

49 Dodge "Little" Hearse

This is the only known 1949 Dodge Hearse ever manufactured, built by J.C. Little. Originally from Scotland, John J.C. Little (1888-1971) started his North American career as a coachbuilder at Canada's largest coachbuilder, the O.J. Mitchell Hearse Company of Ingersoll, Ontario. He built his first home-built coach sometime in 1937 and by 1940 had saved up enough money to open his own body shop. From his small shop, which was located in the service bays of an Ingersoll Shell station, Little produced a series of hand-built professional coaches until he closed in the late Fifties. He specialized in modifying regular wheelbase production vehicles into sedan-ambulances and funeral cars.¹

Found in a small town museum in Ingersoll, Ontario, by the last owner, the car is currently unrestored. Completely unrestored. It is the ex tour vehicle of the band THE TOMBSTONES of Owen Sound, Ontario.

The Tombstones

James Wayner (aka Mr. Blues) - (1947 - 31 March 2007) - Singer, songwriter, drummer and harmonica player - Was a member of The Bearcats, Georgia Strait, The Sharks, Sounder and The Tombstones. On his web site, now expired, he said of the Tombstones, "This is the band that started all for me... went out with my friend Scotty to watch him audition for a band we knew nothing about. We both wanted to be drummers. He got the job and I was depressed because now he had a band and I didn't. We started jamming and I grabbed a microphone and started to sing what I thought was the blues. I never sang before in my life. Well guess what? They decided to have two singers in the band. Wow my first band and boy was it fun. From there on I never looked back! *wink*. We have had two reunions so far, which were complete sell outs. There wasn't too many places we didn't play in Ontario, Canada. REAT memories and great times."

For the very brave, see this car on fire and another video, sans pyro (both done by the previous owner of the car).

{gallery}toybox/49_dodge/little{/gallery}

Photos by the RedHead

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1. Excerpt from an article on Coachbuilt.

{mospagebreak title=The Hearse Chronicles}

This is the JC Little Hearse I missed out on by a coupla bux on ebay about a year ago. Call it delayed gratification, but it's now mineminemine. I will accept envy, pity, and donations toward the cubic expense of getting this thing back on the road. Let me tell you about it...if this were a "Friends" episode, it would be called...

THE ONE WITH THE RUSTY CRUSTY HEARSE Before I get into the trip, I would like to say thanks for the support from those who extended it. What started as a really fun weekend turned into one from the pits of hades...got to the point I didn't want to answer the phone anymore for fear of "who went in now???" And, on a related note, quite possibly the worst task in the world is to have to write a letter of condolence for not one but two of the "good ones"....and somehow the pr!cks of the world survive and thrive.

Anyway. So, the RedHead and I left DC Friday evening (actually 11PM, but who's really keeping track?), driving the Queen Mary with BigYella behind. The Queen Mary is a 99 GMC CrewCab Dually 454 V-8, with a ginormous cap on the back, and BigYella is a 22'6" car trailer, that is, natch, bright yellow. The whole combination measures right under 50' nose to tailboard.

I had MapQuested directions, sticking to the interstates for reasons of vehicle size/weight, as well as hills. HOWEVER, the RedHead brought along her new Garmin GPS, so I followed its directions. What I failed to realize until about 2AM was that it took me the SHORTEST way....which happened to be secondary roads. O yea, did I happen to mention that this was in Western PA...where their hills are like 2000 ft? Mmm-hmmm. So, that was the first hiccup of the trip. Second hiccup, directly related to the first, was in the process of coming down one hellacious hill on Rt 153 into Penfield, the left

front trailer wheel started grabbing and seizing anytime I touched the truck brakes. Stopped in a gas station and waited about 1/2 hour for the brake to cool enough to actually mess with it, and found that the adjustment was WAY too tight. Backed em off a little, and turned the gain down on the truck controller. Press on, and "drive big", as a pirate friend used to say. Yea, sounded good at least. In the execution, not so much.

We make it to Lantz Corners, PA. By this time, I am so far off the interstates that I really have no choice BUT to continue on the secondary roads. Truck controller is turned down to 10% brakes, and the LF tire is ominously squeaking and locking up every time I *look* at the brake pedal, let alone stop. I pass a little garage, with a couple of heavy-duty wreckers out front. SCREECH, we turn into the lot (well, after making a U-turn in the State Police driveway up the road a bit). By this time, it's 8AM Saturday. Nobody around. I call the shop number on the sign, and talk to Mr Boylan himself, who is on his way in. He arrives, and says he is only there till noon and that he's booked up with a fuel pump job. Note that I had introduced myself as a fellow wrecker driver at this point. "OK", sez I, "how much to rent space in your lot and rent tools to fix the silly thing myself?" This seemed to be the proper way to go about it, as he told me to "park over there so you can unhook if ya haveta go fetch parts". Out comes the forklift and up goes the trailer (MUCH easier than a mere floor jack, if not quite so portable). He hands me a bunch of tools, and I go to work. Turns out the bearings have gotten so hot the grease has liquified. Oh yes, I also tore the retainer spring out of the grease seal pulling it off. Now, it's important to explain at this point, that this trailer was BUILT in April, 2007, and has maybe 250 miles on it at this point. The entire damned thing appears to have been built with Chinese sourced parts (bearings, seals, even the frelling tires!). NONE of which are, of course, available on a Saturday, in Lantz Corners PA. Hmmmmmmm.

OK, bearings don't look bad, per se. Lemme just repack em (by hand, old school way. Involves grabbing a handful of bearing grease in one hand, and jamming it into the bearing which is held in the other. Quite messy, but effective.) Get the bearings repacked, back the #@\$# brakes off on that wheel ALL the way, put the whole mess back together. Bout 11AM at this point.

Best part of this deal: Clean up the tools I'd borrowed, and hand 'em back to Mr Boylan, and ask him what I owe him for the grease, and the 2 cans of Brake-Clean, and the rental of tools etc. He sya "Oh, 8 dollars oughta cover it"!?!?????!!?!!!!!!!???

Needless to say, he got more than that. I said "BS, let me at least buy you lunch" and handed him 30 bucks. (Also got his card, and he'll be getting a Valley Towing T-shirt as well, but I digress) A "discussion" then ensued, him taking the position that I didn't have to give him extra, and me responding that he had helped me out of a bad spot and he danged sure didn't have to do that. End result, he took the money. God bless small town folks anyway!! And most especially one Mitch Boylan, proprietor of Boylan's Garage, Towing and Used Cars, one heckuva good person.

So, back in the Queen, north-bound and down....

{gallery}toybox/49_dodge/49{/gallery}

Photos by the RedHead

{mos_fb_discuss:10} or on the Pro Cars forum .

{mospagebreak title=Loading the Little} Taste Test, Part Deux When we last left the intrepid hearse collectors, they were rumbling out of Lantz Corners PA, headed North to Buffalo.

At this point, I have to note that since it was daylight, and the trailer had seemed to settle down, and the hills didn't suck nearly so much, it was actually not too stressful. Nice scenery, good company, cute navigator...not so bad.

Stopped in some town along the way that had a couple paper mills (Godz did they stink) to use the restroom, and the RedHead scampered off to take pics [look] of interesting bridges and an old powerhouse for one of the mills. Me? I was left with the mundane task of checking to make sure the trailer brakes etc weren't about to self-destruct. (Now I am thinking about this, the paper-mill town may have been just *before* Boylan's Garage...it all runs together. At this point in our epic adventure, I'd been awake for about 22 hours.)

We hit Buffalo, and cross the Peace Bridge. The Canadian Customs fella asked "What's your purpose in coming to Canada?" My answer: "Going to buy a 49 Dodge. Oh yea, it used to be a hearse." His eyes got more than a little big. "I bet that's the first time you've gotten *that* answer, right?" "Um, yessir, can't say I've ever heard that, eh." Welcome to Canada.....

Up the QEW, and to Oshawa. Now, lemme interject this comment to my brothers and sisters in the North: I thought DC drivers were insane. Now I see that we in DC are but mere apprentices, and when we master the art of driving in a truly

reckless and wholly insane fashion, we can graduate and drive in Canada. Evidently, the Canadians either don't ever run radar, or the drivers on the QEW, the 403, and the 401 just DON'T CARE! Truly, an invigorating experience, especially seeing a crotch rocket coming up behind you doing at least 95 (mph, thanks), and me just KNOWING he was gonna misjudge and end up on the deck of the trailer. O yea, I am doing just under the speed limit...in the right hand lane. Didn't matter. All lanes thru, and all lanes bat-outta-hell/ super-warp-drive speed.

Make it to Oshawa, and find the fella's house. Neat guy. Cool taste in decorating his house (old advertising signs, other neat schtuff). The Little-Dodge....

Well, lemme just say this about the Little-Dodge. CUBIC dollars. Dollars by the wheelbarrow full. Heck, make that dump-trucks full of hundred dollar bills. This poor car is rusty crusty. Rocker panels? WHAT rocker panels? Heck, the rockers are flat GONE, B-pillars are rusted away three inches up. Fred Flintstone would love the floorpans (or lack thereof). Perforations abound, on the hood, ALL four fenders, the roof seam leading line.... Yeesh. I am off my rocker, completely around the bend, no question about it.

On the plus side, the interior is in pretty decent shape, not to mention mostly intact. No coffin rollers though. Anyone know if it ever had em?

So, how to load this beast? Now, my car trailer has a deck of 22'6". The rear-most 14'6" is a tilt-deck, with 8' ahead of that. The problem becomes that when you attempt to load a car, when the front wheels near the pivot pin about 5 feet in, it wants to tilt down. I sure as heck did NOT want to mess around loading this beast for hours. So, call the local towing company. "Bring a flatbed". The plan was to push the car out of his drive, onto the street (blessedly not heavily traveled). Load the car on the flatbed backwards and then drop it onto the trailer that way. Luckily, the driver from Jim's Towing, Scott, had a clue, and the operation went just as I had envisioned. (If that last comment doesn't terrify you, nothing will).

So at this point, the 49 Dodge is on the trailer, and I am securing same to the trailer. The final count went like this: 4 5/16" chains, 2 binders, and 4 3" webbed ratchet straps, plus a 1" strap top hold the hood down, and two bungies to secure the doors. Not to mention I had an audience the size of, oh, the whole neighbourhood watching in rapt amazement that some idiot (Yep, that's me) actually bought this rust encrusted gem...and is gonna restore it.

Now, if anyone here has ever done heavy hauling or towing, you should know about weight. You want the most weight right over the trailer axles, but slightly biased forward. That's to keep the trailer tongue firmly seated, as it is strongest pushing down, not pulling up depending on the latch. Wonder of wonders, I got the weight distro pretty close just by eye, the first time. Unfortunately, as I was to learn later, I had a little too much tongue weight....

{gallery}toybox/49_dodge/load1{/gallery}

Photos by the RedHead

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{mospagebreak title=Still Loading...}Hearse Chronicles Part Tres OK, so here we are in Oshawa, all chained and strapped (whoo, sounds kinky) and ready to head South. Actually more west then south, but you get the idea. At this point, it's about (about) 7PM or so. I want to make the US Customs late at night, to hopefully avoid long lines like we saw heading up. (Cuz I KNOW we are gonna get the full monte hairy eyeball with THIS load). Except for the RedHead's and my amazement with the suicidal tendencies of Ontario's drivers, the trip to the border went well, no real issues to speak of. We stopped at a Red Lobster to have a celebratory dinner (crab legs, mmmmmmmmm). Now, lemme just stop for a moment to give you all this news-flash: If you want to keep a low profile, do NOT have a rig like mine...with a 58 year old hearse on the back...that still says on the doors "The Tombstones, Owen Sound Ont". Pretty much anybody that saw it...that had the courage to approach us (I was running close to 38 hours up at this point, with a couple catnaps in there, and pretty grease-encrusted and dirty. The RedHead on the other hand looked radiant as always, and no she's not reading this over my shoulder) asked with an expression of wonderment "What IS it...and what are ya gonna DO with it?"

So...dinner consumed, let's run/drive for the border. We hit the border, actually the line on the Peace Bridge, at 1:15AM Sunday morning. At about 2 AM, I pull into the TRUCKS lane. Now, the choices available to me were "Cars, RV's and

Buses <-----; and Trucks ----->. OK, I have a total GVW of 26,000 pounds, I gotta stop at weigh stations... I'm a truck! Also, the truck line was MUCH shorter. So.... the Customs drone at the window sez "Is this a commercial load?" Nope, sez I, I bought the silly thing...woe is me. His icy response" THIS lane is ONLY for commercial trucks". Well geez, sir, it doesn't SAY that anywhere, and this IS a truck since I gotta stop at weigh stations, and gee I am heartily sorry for having screwed da pooch etc etc. "Park over there and go into Door number 2"

Great. Wunnerful.... I sense that I am in for it, and am bracing myself for the hellish bureaucratic gauntlet I am gonna have to run. Now, the cat I bought the car from had actually (on my frantic request on Thursday) transferred the title into his name, and so I had a bill of sale and a whole paperwork chain. The RedHead and I stroll into Door #2....

The fella behind the desk and I confer for a while, and he says "Well, we aren't gonna give you the import certificate since the car isn't running. Whenever you get the car running and restored, just go to Customs at Dulles Airport, bring the car, and they'll do the paperwork." Hmm. NOT! Sez I: "Um, OK, kind sirs, but Virginia has a law that sez I have to title a car within 30 days of purchase (and they can get a lil mean about that, not to mention fine me). This here bill of sale is dated *yesterday*, and I gotta have your form 7501 to title this here Canadian car in the states. Can I have something on Customs letterhead with your badge number, explaining this delay, so that in a couple years when I finish the restoration Virginia won't fine me?"

Sez he:" Hmmm. OK, because of your need to comply with your state's law, we'll do the form. We usually don't in these cases since people lose the form before they actually register the car, but we can do this." "Yay", thinks I. So, this other Customs officer and I fill out the papers, and says OK, lets go look at your car. Turns out, he had an auto-sound business in college, and the car they used as an advertising vehicle for their services was a 60's Cad hearse!!!!!! So, he thought the Little-Dodge was most cool, and the whole process was pretty painless. Note to the purists: No, I did NOT get into a modified vs. stock discussion with him...since he held the fate of my latest project in his hands at that point.

We go back in, the RedHead and I get our licences back, and I leave with all the docs I need to title the car. Welcome back to the US, the USofA...

{gallery}toybox/49_dodge/load2{/gallery}

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{mospagebreak title=Rusty Crusty}Boy THIS turned into a novel.... I'd like to say the rest of the trip was uneventful. Mom always told me not to lie though. Plagues of locusts, pestilence, etc were always mentioned as potential consequences, and I just don't think my shots are up to date for "pestilence" or tetanus for that matter.

What I WILL say though is that I maybe, possibly, probably should have listened to the RedHead when she suggested getting a motel room in Buffalo. "Nay", sez I, the raving lunatic, "I'm OK to drive for a while yet". Note that this is about 3:30 AM, and I am right around 40 hours up, again with a few catnaps. Well, I admit freely that I am stooopid. I shoulda stopped in Buffalo, cuz when I *did* start getting tired (and by this time the RedHead had been moaning in discomfort and exhaustion for a few hours), it was North of Erie PA....and every room to Erie, and to Cleveland was full....even at the fleabag motels.

Arg. It's now about 6:30AM, and we are in some little town I was too tired to note the name of. Pull into a McDonalds, and I crash out for an hour and a half "powernap". RedHead does some exploring, since she can't sleep in the truck. Now, one thing that came with the Little-Dodge that I left on was a fake foot sticking out of the grille. She comes back to the truck, wakes me up, and asks "Did you take the foot out?" After I stared stupidly at her, wondering just what exactly she meant (and the mind just *boggled* with the possibilities), she elaborated. Seems someone must have been looking at the hearse as I slept, blissfully unaware, and accidently I guess pulled the foot out of the grille, since it was laying on the trailer deck. Hmmm.... Chuck the foot in the hearse, bungie the doors, and let's roll. Now, this was the second McD's I'd stopped at on the trip. The first was where I got the call about the P-51 crash in Oshkosh. Enough said bout that. I may not stop at McD's for a long time.

Driving down the PA Turnpike, I am feeling pretty good, and let the road speed creep up to about 60. I then notice a disquieting thing. Remember I mentioned in an earlier episode that the trailer weight was biased slightly forward, putting too much tongue weight on? Yuppers. What happens then is that you actually load the drive axles down, and pull weight OFF the steer axles. So the front end tends to "float". The faster you go, the more it "floats" and understeers like hella. Needless to say, the speed came back down to about 50MPH in a (measured, deliberate) hurry.

Somewhere along the PA Turnpike, I saw a very tasty Deuce coupe hot rod that passed me (as everything ELSE was doing, including a little old lady in a motorized wheelchair who shook her cane at me. I waved back.). Soon thereafter, I saw in my rearview what looked like the front end of an Edsel. Yup, I pinched myself to make sure I was awake. Soon

thereafter, a service plaza came up, and I pulled in to replenish the "bottomless pit" otherwise known as the Queen Mary's fuel tanks (and ooh boy those fillups just HURT). The Edsel pulled in as well, and we wound up in that rest area for an HOUR as a BUNCH of folks came over to chat about the hearse. One fella owned a 49 Plymouth, so that was neat. I got his email address for future reference. The guys in the Edsel were father and son, the Edsel was the son's, and they were on the way back from the 50th Anniversary Edsel meet in Dearborn. COOL!!!! Great-looking Pacer convertible, teletouch transmission, drum speedo, and a host of other neat touches. The son has a 59 2 dr Ranger wagon, 1 of 12 built and one of three remaining that he's restoring. They were built as Zone Rep's cars. So, kindred spirits.

The rest of the trip was on I-70, and down I-81 to the ultimate destination of the "Rock Farm and His-and-Hearses-pital", where the Little Dodge is currently resting under a tarp. I need to move some crap (I mean old cars) around in the various storage spots, and put in inside. That'll happen in the next days.

So, the bottom line is this: I have WAY too many projects for any TEN people, and I am gonna be broker than broke by the time they all get done...but what the he!!, it makes for an interesting life.

By the way DaveL, I am told that the pic in the Dodge Story pic is of my exact hearse. I'd LOVE a scan of that, pending my finding the book itself.

Anybody else having ANY info about this neat piece of funeral car history, send it along! And yes Gregg Merksamer and Steve Lichtman, that's aimed at y'all!!

Does anyone have any idea how many Little-built cars survive? Of course, I know of Lloyd Needham's jaw-droppingly beautiful 41 Carved Cadillac and my own, any others from out of the woodwork?

Hope y'all enjoyed this epistle, it actually has helped my blacker-than-coal mood a lot to write it up. A tip of the hat, and a raising of the glass to two of the best, gone West way too soon and achingly missed: Jim "Bulldog" LeRoy, and Gerry "Becks!!" Beck. Blue Skies, Tailwinds, and CAVU forever, guys.

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Photos by the RedHead

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{mospagebreak title=Last Ride} OK, fer sure LAST chapter As a brief side note, the greatest part of the whole trip was that ALL the weigh stations along the down-bound route were closed. YAY!!

The whole combo, QueenMary, BigYella, and Little-Dodge, weighed just under 18,000 pounds, according to the T/A Cat Scale in Breezewood PA. Less than I would have thought...but I was right in that the way it was configured pulled about 350 pounds off the front steer axle on the truck. Eeesh.

Ah well, if it was easy, everybody'd be doing it.

{mos_fb_discuss:10} or on the Pro Cars forum .