

Flashy carmaker DeLorean dies at 80

Detroit News, The (MI) - Monday, March 21, 2005

Author: The Detroit News ; Ed Garsten

John Z. DeLorean, the flamboyant car guy who captured the world's imagination with his bold dreams and then flamed out in a surreal videotaped cocaine bust, died Saturday at 80 in New Jersey after complications from a stroke.

The Detroit native's most enduring legacy may be a failed gull-wing sports car immortalized in the "Back to the Future" films, but he'll also be remembered as a break-the-mold maverick who ushered in the muscle car-era of the 1960s.

"Obviously, we're deeply saddened by the passing of an incredible, talented car person and loving family member," said his nephew, Mark **DeLorean**.

DeLorean made his mark as a fast-rising executive at General Motors Corp. An engineer by trade, he ran the Pontiac and Chevrolet divisions and struck gold by converting the civilized Pontiac Tempest into the fast and furious GTO.

Unlike his staid peers, **DeLorean** exuded a movie star image with his good looks, long hair and wild ideas. In his heyday, he cavorted with show business elite like Sammy Davis Jr. and Johnny Carson and married two starlets decades his junior. **DeLorean** was respected and considered to be on the fast track to one day lead the world's biggest automaker.

"**John DeLorean** was one of Detroit's larger-than-life figures who secured a noteworthy place in our industry's history," said Rick Wagoner, GM chairman and CEO.

"He made a name for himself through his talent, creativity, innovation and daring."

"At GM, he will always be remembered as the father of the Pontiac GTO, which really started the muscle-car craze of the '60s."

But instead of rising to lead the giant automaker, **DeLorean** quit GM in 1973 to start his own company -- **DeLorean** Motor Car Co. in war-torn Belfast, Northern Ireland.

In 1981, his company launched its first car, the **DeLorean** DMC-12. Its sleek, low profile, unpainted stainless steel exterior and signature gull-wing doors shattered conventions held in the corridors of Detroit's automakers.

Powered by a 130-horsepower Peugeot-Renault-Volvo fuel-injected V6 engine mounted in the rear, **DeLorean** called the DMC-12 an "ethical" sports car.

He crammed prototypes with safety features such as air bags and onboard computers with digital displays that wouldn't be widely available for many years. Cost and production problems, however, kept those features from making it into the vehicles that were sold.

After selling fewer than 9,000 cars, **DeLorean** Motor Car folded in 1983, a year after its founder was swept up in a drug trafficking sting and accused of selling \$24 million worth of cocaine to bail out his sinking company.

DeLorean was acquitted in 1984 after his lawyers successfully argued he was entrapped, even though he was seen on a videotape with a suitcase of cocaine, calling it "good as gold."

He was also cleared of federal charges of defrauding investors, but legal problems prevented a successful return to the car business. **DeLorean** had hoped to produce a \$20,000 plastic car. In 1999, he declared bankruptcy.

DeLorean will be remembered for being one of a handful of U.S. entrepreneurs who dared start a car company in the last 75 years. But for all his talent and ambition, his reputation was ultimately devastated by the cocaine bust, the financial problems and the seamy allegations spilling from former business associates.

In his 1985 autobiography, "**DeLorean** ," he said he had discovered Christianity but confessed that for most of his life, "I was a proud and arrogant phony ... I was an egomaniac out of control."

Even though his company and career vanished, the **DeLorean** DMC-12 rode into pop culture history as the time-transporting vehicle driven by Michael J. Fox's character, Marty McFly, in the popular "Back to the Future" trilogy in the late 1980s.

John Zachary DeLorean was born Jan. 6, 1925, in Detroit as the first of four sons to a foundry worker for Ford Motor Co.

He played saxophone in a jazz band and won a music scholarship to the Lawrence Institute of Technology in Detroit.

He shifted to engineering, and after graduating in 1948 was hired by Chrysler.

He joined GM in 1956 as an engineering director for Pontiac. His patents included the recessed windshield wiper and the overhead cam engine.

DeLorean was a GM vice president in charge of all North American car and truck operations when he quit in 1973.

DeLorean is survived by his wife, Sally **DeLorean** ; son, Zachary Tavio **DeLorean** ; daughters, Kathryn Ann **DeLorean** and Sheila Baldwin **DeLorean** ; three brothers; several nieces and nephews; and two grandchildren.

A public viewing is scheduled for 2 p.m. to 8 p.m. Wednesday at the A.J. Desmond & Sons Funeral Home in Royal Oak. Funeral services will be private.

Caption: **DeLorean, John DeLorean** , at one time a bright star in Detroit automaking circles, shows off one of the first of his cars to come off the assembly line at his plant in Belfast, Northern Ireland.

Section: Front

Page: 01A

Company Name: #keywords2#

Index Terms: OFFICIALS ; AUTOMOBILE INDUSTRY ; DEATHS

Record Number: det21116987

Copyright (c) The Detroit News. All rights reserved. Reproduced with the permission of Gannett Co., Inc. by NewsBank, inc.