



STAFF PHOTO/STEVE SOMERVILLE

Patricia Martin and her mutt, Nick, enjoy a ride through Stouffville in her daughter's convertible.

GOING TOPLESS *New, vintage convertibles still thrilling automotive enthusiasts*

BY HANNELORE VOLPE
Staff Writer

Driving a convertible under a star-filled sky is the closest thing to feeling the freedom of flight, Pete Yiotis Gastis says.
But back when he was driving his very first convertible — a 1955 Ford Fairlane — it didn't take him long to notice another very good reason to let the top down.
"It impressed the girls."
The Unionville artist has been impressing the opposite sex ever since, owning several convertibles over the years.
"You feel free as a bird, especially when you are driving in the country under the trees, listening to music and the air hits you,"

Mr. Gastis said.
The convertible's popularity hasn't dwindled over the past century, according to antique and classic car restorer Harold Woollings of Vampire Performance in Bradford, just north of Newmarket.
A 1948 convertible, as well as an Austin Mini from around the late 60s and a 1941 Mercury sit in Mr. Woollings shop waiting to be restored — it's enough to make any car buff drool.
They're brought in by people in their 30s and up who want to restore a car that made an impact on them when they were teenagers or that reminds them of their very first vehicle.
Some people inherit cars from grandparents and decide to have them brought back to

pristine condition.
A significant number of convertible owners are women in their 40s and men in their 50s.
Stouffville resident Pat Martin has noticed several friends and neighbours bought convertibles "once they hit that mid-life crisis stage".

FOR MORE INFO ...
The Guild of Automotive Restorers,
905-775-0499
Twin Hills Ford and Lincoln Ltd.
905-884-4441
Camaro Heaven
www.camaroheaven.net
Maranello BMW: 416-213-5699
Ford: www.ford.ca

Ostensibly, the sporty white convertible in her driveway was bought for the family's 20-year-old daughter, Emilie.
"I wish it was mine," Mrs. Martin said wistfully.
But that hasn't stopped her from slipping behind the wheel. Lately, she has been casting covetous glances at it, especially when she remembers Emilie is heading to university next month.
The convertible, unlike a regular car, "gives you a real sense of freedom, with the sun on your shoulders and the wind in your hair," Mrs. Martin said.
Topless vehicles are also known as cabriolets or ragtops.
The term ragtop comes from the early 1900s when convertibles were constructed of wood strips

with canvas stretched over.
Steel tops began appearing in the 1920s, although canvas tops could still be found into the 1930s on two-seater roadsters, as they were known.
Over the decades, removing and replacing the top has become easier.
"The Model-T convertible top was difficult to get down," Mr. Woollings said.
By the 1960s, convertibles tops could be raised or lowered in about five minutes.
Now, the 2006 Porsche 911 Carrera Cabriolet advertises an electronic soft top that opens or closes in 20 seconds and weighs a little more than 92 lbs.

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Flick portrays sad, dysfunctional grunge star



Anne Brodie
On Movies

LAST DAYS
Starring Michael Pitt
A Gus Van Sant film
This is Gus Van Sant's long-awaited meditation on the last days of Seattle grunge god Kurt Cobain (1967-94).
There are disclaimers the story and characters are fictional, but that's not altogether true. Many of the actors in the film play characters with their own names.

The film is dedicated to Mr. Cobain, lead singer and guitarist of the American grunge band Nirvana.
He served not only as the band's frontman, but as its leader and spiritual centre.
Mr. Cobain died of a self-inflicted gunshot wound at his estate, sparking a wave of conspiracy theories.
Did his wife, actress/rock star Courtney Love, order a hit on him or drive him insane?

Did his so-called friends kill him because he wouldn't give them any more money?
The Cobain character, Blake, is a dilapidated rock star holed up in his rural stone mansion, also dilapidated, with a house full of hangers-on who don't want the party to end.
They don't call anyone when Blake repeatedly passes out cold or wanders around with a shotgun.
Mr. Pitt lost weight to do this movie; he looks so similar to Mr.

Cobain it's frightening, even though Mr. Van Sant really only shows us his face in the last 10 minutes. The rest of the time, it's hidden behind a curtain of long, blonde hair.
Blake's a tortured figure, certainly rich beyond his wildest dreams and as influential as any modern pop icon, but unable to function even to make himself a bowl of cereal and eat it.

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