

Stark Raving Sane: On First Cars

By Catherine Sweet

My first car was an interesting experience. I was living away from home and had recently gotten a new job, but it was no longer a walking distance from my apartment. The buses in the community in which I lived were unpredictable and only ran until 11pm. I was working in a movie theatre and I sometimes worked until 2am. Besides, the ride cost me about \$10 a day. Keep in mind I was getting paid about \$12 an hour, but still, in my 20-year old mind, this was an unreasonable expense.

I probably could have asked my employers to work during the days (we opened at 11am), but obviously the prospect of owning my own car was far more intoxicating. I made a sophomoric mistake: probably one of the most common mistakes that kids make when they're looking for a car. I was dead-set on a specific make and model of car. I hit the free car ads and scoured the pages for this type of car I wanted. I didn't look for a quality car, or a car with low milage. No, I looked for my dream car like I had blinders on- willing to settle for a total P.O.S.

I bought that P.O.S., and paid for the constant repairs like any other adult would.

On my next day off, I found myself on a train for half an hour to a really shady community. There was the car, sitting in the drive. It was cool, but there were drawbacks. Big ones. I couldn't take the car for a test-drive because I had not yet learned how to drive a standard, so the owner drove it around the block. The guy saw me coming a mile away.

It was a 1982, it smelled a little funny, the engine wasn't original to the car (or even the model of car), I could only push the clutch in about 2 inches, the tires were bald, the speedometer and odometer didn't work and I didn't find out until later that the gas gauge stuck on "full" if you filled it too high. But the tape deck worked

almost all the time and the guy told me he'd throw in "The Club" and fix the horn (he didn't).

Why did I all of a sudden lose all grasp of reasoning? I was no longer simply willing to settle for a crapbox, but it was like I was ringing a bell and wearing a sandwich sign proclaiming "Rob Me Blind!" I'm not sure what prompted me to lose touch with reality. I was never in a rush to move away from home. Nor did I want to rebel via smoking, drinking or drugs. Now, after a couple of years of analysis, I've decided that this car was the incredibly "adult" thing that I had to do. I bought that P.O.S., and paid for the constant repairs like any other adult would.

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It was like an abusive relationship. It would break down, stall, flood, stall, bang, stall, and stall and I would run back to it day after day, nurturing it with fuel and lubricants (it was a lubricant junkie). Two years later, I'm still experiencing the pain. The car was so small, the seats could not go back far enough for me to drive comfortably, so I ended up having to hold both legs off the seats to work the pedals and not knock the wheel with my knees. My joints were so messed up I had to see a physiotherapist when I returned home.

In my oh-so-mature (cough) present-day mind, I know that the bus is a reasonable alternative and no matter how much I like the look of a car, I have to make a more critical decision. Was everyone's youthful forays into car ownership as bad as mine? I hope so, actually. Like moving away from home, everyone should experience the bittersweet bliss of owning a condemnable car. My beautiful beast was crushed at the scrapyard a short month after I moved home. It was about 6 months overdue.



What is more strange: The fact that Catharine actually owned this P.O.S. car or the fact that Catharine is six feet tall.

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