

They Salute the Car, not the Driver by Richard Maclean

The military saying brought back to life in the movie *Band of Brothers*, "We salute the rank, not the man," inspired this trip down memory land.

I bought a new 1970 Dodge Dart with a 318 CID engine in Houston, Texas. I toured all over the Southwest, then on to another job in California. Not a spec of rust. A job offer with General Electric moved the family to Albany, New York. The rust cometh. Then on to Pittsfield, Massachusetts, where the rust thrived. Finally, on to Connecticut, where rust ate the car in earnest. The CT-DMV did not take kindly to vehicles with lower quarter panels transformed into gaping, jagged holes. Passing inspections became a challenge.

As the family affectionately called it, *Old Nellie* needed major surgery. Stat! The garage floor operating table contained body filler, sheet metal, pop rivets, and primer of various hues. Dents and scratches were only character enhancements. To add to this ambiance, my son spray painted his age onto the trunk to transform it into a pseudo race car number 13. The only thing missing was the bumper sticker: ***This Car is Not Abandoned.***

Without question, *Old Nellie* was the worst car driven into GE corporate headquarters in Fairfield, Connecticut. Oh, but wait, my son's wannabe race car was parked next to the real deal, a restored 1967 XKE roadster. Many would agree that E-type Jaguars are one of the most recognizable and iconic cars on the road then and now.

GE was involved in conflicts with environmental and anti-war activists over PCBs in the Hudson River and major military defense contracts, respectively. On top of this were laid-off employees angry at CEO Jack Welsh (a.k.a. Neutron Jack). Security was tight, as evidenced by the formidable fencing, perimeter security measures, and the substantial guard building.

Old Nellie and I were thoroughly scrutinized when passing through the gate despite having the requisite green triangular parking sticker pass on the windshield. I was showing the XKE at concours events where the slightest non-conformity to originality meant points off. To resolve this issue, I did not attach the sticker to the windshield as mandated by security; I propped it up on the dash-top.

It was not necessary. When I drove in, the guards almost snapped to attention and waved me through. Their fixed gaze was on the car and certainly not on me. I don't need no stinking badge sticker!

Old Nellie was sold in 1990 to Charles, a demolition derby driver in Connecticut. He paid me \$350 or about \$800 in today's dollars. I was amazed. He said he was interested in the 318 V8 engine. Maybe it was also the prepped race condition. I hope he kept the number 13 and crashed it well.



Old Nellie before the rust plague.

The CT-DMV approved repair kit.



The required sticker pass



The survivor

