The cockeyed tale of the three-wheeled Dale

Stranger than fiction, but true it is!

By Phil Skinner

Events were eerily similar to "The Udine Incident" that took place in December 1973, President Richard M. Nixon asked that all outside holiday lighting be turned off so as to conserve energy. Mistletoe lines soon were forming around gas stations, the first time since World War II, fuel rationing was implemented. In Detroit, engines were scrambling to convert gas-powered vehicles into fuel-efficient models, 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 then-available models had any glee about the long road, they were scarce. On the same day, a light appeared at the far end of America's darkened travel tunnel. A rather tall, skinny fellow, described by some as "burly" — by the name of Geraldine Elizabeth Carmichael held a patent for a new invention.

She claimed to have been raised as a farmer's daughter who had tinkered with tractors and farm equipment. 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 degree in Business Administration from the University of Miami in Florida.

After the workers learned to call her, claimed to be 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 Twelve Century Motor Car Co., with corporate locations in Dallas, Texas, and Encino, Calif.

Securities act 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 scam. Twelve

Century was not licensed to sell such issues in the state. Undaunted, Liz Carmichael went on the lecture tour, 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 plans for only the Dale but also for the Lincoln Continental built the Reevell, and an even smarter little station wagon known as the Vana- gon (a quirky concoction) to the Volkswagen bus of the same name), both to have been three-wheeled.

In late 1974, instead of Dallas, Texas, a Dale prototype was assembled, and given a maiden voyage. Unfortunately the little car didn't work. The cruelly built Dale developed problems in its own drive unit. The car was towed back to the garage and disassembled as engineers started over.

Twentieth Century was a real automotive company according to one engineer, John de Guzman, who came from NASA where he had worked on the Saturn project. In his opinion, the Dale steering used to guide the car. Motion came from a unique single-axis trans- mission system just like the Dale's.

Power was obtained from an air-cooled horizontally opposed twin 50-hp motor, claiming 40 hp at 6,000 rpm. In reality, the engine was a pared BMW 850-cc motor.

The converted third member transaxle may have been the one unique engineering concept that really worked. Yes, there really were several dedicated engineers working on the car who wholeheartedly believed in it.

To this day, Design Engineer John McGinnes, between the Dale on all have been a success, except for pressure from the big boys in Detroit. McGinnes likens the Dale to a toy. The tires were 15x7.50-13 with a rugged, Tucker story, only in drag. For this uniquely bizarre tale, one could even relate the name — 25 percent reduction in tire sales.

The claim seems to be a high even for McGinnes, he feels that the Dale was probably capable of an honest 20 mph.

Admittedly, on paper, the Dale looked pretty good. Finished in a deep Canar- vally color, the Dale had no problem with resin skin to eliminate chips and mar- ris. The body was also sporty looking. The car's original design had been purchased by Carmichael from Dale Clift, then president of Metalcraft.

In the prototype, the much advertised modular air-conditioning unit was never actually used. The test vehicle rolled down and slid open for ventilation.

The list of standard items included a three-speed automatic with an optional four-speed manual shifter. Independent coil springs were used on all wheels, with standard shock absorbers for the front wheels, and an air shock for the rear. The suspension was dry.

The car was stopped with disc brakes using a split-type master cylinder.

Unfortunately the Dale was not to be. Of Liz Carmichael had planned to build the car as advertised, it still might not have been up to the same standards for the Detroit automakers, especially against the flood of imports that have been crashing on American automotive showrooms 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 situation went through a change, but now more than a decade later, our country is still concerned about gas mileage.

What ever happened to Liz Carmichael and the Dale? Last we heard, she skipped the $20,000 bail in 1977!

In April 1989 a national television special called "Traveling in Cars" aired. According to California's Department of Motor Vehicles investigators assigned to the project, saw all around the country as a result of the program.

During the trial Liz Carmichael had kept the little car on display 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. Ma.
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 her five children. Working on the evidence collected by the Dade automobile was returned to Los Angeles in April 1899, and sentenced for her original crimes. Surprisingly, she was not brought up on charges of bail jumping. California did not have a law prohibiting that act in 1877.

Whatever happened to the mock-up and prototype of the 1900 Deuce you may ask? Both of the Deuces were impounded as evidence, and eventually sold at an IRS auction for tax indebtedness.

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

In the early part of 1989 the one and only Deuce 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 Deuce. It is apparent that many of the Deuce parts were pirated from other ears. The speedometer was a Stewart Warner unit, while the door handles were directly from an early 1920s AMC product. Other parts from Ford and Chevrolet also abound on the prototype.

Chamberlain's plans for the Deuce are to restore it and place it on display in a museum. As mentioned earlier, on the 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 Deuce will once again ride, being able to make it back to the garage on its own power.

As of 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 is 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 Dallas scene— which included sports car racing — died Saturday, Jan. 29, at his home in Palms Beach, Fla. Kimberly was 65 years old, suffering from cancer, which he had been battling for several years.

The grandson of one of the founders of the paper industry, Kimberly-Clark Corp., Kimberly was offered a large sum by Kimberly the means to pursue his many interests including hunting, boating, and sports car racing. Driving in an Italian racing red Ferrari during the early 1960s, he...