

# autos

Your guide to smart wheels and great deals

## Surf and turf

German-made Amphicar, a relative rarity, is an intrepid traveler

By Lance Lambert  
Special to Autos

There are times when the best mode of transportation is an automobile. At other times it's a boat. Sometimes it is both. Mount Vernon residents Larry and Nancy Solheim have the choice of traveling either way, or both at the same time, in their 1966 Amphicar.

Larry is a 66-year-old retired American Safety Equipment Co. executive and former Air Force helicopter pilot who spent his time in the service flying security observation over missile sites. He was in Port Townsend when he saw his first Amphicar.

"I saw an Amphicar in a parade and fell in love. Very soon after that, I was the owner of my first automobile that was also a boat," he says. "The registration lists it as a 1966 model year, but very few Amphicar owners know for sure what their car's true model year is. An Amphicar was titled for the year it was sold, not the year it was constructed."

The vehicles were manufactured in West Germany from 1961 to 1965, with the company being in business into 1968. Nearly 3,900 were manufactured, with the majority being sold



PHOTO COURTESY OF JERRY SORESENSEN

Larry and Nancy Solheim take their 1966 Amphicar for a spin/dip not far from their Mount Vernon home.

in the United States. Although built in Germany, the engine is a British four-cylinder motor that was originally designed to power a Triumph Herald, and later was used in the Triumph Spitfire sports car.

The 43-horsepower engine is located in the rear (stern?) and

provides power to both the rear wheels and the twin props that are located beneath the rear bumper. Top speed on land is approximately 70 mph, and on water about 6 knots (7 mph). It is the spinning props that make this unusual-looking car the center of attention wherever it

travels.

"People always smile when they see our car, and usually laugh when they see us drive straight down a boat launch and into the water," he says. "Everyone is fascinated and delighted

Continued on page G3

For more automotive news, Car Talk and listings, visit [autos.seattletimes.com](http://autos.seattletimes.com)



# Amphicar is one of 1,000 surviving worldwide

Continued from G1

when they see the spinning props. Cell phones are pointed at us from every direction, including those held by passengers on nearby boats."

Larry and Nancy, married for over 45 years, spend as much time as possible on land and water with their two daughters and three grandchildren. They are active in the International Amphicar Owners Club, and Larry is the club's webmaster ([www.amphicar.com](http://www.amphicar.com)). There are currently 340 members worldwide and an estimated 1,000 Amphicars can still be found around the world.

"My guess is that about 500 of the cars remaining are in operable condition. It takes a lot of money to restore one and a lot of money to buy one. The sale prices start in the low \$20,000 range for 'junkers' and go into the \$60,000 range for restored cars

and even higher for any in pristine original condition," he says.

When asked what kind of person owns an Amphicar, the Solheims laugh.

"The owners tend to be a bit quirky, and they love to have fun," he says. "For some, the car may be the only specialty vehicle owned, but many owners are hardcore 'car people' and the Amphicar may be just one of many collectible cars owned."

Lake McMurry, a short distance from the Solheims' home, provided an opportunity to experience the Amphicar on both land and water.

There was no hesitation as Larry drove down the road and into the water. The front of the car is shaped like a boat, and entering the water was easy, though a bit dramatic. The launch created a small wall of water that broke over the hood (bow?). The car then settled into boat mode, though any



LANCE LAMBERT / SPECIAL TO AUTOS

An aft view shows the twin propellers of the Amphicar.

nearby speedboats did not need to worry about being put to shame by the Amphicar's performance.

"It goes through the water more like a box than a boat," he says.

But cruising in an Amphicar, either on land or water, is not about speed. It is about having fun.

Your reporter was given the opportunity to experience being a quirky Amphicar driver and a sea captain for a short time. On land, the first thing noticeable was the large turning radius that is required. It's best to plan ahead for any turn

because extra area is going to be needed.

The cruise around the lake was a mixture of enjoying the ride, waving at the many cell phone-pointing sunbathers and boaters, and frequently checking that the doors were properly shut and sealed. Larry mentioned that he had insurance for operation on both land and sea.

So, is it a car that is also a boat, or a boat that is also a car? Legally it has to be registered as both, and driver and passengers are required to wear life vests when plying the waters.