

## JUST WHO IS THIS JOHN DELOREAN ? HE CREATED A LASTING IMPRESSION

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On Tuesday, in an arrest that shocked the automotive world, federal agents handcuffed the self-made aristocrat **John Zachary DeLorean**, and charged him with conspiring to deal 220 pounds of cocaine

**DeLorean**, 57, born in Detroit, son of a Ford foundry worker, child of divorced parents in California, graduate of Cass Technical High School and Lawrence Institute of Technology, creator of a meteoric career in General Motors management, founder of his own exotic sports car company, now sits in Terminal Island federal prison.

As surely as he imprinted his name on his sports cars, **DeLorean** stamped a vivid impression on those who knew him. Here, as collected by Free Press Staff Writers Patricia Chargot, Judy Pasternak and Rick Ratliff, are verbal snapshots of the extraordinary **DeLorean** :

Lawrence Tech, 1941

"He had what you might call a photographic mind. He could tell you something was in the book, he could even remember sometimes the page it was on. I'd check and he'd be correct . .

"He was always helping the other guys . . . We'd have study periods and they'd say, 'Hey **John**, how do you do this?' and he'd go over and show them and help them. He was never too busy to help these guys. Because he felt sure of himself, he didn't try and rub it in.

-- Hurst Wulf, former LIT associate professor who taught **DeLorean** three classes

Lawrence Tech, 1947

A letter in the Tech News: "Dear Editor, I would like to compliment you on securing the services of that distinguished and polished journalist, Mr. **DeLorean** (who had returned from Army duty). Seldom, if ever, does a college of this size boast an author of such proportions . . .

"In (his college newspaper columns) his subtle witticisms, fluent prose and lofty philosophy have brought warmth and joy to the hearts of his avid readers. Truly such literary grace and charm must come from a pen driven by a truly noble mind.

"I know most of the student body joins me in this sincere tribute to high endeavor and matchless style which Mr. **DeLorean** exemplifies. Sincerely, Naerolod Nhoj."

-- **John DeLorean**

Pontiac, early '60s

"He was a young engineer-type with better than average intelligence who most thought would be nice to know. He was callow, naive and energetic . . . inquisitive, bright, responded well . . .

"He had all the qualities of a really attractive guy, until I spent some time with him and realized his driving ego and heavy ambitions, which caused him to set his own rules, and lose patience with people who weren't serving his purpose. He walked over a whole lot of people."

-- a longtime business associate

"He surrounded himself with a very small, but very, very important cadre of people. These were guys he felt comfortable with, who were working for the (Pontiac) division who he could really depend on. This was a hand-picked group, not his normal (corporately assigned) staff . . .

"He was open to anything avant-garde and out-front. (In 1964 a singing group , Ronnie and the Daytonas came to GM with a song about the GTO, **DeLorean** 's hot new Pontiac.) "They were pretty damn good. They had a California surfin' sound, much like the Beach Boys . . .

"It got recorded, and we bought thousands of copies to send to our dealers. The record went on to sell a million copies, and reached third place in the top-40 chart. It was nothing but a 2 1/2-minute commercial for the Pontiac GTO."

-- Jim Wangers, former advertising executive who handled the Pontiac account

Transformed in 1965

"He became a flamboyant character after he discovered California . It happened very fast.

"The first thing was the reconstructive surgery on his face and the new wardrobe . . . He went for a whole new non-Detroit look. The **DeLorean** look was hair slightly shaggy , a very well- cut three-piece dark suit and custom shirts with collar- points that came down to his nipples . . .

"He talked differently in that he was suddenly exposed to the big time. He realized he could talk to network and movie executives. And he began to reflect their attitudes in his conversations."

-- David E. Davis Jr., former vice-president of Campbell- Ewald and now editor and publisher of Car & Driver magazine.

Romance, late-'60s

**DeLorean** had taken up with fashion model Kelly Harmon. In 1969 he divorced his wife of 15 years, Elizabeth Higgins, and married Harmon .

"He was double her age, and playing like a sophomore in high school and just oozing with romantic falsities, as far as I'm concerned . . .

"It was almost sickening, the conversations they'd have that we all stopped using in high school. It was like something out of Andy Hardy goes to the prom, high school lingo and everything.

" **John** never felt foolish about anything he did (in front of his business associates). We'd all be there in his office (at GM), and he'd be on the phone long-distance with Harmon, and he'd keep mouthing constantly in a low voice, 'I love you,' 'I love you,' 'I love you.' It would go on indefinitely. He didn't have any men friends, only those who groveled at his feet. And all the women were showpieces."

-- a longtime business associate

Staying fit in 1969

"He was a guy with an absolute fetish about physical condition and appearance . . . He was a nut about his appearance. He published a poster of himself once as general manager at Chevrolet . He had pictures of himself with his shirt wide open. He loved to show off his upper body development.

"He was a serious fitness buff. He watched his diet very carefully. As his advertising guy , I was driven crazy by his passion for youth and beauty. Everyone in the ads had to be young and beautiful . . .

" **John** stayed 37 for ever. Think what number 6-0 will mean for a guy like **John** ."

-- David E. Davis

"Kelly (Harmon) complained that he took a lot of vitamins. She couldn't understand it because she was so young. She thought it was strange."

-- Astrologer Cleo Aubin

In the stars . . .

"He's a Capricorn (born 3 a.m. Jan. 6, 1925) with a Gemini moon and a Scorpio ascendent . . .

"I know (from reading his chart) he's suspicious, morose, gets depressed often, and is extremely ambitious and money- minded. He did the same thing Nixon (also a Capricorn) did -- sabotaged his own integrity to salvage his ego. I wouldn't say they're that similar. Mr. **DeLorean** is more optimistic and enthusiastic, but they're both motivated by the same principles .

"He was very turned on by cars, extremely lucky in many ways, but when the planets move around, you have to restrict yourself and he didn't. There's a lot of confusion in his chart right now, like he doesn't understand what happened . . ."

"He didn't like me. Nope. He didn't want me to talk to Kelly.

-- Astrologer Cleo Aubin

Detroit, mid-'70s

**DeLorean** quit General Motors in 1973. In the same year he married model Cristina Ferrare. With his son Zachary they rented a Bloomfield Hills condo while he worked on the design of his dream car. They spent a lot of time at the more spacious home of entrepreneur and Detroit Express soccer team owner Sonny Van Arnem.

"He was a real creative guy, a dreamer who could see hope in almost any decent idea.

"Cristina was one of the most truthful, moral, loyal, warm, feminine women I've ever met in my life . . .

"We spent a lot of time together socially. It was always light. **John** and I would brainstorm ideas -- any idea. I was into raising money for computer projects and he was into raising money for automotive projects.

"He was always talking about ways to improve society. We were both interested in transportation, and we'd talk about revitalizing things like the railroad, using large pieces of aircraft to move masses of people, using hydroplanes to bring seafood in from the deep sea. They rarely wanted to go out. It was just sitting there playing monopoly, gin rummy, eating, all very peaceful.

"Everything they did was around food. She was a great cook . . . She loved Italian food -- great salads, lasagna, spaghetti, those were her favorites. She'd make a mess out of the kitchen, and she didn't mind cleaning it up herself either.

"She could make great cakes -- and sometimes they weren't so great. The last time we had a big dinner, **John** complained about this banana-fruit cake she made. It looked terrible . It had fallen down in the oven, and she had stuck a little candle in it. **John** made fun of it, and so she stuck it in his face. We had this cake fight. We were all dressed up and going out and it got real messy.

"I've never seen people love each other the way they did. It was wonderful and natural, that's why I'm so shook up about this. They were the most fun couple I've ever been with.

"They were light, there was constant joking between them. They were like two kids. These are people with a grand perspective, who for whatever reasons have been able to carry their energy all over the earth.

"You're talking about people who cared about their whole existence, about the whole quality of their lives, about their bodies, about their minds, about love."

-- Sonny Van Arnem

"They'd come (Sundays, to the house) in the afternoon, and lots of times we'd barbeque. Cristina would bring dishes over. There were always four or five of our kids around, and **John** would talk to the kids.

"He was quite fond of our youngest, Katie. She was just a few years older than Zachary, and they played a lot together. All the kids were interested in what he had to say. He'd talk not only about business, but about government and sports. He'd carry on conversations with them, serious conversations."

-- **John** Noonan, then **DeLorean** 's attorney

"I think **John** wanted to leave Detroit . It's his home. But when you leave General Motors and walk from a job where you make \$650,000 and you could have been the next president, there's bad feelings with all the executives. You just don't really do that, just go and say, 'Hey, I'm checking out.' "

-- Walter Burkemo, former golf pro and longtime **DeLorean** friend

Los Angeles, 1975

"I saw him in the airport ahead of me, and I thought it was him, but I hadn't seen him for a long time . . . Finally when I got up to the gate, he recognized me. I noticed he was looking beyond me all the time (at) a network camera crew."

-- William Rodger, a former professional colleague.

Belfast, 1978

"The first time I met him was on the occasion that the announcement was made that he would open his factory here. He certainly seemed to be a man who knew the automobile business. He was certainly quite flamboyant . . .

"He always seemed on top of things, very quick to answer any question . . . I always found him to be very frank, and very willing to talk. He wasn't the type of person who had his secretary say he's not in.

"He bought a house which was convenient to the factory. It was quite an expensive house. I've heard stories there were golden taps on the baths. He had a very expensive way of going about things . . . He always dressed in very expensive suits with his initials on the cuffs of his shirts.

"The last time I saw him personally was at the ceremony to open the factory. And he was there on that particular day, very flamboyant, very optimistic . . . He was interested in getting production going as soon as possible."

-- **John** Kane, labor correspondent, Belfast Daily Telegraph in Northern Ireland

### **DeLorean** at parties

"He was very uncomfortable socially . . . the most uncomfortable person you'd ever see at a cocktail party. He'd hang back, stand off in the corner, skulk with his hand around his wife's shoulder, find an excuse and leave.

"He was notorious for showing up at a party for 20 minutes, then leaving."

-- David E. Davis

"I once went to a social (business-related) gathering (with **DeLorean** ) where everyone was wearing sports coats and he wore white jeans , no socks, loafers, a fishnet shirt, and ate with his fingers. He didn't want people to think he had to walk to the same drumbeat as common folks. He was a man that needed constant attention to keep his confidence at the right level."

-- a longtime business associate

### Management style, 1979

"At GM there was strict discipline and everyone knew what the channels for communication were , (but **DeLorean** 's) channels were whatever he wanted them to be. He either includes you, or excludes you, depending on his moods.

"For example, Dick Smith (a fictitious **DeLorean** car dealer) in California is worried about selling cars. If **John** likes Dick at that moment, he'd be included in the communications link. If not, **John** wouldn't talk to him for several weeks. It's like biting yourself in the a --

"He had an ego unlike anybody else's, one of the biggest I've ever seen. The only one comparable I've ever met is (Lee) Iacocca."

-- Walter Strycker, who resigned as **DeLorean** company financial officer

An impression from 1980

"He's bigger than life . . . I was taken up to his (New York) office which was rather large, and very long . . . He was sitting behind a non-typical desk on a pedestal -- a burled walnut sort of thing.

"Before I got across, he stood up to welcome me, and I thought he would never stop unfolding. He had a very big face, a huge hand, a very firm handshake . .

-- Mike Knepper, **Delorean** Motor Co. public relations director from September 1980 to March 1982.

The 1981 Christmas party

"He held the Christmas party for the staff at his home in New York . . . What was unusual was how much fun everybody had, because of Cristina. She did a lot of the cooking, a lot of the serving, and when she changed from her gold lame evening slippers to a pair of Mickey Mouse shoes it put everyone at ease . . .

" **John** was dressed, like all the rest of us, in a business suit."

-- Mike Knepper

New York, early 1982

"It was so strange and funny in a sad way . . . We always spent lots of money. **John** did everything first class . . . But here we were, practically flat broke, and it was Washington's birthday -- a holiday . . .

"A memo came down saying we would work on Washington's birthday . . . But on the 35th floor where I had my office, the memo indicated that the heat would be turned off in the building . . . It said we could either work in the office or move to the 43d floor, which had a separate heating system . . .

"There we were, working in casual clothes and jackets or heavy sweaters. It was totally bizzare. After all those trips on the Concorde . . ."

-- Mike Knepper

Under pressure

" **John** does have a couple of things that he does when he's nervous . . . When he would start getting anxious, like when he wanted to say something and someone else was talking, there was a strange twitching of his jaw, and he kind of stretches his neck, jerks it to the side like his collar is too tight.

" He also makes a lot of nervous gestures with his hands, folding them and unfolding them, particularly when he's standing, the center of attention, showing off the car at a press conference . . .

" There seems to be an underlying energy level there."

-- Mike Knepper

"I have read Wall Street Journal pieces that say that toward the end he began to get frazzled. But the thing I would say was most characteristic about **John** is he maintained a public cool. **John** generally looks like he's got it under control, even though guys like that can be flying apart inside."

-- David E. Davis

"He certainly was besieged by a lot of problems, but you have to give the guy credit for handling physical wear and tear . . . He has a great capacity for going without sleep . . .

"But toward the end, it began to show. He looked haggard and he almost lost his voice a couple of times . . . Still, he had this constant optimism."

-- Mike Knepper

New York, later 1982

"I was shocked to see his gray hair, but it looked great, I thought, like he was being much more honest with himself. It was the first time I'd seen him since Kathryn (the DeLoreans' second child) was born, and all he talked about was the kids, and he showed me a lot of pictures. I was going to have dinner with them, but I had to get back to Detroit."

-- Sonny Van Arnem

"About four weeks ago when it came out that **DeLorean** was losing the company, that it was going into receivership, I called him and said, ' **John** , what are you going to do?'



"He said, 'I don't know. We're not going to lose the company . We're not going to lose the company.' He kept saying that."

-- Walter Burkemo

Belfast, October 1982

"It was a bolt out of the blue . . . When the factory went into receivership around February, there were then about 2,600 employed. The bulk of them were laid off. Many of them went on the dole.

"And the sad thing about it was that some of these people were skilled people who had left good jobs to work at **DeLorean** . Their chances of finding employment are not good.

"When the plant closed last week, there were only about 70 people working. They were keeping the plant in order . Most of them have now been paid off . . .

"At all times Mr. **DeLorean** was extremely optimistic. He never gave the impression the company was going through a difficult time . . . He would pass it off and give the impression it was a minor thing. This is one of the things that disappointed a lot of the workers. It turns out it wasn't that way at all."

-- **John** Kane Los Angeles, Wednesday

"As I watched those federal marshals and FBI guys pushing him around and jamming him into the car . . . I thought any one of those humiliations would be beyond the bearing of a guy like **John DeLorean** . . . He has a very Nietzschean Superman view of himself."

-- David E. Davis

"I resent the public humiliation of him being handcuffed. There's no need for that. I think that the man should be treated as a human being. And those hundreds of bloody television cameras . . ."

-- **John** Freeman, Irish Regional Secretary for the Transporter Union, Belfast, Northern Ireland.

Coda

"I had a kid on drugs. He said that's the worst damn thing I've ever heard. **John** never dealt in anything like that."

-- Walter Burkemo

"Being an engineer is to live in a mean, bare prison cell and regard yourself the sovereign of limitless space; it is to turn failure into success, mice into men, rags into riches, stone into buildings, steel into bridges, for each engineer has a magician in his soul . . ."

-- **John Z . DeLorean** , 1947

"It seemed to me, and still does, that the system of American business often produces wrong, immoral and irresponsible decisions, even though the personal morality of the people running the businesses is often above reproach."

-- **John Z . DeLorean** , 1979

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