

The cockeyed tale of the three-wheeled Dale

Stranger than fiction, but true it is!

By Phil Skinner

Events were eerily similar to "The Grinch That Stole Christmas" when in December 1973, President Richard M. Nixon asked that all outside holiday lighting be turned off so as to conserve energy.

Mile-long lines soon were forming around gas stations. For the first time since World War II, fuel rationing was implemented. In Detroit, engineers were scrambling to come up with make-do fuel efficient vehicles, and gas-guzzling Detroit monsters were scorned like the plague throughout the land.

The bright future of American roads and Sunday afternoon drives was quickly growing dim. If the Arabian oil czars had their greedy ways, those roadway freedoms would soon be as scarce as the precious pitch black crude whose production they were limiting.

Then, almost miraculously, a light appeared at the far end of America's darkened travel tunnel. A rather tall woman — impolitely but correctly described by some as "burly" — by the name of Geraldine Elizabeth Carmichael presented for both investors and prospective buyers, a new little three-wheeled car. It was advertised as being safe to drive, resistant to damage, capable of 85 mph and 70 mpg, with a price tag of just \$2,000. The new little 1,000-pound miracle was called the "Dale."

No one was really sure from where Geraldine Elizabeth Carmichael came. She claimed to have been raised as a farmer's daughter who had tinkered with tractors and farm trucks since she was old enough to hold a wrench, with a formal education in Mechanical Engineering at Ohio State University. To help her in launching a new business, she also claimed to hold a Masters in Business Administration from the University of Miami in Florida.

"Liz," as her coworkers learned to call her, claimed to be a widow with five children. Her late husband, Jim Carmichael, was supposed to have been a structural engineer for NASA on the Apollo and space shuttle programs.

Incorporating the venture in the state of Nevada, the Dale was to be manufactured by Twentieth Century Motor Car Co., with corporate locations in Dallas, Texas, and Encino, Calif.

Securities and stock options were offered to prospective investors. At the Encino office, a three-wheeled mockup of the Dale was on display in the lobby.

The California Securities Commission soon put a stop to the sale of stock. Twentieth Century was not licensed to sell such issues in the state. Undaunted, Liz Carmichael went about promoting and taking orders, along with deposits, for this remarkable new vehicle, with a promised delivery date of fall 1975.

People magazine ran an article on both Liz Carmichael and her hopes for the little car. Trade magazines from around the world announced the plans for not only the Dale but also for a \$2,450 counterpart called the Revelle, and an even smarter little station wagon known as the Vanagon, (no relation, of course, to the Volkswagen bus of the same name), both to have been three-wheelers.

In late 1974, outside of Dallas, Texas, a Dale prototype was assembled, and given a maiden voyage. Unfortunately the little car that thought it could couldn't.

The crudely built Dale developed problems in its one-wheel transaxle drive unit. The car was towed back to the garage and disassembled as engineers started looking for bugs.

Twentieth Century was a real automotive company according to one engineer, John McGuinness. McGuinness had come from NASA where he had worked on the Saturn project. In his opinion, the Dale

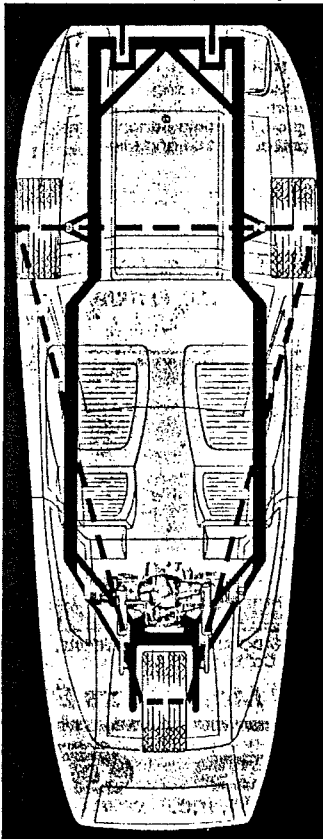


Sporting chrome grillework and high-back bucket seats the Dale would have been a good-looking car, if it was ever really meant for production.

was a viable vehicle. Like several other employees, he returned part of his salary when finances became tight in an effort to keep the project alive.

Other troubles started for Mrs. Carmichael. Fraud investigations delved into whether the Dale had really been planned for production, or was developed as just an opportunist's play for eager profit-hungry investors.

Suddenly the company was being looked into by a local L.A. area television station's investigative reporter. Newspaper articles started to appear questioning the integrity of the company's claims. The investors started to get a bit impatient, and soon the phones were disconnected and the corporate office in Encino had locked its doors. Investigators from the Los Angeles County District Attorney's office felt they had enough information to make an arrest, and in April of



This illustration from an original brochure shows off an imaginary space-age frame that was supposed to be the backbone of the Dale.

1975, Geraldine Elizabeth Carmichael was taken into custody.

Pre-trial motions and the usual legal clogged works kept the case going for another year and a half. Then, just before the trial was to begin, came the biggest surprise for all involved.

Geraldine Elizabeth Carmichael wasn't who she said she was. In fact, she wasn't even a she. Born as Jerry Dean Michael, "he," now a "she," was a fugitive from federal authorities, sought on a counterfeiting charge from 1961.

The Dale case went to trial, and the jurors came back with a guilty verdict on 29 counts of grand theft, three counts of corporate security fraud, and one count of conspiracy. The sentence was to have been two consecutive 10-year terms in state prison, and a \$30,000 fine.

An appeal was filed. Then, almost as mysteriously as she, or he, had appeared, the promoter of the Dale car disappeared, jumping a \$50,000 bail bond.

Was the Dale a real car? As described in sales literature the Dale was supposed to have been almost indestructible. Liz Carmichael told reporters that the Dale was scratch-, dent-, burglar-, and bullet-proof. She made the claim she had personally crashed the Dale into a brick wall at 30 mph, resulting in no injuries to her or the car.

"Dollar for Dollar, The Best Car Ever Built!" proclaimed the brochure, along with its claim of 70 mpg. It was supposedly "a maximum efficiency car," built of "space age technology."

The prototype looked good on the surface, but just under the bright yellow finish, a close look revealed the flaws of this miracle vehicle.

"Rigidex" windows — advertised as having 70 times the impact resistance of safety glass — were simply panes of transparent plastic fitted into the open cavities of the fiberglass body. The energy absorbing front bumpers, in production to be composed of "high density urethane [sic] foam" were actually just black vinyl covered pieces of three-eighths inch plywood. The exclusive Dale framework of structural resin was nothing more than welded half-inch square tubing.

Driver safety was played up in the catalog, with such items featured as impact resistant "rocket structural resin" skin. It was claimed that the outer skin of the Dale could, "absorb over four times the impact of a Cadillac, without serious damage." (This author wonders: does that mean a Cadillac can hit a Dale four times without getting hurt, or can the Dale withstand the impact of four Cadillacs at the same time?)

The numerous scratches and chips in the surface of the prototype today, bear mute testimony to the fraudulent claims of the Twentieth Century Motor Car Co.

The Dale was to have been a two-passenger vehicle, with the two front wheels linked to a standard rack and pinion

steering used to guide the car. Motion came from the unique single-wheel transaxle mounted at the rear of the car.

Power was obtained from an air-cooled horizontally opposed two-cylinder motor, claiming 40 hp at 6,600 rpm. In reality, the engine was a pirated BMW 850-cc motorcycle engine.

The converted third member transaxle may have been the one unique engineering accomplishment of the Dale. Yes, there really were several dedicated engineers working on the car who wholeheartedly believed in the project.

To this day, Design Engineer John McGuinness believes the Dale could have been a success, except for pressure from the big boys in Detroit. McGuinness likens the events to a modern-day Preston Tucker story, only in drag. For this uniquely bizarre tale, one could even throw in the Ohio tire manias as culprits. After all, a car that uses only three tires — as opposed to the conventional four — would mean a 25 percent reduction in tire sales.

While the 70 mpg claim seemed a bit high even for McGuinness, he feels that the Dale was probably capable of an honest 60 mpg.

Admittedly, on paper, the Dale looked pretty good. Finished in a deep rich Canary Yellow (allegedly cast into the resin skin to eliminate chips and marring) the sleek little vehicle was a sporty thing. The car's original design had been purchased by Carmichael from Dale Clift, thus explaining the car's name.

In the prototype, the much advertised modular air conditioning unit was never installed, and the windows don't even roll down or slide open for ventilation.

The list of standard items included a three-speed automatic or an optional four-speed manual shifter. Independent coil springs were to be used on all three wheels, with standard shock absorbers for the front wheels, and an air shock for the rear. The tires were size A70-13s, and the car was stopped with disc brakes using a split-type master cylinder.

With a 114-inch wheelbase, the turning radius was supposed to be just under 34 feet. By the use of a low center of gravity, it was said to be nearly impossible to roll over in the Dale, even with a sharp 45 degree turn. Apparently, this was one of the few claims that seemed to bear a touch of the truth.

Unfortunately the Dale was not to be. If Liz Carmichael had planned to build the car as advertised, it still might not have made any major waves for the Detroit automakers, especially against the flood of imports that have been crashing against our concrete automotive shorelines since before the Dale's projected debut date.

By the middle of 1975, with the oil embargo over, only doubled gas prices were a reminder of the long lines and rationing of early 1974. We were momentarily thrust back into a gas panic in early 1979 when Iran's political leadership went through a change, but now more than a decade later, our country is still complacent about gas mileage.

What ever happened to Liz Carmichael after she skipped out on the \$50,000 bail in 1977?

In April 1989 a national television show profiled Carmichael's story. According to California's Department of Motor Vehicles investigators assigned to the case, leads came in from all around the country as a result of the program.

During the trial Liz Carmichael had kept her finances alive by buying flowers at wholesale, and then sending her five kids out to sell them at various Los Angeles street corners. The five children, it turned out, had been fathered by her while married to a Vivian Barrett. Ms.

Bar
lega
beer
emp
Car
O
past
inve
Aus
Katl
Car
chil
ings
aut
in A
orig
brou
Cali
that
W
and
B
evid
auct
F
disp
rela
han
type
year
Ir
only
Sou
"Go
T
sho
the
mar
fron
Stev
han
AM
Che
C
rest
mut
mai
see
lem
hop
of,
beir
on i
A
the
"Ge
Kat
take
nar
"C
Ji
and
life
spo
29,
berl
can
sew
T
the
Cor
ber
est
apc
ing
r

Barrett had passed away just before the legal proceedings were to begin, and had been named, along with nine other employees of Twentieth Century Motor Car Co., in various criminal charges.

One lead, based on Liz Carmichael's past performance of selling flowers, led investigators to a small town outside of Austin, Texas. There, using the name of Katherine Elizabeth Brown, was Liz Carmichael, living with one of his/her five children. Waiving extradition proceedings, the marketing genius of the Dale automobile was returned to Los Angeles in April 1989, and sentenced for his/her original crimes. Surprisingly, she was not brought up on charges of bail jumping. California didn't have a law prohibiting that act in 1977.

Whatever happened to the mock-up and prototype of the Dale, you may ask? Both of the Dales were impounded as evidence, and eventually sold at an IRS auction for tax indebtedness.

For several years the mock-up was on display in a Southern California movie-related museum and recently traded hands at an auction. The ill-fated prototype was kept hidden away for many years.

In the early part of 1989 the one and only Dale prototype was acquired by Southern California car collector Gordon "Gordie" Chamberlain of Glendale.

Today it is missing a few pieces, and shows several dents and scrapes marring the skin of the Dale. It is apparent that many of the Dale's parts were pirated from other cars. The speedometer was a Stewart-Warner unit, while the door handles were directly from an early-'70s AMC product. Other parts from Ford and Chevrolet also abound on the prototype.

Chamberlain's plans for the Dale are to restore it and place it on display in a museum. As mentioned earlier, on its maiden voyage, the rear transaxle seemed to develop a problem. That problem apparently still exists to this day. It is hoped that this glitch may be taken care of, and the Dale will once again ride, being able to make it back to the garage on its own power.

As one last note of irony, the name of the small Texas town where Jerry Dean "Geraldine Elizabeth Carmichael/Katherine Elizabeth Brown" Michael was taken into custody was so appropriately named Dale.

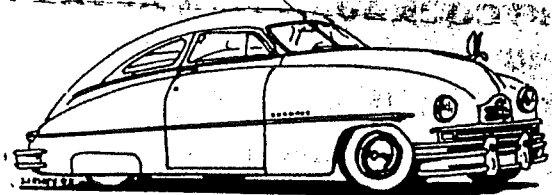
'Gray Fox' passes

James Kimberly, the man known as the "Gray Fox" for his prematurely gray hair and good looks as well as for his zest for life in the fast lane - which included sports car racing - died Saturday, Jan. 29, at his home in Palm Beach, Fla. Kimberly was 86 years old and succumbed to cancer, which he had been battling for several years.

The grandson of one of the founders of the paper product giant, Kimberly-Clark Corp., the family fortune allowed Kimberly the means to pursue his many interests including hunting, boating, and sports car racing. Driving an Italian racing red Ferrari during the early 1950s, he

and on the streets of downtown Elkhart Lake, Wis., racing against the top sports car racers of the time. Kimberly also held the posts of National Activities Chairman and, later, President of the Sports Car Club of America during that time period and was instrumental in helping to establish the scenic Road America race circuit, where racing resumed after years of street events in nearby Elkhart Lake. He was also featured on the cover of *Sports Illustrated* in 1956 after winning the Sebring International sports car race.

Kimberly was a graduate of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and served in the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary in World War II. He is survived by three daughters and several grandchildren and great-grandchildren.



ANTIQUE CAR AUCTION May 29, 1994, at 12:00 Noon, Bates City, MO (near Kansas City, MO). Over 60 Studebakers, Rural Router Wagon, 43 WWII Weasel Experimental Military Vehicle. Also 55 Thunderbird, 72 Cadillac Convertible, 48 Jeepster, 61 Cadillac 4 Dr Sedan, 65 Sunbeam Alpine Roadster, 53 Avanti Coupe, 89 Avanti Convertible. Private collection, no consignments, no reserves. Call or write for brochure - ARNOLD HOSKOVEC, Rt 2 Box 53E, Bates City, MO 64011, (816) 625-4719, or Easley Auction Co, Randy Easley, Auctioneer, Orrick, MO (816) 496-3423.

PALM SPRINGS

Keith Mc Cormick presents the
16th Collector Car Auction
SATURDAY and SUNDAY
FEBRUARY 26th & 27th, 1994

AUCTION OF 300 ANTIQUE, CLASSIC, SPORTS, AND SPECIAL INTEREST AUTOS IN THE BALLROOM OF THE FABULOUS RIVIERA
 Indian Canyon Way, Palm Springs, California



The Mc Cormick Family is once again organizing this auction in their usual friendly and courteous manner.

Ask for Keith or Desley to answer your questions.



HOST HOTEL
 The luxury Riviera Hotel is offering a **SPECIAL \$125** rate to auction participants. You must book early - **CALL (619)-327-8311** for hotel reservations and mention the auction.

PHONE FOR CONSIGNMENT NUMBERS, ASK FOR ENTRY FORMS, BIDDER APPLICATIONS, AND GET ON OUR MAILING LIST...NOW!

(619)-320-3290

RESERVE YOUR POSITION NOW!

ENTRY FEES: SATURDAY AND SUNDAY \$250. No numbers will be reserved without consignment fee being paid in full in advance. VISA, MasterCard and American Express are accepted. Positions will be filled on first-come first-served basis. To reserve the position you desire, send your check covering the entry fee or phone in your credit card number, you may specify the cars you're entering at a later date. Entry fees are REFUNDABLE if you notify us in writing 14 days prior to the auction. Color photographs may be included in our exclusive color brochure. We strictly limit the number of positions available in this two-day event of 300 cars.

COMMISSION STRUCTURE: FLAT 5% OF SALES PRICE (One of the lowest in the business).



PALM SPRINGS AUCTIONS, INC.

602 E. SUNNY DUNES ROAD
 PALM SPRINGS, CALIFORNIA 92264

State License C-1798
(619)-320-3290



James Kimberly