

HOW WEIRD IS WEIRD?

By Joeth Zucco
Senior Editor

It was an early Monday morn-

ing and the car lot was quiet. Everything was in place -- the upside down billboard, the clean, shiny cars and the "weird"

proprietor. Wally Smith, tagged Weird Wally by a friend, was in his office cleaning his desk and

getting ready for another day of business. His Mickey Mouse phone stood at attention, and even rang once during our interview.

A stack of business cards sat near the front of his desk. They epitomized the personality: A Herbie the Love Bug-type of car chomping on Wally with only his arms and legs free. In the background the familiar billboard seemed to say it all. And on the back of the card the actual address, 2323 P St., is replaced with the phrase "On Wee Wee Street."

Although the business card, billboards and lot are typical of a typical used car salesman, Wally said he's not.

"Most can't get away with dressing the way I do," he said, relaxed in a white tee shirt and Lee jeans. "I dress the way I do because the cars are all low price and I don't want to out-dress the customer. And I don't want to hang around in nice clothes around old cars."

Except for a college student who comes in to wash and clean the cars, Wally is the only one at

the car lot and has to take care of problems that arise.

His interest in cars began as a hobby. He started selling cars from his home. He dealt mainly with special-interest cars -- milestone cars from the 1950s and 1960's -- and also low-mileage cars, which are 10- to 15-year-old cars that were owned by older people who rarely drove them. Wally would clean them up and then sell them for little or no profit.

"I was in it for the fun of the chase," Wally said. "The cars come out of the estates negative in terms of polish. It's kind of like a pretty woman putting on makeup -- she's pretty without it, but she's beautiful with it on. It's the same with a car."

The hobby turned into a job 14 years ago. Before that, he was a city truck driver, an over-the-road truck driver and briefly a factory representative for American Tobacco Company. Wally said he couldn't cope with the high pressure that went along with being a representative, so

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Weird Wally conducts business via his Mickey Mouse phone.

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