within an hour of a cold soak at negative 65 degrees F. These tanks had originally been planned for operation in Korea, but by now the Cold War had frozen over. These Cadillac tanks were meant to take on Russian tanks – the T34/85 was known the world over for its superior design. No one knew where the next land engagement might open up, but we do know Barth's contributions were important.

(Opposite) Roe feeding her breakfast donute to a noshing deer while cruising on their honeymoon out west (early December, 1955).



Wally Barth - A Career with Cadillac

(Continued)

Sandra Lynne was born in '56. In '58 Wally got a call from his old boss back in Detroit, Les Murray. The Barths didn't dally; they were back at Clark Street by November and living in West Bloomfield township soon after. The iconic 1959s had just gone on sale, so they sold their turquoise '58 sedan (!) and bought a silver '59 Coupe DeVille. Wally took on responsibility for electric clocks, turn signal switches, the new neutral safety switch with parking brake vacuum release valve, new cornering lamps, turn signal indicators on the fenders, under-car lamps, fog lamps, Twilight Sentinel, all radio components as well as some accessories, such as door guard moldings, floor mats and compasses.

If your Cadillac is from the Sixties, Wally Barth had a hand in its design and production.

In '63 he took on the position of assistant Staff Engineer, Electrical, and this allowed him overnight testing of company test cars. A different Cadillac every night! For instance, a west coast vacation in '69 came by way of a company Brougham.

Also in '69 Wally got another promotion. The former assistant staff engineer was now Staff Engineer, Electrical! In 1971, Wally Barth received a patent with co-inventor Bill Bell for an electrical "transmission disabling device," which Barth modestly attributes to his partner Bell. Wally merely appreciated the invitations to annual dinners at Cadillac reserved for its patent holders. Wally was Staff Engineer when he received the letter from GM CEO H. G. Warner, and that 60th Anniversary Celebration packet we introduced in last month's TAILFIN. Barth had tremendous responsibilities during this period. He supervised the design and development of all vehicle wiring, lighting, charging and instrumentation, including these samples of major Cadillac milestones:

- Rectangular and tungsten-halogen headlights
- Theft deterrent systems
- Electronic cruise control systems
- Entertainment (stereo FM, 8-track and cassette tape players, power antennas)
- Air bag systems.
- Maintenance-free batteries
- Driver information trip computers
- Digital fuel injection

Try to imagine your Cadillac without those improvements. Then, thank your lucky stars Wally Barth missed out on the job at Pontiac, and skipped out on that Chrysler interview.



Above, Sandy - apparently unimpressed by all that Cadillac styling.

Below, Lisa and Sandy - watch out for those fins!



One man's family - circa 1963.

Wally Barth - A Career with Cadillac

(Continued)

Posing for a family Christmas card in a company convertible.



A cadre of Cadillac electrical engineers out west – typically at Scottsdale, Pikes Peak, Durango, CO and other test locations.



Dad's favorite Cadillacs were the Broughams. He loved that great, floating ride. And they were always fully loaded. The execs would drive home a different car every night, and if they found any issue at all, even a tiny one, they reported them in tiny black notebooks carried in the glove boxes of the company cars.

-- Sandy

The Barth family was a very traditional one, with dinners together every evening, where everyone got a chance to share how their days had gone. Sandy remembers her dad telling stories about the Cadillac production line, and the challenges he faced daily. Once in a while, he'd mention seeing a whole line of Mary Kay pink Cadillacs coming down the line together. He often had meetings and tests at the Proving Ground in Milford. He organized a road trip to Pike's Peak in Colorado to test the radio's reception, and he met regularly at D'Arcy-McManus Massius in Bloomfield Hills to discuss upcoming advertising campaigns. What was an engineer doing at these sessions? Ostensibly he served on a focus group, but more likely he made sure the copy was accurate.



In the '70s Mrs. Barth once got a call from Wally, who was using a phone positioned on the hump between the front seats. Was it an early cell phone? Well, he was driving – a mile from home – but that huge trunk was FULL of Motorola equipment, huge batteries, and miles of wiring. Another time Wally came home with a rear driver's side window fixed in place with a squiggly line woven through it. He wore a ring that allowed him to unlock all the doors remotely. By the late '70s the Barth kids were getting used to seeing prototypes of GPS systems, a heads-up display operated from a 16" aluminum box full of vacuum tubes, and even a fiber optic alternative for lighting mirrors and doors – so the lamps would not affect temperature readings.

Wally Barth - A Career with Cadillac

(Continued)

We were surrounded by auto execs in our subdivision, West Bloomfield, Birmingham and Franklin. Chuck Jordan, who would later become head of GM Design at the Tech Center, lived nearby. He often passed us at the school bus stop in his red and white '55 Corvette. Even in the snow! Dad car pooled with several Cadillac men. I went to Sunday school with Jeff Sackett, son of Ansel Sackett, who always drove one of the antiques he collected to the Franklin Roundup Parade. You know him from the Ansel Sackett Awards of the CLC.

Dad always drove home in a different company car. Sometimes it was a test car – triple the number of headlights, or two large knobs instead of a steering wheel... Other times he would bring home a competitor's car (a "stinkin' Lincoln)... But we loved the other GM cars, like a Corvette or a Buick Riviera. Once in a long while he'd bring home a foreign job, like a yellow XKE Jaguar... Woof! Nice! Dad never liked any of these substitutes, because their rides just couldn't measure up to a Cadillac's.

Sometimes we got to see new cars before anyone else did. The press would follow dad home, so he always parked inside the garage. The latest models would always draw lots of stares from other drivers and pedestrians. Pretty cool. You know, Cadillac didn't want their new cars left in public lots, but that never stopped dad from driving them to the hardware store or to church!

-- Sandy



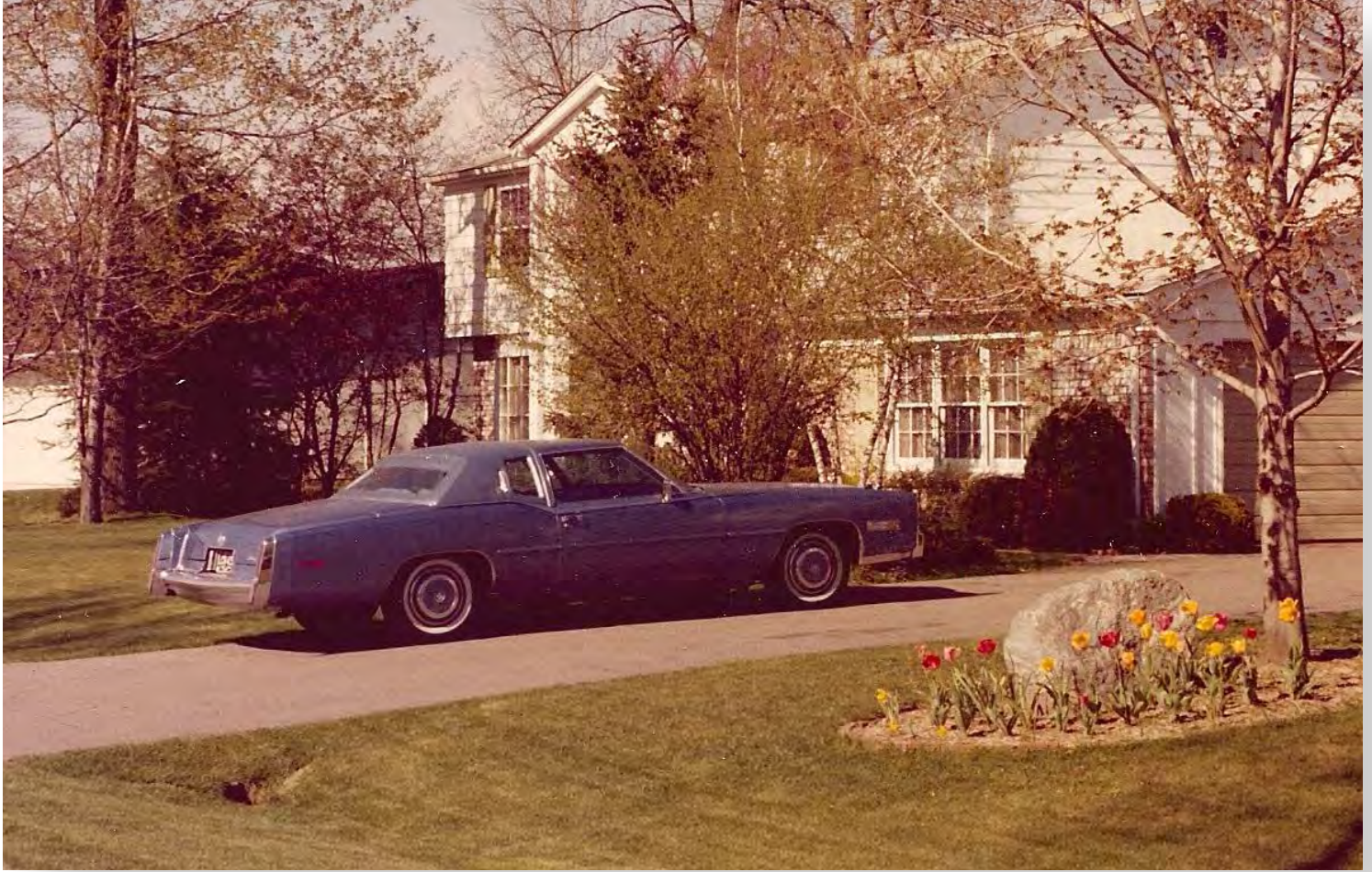
In the '70s Cadillac required their execs to buy a new car every two years (at discount of course). Wally would still drive the company cars, but Roe got the new Cadillacs now, to replace her '65 Corvair. In '75 the family bought a very cushy DeVille d'Elegance with double-padded pillow seats and a 500 cid engine. Here's Roe in the car just before it was sold to a new owner and before they acquired their next Cadillac (see next page).



More test cars out west in the eighties.

Wally Barth - A Career with Cadillac

(Continued)



Roe generously allowed Sandy to drive her turquoise Eldorado Biarritz to college in downtown Detroit. Needless to say, Sandy was the most popular driver in her carpool! Below, the Eldorado at Meadowbrook Hall, Rochester Hills, MI.



Wally Barth - A Career with Cadillac

(Continued)



Engineering group with a Seville and Sedan de Villes, below.



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In 1973 dad brought home one of the four Official Cadillac Pace Cars, souped up for the Indy 500 race. We hopped in and drove down Northwestern Highway in this convertible with Indy 500 Pace Car lettering. I was behind the wheel and dad rode shotgun. A guy pulled up at a light and revved his engine. I smiled at dad and he nodded "yes." Shot out of a cannon, we left that dude in our dust. Fun times!

-- Sandy

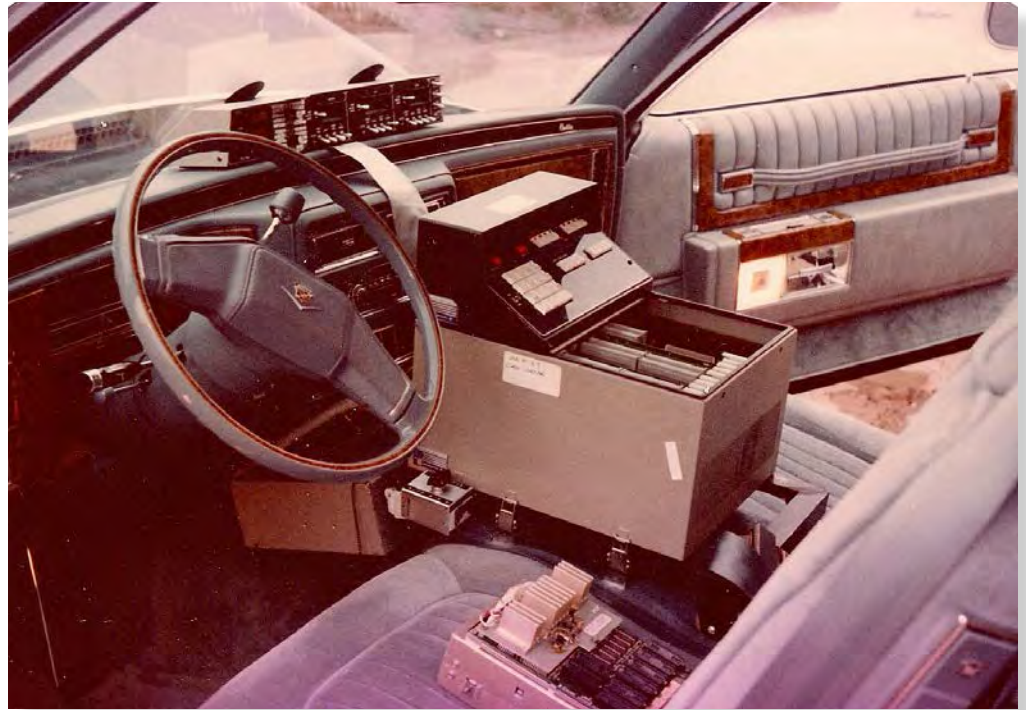


Wally Barth - A Career with Cadillac

(Continued)



*Wally's home office with original PC.
Right - early computer test equipment.*



The company cars would sometimes cause confusion. For instance, once a month on a Saturday dad would take us to downtown Detroit for lunch. Our favorite place was Lelli's (scrumptious northern Italian – minestrone, filet with spaghetti and Zuppa Inglese – a warm cake with a frozen custard inside). We'd head back to Lelli's covered garage, and the parking attendant would ask dad which car was his... and half the time dad would have no idea! I guess they ran it down by checking the windshield for engineering IDs.

-- Sandy

Wally remained in this position until he became Manager for Export Engineering in 1980. Among other things he accomplished during this time, Wally made the mental leap to using computers for managing the work. He began with a KayPro 2 in 1984 (*sidebar*). That powerhouse had a 5" monochrome screen with a daisy wheel printer (unless you were around for this revolution you cannot possibly imagine the state of the art in those days). It ran on a CP/M operating system, which was superseded in the '90s by DOS... These early days of office automation strengthened the engineering section's ability to manage the work, and Wally contributed heavily to the transition.

Wally Barth retired effective January 1, 1988, "with over 37 years of mostly fond memories and great friendships..." He passed away in 1991, leaving us his memoirs and wonderful memories of the glory days of Cadillac Motors.



Wally and Roe on their wedding Day, Oct. 20, 1955 taken by his father at his studio on Woodward Avenue, Detroit.

