

ATLANTA CLASSIC THUNDERBIRD CLUB CAR APPEARS IN DOLLY PARTON CHRISTMAS MOVIE

As a regular attendee at a local monthly car show, the idea of having the 1956 Thunderbird my wife and I own appear in any movie was not even remotely on the radar screen. Don't get me wrong—my wife and I love our car, but never thought of it in a movie. Despite that, it received a professional ground up restoration in early 2013. It has since won many local car shows and a received a National First Prize from the Antique Automobile Club of America—proof of the quality of the restoration.

Caffeine and Octane is a monthly car gathering that takes place in Atlanta every first Sunday in the month. It is an opportunity for car people to meet and drink coffee among some of the finest cars in the area. We attend frequently and always look forward to spending a pleasant morning with fellow car enthusiasts.

Unlike the many shows we had previously attended, this one was different. An incredibly wonderful opportunity awaited us.

We were sitting by our car talking to friends, when a gentleman approached to inquire if we would be interested in renting our car to movie company to be used in a period movie that was filming locally. The young man explained the producers were looking for a vintage red 1955-56 Thunderbird. The setting for the movie was to be rural Tennessee during the Christmas of 1955, so either a 1955 or 1956 car could be used. After taking several pictures of the car, he jotted down our contact information and said someone would be in touch. For a city-bred person,

who has been led to believe that such things do not happen to ordinary people, the idea of being approached at a car show and offered a chance to have your car appear in a movie seemed too unreal to be true.

But it turned out to be true. Two days later, we received a call saying they wanted to use our car. The best part of the story was that it would be a Dolly Parton Christmas movie, the sequel to the much acclaimed "Dolly Parton's Coat of Many Colors" movie that broke broadcast network records in 2015. The new movie, "*Dolly Parton's Christmas of Many Colors: Circle of Love*," was scheduled to be filmed in the Atlanta area. And despite our concern about turning over the car to a movie company, the apprehension was outweighed by the prospect of being even a very small part of a movie featuring Dolly Parton, a woman we greatly admire.

Once the final arrangements had been made, a date was set to bring the car to the set for filming. Although it was the middle of July with temperatures well above 90 degrees, downtown Covington, Georgia, the location picked to replicate a Tennessee country community, was decorated to look like a '50's Christmas card. There were several vintage cars from the late 40's and mid 50's lined up along the main downtown street. The decorations and cars, combined with the extras in period clothing, left the impression of a long ago childhood Christmas.

My wife and I were met on the set by Kody from Atlanta Movie Car Company and shown where to park the car. For the rest of the afternoon, we were allowed to sit and watch the filming. It was strange to see extras dressed in winter attire pretending to shiver in the cold air of December when it was 95 degrees. Since the intense heat was a major factor, only the scenes with extras were filmed outside. Miss Parton wasn't present.



By the early evening, a brief rain shower amplified the humidity making things even more uncomfortable, especially depending on how you were dressed. The extras were regularly being attended by the make-up artists who had to repair sweaty faces between scenes. The rain came to an end, as the sun slowly disappeared below the horizon. The crew set up lights for night filming. It was at that time that a black Cadillac Escalade pulled up, the back door opened and a man stepped out of the front seat to help the lady in the backseat out of the vehicle. It was Dolly Parton dressed in a black top with a bright red skirt and wearing her trademark blonde wig.

She was a slim, graceful lady with a figure that would put a 25-year-old to shame—"gorgeous" is the word. She was shown a position beside our Thunderbird which was parked on the street in front of a store window next to a giant toy Nutcracker. We could not believe that Dolly Parton was actually standing next to our car and that they were preparing to film a scene Miss Parton and the car. We hadn't been told how the car would be used in the movie.

While many of the cars on the set were simply parked and used as background, our car was to play a major role as Miss Parton's personal car. We were able to observe the filming of a scene with Dolly and the actress playing the young Dolly in front of the Thunderbird.

Dolly Parton appears in the sequel as the town "painted lady" who befriends young Dolly (played by nine-year-old Alyvia Alyn Lind) much to the chagrin of her family. She drives a new, shiny red car in sharp contrast to the older cars and pickup trucks common to the area.



Parton agreed to take a picture with the car and with us. She is as gracious as she is lovely. My wife and I got a big kick out of meeting her and knowing we could pick up the phone and say to our friends "We got to meet Dolly Parton and take a picture with her."

My wife and I share a love for early T-Birds. The '56 was our first choice for a collector car. President Paul Christian and the Atlanta Classic Thunderbird Club are an integral part of the enjoyment we derive from owning a classic Thunderbird. Our '56 'Bird is a crowd favorite wherever we take it, and it has won several trophies at car shows, but our fondest memory, courtesy of the Thunderbird, has to be meeting and taking a picture with Dolly Parton. We now look forward to seeing the movie, when it is broadcast on NBC.

*Jerry and Wilma Drayton, CTCI #36395
Decatur, Georgia*

Photos by Jerry Drayton and "Sneak Peek" from the internet and CTCI member Cliff Monroe



Even when the filming was over, the pride, the joy and the memory endured.

Of course, the high point of the day came when Miss



The movie ends with a scene of the "painted lady" visiting the Parton cabin at Christmas after a snowstorm.