



Villager's Ranchero Is Perfect For Lighter Hauling Of Retirement

Patrick "Rick" Ruiz never considered himself a "Ford guy" until he laid eyes on his 1959 Ford Ranchero.

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By Sherri Coner

As Patrick "Rick" Ruiz looked over at his black 1959 Ford Ranchero, he shrugged and smiled. "I was never a Ford guy," the Village of Buttonwood resident said.

But things changed a couple of years ago, when Ruiz spotted the car/truck combo in Lakeland. He forgot he was never a Ford guy.

Without a second thought, Ruiz bought the Ranchero and took it home.

Manufactured in Ohio between 1957 and 1979, Ford's Ranchero might have initially been confusing to some buyers. After all, it was definitely not a car. But it wasn't a truck either.

Instead, the Ranchero was built to merge the best qualities of a car with the handiest feature of a truck.

With only two doors and a comfortable bench seat, the Ranchero frame is set low like a car, but it is nearly the same length as a station wagon.

The open bed behind the front bench seat resembles that of a pickup truck, but it's not as deep.

Two years after Ford introduced the Ranchero, Chevrolet manufactured a slightly different version of the same mindset. Dubbed the El Camino, Chevrolet's addition to the market differed from the Ranchero in some ways.

Many consumers noted that Ford's Ranchero had a wider and sturdier frame.

One year before new car and truck models for the 1980s bit the market and just shy of manufacturing about 500,000 Rancheros, Ford opted to end production of the Ranchero, which Ford fans referred to as “coupe utility” vehicles.

But Ruiz was happy to find the rare classic. After he carefully inspected it, he made some decisions about repairs.

As handy as the Ranchero would be for him and his wife, Cynthia, Ruiz had no qualms at all about putting some time into repair work.

A few upgrades would help guarantee that the 60-year-old find was again as reliable and dependable as it was in its heyday.

“I replaced the fueling system and the ignition system,” Ruiz said. “I rebuilt the whole front end, and it has a new cooling system.”

Two years later, neighbors and bystanders continue to wave, honk and smile when they see the shiny wheels of yesterday roll by.

The Ranchero’s spot in the family garage is rarely filled, Ruiz said. That’s because the vehicle is his daily driver. In fact, 12,000 miles have been added to the odometer since the vehicle joined the family.

When Cynthia asks him to make a trip to the hardware store, Ruiz grabs the keys to the Ranchero.

And, he said, adding or subtracting objects from the bed of the Ranchero is much easier than it would be in a standard size truck bed.

When he buys tools, gallons of paint or transports ladders for home repair projects, there’s no problem using the Ranchero.

“My wife loves this thing,” Ruiz said with a laugh. “It will go anywhere, and it passes everything except the gas station.”

