

Jessamine collectors track down their dream cars

By Jeff McDonald

Lots of us remember the wide-eyed thrill of watching television car chases and getting caught up in the fray. We acted out our favorite scenes with friends on the playground; there were posters of our TV idols on our bedroom walls; and if we were lucky, mom sprung for the official lunchbox.

But for two men in Jessamine County, owning the lunchbox was just not enough. They never stopped dreaming of owning the same souped-up, rubber-burning, gravity-defying cars that their TV heroes were driving.

Today Jimmy Hammond in his “Starsky and Hutch” 1975 Pontiac Gran Torino, and Derrick Perkins in his “Dukes of Hazzard” 1969 Dodge Charger, are basking in a “star car” spotlight. Long after the heyday of muscle-car TV, it’s a spotlight that still shines bright, as a new generation discovers the glory days of their cars through cable re-runs, DVD releases, and new Hollywood movies.



Jimmy Hammond’s Starsky & Hutch Special Edition

Jimmy Hammond was seduced at a young age by television’s “Starsky and Hutch” and the tomato-red Gran Torino with the big white swoosh stripe on the side. The show starred David Soul as the soft-spoken Hutch and Paul Michael Glaser as the street-wise Starsky, off-beat undercover detectives that spent a lot of time cruising around the bay area of San Francisco and looking cool.

“When I was a kid growing up in Nicholasville in the 70’s,” Hammond said. “It didn’t matter where we were or what we were doing, when it was “Starsky and Hutch” time on Wednesday night, the game was over and everybody ran inside to watch.”

When the show, which ran from 1975 through 1979, became a hit, the Ford Motor Company decided to capitalize off of the shows popularity by putting out a Limited Edition 1976 Gran Torino. “There were only 1000 of those made,” said Hammond. “And of those 1000, the whereabouts are known of only about 90. My car is one of those original 1000.”

The day of reckoning came in November 2002. “I noticed on the Internet that one of the rare Limited Edition cars became available, which doesn’t happen often,” Hammond said. “I called the guy and then immediately drove to Rome, New York to get a close up look at it.”

“On the phone, the seller didn’t really talk it up that much, but when I saw the car and the condition it was in, I knew it was a good deal. Once I got to New York, I had to travel 1500 miles round trip back to Kentucky to get a covered trailer to haul it in. The owner could see how sincere I was and wouldn’t even let me leave a deposit to hold it until I got back.”

A roomful of trophies from area automobile competitions lay testament to the car’s authenticity and Hammond’s attention to detail in presenting the vehicle. “I call it my Starsky room,” Hammond said. “It’s a den that my wife and I fixed up. We’ve got my awards, my 1:18 scale die casts, pictures, personalized car tags and a bunch of other “Starsky and Hutch” memorabilia.”

Hammond’s award list is extensive: Best of Show at the 2003 Spoonbread Festival in Berea, Best of Show at the 2003 Children’s Miracle Network Show in Winchester, Best of Show at the 2003 Mushroom Festival in Irvine, Best of Show at the 2004 Professional Master Technicians Show in Lexington, and Best Ford at the 2003 Lone Wolf Custom Show in Georgetown.

If the car shows are within a two-hour drive, Hammond drives the vehicle over the road. “I didn’t get this car so it could be a trailer queen,” said Hammond.

In 2003 Hammond was part of an elite group of 14 Gran Torinos that united in Evansville, Indiana at the River City Autofest. “It set a world record for most “Starsky and Hutch” Torinos gathered in one place.”

“We had a fantastic time,” Hammond said. “It was fun to get our cars together and to trade stories with each other. We cruised at night with our sirens blaring and red lights flashing.”

The 2004 movie starring Ben Stiller and Owen Wilson that resurrected “Starsky and Hutch” has provided Hammond with some unique opportunities to show off his car.

“I was invited to Glasgow for the movie premiere, and I was treated like a king.” said Hammond. “My car was displayed under the theater marquee. They put my wife and me,

and four of my friends up for the night, fed us, gave us movie passes, free concessions, and movie posters. The whole works.”

So who was Hammond’s favorite character on the TV series? “Well Starsky was the one that was my hero,” said Hammond. “He was the guy who did all the driving and who owned the car.”

With the DVD movie release and the original TV segments also being released on DVD, interest in all things “Starsky and Hutch” is likely to remain high. Hammond, a self-employed electrician, will likely be keeping busy with car shows and appearances. “I’m going to keep this car until I die,” Hammond says of his award-winning wheels.

Derrick Perkins’ General Lee Replica

In 1983, Derrick Perkins was stationed at Eglin Air Force Base in Fort Walton, Florida where he spent his days as a weapons specialist, testing missiles for F-15 Fighters. One day as he was driving home from work, he spotted something by the roadside that beckoned him to stop and investigate.

He found himself staring down a tarnished, road-weary, blue-colored 1969 Dodge Charger with a “For Sale” sign in the window. But in his mind’s eye, Perkins was already envisioning the car’s potential as the orange-red General Lee, the star of television’s “Dukes of Hazzard.” Faster than a car horn can beep “Dixie,” he had paid the asking price of \$500 and hauled the car home.

At the time that Perkins bought the car, “The Dukes of Hazzard” was still part of the CBS prime-time lineup. Perkins has fond memories of watching original “Dukes” television series which ran from 1979 to 1985 (and is currently being re-run on TNN.) “On Friday nights there was nowhere else to be but watching the “Dukes,” says Perkins. “The Dukes were always helping out their friends and neighbors in distress and there was a strong sense of family. It was a good clean family fun. That’s why it is still a part of America today.”

While Perkins admires the “do the right thing” exploits of cousins Bo and Luke Duke, he believes the unsung heroes of the show were the stunt drivers that worked behind the scenes. “Getting to know the stunt men and hearing their stories at the “Dukes” fan events that I attend is a real treat,” Perkins said. “These guys would hang a car in a tree, break their backs, ribs and necks, and then show up the next day ready for work.”

“My favorite stunt man is Corey Eubanks,” Perkins says. “He really knows how to take care of business. He pioneered stunts and safety techniques while working on the show that are still used today.”

Growing up in Chippewa Township, Pennsylvania, Perkins had begun developing his mechanical skills by watching, and later assisting, a gear-head neighbor. “Tom and I

worked together restoring a '68 Plymouth Wagon," says Perkins. "The engine was a 273 Hi-Po, a hot little engine. That was where I got my start with cars."

Behind Perkins' Jessamine County home of nine years stands a ramshackle barn that would not look out of place on the "Dukes of Hazzard" TV set. Inside the tool-strewn workshop, the "General Lee" rests on a dirt floor. Lift the trunk lid of the restored car and you'll find a tribute to the "Dukes of Hazzard" clan that Perkins calls family. Dozens of autographs are scrawled on the underside of the lid -- Corey Eubanks and other stunt men, all of the original TV cast including John Schneider and Tom Wopat, and much of the cast from the upcoming big-screen movie.

When the new movie hits theaters this summer, you might spot Perkins in the crowd scenes. "I was standing on a grandstand at the State Capital Dragway in Erwinville, Louisiana near Baton Rouge with hundreds of other extras," said Perkins of the filming which took place in late January earlier this year. "We stood around for 10 hours a day for four days to do 10 minutes of actual filming. I'm in the crowd at start and finish of the road rally which is central to the movie's plot."

Back at his rural Jessamine County home of nine years, Perkins' life seems to embody the family values and do-good spirit of the "Dukes of Hazzard." When he gets a break from his Department of Homeland Security responsibilities at Bluegrass Airport, Perkins puts in time as a volunteer coordinator for the Lexington Young Marines. And with requests coming in to show off his car at upcoming "Dukes" movie premieres, he will be donating appearance fees to Children's Miracle Network hospitals. "Just a good ol' boy, never meanin' no harm..."

	Jimmy Hammond's 1976 Ford Gran Torino Starsky & Hutch Special Edition	Derrick Perkins' 1969 Dodge Charger "General Lee" Replica
Model Year	1976	1969
Nickname	The Striped Tomato	General Lee
Body	2-door coupe	2-door coupe
List price	\$4,461.00 (1976)	\$3,499.00 (1969)
Engine	351 cu. in. V-8	440 cu. in. Holley V-8
Transmission	Automatic	Automatic
Color	Tomato Red	Hemi Orange
Interior	Black vinyl & bucket seats	Black vinyl & bucket seats
Mileage	55,000	98,000
Special Features	Portable red light on top, and white swoosh on side	Confederate flag on roof, and horn that plays "Dixie"
Original TV Series Years	1975 - 1979	1979 - 1985

Contact Information for photographer to reach car owners:

Risa,

It's not beyond the realm of possibilities that these guys would get their cars *together* for a photo. If you or the photographer wants to go that direction, I think it could be arranged.

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