

**BMW Car Club
of America
North Star Chapter**



North Star Bavarian December 2013



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On The Cover



As this is my last issue serving as the North Star Bavarian editor, I want to say 'thank you' to all the folks who not only allowed me to have my little playground here, but also those who encouraged me and even laid down some kind words when warranted.

While certainly grateful to have had this opportunity, I am now passing the torch to Brian Thull. He'll rock it. He's a Class A BMW Head, and I have heard from some people who hear things he has a talent for design.

I'll see you out on the road.

~ Jonathan

"North Star Bavarian" is published by the North Star Chapter of the BMW Car Club of America, Inc. Please address correspondence to P.O. Box 2774, Minneapolis, MN 55402-2774. All information furnished herein is provided by membership for members only. Ideas, suggestions and opinions, technical or otherwise, are those of the authors, without authentication by or liability to the officers of the Club. Unless specifically stated otherwise, the Club endorses no person, product, service or business. North Star Chapter, Inc. is a non-profit Minnesota corporation.

This newsletter and other information about the chapter may be found on the internet at:
www.northstarbmw.org

Contact for Ad rates:

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Artwork - TIFF or PDF preferable, Macintosh or IBM compatible to:
editor@northstarbmw.org

Deadlines for next full newsletter:

Copy and advertising to editor no later than the 10th of the month preceding publication date, or contact editor@northstarbmw.org

Publication Dates:

3/1, 6/1, 9/1, 12/1



Just Let It Go

When I first started this missive, I was waiting for a call from a local independent repair shop to let me know Trinity, our 2004 Toyota Matrix XRS-6, could come home from her sleepover. She had a night away while waiting for gaskets and seals to stem the oil flow from her timing chain case. Said flow left a damp spot on the garage floor through which my four-year-old son could not possibly miss tromping on his way to climbing into my Mercedes.

“Wait a minute,” you’re thinking. “The Wrench actually paid regular humans to work on your car?”

Let me explain. For a modern car, Trinity is actually pretty easy to work on. There’s nothing fancy about the interior, bodywork, or most of the mechanical components. Japanese cars are very much like better-engineered German cars in that, where possible, things come apart and go back together quite logically. The key here is “where possible” – having a sidewinder drivetrain, part and parcel to most front-wheel-drive applications, means anything on the serpentine belt end of the motor is largely inaccessible, crammed against the passenger side inner wheel well.



Examples? It’s so tight in there that to remove the serpentine belt tensioner – one of the few actual repairs I’ve had to perform – you need to unbolt and jack up the engine. To get to the timing chain tensioner – a small mechanical ratcheting device bolted to the timing case – you need to almost remove the serpentine belt tensioner (unbolting, but no jacking this time) and move the air conditioning lines out of the way. Then you can almost see it with a mirror and a bright light.

Conversely, the radiator replacement was a piece of cake. So are oil changes and other bits of basic maintenance like the brakes. In fact, most parts not associated with the serpentine belt are kind of just right there. Knock on wood, at 131k miles these were the only two non-maintenance repairs we’ve had until now. Remarkable, really.

The oil leak had been going on for some time. The timing chain tensioner O-ring was leaking, so I replaced the whole unit (you can’t buy just the O-ring for our “2ZZ” engine). While that was *one* leak, it apparently wasn’t the *only* leak. Getting to the backside of the engine to clean everything is an exercise best left to individuals with long, thin arms sporting two elbows each who are adept at not spraying Brakleen in their eyes (i.e. – not me). Then you wait for more oil to appear, and break out the mirror and the bright light.

I bit the bullet and called The Phoenix Auto Repair in St. Louis Park. My friend Chris had the clutch in his E34 M5 replaced there – twice, actually, due to a rear main seal leak soaking the new clutch disk – and said they were a good group. I think they used to work on his E21 320is, too, before a tree fell on it. They were described to me as smart guys who are real technicians and problem-solvers, rather than ALLDATA parts replacers.

I made the appointment and showed up last Friday morning. The parking lot was sprinkled with older Mercedes sedans and the random Jaguar, plus a smattering of mid- to late-model Japanese cars, and Saabs. Lots and lots of Saabs. Out front was a clean, nicer-than-driver-quality 280SL Pagoda.

Entering the shop space there were, of all the goofy things, two gorgeous Amphicars, both with current Minnesota lakes boating licenses. On one lift sat a brutally pretty 1957-ish Cadillac Coupe de Ville, and over to the side was a clean Honda Civic Si Coupe from back when they were kind of interesting. Lurking nearby was a stunning W108 Mercedes-Benz 280 sedan in anthracite gray over tobacco leather. I approached the counter.

Now, I’ve been on both sides of that particular counter. I’ve been a professional mechanic, as well as a service writer. I’ve more often been a customer. There’s a delicate balance between showing you have a deep knowledge of the problem and maybe even the solution, and just coming across like some Internet troll who spends too much time on the forums. I don’t mind throwing around some observations and what passes for knowledge – think bowling ball in a boxcar – but I hate the troll character. And guess what? So does the guy behind the desk. Humor, self-deprecating and otherwise, helps here.

We chatted briefly about the possibilities for leaks in that area – valve cover gasket and timing chain case – and the path forward. They cleaned everything up and put a dye in the oil. They also replaced a crimp-style hose clamp on the power steering pump that will be familiar to anyone with a 3 series BMW from E30 through E46. We picked up the car Friday night and, after a couple hundred miles over the weekend, brought it back Monday morning for dye inspection.

Sure enough, the timing chain case was barfing oil. Had it been the valve cover gasket – and had that been obvious before I took it to The Phoenix – I would have replaced it myself. To reseal the chain case means pulling *everything* off the “front” of the engine including every pulley and tensioner and the water pump, not to mention the valve cover gasket. The lack of physical access, no real ability to effectively dispose of large quantities of engine fluids, and being completely bereft of air tools means I had less than no interest in tackling this myself.

At least at 131k miles, I didn’t need a new timing chain. Cost would have been \$210.00 for the part, and it had to come off anyway. And they were very complimentary about how remarkably clean the engine was inside, likely attributed to 5,000-mile Mobil 1 swaps since the first oil change at the 5k mark.

Trinity has since come home, her parents roughly \$550.00 poorer, but without any apparent drippiness.

In my eyes, money well spent on a family member we’ve had since new and who really owes us nothing.



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Join Fellow North Star Members at the Not-Holiday Party!

The North Star Chapter Not-Holiday Dinner
will take place on
Saturday, January 11, 2014 from 5:00 - 7:30 PM
at the Gasthof zur Gemütlichkeit located at
2300 University Avenue NE, Minneapolis, MN 55418.

The dinner will be served buffet style with a cash bar.
More information on reservations and tickets will be
coming soon on the North Star BMW CCA website
and our Facebook page!

If you have any questions, please contact Gary
Brown at: garybrown825@comcast.net.



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An Isetta Restoration – Part 1: Little Cars... The Stories are the Best Part

Words and photos by Craig Lovold

When I was younger I remember hearing my mom tell stories about the funky little car she drove when she had a job as a social worker in St. Paul. It was so small that she would sometimes find it up on the sidewalk since it only required a couple guys to lift it up. In the winter she had to stop halfway home and a local garage let her pull it inside to thaw out the windshield since the defroster was so weak. She had to have it serviced at a motorcycle shop, rather than at a regular mechanic. She had some pictures of it in a parade in her hometown of Stanley, WI around 1960. She eventually sold it for \$300 when it started to become unreliable.

That car was a 1957 BMW Isetta.

Flash forward to around 1993. I had joined the BMWCCA and met a few guys in the club. I mentioned my mom's old Isetta and a club member said they knew of a guy who had one in a grove. I thought it would be really cool to get one restored and let my mom take it for a drive. I contacted the owner and went to look at the car. He was an older gentleman that restored a few cars now and then but had too many

projects. The little yellow '57 Isetta had been sitting for about 20 years; it had 1974 license plates. The floor was pretty rusty and it was evident that it had been repainted, but it was complete. I bought it for \$1500 and towed it home. I didn't want to risk damage to the engine so I never tried to start it.

My wife and I had just had our first child, and I really didn't have time to do the full restoration this car required. It sat in the back of the garage waiting until I had the time to do it right. Well, time went by and we had more children. We moved twice and brought the car with us. I did a little prep work on some parts and picked up a few required new parts, but never put much into it. I said I would wait until our youngest was in school before I started the restoration.

In the meantime, we nicknamed the car Penelope.

In 2009 I happened to do an 'Isetta' search on Craigslist. I hadn't been looking for one and I don't know what made me run the search that morning, but there it was: A listing for a
more:





1958 Isetta for \$2500, and only about 30 miles away. It said not to call until 8:00 am, but by then I already had a trailer hooked up and was ready to go. I called at 7:59 and told them I was on my way and I would most likely take it. When I got to the owner's scrapyard he said that several people had called after me. Timing is everything. He explained that his father bought the car in 1980 at auction. He told me that it was a, "British car, made by a company called British Motor Works," and that the company previously made guns and was called British Arms. I didn't have the heart to correct him; I could see he liked to tell the story. The owner was getting older and his health was failing. His children were dividing up some of the assets and thought it best to sell many of the items and split the money rather than fight over them.

We walked out to a large pole shed. Inside were a number of old unrestored cars from the 1960s and 1970s. Tucked in the far back corner was a red Isetta. He had to move a few cars to make room to extract it but he managed to get it out. It was dirty but complete. The Isetta had been sitting against a small pile of gravel on the driver's side so the muffler was rusted out and the rear suspension was covered with dirt and gravel.

I could tell it was a gem as soon as it hit daylight. I was told that a few years after getting the car his sons had tried to start it but could never get it going. Fortunately they removed the battery so the battery tray wasn't rusted out. It looked all original and had only 24,000 miles on the clock. We pumped up the cracked old tires and they actually held air.

I don't know why, but I talked him down to \$2350. Sheesh, what a jerk I am. I asked about the title and the owner said that he couldn't find it, so he wrote out a receipt and gave me all the information he could about it so I could file for a replacement. I headed home with my prize in tow. I knew local shop owner Chris Orr had an interest in old BMWs because he bought an old 1600-2 from a coworker of mine. I stopped by Orr Autosport on the way home to show it off. I could see a little drool in the corner of his mouth and Chris asked if I wanted to double my money, but I turned him down.

I went to the DMV and applied for a new title using my receipt and a 'Statement of



Facts'. A few weeks later I got a letter back saying that the car was still registered to a woman's named Vira Neilsen. For privacy reasons the state wouldn't give me any more information than a name. Apparently the previous owner never bothered to transfer the title. Dang! I thought that the chances of locating the registered owner were almost nil so I shelved the title issue for the time being.

A local Isetta aficionado named Duane Saunders stopped by one day to take a look at it. He has a garage at the AutoMotorplex where he keeps several of his six restored Isettias along with various other microcars. He was amazed at the condition of the interior; he even asked if he could borrow the sun visors sometime to make templates. He said he had never seen intact visors before; they are made out of thick cardboard with a pattern and BMW logo stamped into them.

I knew that I still didn't have time to start restoring either Isetta, but I was glad to have a second car to use as a reference after I ripped apart Penelope. And this one was in much nicer shape. I had gotten to know Chris Orr a bit after picking up the red Isetta and he offered to store the car at his shop to free up space in my garage. If you have been to Orr in the last year or so you probably noticed it in their lobby. He said it made a nice conversation piece.

more:



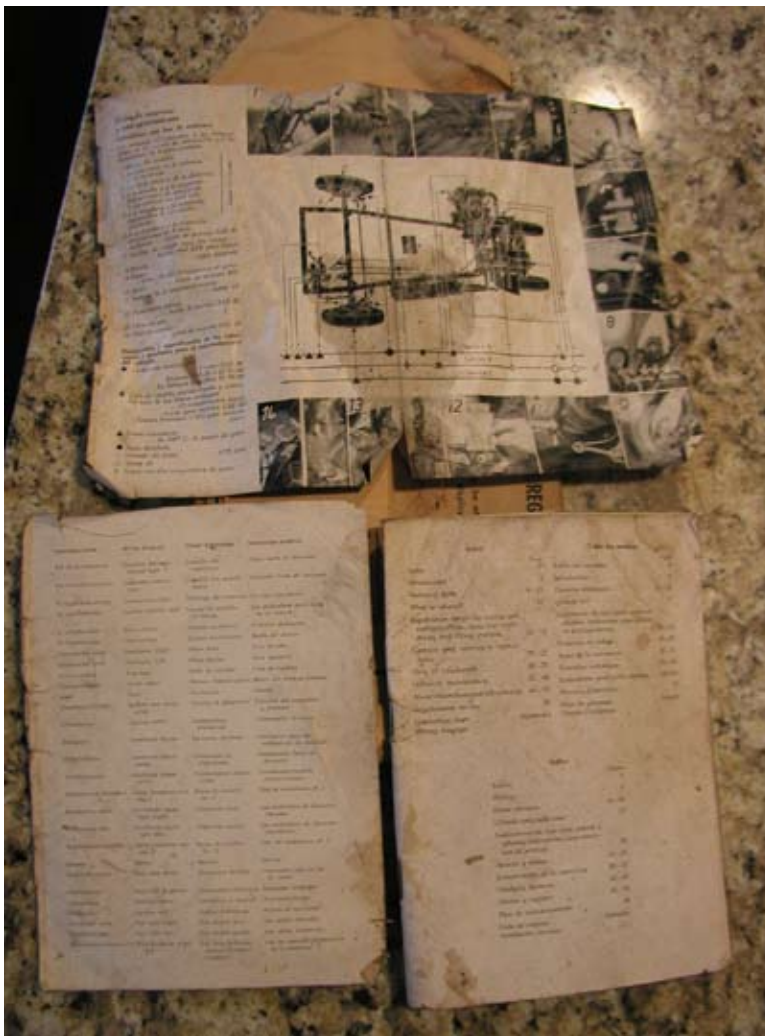


My youngest daughter is now in 3rd grade and I've cleared away my other projects to start getting at least one of these cars on the road again. I had managed to get a title for Penelope, but I still didn't have one for the red car. I looked into getting a bonded title, but that wasn't an option since the title was still registered in someone else's name. I decide to start sleuthing and managed to find an obituary notice for the registered owner. The obituary listed surviving children and I managed to locate her daughter only about 30 minutes from my office. She was very helpful and I managed to get all the necessary paperwork filled out and submitted. What a relief!

I had a chance to talk with Vira's daughter when we met. It turns out that the Isetta was her dad's car. She thought he might have been the second owner. He used to drive it to work outside Zimmerman, MN to his job at a plant that made Ovaltine. She remembered riding in it and that her older brother had gotten to drive it once. The car must have developed running problems and it was last on the road in 1968. There were license plates for 1969 and 1970 in the car when I got it, so they must have been hoping to get it running again. The car was parked behind their garage and their dad build a roof extension to cover it. Their dad passed away in 1980 and the car was sold at auction. I'm guessing that he car was transferred to Vira upon her husband's death. The daughter I talked to said that she and her sister posed for a picture up through the sunroof of the car at the auction, as a way to say goodbye to the car.

I had talked with my daughters about what to name the car but we never really came up with a name that seemed right. After learning about the history of the car the name Vira seemed appropriate. So from here on in, Vira refers to the red 1958 Isetta.

I decided that Vira was only going to get a mechanical refresh. It has a fair number of scratches and dings, but the paint is all original and has what Chris Orr refers to as 'a nice patina'. The original vinyl seat is still intact, and I'm going to have John Beisecker at Sterling Enterprises work his magic and try



to clean and protect the original vinyl as much as possible. I really want to preserve as much as possible because, as they say, a car is only original once.

I didn't want to take any chances with the old engines so I wanted to have them rebuilt by someone who specialized in them. I had heard about a local mechanic who specialized in old BMW motorcycles named Charlie Johnson. He is well known by the BMW motorcycle crowd as probably the best antique BMW motorcycle specialist around. He has been working on them for over 40 years and his garage is filled with cool old BMW bikes. I brought both Isetta engines over to him, since I wanted both of them gone over anyway. Isetta engine parts aren't cheap, but almost everything is still available since they are very closely related to the BMW motorcycle engine of the time. He also looked over the transmissions and gave them a clean bill of health. Now I have a pair for fire-breathing 13 horsepower one cylinder hemis ready to go!

The brakes were completely shot on both cars, as is typical. After replacing the master cylinder, wheel cylinders, hard lines and flexible lines Vira has working brakes again. An interesting thing about Isettas is that you can do a one man brake bleed on the front wheels. With the front door open I can reach the bleeder valves and the brake pedal at the same time.

The Isetta has 10 inch tires, which is not a common size. Trailers and golf carts usually have 8 or 12 inch tires. I managed to find some adorable 10 inch whitewall tires from Coker that are made from the original Firestone molds. With tubes and shipping these little bias ply tires cost about \$170 each. That's about the same as a 245/40-17 Dunlop Direzza for my M3. Yikes.

Stay tuned for the next installment coming soon!

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Bridges and Brew: A Southern Minnesota Adventure

Words and photos by Tom Lawell

Fifty-eight degrees. That's what the thermometer said as we headed out on the first SUMMER drive of the season. The calendar said it was July 27th!

Undeterred by cool and cloudy weather, 27 club members, friends and family headed south from Cottage Grove and across the Mississippi River on the new \$120 million Hastings bridge. As we fled the metro area, the roads opened up and the trip through the scenic Welsh Village twisties was invigorating. Meandering on County Roads 7, 9 and 6 we made our way to Zumbrota to visit the only remaining covered bridge in Minnesota. By comparison, the bridge cost only \$5,800 to construct in 1869!

A quick trip east on Highway 60 brought us to the Mississippi River where we enjoyed a great meal and a few beverages at the Reads Landing Brewing Company. Next time you're in the area, be sure to give it a try. Based on the smile below, their homemade brews must be quite good!

After lunch we headed north through Lake City and then west on County 5 for some more back road fun up to Red Wing. Avoiding the busy Highway 61, we wound up County 18 and 58 back to Hastings. Despite the less than perfect weather, the group thoroughly enjoyed the outing and the chance to connect with other club members.

Thanks to all who attended!



River Road Pizza Run Recap

Words and photos by Tom Lawell



The annual River Road Pizza Run took place on August 17th with 14 member vehicles making their way down to the Stone Barn restaurant in rural Nelson, Wisconsin. The route was modified this year to account for paving work underway on the River Road. Thankfully, there is no shortage of great back roads in the bluff country along the Mississippi River. We may have taken the long way to the Stone Barn, but no one seemed to mind.

The trip from Cottage Grove to Plum City, WI was uneventful. The fun began when the caravan turned south and meandered through the back-country eventually ending up in Durand, WI. From there the participants regrouped and headed south once again on some remarkable roads towards Nelson. Not to be missed, Lindstrom Valley Road is a fabulous route to drive and the scenery is postcard perfect.

The group arrived at the Stone Barn shortly after it opened at 5 p.m. There was a bit of a wait, but the weather was great and the company was even better. Bubbling hot out of the stone oven, the pizza was huge and delicious. Ice cold out of the cooler, the New Glarus Brewery Spotted Cow Beer (not available in Minnesota) was a rare and refreshing treat. The group headed home satisfied and smiling.

Yes, we will do it again next year!



BMW Individual

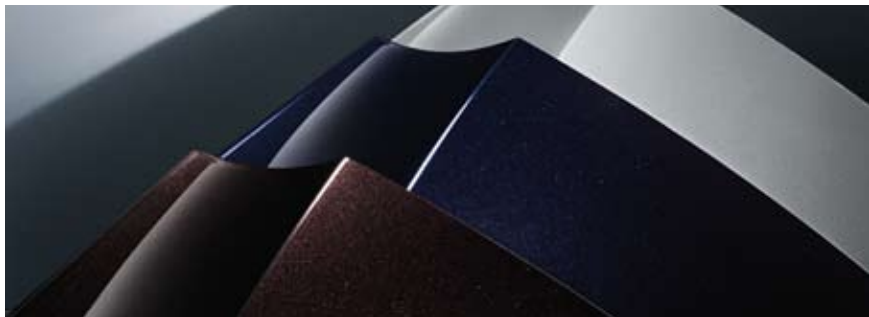
Words and photos courtesy of BMW AG

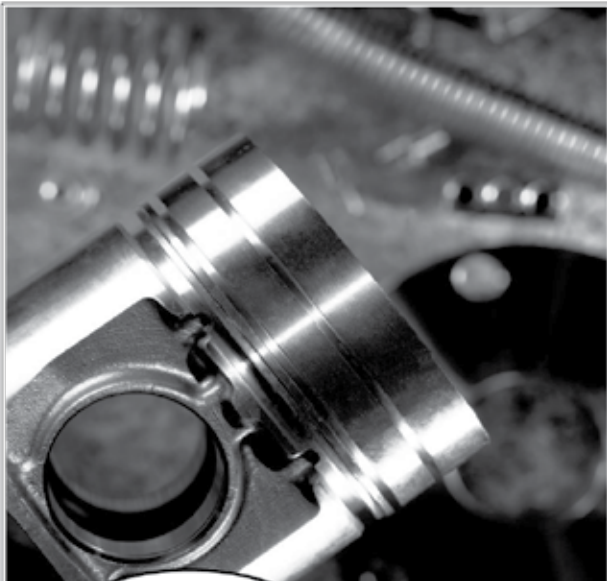
Each and every BMW customer is unique. He or she possesses an unmatched set of attributes and character traits that make up a quite distinct personality. BMW Individual lends expression to this uniqueness in exclusive and premium fashion. Here customers can select from choice ranges of colour and material design to lend their BMW automobile a personal touch that goes well beyond the standard options. In this, BMW Individual sets benchmarks both inside and out. Everything BMW Individual offers reflects the peak of what is achievable technically and in terms of quality. What began in the 1990s with the creation of bespoke vehicles for Karl Lagerfeld, José Carreras and a host of royalty has since become a byword for outstanding quality, the fulfilment of the most exacting requirements and an unerring focus on the customer. That is what BMW Individual has stood for for more than 20 years.

The BMW Individual range is divided into two areas: the BMW Individual Collection and the BMW Individual Manufaktur. The BMW Individual Collection embraces equipment and fittings that are perfectly tailored to the various BMW model series, including exclusive paintwork finishes, high-quality leather upholstery and interior trims. Beyond this, customers can select specially designed BMW Individual leather steering wheels, wheel rims, Alcantara roof liners and technical features such as a cool box or extra reading lights.

The BMW Individual Manufaktur is not so much a place as an idea which is turned into reality on a daily basis. That idea is total customer orientation. Here special requests from BMW customers, which go beyond the BMW Individual Collection, take shape. Whether it is elaborate paintwork, unconventional materials or outré requests, the BMW Individual Manufaktur draws on its experience and craftsmanship to make every vision of exclusivity a reality – provided it does not conflict with safety standards, the brand character or legal requirements. The Manufaktur also develops and completes special editions, show cars and market-specific special editions.

BMW Individual was quick to recognise the demand for individualisation at the very highest level. More than 20 years of experience provide fresh daily inspiration and incentive for the BMW Individual specialists. The number of customised vehicles currently runs to some 20,000 a year, each representing the special quality standards, handcraftsmanship and design competence of BMW Individual.





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2001 M5

This is a highly sorted E39 M5. No tracking or accidents. Rear bumper cover was replaced due to a parking lot tap. Full detailed maintenance history available. This was a California car until last year when I purchased it. Paint is 9.8 out of 10. Only flaws are minor curb rash and some minor front end rash where the clear shield did not cover. The interior is 10 out of 10 with no seat wear. It shows like a car with half as many miles. This has full leather which includes the dash and door cards. New illuminated shift lever and boot, new rear Alcantara parcel shelf, valve cover gaskets replaced and cooling system has been recently updated. Vacuum lines and cooling hoses have been inspected and replaced as needed. Fog lights are new and headlights are crystal clear. Old school maintained with BMW Synthetic Oil and BMW coolant otherwise all Red line fluids. Brakes and PS2 tires have lots of life left in them. Stored winters in a heated garage. \$18,500. Contact John for more info 612-247-7122

2008 M3 Sedan

BLK/BLK 6 spd manual, two sets of rims for summer and winter. 47k miles. Immaculate condition. Winter pkg, premium pkg, navigation, etc. No issues with the car. Recent work done at bmw of mtnka - front brakes (rotors, pads), brake fluid flush, oil change, rear differential seal. Bought the car from Chicago last December w 30k miles. Prior to my ownership, car stayed in FL. I just found out that around 30K miles, BMW put new clutch and transmission. There is no mechanical or cosmetic issues with the car. I put the car in storage. Asking \$39,995.00 or B/O. Recent financial crisis is forcing me to sell the car. I am a BMW enthusiast and take good care of my toys. bobby_islam@hotmail.com. 612-987-6542 (cell)

2002 530i

81,000 miles. Clean, has the usual rock/sand chips in front for that many miles. Was the wifes daily driver. Service at Orr Autosport. \$5000 on a good day, OBO. Craig Weber 612-968-0839 4cweber@charter.net



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Wanted

USGP at COTA, 2013

A DVR copy of the 2013 USGP at Circuit of the Americas from this past weekend. I made it to the race, but recorded 2.5 hours of Olympic Curling tryouts on NBCSN instead of the race on NBC. Can anyone help me out here? The favor will be returned! Jim / jdsouthwell@gmail.com / 612.281.9700

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