

OUR FIRST CARS

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A selection of readers share their first cars and related experiences with us2

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THE DISPATCHER

Telematics Industry Insights by Michael L. Sena

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The Dispatcher Readers Present Their First Cars

A selection of readers share their first cars and related experiences with us

THIS IS HOW it started. Shortly after I sent out the December issue of *THE DISPATCHER*, one reader, Graeme Smith (OXBOTICA, RICCARDO, FORD) sent the following note: “Thanks Mike. Interesting read as always! Maybe you should have readers send in their own pics of their own first cars! (Mine would be a third-hand 1977 Triumph Dolomite Sprint!)”. Graeme was referring to the reference I made to my first car, a '61 VW Beetle, in the *Musings of a Dispatcher* section of the issue.

Said and done. Two days later I sent this message to all readers:

Reader Suggestion

One faithful reader, reflecting on the [December](#) issue's Musings, suggested that I ask those of you who are willing to send in a photo of your first car. His was a third-hand 1977 Triumph Dolomite Sprint. Orange. I received his note just after returning from Stockholm's photographic museum where we went to see an exhibition of photos of pets and their owners. It's remarkable how much people resemble their dogs, cats, hamsters and horses, don't you think? I don't believe we resemble our cars, but I do feel that our cars reflect our personalities at the particular time we buy and own them. First cars are particularly special from that standpoint. Add the make, model and year of the vehicle and the year you bought/or were given it. I won't plan on adding names, but I think it would be interesting for the readers to know in which country you drove the car.

If enough of you think it would be interesting, I will put together a FIRST CAR LIMITED EDITION OF THE DISPATCHER READERS.

Within a week, twenty of you had responded and then several more arrived. I think you have just been waiting for someone to ask you to talk about one of your favorite topics. Every car has a story. I believe this is particularly true with our first cars. As you will see, it is the owners themselves who tell their own story in the way that they choose and under their own bylines, as it should be.

Graeme Smith

Graeme sent his note after receiving the December issue.

Thanks Mike. Interesting read as always! Maybe you should have readers send in their own pics of their own first cars! (Mine would be a third-hand 1977 Triumph Dolomite Sprint!).

Thank you, Graeme. It is always a pleasure to hear from you. Great idea. Yours would be real treat for everyone to see. Did it happen to be British Racing Green?



Ha, no - it was a lovely shade of orange! I've got some old fashioned paper pics of it somewhere, but came across one just like it at a show last year! It was really way ahead of its time in terms of driver comforts. Took me several replacement cars to get some of the "customer delight" features back again. Things like lights on the visor mirrors, multi-adjustable seats etc. But the defining feature was that it had an overdrive! Yes, a little switch on the gear knob to click when in 4th gear to select overdrive. Brilliant.

This is when I sent out the message to all readers.

Mike - You weren't supposed to take that suggestion seriously!

Anyway, happy to join in the spirit, and here is a proud first owner polishing the car the day after he bought it :)

Look at that shine from 1985!





Glen Mercer

This may not be what you meant, but it was technically my first car... 1958 or so.



Today it would be called a Micromobility Device and some VC would make a couple hundred million from it...

It certainly counts. What a beauty. It must have been tough to beat when it came to choosing one with a motor.

I did okay. I later had an Acura NSX Zanardi.



Drew Lidkea

I inherited my first car from my Grandmother, who previously owned a Mazda RX-7 turbo. This Mazda MX-3 V6 was her replacement after the RX-7 was written off.

You were certainly a lucky guy. You must have been your Grandmother's favorite.

I was the first grandson, so yes, while I would never admit it, I was favoured.





Ken Pyle

Geez, this is depressing, but I don't think I have a picture of my first car (a pickup 1970 Chevy Half-Ton pickup truck purchased in 1979 around the time of long gas lines).

The only actual photos I have of my first pea green VW Beetle are 35mm color slides. I have used photos that I have found on the Web. I officially authorize you to do the same. (As it turned out, I did have a color photo of my first car which appears in this issue.)

As you know, having one's car in those days was an important rite of passage for a teenage boy, even in the late 1970s. It meant freedom to go where one wanted. It was also necessary if one had a date (which I never did, but at least I had the vehicle).

In the first semester of my junior year, I took an after-school class in the art of electronic assembly. With my soldering certificate in hand, I found work in the second semester at a manufacturer that designed and sold equipment to the burgeoning cable television industry. I really enjoyed working there and would work just about every day for 4 or 5 hours after school and 10 hours on Saturday.

Although it was only 3-miles by bike, the daily trek got old. One

day, on the way to work, I noticed the 1970 C20, 1/2 ton pick-up for sale. My first choice would have been a Jeep, but used Jeeps weren't as readily available.

What was lovely about this truck was the simplicity. Look at that interior; hardly anything to break. The few times I did have to fix things, I could do it myself (except for the mufflers).

The downside was the 10 MPG, which wasn't a great thing in the middle of the gas crisis. Still, I look back fondly on that first vehicle and the places it brought me.



Sheldon Sandler

I bought the 1964 Saab 96 as a graduation present to myself after leaving the bucolic confines of Penn state and moving to Philadelphia for my first job. I picked the Saab because it was cheap. That was 1967.



Not only was I confused but every gas station attendant was too. No one understood that a can of oil had to be added directly into the gas tank at every fill up. (Two stroke engines were singularly part of Saab's charm) And winter tires installed on the front wheels? In those days front wheel drive was unheard of.

I carried a few extra spark plugs in the trunk because the plugs were prone to clogging with oil at the most inopportune times. My clearest memory was stalling to a dead stop at midnight in a particularly dangerous neighborhood of the city. That might have set my personal record for changing the plugs in record time.

Those were the days when cars had character. The Saab had more than its share.





A Red 1977 Honda Civic Hatchback

Bern Grush

My father-in-law gave us his old '68 *Chrysler New Yorker* in 1975. Today's SUVs are smaller! I was so happy to buy a new red 1977 *Honda Civic* hatchback after that. My first actual purchase. The first car I drove (not mine) was my mother's 1965 white *VW beetle*. My last car, sold in 2019 was a 2014 3-series *BMW*. I might be done with cars.





Bob Poole

I'm pretty sure I do not have a photo of my first car—a white 1963 *Plymouth Valiant Signet* that I purchased used in Spring 1966, prior to heading off to a summer job (prior to grad school) at FORD MOTOR COMPANY's *Advanced Vehicle Concepts department* on their campus in Dearborn, MI. It was not my idea of a great car—just basic transportation. It was a white 2-door hardtop, so at least it was not quite a clunky-looking 4-door sedan.

Several years later, while working for Sikorsky Aircraft in Connecticut, I bought a car I really liked: a 1968 *Plymouth Barracuda*—the fastback with bucket seats and a fold-down rear seat and folding trunk divider that provided about 7 feet of flat space. That car was great for going to drive-in movies and for occasional car-camping, with a 3" thick foam mattress in back. It was silver, with black racing stripes on the side between front and rear wheel wells. Years later I had it repainted yellow, but kept the racing stripes. I drove that car until 1984, with over 200K miles on the odometer and an AM radio that no longer worked. Replaced it with a *Camaro*—sexy but far less versatile.

I found a somewhat faded color photo of my silver 1968 *Barracuda*, taken at White Sands, NM on a cross-country trip in 1969.



Paolo Abbate

I like the idea! These are Anna and me popping up from the deck of a 1971 Fiat 500 L (L stays for luxury and the only luxury was that you could pop up from the roof, while all other features were really neolithic, like the way to change gear using the “doppietta” move).

You and Anna look like film stars in a Fellini movie. This is terrific.



...ahahah, not really but it starts to really look old fashioned.



1966 Mustang - This is exactly like my car (not my photograph)

David Hodge

It sounds like a great idea and a fun exercise. I'll be happy to join in. The only problem is I don't have an original photo of the actual car. I can tell you the details. It was a very excellent experience. In 1972 I purchased a 1966 Mustang (hardtop) with a 283 HP engine (I think, something in that range), and I paid \$50 for the car. The reason it was so cheap was the floorboards had just about rusted away. It ran okay but needed some tweaks to the motor and a transmission overhaul. It had about 120K miles, and it was in Niagara Falls, New York., where winters were tough on cars because they used salt on the roads. I spent a summer replacing the floorboards (welded in new panels) and replaced many of the corroded chrome parts. Sanded it all down, primed, and repainted it bright red. New tires, lights all around, and even had a little upholstery work done to fix a few minor tears or seems that had given way. When it was finished, it looked like it came off the showroom floor (at least to me). I drove it for about a year when I found a 1970 Mach I, Ford's racer version of the Mustang at the time. Special cam, shocks, tires, wheels, etc. Mine was blue with black racing stripes. I sold the first Mustang for \$2,800 and bought the Mach I for \$3,300.





1957 Morris Minor

Paul Kompfner

My my first car was the use of my parents' drop-head (convertible) Morris Minor, probably 1956 or 1957 model, beige and with single, not split, windshield. I got away with adding blue and red racing stripes (2-inch wide insulating tape!). I'll never forget the time a front wheel rim collapsed, probably when cornering hard (poor steel!). This was in New Jersey; the car was bought in France (so LHD) and exported straight away to USA.

In 1965 at University of California San Diego I bought my best friend's red '57 Chevy that I eventually drove back to New Jersey in 1968 before returning (definitively) to UK. They sold it off cheap...shame, it's quite a valuable classic now.



Barry Glick

My first car (and I wish I still had it 😊!) was a *1965 Mustang convertible*, cherry red. It cost me \$350 and I didn't know how to drive a standard until I had to drive this home from my seller's place in Brooklyn. I bought it in 1972.





Jacques Amselem

My first car was a 1971 *VW Beetle*, metallic blue, but I no longer have pictures unfortunately. It was exactly the ones in the photos I found, a 1300 and the colour was Gemini blue. And I remember I always had automatic starter and ignition breakers problems with that car and you could see nothing when driving... but it was cool.

The one I could propose is the *Porsche 911* which I have since 20 years and drove in France, Italy, Germany, Czech Republic, Austria, Slovenia, Croatia and maybe a couple of more countries which I forgot. I attach a picture of earlier this summer when my son, Matteo who is now 10, was having his first drive, he is actually sitting on my knees (you can see me if you pay attention) so I can do the pedals and he has the wheel. We were in a safe parking garage doing that.. of course ... and if I am not mistaken, you also had a few rides in this car .. It is a 1988 3.2l *Carrera*, people say it is the last real 911, it is the best car I ever drove.



It is at the garage now, for service, I will probably sell it next year since it became impossible to drive it in Paris; speed limit 30 Km/h in all city, traffic jams, scratches and other deteriorations from jealous or simply stupid individuals, unless we move somewhere in a less crowded place where I could still enjoy the music of the flat six.



Fred Dryer

My father had a repair shop in Cattaraugus, NY from the 1940's, specializing in agricultural machinery, building snow plows for the townships, logging truck beds, and even metal road bridges. I grew up in the shop, and, with his help, built a green go-cart with my cousins, powered by a lawnmower engine (top left).



That inspired the more elaborate vehicle (second photo) construction project with my Dad, assembled from *Ford Model A* parts and a *Wisconsin 4* stroke engine. The axles were cut down and re-machined to have a narrower dimension, the *Model A* clutch assembly was machined and made less bulky, and the drive train was re-designed, having two *Model A* transmission in series. At both in high gear and on the level, the car would do about 30 mph, while in double reverse, it would climb over nearly any terrain. There were no suspension parts at all. I drove this all over with friends, as far as fifteen miles on dirt back roads, and up and down local creek beds at the end of Franklin Street in Cattaraugus.

Completed in 1952, his most memorable project was custom designing and building a 1/8 scale, fully operating model (third photo on left) of the *1907 Huber Traction Engine* he and his father used on their dairy farm from 1907 to the early 1930's (fourth photo on left). That is my father in the photo working on the farm. Born in 1895, he never went to high school, took over the farm as head-of-household in 1917, electrified the buildings with a 40 watt, DC wind-powered/battery system, and built a Ham wireless radio, before the family was forced to auction the farm off during the depression. As a young farmer, he also produced a patent on a field plow design. Dad learned his machining and welding trade working for the county and thereafter started his own shop. At 65, his own pursuit of flying lessons inspired me to get a solo license at 16 and to pursue a Bachelor of Aeronautical Engineering degree. Ironically, my high school advisor suggested that I not pursue engineering.

My memorable road cars were initially a *1965 Mustang 289* twin four barrel, manual 5 speed convertible, and later, a *1971 Datsun 240 Z* (body renovated three times!), and a *1988 RX7* convertible.

J. Martin Rowell

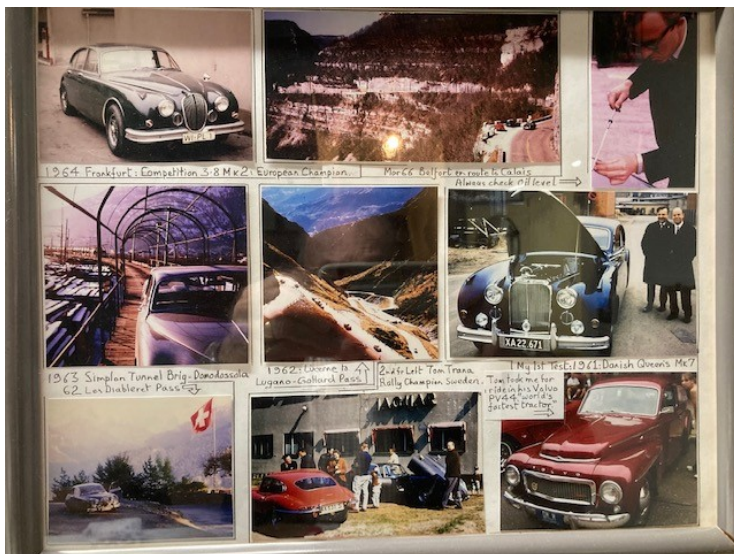
Having had a near-fatal accident aged 18, Dad ruled out motorcycles (unlike some of my Apprentice peers, between 1956-60). He had owned a series of MGs in the 1930s and won prizes in Car-Club Time-Trials. He had useful tips in preparing me for my license in 1956, driving Mum's Standard 8 which I "borrowed" at home in Leicestershire.



In Coventry, a bicycle solved local travel needs until in May 1959 I paid £535 for an *Austin Mini*, driving 80,000 entertaining miles, especially in Jaguar Apprentice Motor Club Rallies. My pale blue *Mini* (5288 MH license plate pictured left) had typical 1960s extras:-

- a) 3/4" track-widening spacers for its 10" wheels,
- b) Dunlop Duraband Radials,
- c) Helphos spot-lamp (inside windscreen) for Apprentices' Night Rallies .
- d) Cranked gear-lever extension to match 6" rearward-placement of driver's seat and
- e) a "straight-through" muffler with 2" copper tail pipe for suitable sounds.
- f) a dark blue 'go-faster'

The 5288 MH *Mini* was replaced in May 1966 with a roomy grey *Austin Mini Clubman* which made several heavy-laden trips to/from UK and Germany early in our marriage. Both *Minis* were enjoyable and practical, a delight on twisting roads and in cities (motorized roller skates).



In these formative years, I was fortunate to be selected as a "Demonstration Driver" at various motor shows between 1957 and 1960, especially in London and Geneva. The years 1960-66, as an Overseas Service Engineer, were pivotal in my life, experiencing other cultures and developing skills during travels throughout Europe. On my first visit in 1960 to the famed Danish Importer Ole Sommer, my first test drive was the Queen's *MK7*. Cars I drove over the years included a *Volvo PV544* (fastest tractor in the world), a *Saab 96*, *Fiat 1100*, *Simca 1000*, *Renault 4* and *Citroen 2CV*.

Alain Kornhauser

I may not have a picture of my first car. It was a new 1967 *Austin Healy 3000*, British Racing Green. It was essentially the last one imported into the US. Fantastic car that I spent more time under fixing it than I did behind the big wood steering wheel driving it. Before that, neither I nor my parents could afford a car.



Peder Fast

This is my first car, a 1970 Volvo 144, which I was proud and lucky owner of during the university time from 1975 and until 1983. It had a 4 cylinder, 2 liter engine with 82hp. Student with their own cars was not that common at that time, and I have many nice memories from trips with friends.



The car also to and from France to study French during the summer and up to glaciers and summer skiing. A car with a 2 liter engine was really considered large in France at that time due to taxation based on cylinder volume. The car served very well, had a muffler in stainless steel which lasted during my ownership.

The life of the car ended in February 1983 after being hit by an oncoming Range Rover skidding over to me side on a country road with snow and snow walls. I was pushed over the ditch out on a field but the car was still possible to drive to a workshop in the next town. The Range Rover, however, needed to be towed as the electronic ignition fall into parts.


Everything was just great to me as I had bought my first brand new Volvo 244 which was planned to be delivered the same week. I was duly compensated by the insurance company and was spared the efforts to sell it.

Alistair Dinwiddie

The purchase of my first car, a deep blue *Mini 1275 GT* very much like this one, coincided with my move in 1976 from Scotland to Sweden to start working as a cartographer in Stockholm. With nothing except one suitcase in the boot/trunk of my Mini, I took the ferry on a very rough 24-hour crossing from Newcastle in the UK to Gothenburg on the Swedish west coast. From Gothenburg it is a six-hour drive to Stockholm, and believe it or not, I, a cartographer, had forgotten to bring my maps of Sweden! Sweden is however a highly organised country, most of the time anyway, and I could quite easily follow the road signs and equate them with my mental map to find my way to Stockholm.



I arrived in Stockholm at the beginning of December and quite soon after, the snow enveloped Stockholm. Minis are very stable little cars with their wheels placed far out in the corners, but on slippery snow and ice they are just small boxes sliding all over the place, especially if one does not have winter tyres. I soon learnt to use my front-wheel drive to glide through the corners. That first summer I drove all around the Stockholm area, ending up one weekend northeast of Stockholm in a small town called Norrtälje. I parked in the square and wandered around the town for few hours. When I got back to the car, I found



two beefy individuals dressed in bikers leathers examining my little Mini.

A little apprehensively, I asked them what they wanted. No problems! They were really friendly and thought the car was fantastic, but can one actually sit in it? We started talking about cars, about which these two brothers seemed to know everything. I mentioned I planned to install a vacuum gauge in the car and they immediately said they could fix that, and if I followed them home to one of the brothers, they could do it straight away.

Blue-eyed and fancy free, I accepted their invitation and found myself in a basement garage filled with a dismantled Ford Pontiac in the process of being refurbished. All the walls were covered in tools of every sort. They obviously spent most of their time down there. The vacuum gauge was fixed in no time!

The other brother then suggested I should come and check out his garage. This turned out to be a large barn, of which the far end was filled with all sorts of motorbikes. The other part was his workshop, with the walls again lined with tools and spare parts. In the middle stood a huge shining chopper bike with the three tyres each a foot and half wide and gear lever in the middle of the bike.

I was totally impressed with these two guys whose lives were so enthusiastically centered around motors and mechanics and who generously shared their enthusiasm with others. About a month after I had met these two brothers, my Mini was parked outside in the street overnight as it always was. But the next morning when I went down to drive to town, my little Mini was not there! It had been stolen and I never saw it again!

So I only got to enjoy my favourite car for about 6 months, but will never forget it and I always keep a lookout for blue *Mini GTs*!

Gene Mahalko

I have several book boxes full of slides and photos that I've been meaning to digitize. I've been looking through the—many inherited from my parents when they passed away. I only found one photograph that was a picture of my sister as a child (age 2?) with the rear tire and enough of the lower panels to identify the car as my dad's '56 Buick, just coincidentally in the background.

I have no photos of any of my cars that I know of. I am surprised my cars aren't in some photos just by coincidence. I will look again, but I am not hopeful. I found a photo online, which is cheating, but that is exactly what my car looked like, green and white two-tone, with the three fake exhaust ports of a Buick Special. By the time I received it from my dad, it was 8 years old, and the green was somewhat faded.

It was clearly from the peak of the era when GM cars were tanks. My dad kept meticulous mileage records for reasons I never understood, but one figure stuck with me. The *Dynaflow* transmission, even in its day, was notoriously inefficient, and my green beast only got 7 mpg in the city. Even though gasoline occasionally dipped to 25 cents per gallon, its care and feeding were still painful. But oh, the roads we travelled.



Alessio Ballatore

I can tell you about the first car I owned myself after having driven other family cars occasionally for some time (though commuting to university was essentially by train in Italy in the 90s. Interestingly enough the exact same train between my home area and Milan still runs, but it's considerably slower in 2021 vs. 30 years ago.



The car was a used Peugeot 205 bought in 1996, which was necessary when I moved from well public transport-equipped Paris to messy Rome, the car brought me a bit everywhere around EU and other countries that are EU now but were not back in

I do not have my own pictures of it (I think, or I should search), but it was looking more or less like this, grey with some red stripes around it (thought it was a cheaper variant than the famous GTI which won rallies back in that old age).

the late '90s (hence hours of queuing at borders like Hungary, Slovakia, etc.).

The car was getting visited often by people in Rome hoping to steal something from it, and after some damages I decided to leave it completely empty and fully open every time I parked, so that they could open it without damaging it at least.

Anders Fagerholt



Above, Anders is posing beside his first car, a 1957 Volvo PV444



Anders' second car was a 1971 Ford Taunus 1600 L, which he bought in 1974 for 12,000 Swedish Kronor. It had 64,500 kilometers on it.



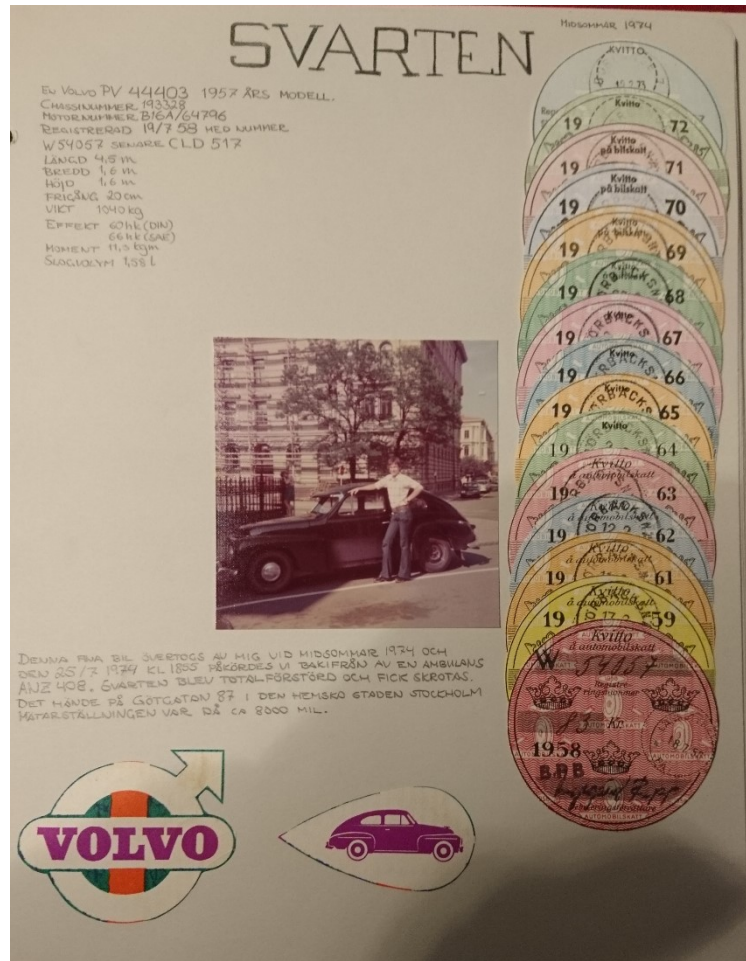
Above is Anders today with his two Saabs, and below with the season's moose (known as 'elk' on this side of the Atlantic).



Anders has provided us with the actual records he kept of his first and second cars. The first was a 1957 Volvo PV444, which he called *The Black* (Svarten). He wrote on the page which includes the photo to the left and the specifications for the car:

This fine car was taken over by me at midsummer 1974. On the 25th of July 1979, at 18.55, we were hit from behind by an ambulance. *The Black* was completely destroyed and had to be scrapped. It happened on Götgatan 87 in the terrible city of Stockholm. The meter reading was about 80,000 kilometers.

On the page are all the yearly automobile tax receipts, beginning in 1958 and including up to 1973.



Anders explains that a Swedish gentleman should have both a summer and winter SAAB. He is planning on driving the summer SAAB until his son takes his license away. The winter SAAB runs on E85, has gone 160,000 kilometers and takes him up to the hunting grounds in the mountains.



Bruce Rosenberg

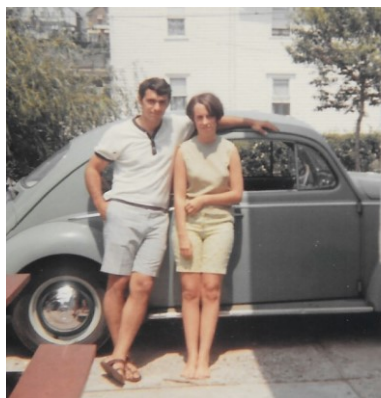


Here is a picture is my AMERICAN MOTORS *Rambler* which I called the Green Monster Jet. It was neither green, a monster nor a jet. It had the same name as a car on drag racing commercials. By the time I parted with it in September 1967, it was burning a quart of oil a day. The rambler was a 1959 bought used for my mother before it devolved to my brother and me.

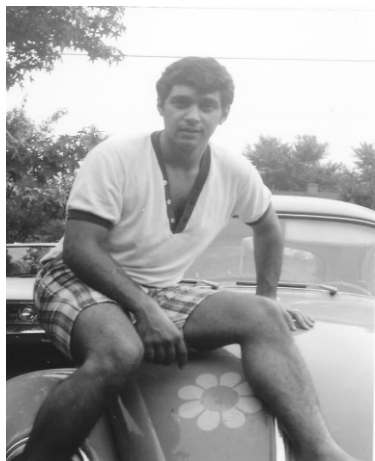
I did not have the title on the Rambler but it was my car. When I shared it with my brother, I always tried to bring it home with as little gas as possible. I knew that gas gauge perfectly.

The first car I had title to was a 1962 *Volvo PV 544* which I got as a college graduation present. During spring vacation of senior year, my mother gave me \$750 to buy a car. She intended that as a down payment. She was surprised that I bought the entire care for \$750. Here is the *Volvo*. It was olive green. Three features I enjoyed were the manual choke, the no-draft windows, and the straps to aid ingress and egress. It is a shame that progress took these features away. The house behind it was owned by a psychology professor who was on Sabbatical. I lived there in early 1971. He wanted to rent it to students but would only rent it to MBA students as we would have a proper respect for property.





The flowers were her idea. They covered a few dings that were beginning to rust. She called it The Bug, and the name stuck.



Yes, that is your Editor posing on the hood of his first VW in the summer of 1968. These were sturdy little cars, with a steel body.

Michael Sena

I AM NOT ashamed to admit that I bought my first car for love. Not for the car, but for a girl (pictured with me in the summer of 1968 in Scranton during a visit with my parents). I met her in the spring of 1967 when she was just finishing high school and I was just finishing my sophomore year of university. She lived in a town called Basking Ridge, New Jersey, which is sixty kilometers north of Princeton. There was absolutely no way to get there by public transit unless I took a bus to Newark and a train to the closest town, Bernardsville. Then it was a five-mile walk to her home. She started college the following fall in Pittsburgh, PA. I could fly there from Newark or Philadelphia, but either way, it took a day and was a costly proposition. I decided that my only option to have a chance at continuing the relationship was to buy a car.

The car I bought in 1967 had to be inexpensive to purchase and run because I had no money. I found a 1961 VW *Beetle* for \$300. Its color was sort of green. It had no heater, no radio and no gas gauge, but it was dependable. Undergrads were not allowed to have cars on campus, so I had to park it a few miles from my dorm. It sat there for 90% of the time I owned it because I only used it to drive to Pittsburgh every few months and to visit her when she returned home on vacations. The PA Turnpike that took me from the NJ/PA border to Pittsburgh was very hilly, and after I blew the second engine on The Bug near the end of my senior year, Fritz, my mechanic, said it was *kaputt*. He had a white '63 VW which I took off his hands for \$500.

I drove the second Bug for a year, my first year of graduate school and her junior year of college. I sold it to graduate student friend, an Austrian, who paid me what I paid for it. We took a pause in our relationship during her senior year, and I bought my first new car, a '71 *Ford Cortina*. We reunited and married after she completed college. We spent my third and last graduate year in Princeton and then put the *Cortina* on blocks in her parents' barn for the year that we were in London. We moved to Boston when we returned, and I sold the *Cortina* to an MIT student. The following year, the 1964 *Mercedes 190* that had been given to us by her father left with her, and that was the end of the love affair. A new life and new cars followed.

About Michael L. Sena

Michael Sena, through his writing, speaking and client work, attempts to bring clarity to an often opaque world of highly automated and connected vehicles. He has not just studied the technologies and analyzed the services. He has developed and implemented them. He has shaped visions and followed through to delivering them. What drives him—why he does what he does—is his desire to move the industry forward: to see accident statistics fall because of safety improvements related to advanced driver assistance systems; to see congestion on all roads reduced because of better traffic information and improved route selection; to see global emissions from transport eliminated because of designing the most fuel efficient vehicles.

This newsletter touches on the principal themes of the industry, highlighting what, how and why developments are occurring so that you can develop your own strategies for the future.



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