

John DeLorean

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(Redirected from John De Lorean)

John Zachary DeLorean (January 6, 1925 – March 19, 2005) was an American engineer and executive in the U.S. automobile industry, and founder of the DeLorean Motor Company. He was most well known for developing the Pontiac GTO muscle car, the DeLorean DMC-12 sports car, which was later featured in the movie *Back to the Future*, and his high profile 1982 arrest on charges of drug trafficking, in an apparent attempt to raise funds for his struggling company, which declared bankruptcy that same year. He successfully defended himself against these charges, showing that his alleged involvement was a result of entrapment by federal agents.

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Early life

John Zachary DeLorean was born on January 6, 1925 in Detroit, Michigan, the eldest of four sons of Zachary and Kathryn Pribak DeLorean. The DeLoreans lived in a small house at 17199 Marx, near the corner of Six Mile Road and Dequindre in Detroit's Near East Side. It was a three-bedroom abode in a tough, lower-middle-

John Z. DeLorean



John DeLorean and the prototype of the DMC-12

Born	January 6, 1925 Detroit, Michigan
Died	March 19, 2005 (aged 80) Summit, New Jersey
Occupation	U.S. automobile engineer and executive

class neighborhood.

A millwright by trade, Zachary DeLorean was an immigrant from Romania. The youngest of thirteen children, he came to America when he was twenty, spending time in Montana and Gary, Indiana, before moving to Michigan.

By the time his son, John, was born, he had found employment with the Ford Motor Company foundry in nearby Highland Park. His limited command of the English language, combined with his almost total lack of education, relegated him to toil at menial and low-paying appointments at the factory. When no work was to be found at Ford, he occasionally took jobs as a carpenter around town.

At 6 ft-4 in and 220 lb (100 kg), he was a formidable man, and was known around the neighborhood as something of a drinker and a brawler, and for common bouts of familial abuse. Despite this propensity for drunken violence, John enjoyed spending time with his father working on the Model A in the yard, and the simple woodworking projects that Zachary would undertake.

John's mother, Kathryn, was an immigrant from Hungary, and was employed mainly at the Carboloy Products Division of General Electric through much of John's early life. She would also take work wherever it could be found to supplement the family's meager income. She generally tolerated her husband's erratic behavior, but during several of the worst times of Zachary's violent tendencies, she would take her sons to live with her sister in Los Angeles, California, and would stay there for a year or so at a time.

The DeLoreans certainly did not live in opulence, but in depression-era terms, things undoubtedly could have been much worse. The family never lacked food or clothing, and the family was able to afford a few small luxuries, like the music lessons that helped John earn scholarships to the better schools in Detroit.

In 1942, Zachary and Kathryn were divorced, and John subsequently saw little of his father, who moved in to a boarding house only to become a solitary and estranged full-blown alcoholic. Several years after the divorce, John went to visit him, and found his father so impaired by drinking that they could barely communicate.

Education

John attended Detroit's public grade schools, and was then accepted into Cass Technical High School, a technical high school for Detroit's honor students. There he signed up for the electrical curriculum. The young DeLorean found the Cass experience to be exhilarating, and excelled at his studies.

DeLorean's excellent academic record combined with his talents in music netted him a scholarship at Lawrence Institute of Technology (now known as Lawrence Technological University), a small but illustrious Detroit college that was alma mater of some of the area's best draftsmen and designers. There again he excelled in the study of industrial engineering, and was elected to the school's Honor Society.

World War II interrupted his studies. In 1943, DeLorean was drafted for military service and served three years in the U.S. Army before being honorably discharged, when he returned to Detroit to find his mother and siblings in economic difficulty due to the strains of Kathryn's single income. John went to work for the Public Lighting Commission for a year and a half in order to put his family on firmer financial ground before

resuming at Lawrence to finish his degree.

His 1947 return to college saw his candidacy for Student Council President end in defeat, but he was quick to print a witty self-deprecating concession in the school paper, for which he was a popular contributor. These final years at Lawrence were also DeLorean's prologue to his contributions in the automotive world, when he worked part-time at Chrysler and a local body shop. In 1948, DeLorean graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree in mechanical engineering.

Instead of entering the engineering workforce after earning his degree, DeLorean worked a stint as a salesman of life insurance, and for the Factory Equipment Corporation. DeLorean claims in his autobiography that his salesman stint was at least partially for the sake of learning to better communicate with people. Both of these endeavors proved a success financially, but John's maternal uncle, Earl Pribak, a foreman at Chrysler's engineering garage, recommended that he attend the Chrysler Institute, and John concurred. The car manufacturer ran a post-graduate facility that would allow him to advance his education while concurrently being allowed exposure to real-world engineering in action.

In 1952, DeLorean graduated the institute with a masters degree in automotive engineering, and signed on to Chrysler's engineering team. During this time, John also took on night classes at the University of Michigan's Ross School of Business to earn credits toward his MBA, which was awarded in 1957.

Career

Packard Motor Company

DeLorean's time at Chrysler lasted less than a year, ending when he was offered a US\$14,000 per year position at Packard Motor Company under supervision of noted engineer Forest McFarland. De Lorean quickly gained the attention of his new employer with an improvement to the company's Ultramatic automatic transmission, giving it a much-improved torque converter and dual drive ranges; it was launched as the "Twin-Ultramatic".

Packard was in serious financial trouble when DeLorean joined, due to a shift in the automobile consumer market. While Ford, General Motors and American Motors had begun producing affordable mainstream products, Packard, Ewing, and Marquette clung to their pre-WWII era notions of high-end, precisely engineered luxury cars. This exclusive philosophy was to take its toll on profitability. However, it proved to have a positive effect on De Lorean's attention to engineering detail, and after four years at Packard he became McFarland's successor as head of research and development.

While still a profitable company, Packard suffered alongside other independents by its inability to compete as Ford and General Motors engaged in a price war. Seeing little to no hope, James Nance, President of Packard, merged with Studebaker Corporation. A subsequent proposed merger with the equally new Nash-Hudson conglomeration American Motors never got past the discussion phase. De Lorean was considering the offer of keeping his job and moving to Studebaker headquarters in South Bend, Indiana, when he received a call from Oliver K. Kelley, vice president of engineering at General Motors, a man whom De Lorean greatly admired. Kelley called to offer John his choice of jobs in five divisions of GM.

General Motors

Pontiac

DeLorean accepted the \$16,000 per year offer (plus a bonus program that normally took engineers several years to participate in), by choosing to work at the Pontiac division as an assistant to chief engineer Pete Estes and general manager Semon "Bunkie" Knudsen. Knudsen was the son of the former president of General Motors, William Knudsen – who was called away from his post to head up the war mobilization production effort at the request of President Roosevelt.

Bunkie was also an MIT engineering graduate, and at 42 he was the youngest man to head a division of GM. DeLorean and Knudsen quickly became close friends, and John would eventually cite Bunkie as a major influence and mentor. Knudsen wanted to improve Pontiac's youth and performance image, and De Lorean was in the middle of the action.

DeLorean's years of engineering at Pontiac were highly successful and produced dozens of patented innovations for the company, and in 1961 he was promoted to the position of division chief engineer. He is credited with developments such as wide-track wheels, torque-box perimeter frame, recessed and articulated windshield wipers, the lane-change turn signal, overhead-cam six-cylinder engine, Endura bumper, and a variety of other cosmetic and structural design elements.

DeLorean's greatest contribution to Pontiac would be more conceptual than technical: The practical 1961 model Tempest, which he would later evolve into the LeMans, and ultimately become *the* sports car of the 1960s—the GTO, which debuted as a Tempest/LeMans option package with a larger, more powerful engine in 1964.

Despite a GM corporate policy that prohibited the use of engines larger than 330 in³ in intermediate-sized cars, such as the Tempest/LeMans, De Lorean got around the rules by specifically offering the 389 in³ V8 as an *option* package. The rules were vague at GM as "new models" required corporate approval but "option packages" did not. When the 14th Floor (GM's executive row) caught on to the existence of the GTO, it was too late to pull it out of production and Pontiac responded that no more than 5,000 GTOs would be built in 1964; with that the corporate brass was appeased.

Shortly thereafter, Car & Driver magazine in its March 1964 issue featured a road test of a 1964 GTO with the optional Tri Power (three two-barrel carburetor) version of the 389 V8 and four-speed transmission to be tested against a Ferrari GTO, but the Ferrari didn't make it to the party so the magazine ended up testing the "Pontiac" alone and recorded a then unheard of 0-60 mph time (for a stock production car as opposed to an exotic sports car) of 4.6 seconds and a standing quarter-mile of 115 mph in 13.1 seconds.

The publication of that road test substantially increased demand for GTOs as Pontiac dealers often found themselves swamped with more potential buyers than cars to sell. Pontiac responded by dramatically increasing GTO production to meet the demand. By the end of the 1964 model year, approximately 32,000 GTOs had been assembled, well above the initial projections of 5,000 units. For the 1965 model year, GM increased the engine displacement limit for intermediate-sized cars to 400 in³, ensuring the future of the GTO as well as competitive musclecars from other GM divisions such as the Oldsmobile 4-4-2, Chevrolet Chevelle SS 396

and Buick Skylark GS.



A black 1965 Pontiac GTO

The **Pontiac GTO** (*Gran Turismo Omologato*, named after the Ferrari coupé) is credited for saving Pontiac from their dated stigma as producer of the "old lady's car" by creating a design that symbolized a generation of new, younger, more affluent drivers with a need for speed and style. From its launch in 1964, sales of the car and its popularity continued to grow dramatically in the following years. DeLorean received almost total credit for the success of the "first muscle car", which is probably due in large part to his talent for self-promotion. As with any new vehicle development, scores of individuals are involved with the conceptualizing, engineering, and marketing – but John DeLorean became the singular golden boy of Pontiac, and was rewarded with his 1965 promotion to head the entire Pontiac division.

John DeLorean was no longer a professional engineer. At the age of 40, he had broken the record for youngest division head at GM, and was determined to continue his string of successes. Adapting to the frustrations that he perceived in the executive offices was, however, a difficult transition for him. DeLorean believed there was an undue amount of infighting at GM between divisional heads, and several of Pontiac's advertising campaign themes met with internal resistance, such as the "Tiger" campaign used to promote the GTO and other Pontiac models in 1965 and 1966.

In response to the "pony car" market dominated by the wildly-successful Ford Mustang, DeLorean turned to the 14th Floor for permission to offer a Pontiac version of a similar vehicle then under development at the Chevrolet division that was set for introduction as a 1967 model named the Camaro.

In May 1966, Pontiac was given approval to offer its version of the sporty X-body car. However, by this time it was too late for Pontiac to put the car in production with the usual fall introduction of the 1967 models in late September, so the division decided to hold off its introduction until February 1967. Even the later introduction precluded the possibility of a truly distinctive Pontiac pony car with its own sheet metal so the 1967 Pontiac Firebird ended with virtually all sheet metal shared with the Chevrolet Camaro except for the hood. The front end would get a pointed Pontiac split grille with quad headlights in contrast with the Camaro's flat front end and dual headlights along with louvered taillights from the larger GTO. The Firebird would also be powered by Pontiac engines and marketed in five different models (both coupe and convertible) ranging from a base model with an economical six-cylinder overhead cam engine to the 400 in³ V8 from the GTO.

Shortly after the Firebird's introduction in 1967, DeLorean turned his attention to development of an all-new Grand Prix, the division's personal luxury car based on the full sized Pontiac line since 1962 but whose sales were sagging by this time, for the 1969 model year that would have its own distinct body shell with drivetrain and chassis components from the intermediate-sized Pontiac A-body (Tempest, LeMans, GTO). The 1969 Pontiac Grand Prix looked a lot like a slightly scaled down Cadillac Eldorado with its razor-sharp bodylines and a six-foot long hood. Inside was a sporty and luxurious interior highlighted by a wraparound cockpit-style instrument panel, bucket seats and center console. The 1969 Grand Prix offered a sportier and higher performance alternative to the other personal luxury cars then on the market such as Ford Thunderbird, Buick

Riviera, Lincoln Continental Mark III and Oldsmobile Toronado in a smaller size and lower price tag. The '69 Grand Prix was one of the industry's biggest success that year with production ending up at over 112,000 units, far higher than the 32,000 1968 Grand Prix built from the full-sized Pontiac body.

During his time at Pontiac, DeLorean had begun to enjoy the freedom and celebrity that came with his position, and spent a good deal of his time traveling to locations around the world to support promotional events. His frequent public appearances helped to solidify his image as a "rebel" corporate businessman with his trendy dress style and casual banter.

Ralph Nader's book, *Unsafe at Any Speed*, published in 1965, criticized a number of Detroit automobiles as poorly designed for safety concerns, including the Chevrolet Corvair model. Even as General Motors experienced revenue declines, Pontiac remained highly profitable under DeLorean, and despite his growing reputation as a corporate maverick, on February 15, 1969 he was again promoted. This time it was to head up the prestigious Chevrolet division, General Motors' flagship brand.

Chevrolet

By this time, DeLorean was commanding an annual salary of \$200,000, with yearly bonuses of up to \$400,000. He had made sizable investments in the San Diego Chargers and the New York Yankees sports teams, and was becoming ever more ubiquitous in the popular culture.

DeLorean continued his jet-setting lifestyle, and was often seen hanging out in business and entertainment celebrity circles. He became friends with James T. Aubrey, president of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Studios, and was introduced to celebrities such as financier Kirk Kerkorian, Chris-Craft chairman Herb Siegel, entertainer Sammy Davis Jr., and *The Tonight Show* host Johnny Carson.

The executive offices of General Motors headquarters continued to clash with De Lorean's nonconformity, and he was still not able to fit the traditional mold of conservatism that was usually expected of someone of his stature. When John was appointed, Chevrolet was having financial and organizational troubles, and GM president Ed Cole needed a first-class manager in that position to sort things out — company man or not. The new model Nova was due out for the 1970 model year, and it was rapidly falling behind schedule. Redesigns for the Corvette and Camaro were also delayed, and unit sales had still not recovered from the past 4 years of turmoil, much of that due to the bad publicity surrounding the Corvair and well-publicized quality-control issues affecting other Chevy models, including defective motor mounts that led to an unprecedented recall of 6.7 million Chevrolets built between 1965 and 1969. De Lorean responded to the production problems by delaying the release of the Nova, and simplifying the modifications to the Corvette and Camaro.

He used the extra time to streamline Chevrolet's production overhead and reduce assembly costs. By 1971, Chevrolet was experiencing record sales in excess of 3 million vehicles, and his division alone was nearly matching that of the entire Ford Motor Company. Another promotion was imminent for De Lorean despite the deep-seated problems with the new compact Vega, introduced in 1971 as Chevy's import-fighter. The Chevrolet Vega suffered from cost overruns both on the assembly line and the showroom floor. The Vega's aluminum-block four-cylinder engine was prone to overheating, block warpage and high oil consumption and the Vega's body was susceptible to severe body corrosion, often dubbed as "the car that began rusting on the showroom floor." However, DeLorean is not entirely to blame for the Vega's woes, as that car was developed

at the corporate level and handed to Chevrolet to build and sell just weeks before his arrival in 1969.

In 1972, DeLorean was appointed to the position of vice president of car and truck production for the entire General Motors line, and his eventual rise to president seemed inevitable. Instead, John De Lorean unexpectedly resigned from General Motors on April 2, 1973 at age 48, telling the confused press that "I want to do things in the social area. I have to do them, and unfortunately the nature of our business just didn't permit me to do as much as I wanted." GM gave him a Florida Cadillac franchise as a retirement gift, and DeLorean did in fact take over the presidency of The National Alliance of Businessmen, a charitable organization with the mission of employing Americans in need, founded by Lyndon Johnson and Henry Ford. GM was a major contributor to the group, and agreed to continue his salary while he remained president of NAB.

Patrick Wright, author and former *Business Week* reporter, approached De Lorean with the idea of writing a book based on his experiences at General Motors. De Lorean agreed to dictate his recollections for Wright, who would write the book. The final product, published in 1979, *On a Clear Day You Can See General Motors*, sold for approximately \$1.6 million, but disagreements over the content led to a conflict between the collaborators and a libel suit against DeLorean. De Lorean claimed to have never received his share of the revenues.

De Lorean Motor Company



DeLorean left General Motors (GM) to form his own company, the De Lorean Motor Company (DMC), showing a two-seater sports car prototype in the mid-1970s called the De Lorean Safety Vehicle (DSV), with its bodyshell designed by Italdesign's Giorgetto Giugiaro. The car entered into production as the DMC-12, but generally known simply as the *De Lorean*. The De Lorean's body distinctively used stainless steel and featured gull-wing doors. The production model was powered by the "Douvrin" V6 engine developed by Peugeot, Renault and Volvo.

The manufacturing plant to build the new car was built in Dunmurry, Northern Ireland, with substantial financial incentives from the Northern Ireland Development Agency of around £100 million. Renault was contracted to build the factory, which employed over 2000 workers at its peak production. The engine was made by Renault, while Lotus designed the chassis and bodywork details. The factory started manufacturing cars in early 1981, but the company was in receivership by February 1982. It turned out around 9,000 cars over 21 months before the British government ordered its closure in November 1982.

When the *Back to the Future* film came out in 1985, featuring De Lorean's namesake car, De Lorean wrote a letter to Bob Gale, one of the movie's producers and writers, thanking him for immortalizing the car in the film. The letter can be seen in the special features of the *Back to the Future* DVD release.

Entrapment

In the summer of 1982, DeLorean received a phone call from James Hoffman, a former drug smuggler turned FBI informant. DeLorean met with Hoffman on July 11, 1982, to discuss an investment opportunity to help save his company. Over the course of the next three months, Hoffman slowly explained his intricate plan

involving cocaine smugglers, a bank for laundering money, and the specifics of how much money DeLorean would be required to front to procure the deal. DeLorean went along with these discussions, planning to trade DMC stock for the seed money for any deal that would benefit the company, but leaving the drug-smuggler investors with stock in a company completely controlled by the British government. On October 19, before going to meet the investors to consummate the deal, DeLorean wrote a letter to his attorney and sealed it, with instructions to open it only if he did not return. The letter explained the situation he was in and his fear for his family's safety if he tried to back out of the deal. On October 19, 1982, DeLorean was charged with trafficking in cocaine by the US Government.

Before the trial began, the FBI's videotape of the sting was leaked to the media by *Hustler Magazine* publisher Larry Flynt. This prompted the judge to postpone the trial until the following year because of undue bias from the leaked tape.

DeLorean successfully defended himself with a procedural defense, arguing that the police had asked him to supply the money to buy the cocaine. His attorney stated in *Time* (March 19, 1984), "This [was] a fictitious crime. Without the government, there would be no crime." The DeLorean defense team had no need to call a single witness. DeLorean was found not guilty due to entrapment on August 16, 1984.

Personal life

According to his autobiography, both DeLorean and ex-wife Cristina Ferrare became born-again Christians following the entrapment controversy. DeLorean was married four times. His first marriage was to Elizabeth Higgins on 3 September 1954 and divorced in 1969. DeLorean then married Kelly Harmon on 31 May 1969 and divorced in 1972. His third marriage was to model Cristina Ferrare on 8 May 1973, ending in divorce in 1985. He was married to Sally Baldwin until his death in 2005.

DeLorean's name is most often seen spelled without the space, as *DeLorean*. Typewritten documents of the DeLorean Motor Company universally used the space, however, and this appears to have been the company's chosen form. In typeset documents, a half space, not a full space, appears between the two portions, and the same is visible in more stylistic representations, as on the automobiles themselves. This use of a half space probably influenced many people to see no space there. The company's founder originally spelled his name as *John Delorean*. At some point in his life he began using the more European-looking *De Lorean* instead (but the proper spelling of a genuine aristocratic name of Roman origin would be "de Lorean"). During the period the DeLorean Motor Company was operating, he used a space exclusively when spelling his name in the course of business.

DeLorean appeared in a widely published magazine advertisement for Cutty Sark whisky in the year prior to his arrest and the collapse of his company. It was captioned "One out of every 100 new businesses succeeds. Here's to those who take the odds." ^[1]

In 1999, DeLorean declared personal bankruptcy after fighting over forty legal cases since the collapse of DeLorean Motor Company.

Death and Legacy

DeLorean died at Overlook Hospital in Summit, New Jersey on March 19, 2005 from a stroke, aged 80. He was a resident of Bedminster Township, New Jersey.^[2] At the time of his death, DeLorean was working on a business venture project known as DeLorean Time, a company that would sell high-end wristwatches. DeLorean's death caused the dissolution of the company, and no De Lorean Time products were ever offered to the public. His ashes are buried at the White Chapel Cemetery, in Troy, Michigan. At the request of his family, and in keeping with military tradition, he was interred with full military honors for his service in WWII.

On February 14, 2006 *Game Show Network* aired an episode of *Anything to Win*, featuring John DeLorean. The episode featured interviews with De Lorean's friends, family and DeLorean enthusiasts.

A feature length motion picture is being developed on the life and career of John DeLorean, by the independent motion picture production company, Stainless Steel Productions.

In 2006 US Patent and Trademark Office documents were uncovered showing a patent # 5,359,941 filed by John DeLorean on November 1, 1994 for a raised monorail transport.^[3]

In 2008, the musical collaborative project Neon Neon are to release a concept album based on the life of John DeLorean.^[4]

Texas entrepreneur Stephen Wynne, current owner of DeLorean Motor Company, is due to start production of DMC cars.^[1] (<http://delorean.com/#>)

John DeLorean is survived by his nephew, Michael, a classical guitarist.

Notes

- [^] <http://www.babbtechnology.com/Collect/cutty/index.htm>
- [^] Hakim, Danny. "John Z. DeLorean, Father of Glamour Car, Dies at 80" (<http://www.nytimes.com/2005/03/21/business/21delorean.html>) , *The New York Times*, March 21, 2005. Accessed November 4, 2007. "John Z. DeLorean, the flamboyant automobile industrialist whose dream of running his own car company dissolved into bankruptcy, died Saturday evening at Overlook Hospital in Summit, N.J. He was 80 years old and lived in Bedminster, N.J."
- [^] USPTO Record (<http://patft.uspto.gov/netacgi/nph-Parser?Sect1=PTO2&Sect2=HITOFF&u=%2Fnetacgi%2FPTO%2Fsearch-adv.htm&r=3&p=1&f=G&l=50&d=PALL&S1=delorean.INNM.&OS=in/delorean&RS=IN/delorean>)
- [^] <http://www.nme.com/news/gruff-rhys/26688>

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- Haddad, William (August 1985). *Hard Driving : My Years with John DeLorean*. ISBN 0-394-53410-7.
- Fallon, Ivan; James Srodes (November 1985). *Dream Maker: The Rise and Fall of John Z Delorean*, 455. ISBN 0-399-12821-2.
- Levin, Hillel (1983). *Grand Delusions: The Cosmic Career of John DeLorean*. Viking, 336. ISBN 0-

670-26685-X.

External links

- DeLorean Motor Company (<http://www.delorean.com/>)
- Stainless Steel Productions (Official Movie Production Company Producing "DeLorean" Film) (<http://www.stainlesssteelproductions.com/>)
- DeLorean Donation Site (<http://www.peten23.com/>)
- NNDB - John DeLorean (<http://www.nndb.com/people/994/000022928/>)
- The Rise and Fall of John DeLorean (<http://eightiesclub.tripod.com/id305.htm>)
- 1980s carmaker DeLorean dies at 80 (<http://edition.cnn.com/2005/US/03/20/obit.delorean/>)

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