Donald DeLaRossa Oral History

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Note to Readers

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- Benson Ford Research Center staff, 2023

DESIGN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

DE LA ROSSA, DONALD

1984

EDSEL B. FORD DESIGN HISTORY CENTER

Henry Ford Museum &
Greenfield Village

This is Dave Crippen in another one of our series of oral history interviews with key automotive designers, and today we're speaking with Don DeLaRossa who spent a number of years at Ford and is now Vice-President of Product Design at Chrysler Corporation. We'll ask Mr. DeLaRossa to tell his story in his own narrative. Perhaps, we should begin with your schooling and your earliest influences.

A I went to John Herrin Art Institute in Indianapolis where I was born and studied art over an extended a period, not as a full-time program but an evening and weekend program, for several years. My interest in automobiles and automobile design was a function of a genuine interest and a natural ability to express myself, which was enhanced by the good fortune that many of us have during our lives. The good fortune, in my case, being employed by General Motors when I came to Detroit. Interestingly, [it was] not to launch a career in automobile design, but to start a career in insurance, which I came from an insurance family.

My uncle, put me up while I was getting situated here. I lived in his home in Dearborn, and he was one of the managers for AAA, and my inclination, when I first came to Detroit, was to go into the insurance business. But, to go through the detail, would be a little excessive on how I happened to side track myself into design.

During the time I was living with my uncle, I had the benefit of being introduced to a man who was an automotive supplier in the Fisher Building, and he looked at some of my sketches which I was doing as a means of just killing time and enjoying myself. His name was Fred Lieson, and Fred represented, among other companies, a stamped art metal that was used in automobile design at the time and probably still is.

Fred, upon looking at my work, asked me whether I would be interested in automobile styling, as it was called at the time. I expressed an interest, and he said that he had the kind of connections that he could make it happen. He said, "Where would you like to go to work?" I said, "I'd like to go to work at Ford." And the only reason I can think of as I think back on it is that we were kind of a Ford family, and I had, through my uncle's help, been getting brochures and all kinds of reading material from the Ford training program that they had at that time.

So, he said, "Fine." There was a chap named Tom Hibbard who ran Ford [design], and he says, "I'll set it up, and you can go out for an interview." Fine. So my uncle drove me out to Dearborn, and just as a little humorous aside, we walked into, which is now called the Triple E Building, the old engineering building where styling was at one end. We walked in there and waited for a few minutes, and I got a call from the person that was going to interview me. It wasn't Tom Hibbard himself, but one of his representatives. I went in for an interview [and] took my sketches. I don't recall how long it was, [but] it was a brief interview. I came out, and I was pretty downhearted. I had flunked. Ford wasn't interested in me. The humorous side of it was [that] my uncle had been scolded for smoking cigars in the lobby of the engineering building which wasn't permissible at all, so he was embarrassed by that.

Q The old Henry Ford influence?

A Yes, right. So, we ended up driving back home, and I was very disappointed that Ford had turned me down.

Q What year was that?

A That was 1945. I'd just gotten out of the air corps and was

getting myself oriented as far as business and career actions were concerned.

So, the next day we called Fred and told him of the demise, and he said, "Well, don't give up." He said, "I've got a very good friend," a fellow by the name of Julio Andrade, who was one of Harley Earl's principal people. He might have been chief stylist for Harley Earl. Howard O'Leary was head of administrative work for Harley, but Julio was head of design, as I recall. And, so, he said, "I've got it all lined up for you to be interviewed by Mr. Andrade." I said, "Fine."

I went down there, and I got the job and was thrilled. It really has stayed with me as a means of impressing upon me the need to not look at things that transpire, necessarily, as failures because they don't follow the format that you've judged as the only correct one; because here's a case where I had the good fortune to work for General Motors. I stayed there slightly less than two years, like twenty months. My first boss was one of the tops in the business, at that time, and one of the all-time great designers and illustrators: a fellow by the name of Henry de Sigeur Lauve, and Henry Lauve was the chief designer or chief stylist of the Buick studio. So, I worked for Henry for a limited period there. After approximately a year, I was transferred to the Cadillac studio. I worked for Bill Mitchell and a fellow who was an outstanding designer [and] who had an untimely death: Ed Glowacke who was one of the -- I have to recognize that my judgment, as to the quality of the ability of these people, is limited because I didn't have much myself, but Ed Glowacke was certainly outstanding. But Mitchell had a style that was unique from Henry's, and it gave me the opportunity to work hard and be

inspired, work with reference to examples of work done by real pros in those two instances, and meet a number of very highly-qualified young men.

After this eighteen to twenty month period, I was given an opportunity -- an invitation of sorts -- to join George Snyder and a group of people who were coming to Ford Motor Company to start the new Ford styling center, and [this was] an unusual and sizable decision for a young person to make, particularly, to leave General Motors. But I seemed impressed with the potential opportunity, and it was a great opportunity. Coming from a company like General Motors, it gave me the best address, certainly, in the business. And it gave me that eighteen [to] twenty month period to observe the real professional ways of expressing yourself in a creative sense.

So, it launched my career, and I remained at Ford for a total of thirty-one years until 1978. I worked in a number of areas for [Eugene] Bordinat. Very early in the scheme of things he was identified as head of the operation, following George Walker and some others that were in the top role. But Gene came in very early, as I recall it, as vice-president of styling.

Q Could we move you back to the time of the switch from General Motors to [where] you said that George Snyder was setting up the [Ford] design center. He was also at G.M.?

A Right, yes. He was head of the advanced studio.

Q Was John Oswald involved in that also?

A Yes. Oswald was the ranking person. George Snyder reported to Oswald.

Q Did you did come over with Gene Bordinat at that time?

A No. Bordinat came over about a month before I got there. And I hadn't known Gene. Gene worked in another area of styling at General Motors than I did, and he had worked at General Motors prior to going into the Air Corps. In fact, he spoke of working on some military projects.

Q Tanks, I believe.

A Tanks, right. But I never had the pleasure of meeting Gene at that point in my career. It was all at Ford.

Q Apparently, someone had decided to bring over a sizable contingent from General Motors?

A Yes.

Q Would this have been Ernie Breech and/or Henry Ford II? Was this a package?

A I, frankly, never was privy to that, and I don't know. In fact, it's an interesting point. It is of added interest to me because I'm surprised at myself for not being curious about it. It really is a very interesting point because there were relatively few people at Ford, so it was a very serious effort on someone's part to organize what would later become what Gene made of it, and Gene was a devoted executive and builder of the organization. It is a credit to him. When you consider there were just a half a dozen or so of us and to build it into what he did was, I thought, very impressive.

Q So, in a sense, you're gearing up for the new first post-war cars?

A Right, yes. Ford had some [design personnel] -- a chap by the name of Bill Schmidt, Johnny Najjar, and Herman Brunn, and I'm trying to think

of the body engineer that worked at styling -- a fine German gentleman who actually did the surface development work [Martin Regitko]. He actually developed the means of developing surface in the form that they did for many years until the advent of computers.

But Ford had the new Lincoln Cosmopolitan and the new Mercury. Those cars were done when we came there from General Motors, and we had no role in them. They were not cars that were consistent with what was judged to meet the standards that were needed at Ford. But [with] timing being the dictator there and the desire to get new cars out on the road, the net result was that those cars that were too olden were offered in the marketplace.

Q Was Mr. Gregorie still there by the time you got there?

A No. He wasn't. I'd heard of him and a lot about him, but, no. His name was Bob, wasn't it? Bob Gregorie?

Q Eugene, but he went by Bob.

A Right. No, he was gone.

Q Was George Walker a consultant by this time?

A Yes, he was. As I recall, in reporting to Oswald and George Snyder, this reporting structure came under engineering, so we had a criteria and a means of judging the vehicle package that was, in many instances, quite different from George Walker's. Walker [and his assistants] Elwood Engel and Joe Oros were, by comparison, free-wheelers and very capable and very talented, and there were many instances where we didn't win. I mean where their candidate was selected and ours wasn't. I remember we, at times, would privately cry in our beer a bit over that. The fact that, as someone described at one time, "They have

an opportunity to come in the building and look at whatever we're doing, but we never had a chance to look at what they were doing."

Q You were physically separate in the South wing of the Triple E Building?

A Yes, right. And for a period when I first met them, they worked down at the Fisher Building.

Q This was Walker's headquarters?

A Walker's headquarters. But they were real strong competitors, and from the point of view of the Ford Motor Company, it was a healthy circumstance even though a bit hard to take to those of us who were Ford employees. But Bordinat was a formidable advisary, and he had a means of getting things straightened around so that there wasn't a lack of comparative quantity or quality in the two organizations. Through his direction, we did very effective, competitive work against the Walker team. Gene was a talented executive as well as a designer, and, as a result, he was a formidable person as far as insuring that there was equality. So, we have him to thank for all of that.

Q The Walker design was accepted for the '49 Ford. Did your team have any input into that at all?

A No, no.

Q That had been taken care of by the time you got there?

A Yes. Very early for me, considering my age, I found myself unimpressed and disappointed with the devotion on the part of many of my peer group who devoted so much attention to trying to get credit for that car of Walker's. I mean, my God, I couldn't believe it! Everybody you met -- you know, one chap whose name I don't remember, but he claimed he

did it in his kitchen on the kitchen table. This fellow here, Dick Calleal, would bad-mouth everybody because he claimed that the fellow I just spoke about who said he did it in his kitchen was lying because Dick Calleal said he did the car [model]. And it was actually -- you could see some humor in it. My God, people just went crazy trying to get credit for it.

Q Was Bob Koto one of that group?

A Bob Koto is the fellow I'm talking about who was so upset because he said he did it, and here's the other fellow [Calleal] who said he did it, and I'm sure there were others that I never heard discuss it.

Q Once that's out of the way and launched, however good it was, you were launched into the early 'Fifties then?

A Right.

Q Did you concentrate early on on the luxury car group -- the Lincoln...?

A Yes, I did. In fact, I had brought in a pictorial organization chart just because one of my people that works for me in administration is on this chart, and this [was] back in the early 'Fifties. There was a period at which Ford made the decision to separate Lincoln and Mercury division organizations. And, at that time, I was given the responsibility for Lincoln. It was the only time in my life I was at this same level as Gene Bordinat, in this context of responsibility.

Q And Gene had what?

A He had Mercury. But it didn't last very long, and it was back to square one, and Gene, having the decided margin of knowledge and ability, was....

Q And chutzpah?

A Yes, right, he sure does have it -- unquestionably, the choice of the company, so it wasn't a surprise to me at all.

Q What early 'Fifties Lincolns did you work on in those days?

A I worked on the competitor of the famous '61 Continental. We were doing an in-house competitor of Elwood's [Engel] Continental, which, interestingly, was designed as a Thunderbird. It wasn't designed as a Lincoln. In fact, that's representative of what I was talking about as far as vehicle package is concerned. We were directed to do a Lincoln that was on a package that was very massive by comparison to this car, and Elwood sold this car. It was really a stroke for him and his reputation and the company as well. I was named as part of the team that worked on it. I was a little amazed at that because it was very nice. I appreciated it, but when you look at the plaque that we all received, the implication is that you were part of the team, and it implies that you were certainly part of the team from a creative point of view, and I certainly wasn't. I was part of the team in that it was my responsibility to take this vehicle through the feasibility development, and really that was the extent of my involvement in it.

Q Is this after the Engel package was accepted?

A Yes.

Q Both yours and Gene Bordinat's?

A Right.

Q Someone tells the story -- I wonder if you can corroborate this -- that it was McNamara who took a look at Engel's design -- actually, he was working on a Thunderbird?

A Yes, he was. Right.

Q And he said, "Can you stretch it into a Lincoln Continental?"

A Yes, that's my recollection as well.

Q And you and Gene were working in another studio on a much heavier model?

A Yes, one that would be more like the '59. Do you remember the '59 and '60 Continentals? Those were done by Johnny Najjar.

Q Moving you back a moment [in time], did you have any input into the Mark II? Do you remember working on that with anyone?

A No. The Mark II, that's the William Clay Ford model?

Q Right.

A No. My only connection with that vehicle and that project was that -- I'll tell the story because I think it's kind of interesting. The [number of] people to whom this would be interesting are certainly limited, but, nonetheless, I'll be brief. I was given the opportunity, through an invitation from William Clay Ford, to join that organization and be the chief designer. I discussed it with Gene Bordinat, and Gene Bordinat expressed an interest in my remaining with him. I think that I had some -- certainly not well-founded -- misgivings about the durability of that organization. I think that, as well as the desire to continue my association with Bordinat, influenced me, and I turned William Clay Ford down, which people don't do.

Q This was the beginnings of the Continental studio?

A Right. I don't want to have that demean John Reinhart and make him sound like second choice, but, in all honesty, he was, and he's a very capable designer, and he did quite a nice job on it. I'm not terribly

enthusiastic about the result. I never was. But I'll leave that to others as far as judging its merits. It had some areas that I thought could have been handled better. Probably I figured that Bordinat and I could have done a much better one had we been given the chance.

Q So, in lieu of that, you went to work on the all new '61 Lincoln?

A Yes. That's right.

Q Did Mr. Bordinat ask you to join that effort?

A Yes, he did.

Q Was he the senior stylist on that?

A Yes, he was. Right. We had a number of leaders in the organization. Some of their names, I've lost leading up to Gene Bordinat -- preceding him. We had a very nice chap who was an administrative person from Ford who actually ran styling for a limited time [Charles Waterhouse]. There was the obvious existence of George Walker, and George Walker moved from outside as a consultant to inside as an officer in the company. He departed for reasons that I was never privy to, but his departure, as the stories that I had heard, that George had -- which seemed to make sense to me, knowing George, that he would nominate a member of his team to follow in his tracks. And, I think, Joe Oros was the person he had selected for reasons I'm not privy to but for reasons that Ford Motor Company made. They selected Gene Bordinat, which was a damned good idea as far as Ford's benefits are concerned, and no slight intended for Joe, but Joe, comparably, was not in Gene Bordinat's league at all. I used to enjoy beating Joe in different design projects regularly just for the hell of it. He was a fellow who seemed to bring that out in me.

Q Very intense?

A Yes. He was tense, and he was very competitive, and I had a way of assessing where his vulnerability was. So I won a few like that and enjoyed it, I'll have to say. It didn't do anything for me, materially, but, just as a designer, I enjoyed beating his socks off.

Q One of the people about this time was Frank Hershey.

A Yes. Hershey was there.

Q The administrator, could that have been Charlie Waterhouse?

A Charlie Waterhouse, right. Charlie was a real gem. I thought him a very nice fellow.

Q He's still very much alive.

A Oh, is he?

Q I chatted with him recently.

A Oh, how nice.

Q Eighty years old.

A Eighty years old. Isn't that wonderful?

Q Everybody speaks well of Charlie. He was a good administrator.

A Yes, he was a real gentleman. That would be a good description.

Q Would Vic Raviolo be, at this point, another one of the people you were thinking of?

A Yes. In fact, as I recall, Gene Bordinat -- I'm not positive of this -- but, I think, Gene Bordinat, and I reported to Vic Raviolo when we were doing the Continental or Lincolns -- preceding the successful '61 Lincoln of Elwood's. In that time frame, Vic was the man, and he was quite a strong person. It's strange that I'd use that term a strong person. As I look back on my career, the number of executives in the leadership role who exercised their prerogative by virtue of their

authority, they number in the dozens. I watched them come and go. The fellow that I did have a good relationship was Jack Reith. He was vice-president of Mercury Division. The vibes were good between Jack and I. But the point that I was making was, the number of people that have the authority, have the position and the kind of authority that can permit them to exercise their judgment, and, in many respects, victimize creative people, is an appalling part of our business. I don't consider that I took much of a rap, but I was involved in enough of it that it made me a bit passive about it. I took it for granted that they were going to do that, and they did. It was interesting to me, even though I was that new to the business, that people who through education or talent that they're blessed with have nothing going for them, really, except their august position in the company, and they can whale away at the creative person.

In that regard, Bordinat was so formidable that he prevented them from this, and I judged, to a large extent, our continuing success in effectiveness to be the result of his capabilities. There's no question in my mind that, [with] a lesser person, we just wouldn't have been able to be as effective as we were.

Q So, it was [Bordinat's] abilities that brought the design center into being?

A Really, it was. Into being and to present the things that he had caused to take place -- the cars that he would review and feel that met the criteria that he judged to be the desirable one, and with those vehicles, we won many shootouts through his input. I'd have to spend a lot of time thinking about it. I don't know why it is or why it was, but

I spent the majority of my career outside of the structure of the car divisions. Most of my time was spent in special projects areas. I had the good fortune to work for Bob McGuire, who was an outstanding designer and outstanding manager.

Q The three of you presented a formidable team?

A Right. I think we did. I paid attention, and I learned a lot from McGuire. Between McGuire and Bordinat, it had significant importance to my career. Bob was very unusual in that he would go out of his way to share his opinion in the form of benefiting the individual through guidance. He had that quality of actually helping. He was an unselfish person in that regard, and he was good -- a very important person to those of us that needed guidance, and he was very effective.

Q In the late 'Fifties you've got two teams working on the '61 Continental?

A Yes.

Q The so-called Engel model prevailed at that point?

A Yes, right.

Q But, input came from all of the groups that wereworking on it?

A Yes.

Q So, you became the '61 Lincoln team?

A Right. Yes.

Q That was a very successful model?

A Oh, it was. It really was. I can't recall whether Elwood departed and came to Chrysler, or when he came....

Q Shortly after that?

A Shortly after that, and, as a result, the rest of the team under Bordinat took the responsibility for the vehicle as it progressed through

the series, and we made some changes to it. I remember one of them that Bordinat and I -- one thing that Elwood did that we never agreed with was that his tumblehome on the car was so severe that the roof rail was right beside your head. The windshield header was right back here. You couldn't get the sun visors down without having to lean back in your seat. A typical designer thing. I still run into it now and then.

Q That's the technical term -- tumblehome?

A Yes. On occasion, I'll have a designer -- I think that they understand me at Chrysler, so I don't have any of them here right now, but, when I came here, there were people who would move the windshield back to a point that they thought was important regardless of whether you bumped your head on the header or not. But Bordinat and I got into that car very early on. We started right away, and we straightened the tumblehome up and moved it out two or three inches a side. It was more in keeping with the class of car -- the kind of layout that you would expect with a Lincoln car.

Q Could you add any comments that you might wish to make about the 1961 Continental -- how important it was or how exciting a project it was and how it affected your design career at Ford?

A I was very excited by Elwood's design. I was amazed at the approval process that took place. That really wrote "finished" to my counter proposal in favor of Elwood's design. I think they made a good decision. The only reservation I had about it was that for all of the drama that it produced in appearance, it did sacrifice some interior package, which, I felt, was not in the interest of the kind of vehicle that we should be aligning ourselves with at Ford. I had a tendency, which hasn't really

gone away, to either make statements or ask questions of very high-ranked people. It's a penchant of mine. As I recall this, I was going through one of my typical DeLaRossa periods, and it was on my mind, and I asked Earl MacPherson about it. Because I was confused by the whole Lincoln subject, as far as Ford Motor Company was concerned. And, at the time, I was questioning why would Ford be doing things like the Mexican Road Race for the Lincolns? Ford won the Mexican Road Race in 1952/'53/'54. That's great, but the thing that I couldn't understand about it was what vehicle is our competition, industry-wide? Cadillac isn't in the racing business. What are we doing in it? At that point, MacPherson said to me, "We're not chasing Cadillac. We don't give a damn about that." That's not intended to be a direct quote, but it was quite plain that he was very firm in his feeling about that. And he said, "Oldsmobile is our competitor." So much for quoting Earle MacPherson.

That thing stuck with me because I thought what the heck? One of the key people in the company is saying, "We're not interested in Cadillac. We're going to chase Oldsmobile." That attitude prevailed at Ford for years. There was no continuity at all. I had the good fortune to be there in this time frame. I had the good fortune to be associated with Gene Bordinat, and I like to think I made something of a contribution to this. I'm not taking credit for it, but I was a contributor to attacking -- Gene, as I recall, shared my feeling -- this problem. That is, the plowing under of design and the ignoring of design continuity from one year to the next at Lincoln, so that the customer never knew what he could expect from Lincoln. You had big Lincolns/little Lincolns. We now have moved to the Elwood Engel Lincoln -- as great a car as it

was, it was designed to be a Thunderbird. But, somebody then said, "Oh, no, wait a minute. No. That's a Lincoln."

Q He tells me it was McNamara.

A I wouldn't be surprised. Gene was closer to the hierarchy by a country mile than I was.

Q It was Elwood.

A Oh, Elwood's? The fact was that, prior to that, they had groped around and demonstrated that they don't know, nor do they care -- they had no respect for building a Lincoln look. I remember working with Gene Bordinat on the developing of a Lincoln story. We got material together of the Lincolns of the past. We got material of Cadillacs. Very relevant and important. You look at those Cadillacs, they didn't [just] happen to look the way they did. That was all part of an intentional building of a background -- a heritage. As far as I'm concerned, Gene Bordinat was the father of that. It's not terribly important either to me or to Gene what they think, but Ford Motor Company owes a lot of credit to Gene for the establishing of a Lincoln look in their automobiles. Lincoln, when they accepted that, their respect in the marketplace grew in direct proportion to it. So, I enjoyed having a hand in that, and he did a marvelous job, but he met with a lot of resistance. He really did. As I look back on it, we sold a few things that were good for the company, and everything you offer doesn't necessarily receive the kind of credits and the kind of applause that you'd like. But, nonetheless, in the long pull, they were the right decisions, and, certainly, he was a master at that.

Q Did we talk about the competition for the '61 Lincoln? I

understand you and Gene were doing one version, and the Engel team was doing another version?

A Right. Yes. There was a chief -- I think he was vice-president of engineering -- Vic Raviola. Gene, at that phase, reported to him in engineering. I remember him visiting the studio and venturing an opinion about what we were doing in clay. He, for a short period, was in the hierarchy of engineering. And our package work originated at the direction of the leadership. I think I'm right about it being Vic Raviola. The package decision-making had directed us to progress the car for '61, off of the '59, which was a very big car, and that was where we were. We were caught in that maelstrom at the time that Elwood attacked with his Thunderbird. That was, really, a devastating thing. As attractive as the car was, to get hit with a package departure of that magnitude is....

Q You were stuck with the enlargement?

A Oh, yes, we were. It was like, you know what, in the punch bowl that nobody really wanted to see that car. It really was funny.

Q You were upstairs, and he was downstairs?

A Yes, right. He was a good operator and very spontaneous, and that was a masterstroke as I look back on it.

Q Apparently aided by McNamara's surprise visit. He said, "What's that?" "It's our proposal for the new Thunderbird." He said, "Hell, why don't we make a Lincoln out of it?"

A I have never been privy to that. I never had heard that before, but I don't think I ever met the man during my stay at Ford.

Q He was, apparently, like a will-o-the-wisp, in and out very quickly. The man who made snap decisions?

A Yes, right, he was. I had encounters that were interesting to me with some of the hierarchy at the company -- Arjay Miller and Jack Reith, to name two. But McNamara, I never met him, nor do I recall having any kind of an encounter with him.

Q Basically, he wasn't interested in design. He was interested in the full package, including engineering possibilities, but he was, as head of Ford Division, more interested in something that would sell?

A Yes, and you would expect that. I think Mr. Iacocca would be thought of similarly when he was at Ford. I had more involvement with him because he was much more interested in -- and participated in -- the design process. He's very unusual, in that regard -- for CEO's -- to the degree in which he participates and the level of interest that he has. I could understand CEO's having an interest in the effect of design or the effect of whatever elements you want to discuss regarding a passenger car or truck, but Mr. Iacocca's involvement runs unusually deep for a top executive, and, fortunately for the companies that he's part of and for us, as creative people, he's very good at what he does.

Q And supportive?

A And very supportive. And very helpful, if what we're doing doesn't follow the directions that his judgment tells him is where it should be, we have the benefit of hearing from him. He is not a shrinking violet when it comes to letting you have the benefit of his knowledge. So it works out very well for us in the creative end.

Q At this point, Mr. Iacocca is beginning his ascendancy in the company with George Walker leaving, Bordinat taking over as vice-president of design, and McNamara leaving for the Kennedy administration. [This was a watershed period for Iacocca and the Ford Motor Company.]

A Yes. That would be the impression I have.

Q For you and Gene Bordinat, having had a good rapport with him, this must have been a fascinating period?

A It really was. I had the good fortune to be [in an advanced studio] rather than in a division or the production vehicle studio, which I periodically was. As I look at my career, the majority of it has been spent in advanced work, and I know we had a curious experience at Ford on the subject of advanced. I don't have enough knowledge of it to know how this happened. I thought it was very unusual and novel, but the story I had heard was that Mr. Ford, personally, was not satisfied that the term "advanced" was proper. As a result, we were requested to rename the equivalent of advanced -- identify it as special projects, and we did that. And I don't recall the stage we were going through at the time we're talking about. Whether I was head of special projects, or reported to Bob McGuire or exactly what the sequence was.

But the key to my recollection here, is that I had the good fortune to work on the laying of the groundwork for the Mustang, and I kept a ledger on that. I have a black, three-ring binder that has the pictures and [data] of what we did during this foundation laying. And we worked on a lot of Mustangs -- a lot of wheelbases. As I've said to various people when we've talked about the history that we've all been involved in, I don't disagree with the car they chose of Joe Oros'. It's nice, and it made history. But I had a heck of a good competitor to that car. In my analysis, I wore the design out by having [done] twenty or more versions of the Mustang -- the competitor -- in search of the solution, and, dimensionally, searching, proportion analysis, but I tried to keep

apples and apples together. As a result, it became important, both to me and to Bordinat as well, that we not depart from this particular design. So, I didn't. In some respects, it had a higher level of modernity than the one they picked. It might have been criticized by some people, as a result of things that General Motors did later, it ended up looking more G.M.-like. So, we did really give that a [good try]. I think it worked well from the standpoint of Mr. Iacocca as far as the search for the proper car.

In answer to was there some competition regarding the subject, I think I would have to be a little cautious. I would have to say that's Don DeLaRossa. Although, I don't think it would appear on the surface, nor today would I be thought of as competitive, but, at that time in my career, I was, and I was really devoted to it. I didn't enjoy losing at all, and I was totally devoted to competing, and I liked winning. Those things, with maturity or age, pass. Now it's quite a different world for me. But, at that time, yes, I was very competitive. I enjoyed winning. I enjoyed some things, I would have to say, that could be rather irrelevant, unimportant. To me, they were important. I enjoyed beating Joe Oros, for instance, at any opportunity I had. I enjoyed beating this chap whose name I don't remember, but you've mentioned him a couple of times today -- Buzz Grisinger. I don't remember him because I don't want to remember him. People that are so convinced that they are the be all to end all, are a bit of a problem for me. Grisinger was -- he had no doubt in his mind that he was right. I had every inclination to respect him as an able designer, but I couldn't tolerate his brand of self-aggrandizement. It was just too much. So, if I forget his name, I can understand why.

Any of those fellows that I could beat in a design contest, I worked very hard at doing it, and I particularly liked to knock off the head of Ford studio. He was particularly fair game. But Joe was a hard-working, dedicated -- a totally devoted, honest person. It's just that, if you love winning, he has to be sacrificed, if you possibly can do it.

I don't whether I've told you the story about what happened in the Mustang fight.

Q Please do.

A Mustang had grown to -- it was the '66/'67 Mustang, and Oros was [stipulating] with Bordinat's support -- and I'm sure Gene was supporting it because it seemed to make sense -- that for orderliness and all kinds of good things, every Mustang that is a candidate is going to be white. I'm not necessarily proud of this, but one of the things that I saw was an opportunity here. So, I had my candidate. I knew that they were down at the starting line, and we had arrived at the approval point, and, typical of Joe, he felt quite self-assured that it was his car. So, at the last minute, I had mine painted red.

The unexpected happened, which was a blessing for me. In the process of -- and this exists today, and it makes sense for top management to want to see all of it. We do a lot internally. We look at our vehicles that are under development. We look at them as creative people. We look at them, privately, outside. In the wintertime, that becomes a bit of a problem unless you have an unusual facility where you can create an outdoor environment. We don't have that here at Chrysler, nor did we have it at Ford. So, within the hierarchy of the company, somebody decided to wrap up this decision. These cars had to go outside. So, my

car went outside, and it was snowing like hell. I've never seen so much snow, and, of course, these electric lift devices are not engineered for operating under those conditions. It was a ramped entry into the studio from the courtyard, and it was slippery, and it was snowing up to your belt line. I was just beside myself with the humor of this and plus the chance of knocking Joe off because his car got stuck. It slipped off into the snow, and it was snow color. It was white. It was terrific. That's kind of sick, but I thought, "Oh, boy." And here's our red beauty there. God!

Q Standing out of the crowd?

A Yes. But, those are the fun things -- they really are. Before we started this interview, I would have done well to have had an up-to-date dossier on myself that really identifies the dates and my past because there's a lot about -- I don't think it's a departure of memory on my part because of my age, it's just that I have been involved in so many things, and I'm not as much of a historian as an interested person in history. But, I don't have the retention of things like other people that we've talked about who really are buffs, and I respect that. They know just exactly where they were and where everything was. I think it's marvelous. I have these little glimmers of recollection about it, but I'm not as....

Q In this case, we would prefer your impressionistic recalls.

A I see.

Q And not to worry about chronology. It's more important to get your viewpoint and your mature version of [events] as they happened to you. So, as far as the Mustang, then, what ensued after that momentous confrontation in the snow?

A I continued to be involved in this, whatever we were, as a result of being courteous, and wisely so, to Mr. Ford as far as what we were going to be called. So, I don't know whether it was special projects or advanced. I do remember that one of the second encounters I had with Mr. Iacocca was kind of a disappointment to me because I've always looked upon things that I've created -- when I really believe in them. I had a new Mustang. This was about 1969/'70. It was for the next generation of Mustang, and, I think I could have fared much better, career-wise -- I'm not talking monetarily, but from the standpoint of personal satisfaction and less personal aggravation -- if I had more ability to deal with being turned down. At this particular incident, I was convinced this was right for the next [Mustang] -- I went through this two times with Mr. Iacocca. I went through it with Fritz Mayhew doing the Mustang II. I did the Mustang II competitor, prior to Fritz Mayhew, and I had -- but, it's another story.

But this was the preceding next generation, and I had been a major contributor, if not the designer of it. I always hesitate in this business because there's so many people that want to be -- it's never been my real devotion to that, but, I think, I really was. I did design the 1972 Torino. You'll probably find three other guys that think they did it, too. Heck, maybe Gene did it.

But, at that same time, I had an associate. He was a very talented Japanese/American, a fellow by the name of Tony Yuki, and we had a good relationship, and, I think, I'm right about this, Tony Yuki was with me when we were doing the preparation for the Mustang -- these twenty to thirty cars. Tony Yuki and I worked on those, and he was a heavy contributor to this project, and he worked with me on this next generation of

Mustang, which I was sure was right for the Mustang of the future, and Mr. Iacocca was just as sure that I wasn't, and it was scuttled. But that's a shortcoming of mine that's stayed with me forever and always will. In all his brilliance, that was a mistake he made. That car would have been gangbusters. It was fantastic. But, in the creative business, that's life.

Lee said to me, "Jesus, it's terrific." But, as I recall, he said, "It doesn't have enough Mustang in it. It doesn't recall the Mustang enough. It's almost like it's too modern. It's too much of a departure." It was a blaster, though. It was fantastic.

Q Have you saved any of the sketches?

A No, I don't think so. I've got to go through a couple of boxes of photographs. It's possible that I have some photographs of it. The thematic material was.... Once in awhile, Lee will be in a mood to give you a short one. He'll tell you about what a hell of a questionable job that that was you did on the Torino with those fat hips. I ran that theme the full length of the car. In other words, it was a wedge. The hood came down like -- they didn't have cars like this around at that time. Boy, it was pure excitement. Bright yellow. God, I was disappointed when he didn't agree with me.

It's a funny thing. For a placid person who's almost sickeningly agreeable, I have [so] little tolerance for being disagreed with. It's amazing. I don't know where I come off with this.

Q Everybody has that.

A I don't know. It's strange. I'm so placid. Were do I come off getting upset because somebody disagrees with me? But I do in the creative business. It's terrible.

Q A sense of your own worth?

A Yes. I guess so. I should see a headskrinker. And that hasn't changed much with age. It's interesting. It's part of the pleasure of the business. It's almost part of vitality. I don't like it any better, being disagreed with, but I get something. It's a bit of a shot of adrenalin. It's really funny. God, you would think at this age that I would have spun my wheels. But, I meet Alex Tremulis, and he's loaded with it. He's just like he was thirty years old. It's fascinating. Some guys seem to really keep it, so they have an adolescence that stays with them. You It really is amazing.

Q In your latter association with Mr. Iacocca, has he ever alluded to that rejected design in any private conversations?

A No, he never has. He has made a remark about the hippy, in this context, physical hips. The hippy design I did on the 1972 Torino.

Q Very successful?

A Yes, it was very successful.

Q Still regarded as being a successful design?

A I appreciate hearing that. I think it was a winner. A fellow that was -- for a short time I was associated with him here at Chrysler -- my nemesis at Ford, in a sense, a fellow by the name of John Naughton. Naughton was head of Ford sales, and we were commissioned to defend an area of the marketplace that had been carved out by Chevrolet with their Monte Carlo. They were making their statement in the marketplace quite effectively for two hundred million dollars in investment. At Ford, we were ordered to do a car that would defend Ford's honor, and we had about fifteen million dollars to do it with. Naughton -- I can't ever recall

him having any respect for my end of the business at all, and this was one of the periods where he was being himself. I'm sure there were other participants, but Bordinat and I, primarily, did a car that was a hell of a competitor. I knew it. Iacocca, whether begrudging or not, gave it the nod. It was approved. I can't remember the name that Ford chose for it. It was just thought to be next to the worst possible thing that could happen as far as John Naughton is concerned. There is a linkage in our business between sales and finance, and Naughton, through the position he took, caused the financial fraternity at Ford to effectively understate the volumes from the scheduling point of view.

When our car came out in the marketplace, it took off like a rocket, but Naughton had effectively given it this handicap, and there were no cars. When you fool with around the family jewels like that, you're talking a loss for a company. In those days, you could be talking a loss of fifty to seventy-five million dollars very conservatively. We never could fight Chevrolet with this car, and not because it wasn't a damned good design. It was because the people that had scheduled the cars said it was a loser. That stayed on my mind. When I met the man here at Chrysler -- he was here for a short time -- I couldn't meet him without thinking about that. That bothered me. Son of a gun, it was something else.

Q Did it ever get out?

A It came out, but it was so in demand. Our sales performance was just a fraction of what it could be. It went off like a rocket. It was very much in demand. I can't think of the name of it, but it was Ford's Monte Carlo fighter, and it was built -- as I say, it was designed with a

ten to fifteen million dollar tight budget, and we did a hell of a job. But we got screwed up with that thing. No, I think, the company could have sold two or three times the number of cars they sold.

Q They completely undercut you?

A Once you schedule a car -- those decisions are made by the hierarchy of the company. Once they're made, those are....

Q Immutable?

A Oh, absolutely. You don't say, "Jesus, I think we understated. We've got to go back and...." No, the business doesn't have that quality.

Q Doesn't have that resiliency?

A No, no. If you'd done that, your plant is loaded, and you've got everything set up, that die is cast. That's the end of it. So, it wiped out that car.

The name of the vehicle that we were discussing was the Elite. I can't recall whether it was a Torino Elite, but I don't think so. I think it was the Ford Elite, and that was the competitor to the Monte Carlo -- very effective.

Q It was a successful car in terms of sales?

A Yes, it was. It was successful, but I was disappointed they couldn't meet the demand. The demand far exceeded our volume capacity.

Q You mentioned that it's almost impossible to do that. Can you elaborate on that a bit as to why they couldn't up production as they can today?

A Yes, they can. We're doing quite a bit of it here at Chrysler. Once we have a performance in the marketplace, it gives us an indication

there is a demand. We're going to do it in the case of the T-115. That's a case of a vehicle that was conservatively planned, and we're rushing ahead now to increase our capacity to build more of them.

Q This is the...?

A The van -- the mini van.

Q The Dodge Caravan?

A Yes, right. And the Plymouth Voyager.

Q An interesting footnote to that before we move back again in time. I've heard Iacocca quoted as saying, "It's easy when you've done it before." Is that a correct quote?

A Yes.

Q Does that mean that you and he worked on that before you left Ford?

A Right. For about a decade. The vehicle was called the Mini-Max. I built, conservatively, a half a dozen of those Mini-Maxes. At Ford, my base was limited somewhat because the only front system that I had was the Fiesta, so I built some Mini-Maxes based on the Fiesta drivetrain. That was an examination of a smaller package than the direction that we took here at Chrysler. But it was an appealing vehicle, and we did a number of those. I never could clearly understand Ford's decision-making process that brought them to the judgment that they shouldn't do it. I know that the market research that was conducted left no doubt that it was a ten-strike. In fact, as I recall, Ford's research on the Mini Max was one of the highest numbers that they'd ever experienced. But there was a body of opinion -- which is relatively commonplace with any of the Big Three or any automobile manufacturer -- that tends to have con-

siderable difficulty dealing with any vehicle solution that has no historical background or foundation.

Q That's interesting.

A Yes, it is. Right now, it's interesting. At the time, it ticked me off, but age has mellowed me, so now it's interesting. At the time, I thought it stunk. The fact is, those people, and they create challenges that are -- like, what is it? Marketing people are particularly rife with this quality. They don't want to know about it. If they haven't seen it perform before in the marketplace -- jeez, you've got problems. Those people are something else. Not to suggest they singularly sunk the Mini-Max, but, let's face it, they were opponents of the Mini-Max. And there are members of the hierarchy of the company that were doubtful about it, because there was no base. The world of the automobile, when I started in it, offered a lot of frustration, certainly, to many of us. Although I'm not a visionary of the category of Alex Tremulis, I could appreciate what Alex was going through because his observations were far more profound than mine. But I experienced a lot of frustration -- in our world, the creative person was being confined to almost a grunt status, because the thinking people, which were the people in product planning and various members of management, decided what was going to be done. It's like painting by numbers, and the grunts were assigned to put a new grille inside the opening. You put a new molding section on or a new flag at the beginning of the molding, you did a new taillight lens, and you might change a wheel cover, but that was about the extent of it, so, in that climate, you can imagine what -- you could relate Lee Iacocca to what he experienced when he decided that what the company needed was

the Mustang. "What? A Mustang? Christ, who needs a...?" There were a lot of people who, I'm sure, were resistant, and he did the same thing with the Mark III. He caused the Mark family to start because he's very imaginative -- very creative -- and not easy to seek. If he believes in it, he's a mover and shaker. So, we have the good fortune of having a management person with that particular quality. But, otherwise, the climate of the business for many years was very repetitious, quite frankly.

Q Let's expand on that a bit, and let me preface it with something I'm sure you know. In a recent television interview, Henry Ford II was asked about the Mustang. He said, "I've been hearing reports that Don Frey says that he was the originator of the Mustang." He said, "But, it was Lee's car all the way through. He initiated it, and he bulled it through." Since you were there in a very good vantage point at the time of Iacocca's rise in the Ford Motor Company, could you expand on his role and your role, vis-a-vis, the designer and the creative ethos at Ford, in terms of design decisions made in the late 'Sixties and the early 'Seventies?

A There was no question in my mind that Lee brought a dimension to the business that I hadn't experienced before. It offered an opportunity that was exciting to all of us. Some of us were more closely related to it from a vantage point and to be participants in programs. But someone has coined the expression, "Every successful car has many fathers." People line up wanting to be identified as the creator of that, and we've talked briefly about the 1949 Ford, as a case in point. It's almost funny. In every business, and they certainly existed at Ford, anything as successful as the Mustang would be fair game as far as a person as Don

Frey is concerned. I think Don was a person of considerable knowledge and ability, but he had an ego that would bring him to that conclusion that he should identify with it and take credit for it. It's not unusual to find that. I don't find it acceptable, but it's familiar to me.

But my role in the Mustang was sufficiently heavy to give me a good feel and understanding of who created it, and that followed in the Mark family as well. I didn't have the good fortune to be on the receiving end of the light going on regarding the need for a Mark. The original Mark III was done jointly by Lee Iacocca, and he dealt with a chap by the name of Art Querfeld, and Art created the first Mark III, at Lee's direction.

Where I came into the Mark program was in the fourth and fifth Mark which were two revisits to the subject where we followed an approach which I strongly favored, and that -- based on the success of the Mark -- was to drift the Mark more into an obvious direct relationship with the Rolls-Royce. You'll notice our design leaves no doubt that we were inspired by the Rolls. We suffered a bit of a design handicap in that I liked the choice that Lee made and directed Art to work in the original Mark III. That came off of the Thunderbird, and that package was ideal. Although I didn't verbalize it, I had the feeling that's where the Mark belonged from the package point of view. I would have liked to have kept it there.

But by this time, I had to come off another car.. I came off of the large car, and the Mark grew. It was very successful and very attractive, but it was a much bigger, more massive, long car -- just huge as I look back on it or I see one on the street today. I think that was an

unfortunate thing. It happens in car business, because a car will phase out, and that platform that you are using disappears, and you're confronted with having to plan your car of the future on another platform.

We're, fortunately, not confronted with that here at Chrysler, which is very pleasing. We have a much [better situation], for reasons that are obvious, in that we, under Lee's direction, have just survived a blood bath here. Our whole view of the future is far better, and more attention is being played to the future of our various categories of cars. So our platform programs are well thought out, it gives the process flexibility, and it gives the designer an incredibly good opportunity to respond to....

Q This sort of atmosphere was conspicuously lacking at Ford Motor Company in the early 'Seventies?

A Yes, it was. Right.

Q Which must have been very frustrating to both Iacocca and yourself?

A Yes, right. It was.

Q Any particular reason for that that? Was there a lack of flexibility at the top?

A Even with a faulty memory, there was the entry of Knudsen into the scene.

Q Which really muddied the waters?

A Boy, that's a very kind and dignified way to express it. It was a horror story!

Q Would you expand on the episode?

A From the career point of view, I had been at Ford long enough that I had survived and been through some degree of unpleasantness, the kind of instability that comes from the appearance and disappearance of various presidents of the company. The only consistency was Mr. Ford, himself, but from the time I started as a manager, which was relatively early after I joined Ford, we had a variety of people running the design center until the air got cleared, and Gene Bordinat was given the responsibility. So we had people coming from Raviola to you name it. There was a new man coming in from somewhere that was going to tell us how to do our business. And also at the top. From the time -- from Ernie Breech and including Ernie Breech to -- and it just went on and on.

Q Crusoe and McNamara?

A All of them.

Q Arjay Miller?

A Yes. Arjay. Some of those people, I had created a better rapport with than others. I had a good relationship with Arjay Miller. I had a rocky relationship with Ernie Breech, and I wasn't particularly enthralled with the appearance of Knudsen. I didn't understand it. Promptly, Bordinat, in his inimitable way, for reasons I have never discussed with him, chose to assign two Knudsen agents to work for me. The Oriental chap, Larry Shinoda, and Dave Wheeler. A very nice fellow. Both of those fellows reported to me, [and] I tried to grin and bear it. I was not particularly pleased, but I'm a saluter, so, I saluted, and that was it. Almost immediately, it was made common knowledge that Knudsen had brought in, vis-a-vis with Larry Shinoda, a hit list -- which was a list of all the people they were going to get rid of promptly. I

felt fairly flattered because Lee Iacocca was on it, and I thought that's fairly good company. Bordinat was on it, and Don DeLaRossa was on it.

Q Was this Shinoda's hit list?

A I never really could find out, but after I watched Shinoda operate, I had the feeling it was Shinoda's list that he made up, maybe at the request of Knudsen. Like new people entering a new company, it's not unusual for them to want to clean house, and they had this list.

Q Clear out the dead wood?

A Yes. Get rid of the dead wood. I'll never forget a particular episode that so completely brought that into perspective. One morning I had been asked by Bordinat to design a trophy to be given as part of the award process at the Indianapolis 500 mile race that would honor William Knudsen -- Bunkie's father. So, I played a role in the designing of this trophy, and one of my people in my organization worked with me, or I worked with them, to do an illustration for this trophy. I fail to remember just exactly how this thing blew out of proportion, but I remember this particular morning.... By the way, Knudsen put us all in shock because Knudsen let us know that he came to work at seven in the morning, plus guess where he started his work, which struck me as kind of interesting for the president of the company to come to the styling center. That didn't flatter me. I thought, Jesus Christ. Being president has got to be fairly complex, but what the hell would he come to the styling center for? He was on another path, I'll tell you.

So, this particular morning we arranged upstairs in Johnny Najjar's area to -- and the part I don't remember is how the group became so august. Here's DeLaRossa, here is Shinoda, Knudsen, and Iacocca, and

Bordinat. So, here's all of us, and I'm showing this trophy to Knudsen. I am trying to show it, but, really, Shinoda showed it. He was not about to let me get into the act here. So, we are all standing there, and Knudsen made a remark about the -- I had floated into this acrylic -- the head of his father.

Q William Knudsen?

A William Knudsen. I have a colored photograph of it at home. I think it's a very nice piece of work. But the way this evolved, it was funny. God, it's all you could do to keep from laughing. So Knudsen's looking at this, and he's saying good things about it. He likes it.

Q After all, it's his father?

A Yes. And he thought it was very nice, and he said to Larry Shinoda, "I've got a small sculpture piece of my father's head out at the house, and," he said, "why don't you come out, Larry...." And this is in front of everyone. "Why don't you come out this weekend and pick it up?" Larry, for some reason or another, said, "I'll come out Saturday afternoon and get it." And Knudsen says, "No. Come out Saturday evening and bring your wife for dinner." Here is all this in front of Iacocca. I thought, son of a gun, this is way out. It was just incredible. He was a different kind of person. To this day, I don't understand what his -- I heard other things like he was always attacking Ford's engine engineering department. Knudsen had not only had [Dave Wheeler] and Larry Shinoda in the styling part of it, but he also, I noticed, was attracted to people like that in other areas as well. Every time he would start badmouthing Ford engineering, he had a person that he would call and have come up to Ford who was his, at best. His name is Smoky Yunick, and

Smoky is well known in NASCAR as an engine builder. But, I mean, Smoky Yunick? And here's Smoky Yunick with his sweat-stained T shirt and his billed cap and a can of beer, and you think what the hell is going on? Smoky Yunick will take over and tell you how to design all the future engines.

Q It sounds like a comic opera.

A It was.

Q But it was not so comic at the time, obviously?

A No, a lot of people got quite upset. I have some ability to see the humor in it. So, I actually kind of enjoyed the humorous side of this, but it's kind of tough to see humor in it if the person has already submitted that they have a hit list and you're on it.

Q The situation that just got worse at Ford?

A Yes, it did. It got very bad. Knudsen caused some design decisions that were very unfortunate. We had some cars -- the timing of the design process was such that they were easy to fall victim to his influence, and it caused us to put a peculiar-looking front end on the Thunderbird. It was an effort on his part to -- I recall him telling us that it should look like a Pontiac. I thought that was kind of honest and strange.

Q He had just come from Pontiac?

A Yes, so he thought that it should look like a Pontiac. What was wrong with us was that we didn't know how to do that, so he caused a very strange-looking front to get on the Thunderbird.

Q What year was that?

A It was the early 'Seventies.

Q The in-fighting must have been fierce at this point. You and Bordinat and Mr. Iacocca on one side and Knudsen and Shinoda on the other?

A Yes, right.

Q And the design center caught in the middle?

A Right, yes. Now, of course, Lee [Iacocca] is a fighter, and I'm probably far beyond my understanding of what was going on behind the scenes. I guess we all hoped that he was going to do something about it. I didn't know in what form it would come, and a condition like that can be rather threatening because you don't know how effective the person will be that you hope will be the winner.

Here's the chairman of the board that's brought this man in. The whole thing was strange and none of us could understand it. Maybe Bordinat understood it, but I certainly didn't understand it. Henry was a different kind of person, and that was a demonstration of his uniqueness that wasn't particularly pleasing.

Q An impulsive decision?

A It seemed to be. I didn't know what was going on in his mind, naturally. As I look back on it -- and I looked at what happened much later on -- perhaps, there was some element that was similar to Lee being fired from Ford. That something was brewing there that I don't think any of us were aware of, but, Lee being a fighter, he put together a group of us. It seemed to be a penchant of Henry's, for reasons that I never clearly understood, except that, perhaps, from a psychological point of view, he viewed it as somehow threatening. He was always critical of Lee's team. The team is a positive kind of statement about associates of

a person, but he wasn't calling us Lee's team. I forget what he called us, but it wasn't good. He didn't like that Lee would travel to Europe with a select group, and Lee would do this with these people, and he'd do that, and Lee talked about this person or included this person in this particular thing.

Q You were talking about the very interesting relationship that evolved between Lee Iacocca and Henry Ford in the late 'Sixties which triggered the coming of Bunkie Knudsen, and you were about to embark on a rather interesting explanation of how that happened.

A Mr. Ford made a number of negative remarks that reached me through a variety of sources -- some Bordinat, some other sources as well -- that, ultimately, could be interpreted as critical of Lee and critical of the group that Lee associated with more closely. In fact, it included quite a cross-section of the company. For instance, Bordinat and I and a chap from finance staff and a number of different people. I think Lee's limit in the Gulfstream was, maybe, six or seven.

Q This is the Ford company plane?

A Yes. We'd go to Europe, and those were the people he wanted. I think the decision to do things like that reached the chairman, and he was constantly negative about it. And, after the coming of Knudsen, most of us really had no way of knowing how to deal with it. Frankly, we were not at a level where we could deal with it, except put up with it. But Lee is not the kind of person that you can deal with that way, and he promptly started doing something about it. This resulted in a shoot-out that included a number of us who were on Henry's list of Lee's associates. So Lee went to Henry and told Henry that if that man [Knudsen]

didn't go, not only was he leaving, but all of these other people were leaving Ford Motor Company as well. Without having direct knowledge of this judgment, I came out of it convinced that that act, and probably other acts that I'm not familiar with, were instrumental in forcing Henry to -- it was peculiar that he would bring Knudsen in, but that was only half as peculiar as it was canning Knudsen. That really looked strange. Lee was the person that caused that to take place, and he laid it on the line that some of the best people in Ford Motor Company and myself were leaving if you don't get this man out of there. It's probably understating it or simplifying it, but shortly after that confrontation, the chairman did oust Knudsen -- in fact, I saved the newspaper. I just saw it the other day. I've got to run it through the copy machine before it gets any more yellow, but it shows Henry on the front page and Lee sitting beside him, and Knudsen is out -- fired. And Lee looks pleased. There's no question about it that he was successful.

Q That's fascinating. Not to put you too much on the spot, but do you really think that was more than a bluff on Iacocca's part? Had he consulted with most of you about that possibility that if Knudsen stayed that it would unteanble curtains for all of you?

A Yes, he had discussed it, and I, definitely, had no problem with what he said at all. I would have left. I certainly was an ally of his in this particular circumstance. I can't speak for the rest of the group, but, I think, that, generally, we would have.

Q It would have been a marvelous cadre of...?

A Yes, it really would have.

Q You could have gone anywhere?

A Yes. We might have come to Chrysler earlier.

Q The disasters of the Knudsen reign, did they result in any other oddities? The large Mustang became, under Shinoda's guidance, fatter and larger and more powerful?

A Yes. That's right. Knudsen and Shinoda, really, were the primary pursuers of the muscle cars of the future. To them they were big tanks, really, and they were competition-oriented people, and they really seemed to, just by their association with NASCAR, eat, sleep and breathe engines, and large displacement and bigger cars, and fatter tires. So this was not a happy course for the Mustang to be taking. It was very unfortunate, and it grew bigger and bigger, and its demise was a direct part of that.

Q They had taken really a marvelous vehicle and bloated it out of proportion?

A Yes.

Q The turmoil is fascinating to me. The turmoil that this created, not only in design and styling, but in product planning and product development, must have been enormous?

A Yes. It was. I think there is, as far as humans in general are concerned, a large element of them do surprisingly well in an environment like that. I was discussing this recently with my wife, and I don't want to depart too far into the psychological aspect of this, but it kind of intrigues me, because as I look at the subject and I look at myself and I look at others, I can sense that there are people that contribute and create turmoil, and there are many people who do quite well in a tumultous atmosphere.

Q Thrive on dissension and tension?

A Yes, tension. I have to say about myself, that I do fairly well in it.

Q You can hold your own?

A Yes. I don't like to think of me contributing to any of it at all, but from a career point of view, I, unconsciously, developed an affinity for tension.

Q There are advocates of creative tension.

A Yes. As I look back on it, I think I would have to be numbered among those people. And Knudsen -- I knew something was going to happen to him. I never felt that anything was going to happen to Don DeLaRossa, quite frankly. As I say, I've been through so many presidents, that I wasn't terribly impressed with being -- only that I was honored that I was on the same hit list with Lee Iacocca. But I didn't feel threatened. And I am fairly decisive and competitive, so I didn't exactly sit on my hands. So, I do have to admit that I thrive on it to a degree. It's a funny thing to know about yourself because it's not supposed to be a very healthful thing, and we're supposed to avoid tension, but, the only thing, whether I'm being honest or not, is I hope I don't create it, but I do enjoy it. Lethargy is a little tougher for me than the tension and the abundance of activity.

Q In the design business, is this a plus?

A I think it is. If you're really laid back, I think that your chances of really accomplishing a great deal and rising into a level of responsibility are very slim. I used to think about it from the point of view that I wished my education program had been taken down a path that

equipped me to be a candidate to run the whole thing. I sensed that I would like to run the company, which sounds strange coming from a designer, but I really would.

Q Certainly that era cried out for competent leaders?

A Yes. That's true.

Q The Shinoda influence began to wane when it became apparent that Knudsen was, in effect, digging his own grave?

A Right.

Q So within the design center, some of you took heart again?

A Yes, right.

Q How did that final episode unravel?

A As soon as Gene Bordinat, being an officer in the company, was made aware of Knudsen's departure that morning, he called Larry Shinoda in and discharged him.

Gene made the decision to keep the one Knudsen person on. Gene's judgment was that [Dave Wheeler] was an asset, had performed well, had not conducted himself as a Knudsen ally without regard for Ford or the Ford people, so he kept Dave on. Dave is still with the design center and works for Jack Telnack. But Gene discharged Larry that day.

Q Is there any truth to the story that Larry had been in Europe and...?

A Yes, that's right. He was.

Q And Gene, as the story goes, said, "You're through."

A Yes, right. Gene called him. I'd forgotten about that. Larry was in Europe, and he got the news [of Knudsen's firing] over there.

Q There was another story which has surfaced, and which you might be

able to corroborate. Someone put up a design display of a sun, and, somehow, contrived so that it sank slowly [during the day of Shinoda's discharge].

A Oh, yes. I remember that.

Q Is that true?

A That's true. Yes.

Q You don't remember who did that or how that came about?

A No, I don't remember what studio. I remember seeing it. From a psychological point of view, in trying to understand why there would be this excessive hostility between Larry and other people, particularly Occidentals, in my judgment, it came from the fact that he was a Japanese-American. His parents were Japanese-Americans as well, and they suffered the unfortunate reaction of the U.S. Government [in 1942], and they were put in a stockade. That's a 25 cent analysis of what really happened. But, I thought, it could have had an impact on a young man, and, from then on, you could want to try to make things right, and that hostility was a form of taking some kind of action against the persons or their forebears that may have been a part of that, and he'd lump all Occidentals together.

Q He's a talented man.

A He's a very talented designer. I have a design book that features his work and a story about him, and he's very good. He did some beautiful work at General Motors on the Corvette and the Corvair and other cars, and he's a really outstanding designer. I was amazed here several years ago after I joined Chrysler, I went down for a ride with the fellow who handles Chrysler's display and exhibits through the Detroit

Automobile Show before it was open. We're riding around, and who do we encounter but Larry Shinoda, and he was very friendly and courteous. He followed that with the fact that he'd like to come and talk to me about business, and he told me he's opening a new business in Franklin [Michigan] at 13 Mile Road. He wrote me a follow-up letter and said he was glad to see me and looked forward to doing some business [with Chrysler]. For obvious reasons, I never pursued it, but he had done some nice work for White....

Q Yes. Apparently, he went with Knudsen?

A Went with Knudsen. I like his work, and I always have liked his work. I thought his truck work was beautiful.

Q Were there any positive aspects to the Knudsen/Shinoda regime in terms of design decisions during the short time they were there?

A No. I remember there were not.

Q There were some near disasters. We've talked about the Mustang. Were there any others?

A Well, the Thunderbird was a very -- they had ruined the front end of the Thunderbird. Made a very strange-looking, three-element opening with a simulation by Knudsen's direction, of the Pontiac. And it happened to be my responsibility, so I guess you could have laid off the design responsibility on me.

Q But you were under the gun?

A Lee is a classy person. If he's going to fight Knudsen, he does it in his own way, and he doesn't take the route a lot of men would to come over there and fight with Knudsen in front of the employees. That's not a class way to do it, and he's a classy person, and so all of the preparation for getting Knudsen sacked was done with finesse behind the scenes.

Q He presented Henry Ford with a fait accompli.

A Right, he did. I thought it was a nice piece of work on Lee's part. God!.

Q So there you are about 1970?

A Yes.

Q Knudsen has left, Shinoda's influence has been removed from the design center, and you and [Bordinat] and Iacocca are about to try to make some sense out of the wreckage. What kind of decisions came out of that matrix?

A In that time frame, we began restoring the Mustang, and, as part of advanced, I worked on the next generation of Mustang. I had an associate designer working with me by the name of Tony Yuki, who was an extremely talented fellow. I have a black three-ring binder in which I kept the history of the Mustang because I, being responsible for advanced, it hadn't yet been turned over to the passenger car studio --like Joe Oros' and the Ford studio. Tony and I worked personally very closely on this. We called the car the Allegro. I think that we did around twenty-five cars. We had a very nice design -- very advanced, very modern, very clean. We were responding to Lee's desire to settle on what the proportion should be, what the wheelbase should be, etc.

So we are cranking out these Allegros, and Bordinat was giving us the benefit of his judgment was that it was important. I don't know whether he got this from Lee or whether he fabricated it, but the thing was that, in order to keep apples and apples, every Allegro had to have the same design. If it's 96 inches wheelbase, or it's 90, or it's a 103, you move the passenger compartment forward or aft. Whatever, it's the

same design. That proved to be a disaster from the standpoint of the design itself. I think Gene would agree with me if he were to be asked. It was a beautiful car, and, as great as the Mustang was that Joe Oros did, that was an old design. It may have been new to the Mustang, and it may have been new to the people, but it was a contrivance of elements that came from the Chrysler series that they did over at Ghia -- the mouth, and the headlights, and little mouths. I'm not saying there was anything wrong with the one they approved, but, personally as a designer, I think ours was better. It's that simple.

And, we got sunk, in my view, because we had worn out the Allegro. We had been showing Allegros for a year. And, by the time things were at the starting post, I was still hearing, "I don't want you to change the Allegro design." So, that Allegro design just was not competitive. It had worn Lee and others out. Suddenly, this older design really was looked upon as fresher. They hadn't seen the design before, so it was a going away winner, which didn't go down well with me. I, obviously, can tell the story too well. You can see that I'm not exactly enthralled with the way it turned out. That was followed by an interesting, if it's appropriate, little vignette on the future of the Mustang. Because we had the original Mustang, and then we got into ruining it by getting it too overweight. We finally got into the addressing of the Mustang for the next generation and called it Mustang II.

I had done a car, a Mustang. I have a picture of myself taken out in a courtyard with my Mustang candidate, and it was given a name because it was named after a city in Southern California where the market research was carried on. But back to the heart of the story. When we

started the Mustang, I took the Mustang issue up with Lee, and I suggested, in rationalizing it, that when we do this new Mustang, let's not forget that the original Mustang was a notchback -- that was followed with a fastback -- so let's not do a fastback first. Let's do the notchback first. My recollection is that it sounded like it made sense to him.

I got to work on a notchback Mustang right away at Ghia and a version of it -- also notchback -- in the United States in Dearborn [Michigan]. Much to my shock and chagrin, there was a young designer by the name of Fritz Mayhew who, I guess, just about walks on water. He didn't care, or know, or agree, or understand what I was talking about. So he embarks on doing a Mustang fastback, and it was very attractive, very dramatic belt line, and a very nice-looking car. And, I'll be damned if Lee didn't buy it. A 180 degrees from what we talked about.

So then all hell broke loose trying to make a notchback out of that car. There was no way, and that accounts for the strange look of the Mustang II notchback. It never looked right. The C-pillar always looked like a trunk of a tree growing out of the quarter panel. You just don't do it. I mean, it's not doable. The car was a mild, weak success, and it just hung around. I had trouble adjusting to that.

A funny aside on that. I've never been a Fritz Mayhew booster, particularly because of that issue. I come to Chrysler to take over the [design] responsibility, and I start walking around up on the fifth floor in different conference rooms. What do I see on the walls but a plethora of Fritz Mayhew paintings. I don't how in the hell this all took place, but somehow Fritz -- somebody here -- he's a helluva painter. He and his

wife are very good artists. But, it was funny, because I thought, "God almighty, here's Fritz Mayhew again." But, anyway, Fritz was....

Q He's still there.

A Oh, yes, right. He's full of himself. As I said, he walks on water. But he really screwed that up. His car -- the guys who ran the market research fiddled with the facts. I'm never sure about those fellows. They are really strange, and they can take all that data and tell anything they want to tell with it. So my notchback got sunk out in California.

Q Did it ever resurface?

A No, no. It was the end of the car. It had a lot of staying power. It was good enough that they would have delayed revisiting the Mustang subject as early as they did.

Q So the notchback design was submerged, and this left you in what kind of a situation at the design center at Ford?

A I had other responsibilities, so we moved ahead on other projects. We were beginning to approach the period where the Ghia interest was emerging.

Q I want to ask you about that. At this point, Ford has taken it over in terms of controlling interest. How did that come about?

A It's my understanding that Lee took the initiative and purchased Ghia from DeTomasso. My original experience in relationship with Ghia, started many years earlier. Back in '53/'54/'55, I had started going to Italy. In fact, I've found some paperwork recently in a file where I was identified as the contract negotiator, and I went over to negotiate the contractual arrangements with various carrozzie like Vignale and, certainly, Ghia and Bertone and a number of others. That was followed with

the awarding of build contracts to Luigi Segre in Torino [Italy]. I worked on a number of cars in Italy in the mid-to-late 'Fifties, so I had a substantial amount of experience with Italy and, particularly, Ghia.

Q This is in line with your work in the advanced studio?

A Yes, right.

Q But Chrysler had a foot in the door during the 'Fifties and 'Sixties at Ghia?

A Right, they did, yes. Luigi Segre and his chief designer and chief engineer, Giovanni Savonuzzi, who later left Ghia and joined Chrysler as head of advanced engineering here at Chrysler. Quite an outstanding engineer. Very nice gentleman.

So, I was really delighted when, after they purchased Ghia, I was chosen to be the president and the chairman of the board of Ghia. It was a wholly-owned subsidiary of Ford and my first experience with a profit center operation, which is unique to people in large companies whose careers, generally, reside in an area that is cost-center oriented, and it's quite a different kind of life. So it was very exciting for me. I really enjoyed it.

Q Could you describe how the Ghia connection worked in terms with Ford and earlier? Obviously, they made body design decisions for you, but how did the whole matrix work?

A Lee originally viewed Ghia as being an opportunity to offer Ford Motor Company a well-known coach builder's name so that we could put the badge of Ghia on a premium line of vehicles, and that was followed by Ford of Europe as well -- the Ghia model. I think it's safe to say that, in the hierarchy at Ford, there were some misgivings about Ghia. When I

took it over, DeTomasso -- the previous year -- had done about six models. In my first year and the following years, I got it up into the twenty to twenty-three models a year, and I was quite aggressive about it. I viewed it as a heck of an opportunity. Number one, it gave me an opportunity that was unique in that I was a Dearborn person who was aware of the long-range plans and the strategiesthat were popular in Dearborn. And I could take a reading on the direction that Bordinat was taking.

So I enjoyed a lot of autonomy, quite frankly, that permitted me to make decisions at Ghia that were quite remote from Dearborn. I carried on a battle with Harold MacDonald for quite an extended period over this subject, and I had Bordinat's support. I pause a moment to say that some of the autonomy -- I don't mean to be unappreciative -- that Gene allowed me at Ghia, as I look back, was the result of Gene's penchant for, his awareness, and his capacity to deal in the general field of top management. He was very concerned that something could go South with Ghia, and he didn't want to have any of that rub off on him. So I ended up having the fortuitous benefit of Gene's looking after Gene. It was nice, and I don't mean to be unkind, but, I think that was one of the things he had on his mind, because there was a lot of talk about that. It was a little suspect.

Q Why?

A I never understood it. Where I first became aware of it was a very surprising phone call I got from the vice-president of finance, Ed Lundy. Ed Lundy had never called me in my life, so this is enough that it gets your attention. I had just taken over as president of Ghia. Ed Lundy's office called and said that Mr. Lundy would like to have you come over at

a certain time and talk to him. I couldn't figure out why. I went over, and Ed is a very nice fellow, very courteous, at least, to the degree that I know him at all, which is fairly shallow, but he's a very nice person. He impressed me that way. So we sat down, and he started talking about why he had me come over was to talk about Ghia. He didn't elaborate on his concerns. All he said was that he had some concerns, and one of the things that he wanted to ensure that I understood was that -- his choice of words was that Ghia be a success, and he said also that he didn't want anything to happen at Ghia that would, in any way, put Lee Iacocca's career in jeopardy. So that's an attention-getter. I thought, Jesus Christ, I don't know what the hell he's saying, but it's interesting.

So, I got that message, and there certainly was nothing I did that ever put him in jeopardy. But it said something about the atmosphere of concern that remains mysterious to me. I turned out a lot of cars and a lot of interesting designs, and I had this running battle with Harold MacDonald to who that whole subject of downsizing was repugnant. I did a whole series of downsized Continentals --four doors, two-door Continentals, and a new Ford four-door sedan all on the -- and I used unitized construction as my approach to lighten the car and reduce the dimensions. But, Harold MacDonald, he's a brick. There is no way you can move Harold MacDonald, I mean, to this day.

Q He was the engineering...?

A Yes. He was chief engineer, and there was no way he was having any of DeLaRossa. In fact, to him, "What the hell would DeLaRossa know about this? He's a goddamed stylist, so he can't know anything about it."

Gene Bordinat was very supportive of me and collaborated with me on this, and Gene did his part in trying to turn Harold around. Gene took this subject up with Iacocca a number of times, but unsuccessfully.

We had one vignette that was a pleasing, relatively unimportant thing, but in an environment like I was in where -- I shipped my cars in air freight. We'd bring 'em in batches of two or three at a time, and then I'd show 'em to Harold MacDonald's advanced engineering subcommittee, as it was called, and we'd show them in the dome. I'd give a podium start with slides on how's Ghia doing, and then I would have the cars under wraps in the dome, and we'd take the group out and show 'em the cars.

It got to be a very popular thing with the people. I was turning opponents into supporters, rapidly. In fact, one day -- late in the day I got a call from an individual -- I can't remember who it was -- who called me frantically about a board meeting the following day. Apparently, it was the result of a board meeting, and the call came from out of town -- New York. The call came in from this individual, and he said, "The board is asking a lot of questions about what we're doing at Ford on small cars." And, he said, "You and I know that they're doing zip." Then he said, "You've got all the small Ghia cars." He said, "Could you get those out of storage?" I had rented storage from Parke-Davis in Allen Park [Michigan] just to keep them from getting banged up and destroyed. And I said, "I'd be delighted." I said, "I've got some new unitized Continentals and Lincolns and Fords." He said, "Sure, bring 'em along."

So, you do it. It was like some fantastic demand, like either the next morning or at noon the next day. So we trucked all these Ghias

cars, and we had a hell of a lot of really nice-looking cars. I wish I had the books here to show you. I've got the whole Ghia file, and it really is interesting. So, I brought all these cars, because what I'd been doing.... At the direction of Henry Ford, there was an expressed position of no interest in front-wheel drive cars even though they had the Fiesta, but, as far as he was concerned, that was the end of the subject.

Obviously, to use the Fiesta drivetrain and platform limited me as far as the range of cars that I could do, so I bought cars in Italy -- Lancias -- which had a nice front-front system with a V-4 engine. I'd cut the sheet metal off, and we'd do our driveable cars on the Lancia bases. So, I had done a mini-Mustang based on the Fiesta with a front-front system, and I had a number of Mini-Maxes and two-door and four-door sedans, all front-wheel drive. Interestingly, it was slightly smaller than the K-Car, ironically, and some of 'em have the K-Car two-door and two-door LeBaron kinds of looks. And I brought the Continental and the Lincoln and the new Ford over. I brought that all. The board was just ecstatic over what they saw.

Q This is the board of Ford Motor Company?

A Ford Motor Company board of directors. Nothing ever came of it.

Q What do you think happened?

A That board was described to me as being -- they use the term in business, where your board is a friendly board. It's a board that goes through the exercise of attending the meeting, but whatever management wants, management gets.

Q A hand-picked board?

A A hand-picked board, that's what they were, and they'd ask a lot of embarrassing questions of Ford. When they looked at the Ghia cars, they were given the impression that Ford was hard at work on front-wheel drive cars -- downsized cars -- which they were not, and they did not. It was funny. They were absolutely unmoved by the board of directors, and they dug their heels in, and they stayed right where they were, and that's the way Henry....

Q Which he'd been responsible for then?

A Well, Henry Ford even admitted it publicly. He said, "I made a mistake." He said, "I didn't believe it." I didn't have that great a relationship with Henry Ford, but, at times, I would be in a situation where we would be showing Ghia cars. We'd take them over to the test track, and we'd have a real dog and pony show. And, at times, in the walk arounds, I'd find myself, not intentionally, walking with Henry. On several occasions he remarked -- as I explained it -- "Boy, that's a beautiful car." I'd say, "Thank you. That came out of Ghia." That was a Fairlane replacement that we did. And I explained to Henry that it was front-wheel drive.

That never went anywhere with Henry, but it pleased me because he said, "That's a beautiful-looking car." And he looked at the Mini-Maxes on many occasions. The internal hierarchy of the company was impossible to move on such subjects as the fight about unitized versus frame construction. Henry was not interested in getting into that.

Q So, you had yourself and, presumably, Iacocca and Bordinat pushing for a European downsizing, which was right in tune with what was happening, internationally, and you had a stone wall?

A Yes, right.

Q Was Harold Sperlich involved in that also?

A No, he wasn't. His office was next to mine. Harold was the mover and shaker for Lee on the Greenfield Operation in Spain. And he depended on Harold to go and knock heads in Ford of Europe. I was just reading an article about Uwe Bahnsen -- an excellent designer and has made a career and is being respected worldwide for being a man that has fixed opinions and is not easily moved. I was frequently going to Germany and to England to -- and this is kind of interesting, because it's hard to understand. They would send me over there because they could not get that man to do what they wanted to have done. He'd tell Dearborn to get lost, and he'd make it stick. They'd say to themselves, "Jesus, that car. I don't like the looks of it. We want one done differently. We'll send DeLaRossa over there." And he would give me a crew of modelers and a tech support person, and I would do a Dearborn version. That has to be an unusual way to approach business. I was always amazed. I didn't mind doing it. It was kind of interesting, but he persevered, and, to this day, he's unmovable. His cars are not selling, and they're in trouble in their trucks, but Uwe Bahnsen is alive and well, and he's gotten credit for being a guy who is no wimp. Goddamn it, if Uwe Bahnsen says that's it, that's the way it is. Weird. Very strange!

Q Such as the Sierra for he's being hailed now?

A Yes. He's hailed, but the Sierra is being discounted, and they're up to their ass in Sierras, and their Intercontinental is not selling. So, I don't know. It's a funny business.

Q You must have felt, obviously, rather frustrated. Your having Ghia

produce these marvelous small cars, and nobody's buying them at the company level. Iacocca had to be rather careful at this point, having come off the Knudsen thing? Was he giving [you] tacit support, but wasn't able to appeal at the executive level?

A Yes. I often wondered where he was. During the last days, I didn't know they were going to be, but things were winding down. Under my own work plan, I decided to do -- because they were struggling with it in Dearborn. Number one, they didn't want a front-wheel drive car, and there was so much bickering about it. I didn't know where he was, but I thought it would really be neat to do a Mustang -- I presented it as a Mustang replacement. I bought a Volkswagen Scirocco, and I took the sheet metal off of it, and I designed and built a Targa-roofed sports car with a rumble seat, and it had a little windshield that folded down. And then, as a ploy, I used very similar colors -- accented with the orange wheels -- of one of his favorite cars -- a Model A Coupe roadster with the rumble seat. This had a metallic brown [body] with the orange wheels on it. And I didn't tell Gene or Lee or anybody about it. Finally, we air freighted a car in. Lee was over in Gene's office, and I invited them to come down to the studio, and I told them I had a surprise for them. So I showed 'em this car. God, he really flipped. He thought that was the greatest thing since sliced bread. In fact, he got into a big flap with Henry over it. When he was fired, he wanted to buy that car, but they wouldn't let him have it. That pissed him off.

Q Ghia had been a growing force in European design, and its influence on American design was somewhat glacial in this period. But it was moving, and you were accelerating this with your tenure as head of Ghia.

Had DeTomasso left by this time? That, under the conditions of taking over, he was to leave?

A Yes, right. He left.

Q So, you had inherited a marvelous cadre of creative design people and modelers?

A Yes, right. And craftsmen. I had seventy-five people and never had many designers. I never wanted many, quite frankly. In fact, I only had four. I really don't work that way with huge staffs. It isn't that I imagine myself as the person that's going to do all of it single-handed, but I had a very talented leader there -- a design director.

Q Who was that?

A Filipo Sapino. Very talented man. We ended up with just three designers and Filipo.

Q Was Tom Tjaarda there?

A For a time he was, and then he left. Tom went to Fiat and worked in advanced. Then Tom followed by filing an employment suit against us.

Q You're in Turin [Italy] at this point?

A Right, yes.

Q How did you interface in terms of design decisions with Ford of Europe and Dearborn?

A Not terribly well with Ford of Europe. Ford of Europe never liked the fact that I was there and viewed me as an opponent. And we did some facelift work on the Granada, and facelift work on the Corsair. We sold the facelift work on the Corsair. It wasn't a real pride and joy -- the molding treatments -- but we did a real nice freshening action on the Granada. They weren't about to let that DeLaRossa -- they viewed me as

being a Dearborn agent and coming into Europe. That was very unpopular. The most unsuccessful but the most beautiful car that I did over there was the Marbella. I have some pictures of it. And if time permits, I'll tell you a little vignette on the Marbella.

Q Please do.

A It was a beautiful car. It was a two-door. My whole motive in doing the car was to fill a void that I felt existed. I don't have any qualms about saying that I was absolutely a hundred percent right. There was a void that I felt that existed in their program in Europe in the two-door market. They had no luxury two door. None. They didn't appear to want one. Fiat owned the market with the Fiat 130. So I decided that I'd get a Granada, and I would get it shipped down to Ghia, and we'd cut it apart, and we'd build a luxury coupe. And we did. So, as I say, it turned out. It was just dynamite. It was beautiful.

Q Can you describe it in design terms?

A In a sense, it looked like I was trying to revisit the Mustang that I lost in that shoot-out with Fritzi [Mayhew].

Q You'd always kept that image?

A Yes, right. But this was a longer roof area, and it was fabulous. I don't know how I even accomplished this, but I ended up with Lee on a trip to Europe. Somehow I even got on the agenda over in Germany, and I had my slides with me and my handouts and the whole works. So I ended up in this conference room that had DeLaRossa and Ghia and the Marbella on it. Nobody knew what the hell it was or anything about it.

Q You'd kept it under wraps?

A I'd kept it under wraps, and nobody had seen the car. Lee had never seen it. So a lot of this makes you wonder, and you think, "How

the hell did this ever happen?" I got up, and I went through my presentation. I was sensitive to the fact that I really had my neck out a mile. The guys in Europe didn't want to know about it. I didn't, until this day, know how much Henry Ford didn't want to know about it. This evolved later on in the day. But it began to evolve as I went through it very rapidly, showed the slides of the car, described its marketplace. I finished. I didn't know that I had upset Henry, but, as I'll finish up the story, you'll see that I did. It was almost like they acted as though I hadn't made a presentation. Nobody said a word. Lee didn't say a word. Henry didn't say -- nobody did. The people in Europe didn't say a word. So I sat down.

So that night I was invited to a castle at which all of the Ford of Europe people that are involved in product were invited. All of the marketing people and the people from Dearborn who were guests, including Henry, were all involved -- were invited out here for dinner. So I was invited. I rode out. There were some limousines, and I got a ride out there. I wasn't with anybody. Like nobody wanted to be with me, really, as I look back on it. So I got out there, and I saw Henry a couple of times with a glass of champagne. That's not unusual for a party like that. So, finally, somebody rang a gong and we all were directed in to this beautiful banquet area. The tables weren't named, and, I think, they were numbered tables, but I just picked a table. I didn't use my head. I ended up picking the table next to Henry. So Henry got up, and he got up to the podium, and I, frankly, don't remember his words, but it was a blistering attack on me and "this stupid car." He was well into the champagne, and it showed a little bit, but he was not so far gone that he couldn't articulate his thoughts, and he blasted me.

Afterwards, it was interesting. There were two reactions from the guests there. One group felt that it was important that they come over and tell me don't be too up tight -- everything's going to be all right. Then there was another group that didn't want to come near me. It was funny. Oh, God!

Q It was the Marbella that had set him off?

A The Marbella. It turned him off.

Q Did you ever find out why?

A I never did. I tried. You know what I did? I shipped the car over to the United States, and I put it in the lobby of the World Headquarters [Dearborn] hoping to bait him into a confrontation, but he never responded. I had that car there for two weeks. I had photographs of it taken in the lobby. It was by the pool. Marbella built by Ghia. It was all there. But I couldn't bring him out on that. He always went from his office by express elevator down to the garage. It was like he never came out into the lobby, and nobody wanted to tell him it was there. It was funny. The only guy that really got upset by it was Bordinat, who had it destroyed.

Q I was going to ask you about Bordinat's role in this episode.

A He never had a role in it, but he got a little anxieteous over that, so he had it destroyed. As peculiar as it is, and it's probably unusual to admit it, I do thrive on those things. Some of the things I do have been kind of screwy, but I enjoy winning those things, and I went right to the wire with that, and it was a helluva car.

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This is September 18, 1984, and this is Dave Crippen in The Edison Institute's design history series, and we're speaking today with Mr. Don DeLaRossa, Vice-President for Product Design at Chrysler, who will continue his narrative of his experiences at Ford and at Chrysler.

A Just a little background on my retirement from Ford. After I'd been through the experience, I had developed a desire and been carrying this desire for many years to retire early. This is not unique with me. A lot of men consider this, and, I think that many of them succeed quite well, and are quite happy in that environment. However, in my case, after early retirement took place, I immediately left the Detroit area and went to Boca Raton, Florida, where we had had a condominium on the ocean for a number of years. I went down there with the expectation that I would be participating with my wife in a business venture that she had been the primary person for a number of years. After getting down to Florida, I realized that her effectiveness in the business had reached a point where there really wasn't any place for me to either serve the business effectively or derive any particular pleasure out of it.

I bought a car that I had always admired. I treated myself to that. A 450 SL Mercedes. I put the top down and proceeded to tour around Boca Raton and generally waste my time and began to gather and develop the reaction to this experience, which turned out to be very disappointing to me.

One thing I have neglected to mention, which should be included, is that when I left Ford, Lee Iacocca called me and asked me to join him at Chrysler, and I was still on this bent that I had been on for a number of years and, no, I wanted to retire and go to Florida. So I had to deliver that reaction to him, which I don't think went over terribly well.

So as the months went on in Florida, we first realized that our condominium that had been such a pleasure to enjoy as kind of a turnkey place to visit three, four times a year, wasn't of a size that could serve comfortably as a home. This had never impacted on me. So we decided to build a home out in the Estancia West -- West of Boca just off of Glades Road. We selected a site we thought was a good choice. We'd selected a nice cul-de-sac and had the home built, and had a pool, and had screens put over the pool. I noticed that everybody had to have screens, so I assumed that there were bugs after all. Although I'd lived in a bug-free environment along the ocean, I didn't realize the bugs had all been blown inland.

So we got this home done. And, from the point of view of what time of year this was, this was of considerable importance because it was getting to be Spring, and we actually moved in in May or June, and, of course, the weather was heating up. I had convinced myself that the temperature, being what it was on the ocean, and I was a little fed up with all the breeze, which is looked upon by many as just the greatest thing since sliced bread. But, to me, it was just too much wind -- too much breeze. So I thought, going inland, it'll be really a treat. There will be breeze, but it will be more pleasant.

So, as we're sitting in the screened-in patio area around the pool at night, we began to experience what it's really like. It was absolutely still. It was black as if you'd walked into a coal mine with the lights out. The air was still, the temperature was high, and this silence, this high temperature -- the combination of the two and a humidity level that made it feel as though somebody had you around the throat.

It took only a matter of a week or two of that experience, and, fortunately, my wife shared this and reacted this way to it. We realized we had made a mistake. I called Lee and told him that I'd had a change of mind and would like very much to join him at Chrysler, and he was pleased. We, fortunately, hit the market at the right time down there. The temporary, slight recession which followed hadn't begun yet, so we were able to sell the house in a matter of a week or thereabouts.

So, we headed back to Detroit, and we had kept our home in Bloomfield Hills. We hadn't sawed off the limb entirely here. So we came back to our home, and I had the good fortune to start out here at Chrysler. I came over and had a visit with Lee in his office, and he showed me the new Chrysler products, and they were very exciting. I was particularly excited about them because there was a plethora of front-wheel drive platforms here at Chrysler, which is something that I had long been pursuing at Ford, unsuccessfully. So it looked to me like there was a tremendous opportunity here to proliferate those and expand the number of products that Chrysler offered. The whole thing was extremely appealing.

I started here, at his request, as a consultant, and I opened up a DeLaRossa Design Associates, which is a typical solution to this kind of business in our profession to use your own name, and I did that. So I ended up working here at Chrysler. I took it on a five-day-a-week arrangement, and I really enjoyed it. They gave me an office very close to the office of the vice-president in charge of design. It was a fellow by the name of Dick Mcadam, and I was just down the hall from him, and I was up in the area where I could have contact with the staff and be a

part of various meetings as well as getting back into the studios and attending the meetings, obviously, as a listener -- an observer, really. I was limited to that, and I understood that. But it was very informative.

Mac was very cooperative, and, obviously, it was clear to him that my role here was to give Chrysler the benefit of another opinion, another judgment on the part of the programs that they were pursuing. They had a variety of projects under consideration, but the prime project that was being considered was what is known now as the G-24 sports car. So I was given an area in the studio. I was given a buck in order to permit me to develop a full-size, clay model, and I was given a crew of modelers that were not reporting directly to me, but I had technical support people that would help support the development of my project and insure that I met the feasibility requirements.

Q What year was this?

A This would be 1979. This was a tremendous experience for me. I really enjoyed it. The crew, as well as the majority of the people that I met here at Chrysler, were very supportive. It was a first-class crew. I was very pleased with it, and, I think, I accomplished a lot. Obviously, as you would expect, in order to be acceptable as a consultant and not be offensive to the staff, you have to handle yourself in a unique way so that you don't come on so strong that you begin to develop an adversarial situation which is not beneficial to anybody. And, I think, I was able to achieve that, based on my own personal feeling plus the observation of the expression of the attitude of the various employees toward me. Those things, if they're mishandled, you can obviously tell that you've overstepped the limitations.

So everything developed beautifully, and at about the six-month point of my contract, Lee and I had a discussion about the product design function here at Chrysler. In the course of the discussion, we got around to the subject of my joining Chrysler as an employee, and it was my opinion, on the basis of the six months, that in order to reach the point that I felt was fully effective, I really needed to join the company. As effective as a consultant can be, there is a limitation with that kind of an arrangement.

As the situation at Chrysler developed, I made the transition from consultant to vice-president of product design at Chrysler. In assuming that responsibility, I'd, fortunately, had six months of opportunity as a consultant to judge the situation at Chrysler, and that helped me a great deal. Among the things that I was pleased to see here, and, I think, generally, you wouldn't expect it from a company and its people who were in the financial climate they were in, I expected to have a predominance of negativism and defeatism, and I didn't find that. These people impressed me as being -- as they describe themselves frequently in conversation, when I spoke respectfully of my observation of them, they would frequently say, "Well, we're survivors." And that survivor attitude really contributed a great deal to the success throughout the company, and the success that I enjoyed here at the design operation.

Q Do you think that Iacocca's optimism permeated the whole executive echelon?

A Yes. I think it did. In fact, I'm sure it did. The positiveness -- the power that Mr. Iacocca exhibits and his devotion to achieving identified goals in the short term and the long term at Chrysler, were

major contributors to the attitude that contributed so much to our success internally.

Q He'd taken over a moribund company with a rather dull and uninteresting product line. What sort of steps did he take, from a business standpoint, to revive the company's affairs?

A From a business point of view, he eliminated the -- what do they call it where they put acres and acres of vehicles out against a fence? I can't recall the name of that. Chrysler had been using that system for many years. At the time I joined them, this was still going through a period of elimination. Now it occurs to me. It's called the sales bank, and the sales bank system is one where the company [uses it] in order to maintain or create a facade that things are well and are going to succeed. With a sales bank, you can accelerate your production levels up to an unrealistic number. You're building cars at X number a day, and they are banked in various open storage areas throughout the country. Then the sales organization draws from this bank and ships these to the dealers.

I won't go into a lot of the detail, but some of the detail is worth mentioning and is quite obvious. When you have cars in a bank like that, the opportunity for theft or regular deterioration in the course of being exposed to weather in an open area is great. And since during many of the periods there was rain, snow, [and industrial pollution], to try to clean those cars up and make them look like quality products suitable for showroom display, was impossible, and that was part of the history of Chrysler. They had also some serious flaws in their body engineering, which they had gained a reputation, unfortunately. So their reputation,

which they had enjoyed for many, many years as a premier engineering company....

Q The Zeder Brothers?

A Zeder Brothers, right. And Chrysler engineering was a major focus of attention in Chrysler, historically. But I don't have enough knowledge to know what the situation was as far as the engineering of the drivetrain and the manufacturing of that. There had been some deterioration there. I'm not certain. But in the case of the body engineering detail, that was very undesirable as far as encouraging a positive reaction from the public -- potential customers.

As you would expect, there was a very unfortunate attitude developing among the dealers. They were sensing a deterioration in the company. They were experiencing declining demand as far as sales were concerned, and, being private businessmen, they depended very heavily on, as any dealer does, on the performance of the corporation. So all of this, in the aggregate, created an atmosphere which it would take a person of Mr. Iacocca's capability and capacity to achieve what he has here. I don't think there's any doubt of that. I'm into my fifth year here. The response, soon after I came here, it was almost as impressed as they are and were with him. There was -- and recognizing, as I described them, that they were survivors, a frailty about it. Well controlled, but they had seen, and they would see, many of their fellow workers disappear from the scene here.

Because one of the major flaws at Chrysler was that the break-even point was about three million cars a year. It's quite obvious that [if] it's a depressed market, you would feel the impact of that immediately.

So they disposed of plants, equipment, and they reduced the number of people.

Q White collar?

A White and blue as well, yes. You hear of blue collar worker more frequently because of the more vocal and nature of organized labor, and he appears to be the person victimized under the circumstances. In reality, there was a very accessibly high number of white collar workers here at Chrysler. I'm saying all of this recognizing that this is Don DeLaRossa's judgment that is describing this, and I'm sure there are those who could well disagree with me, but this is my opinion. As far as my organization is concerned here in assuming the responsibility for product design, two features that had come to alarm me here at Chrysler were an adversarial atmosphere, which was one, and the excessive number of people in the organization. My attention was devoted more to the excessive side of the white collar organization -- the structured pyramid approach that had been the style, as well as the adversarial side of it, of management that would have to be attributed to the person I succeeded.

I can survive adversarial circumstances, but I don't work well in them, and, as a part of my goals as far as efficiency is concerned, it seemed decidedly an inappropriate way to operate. Additionally, we had, both in our blue collar area as well as at the top of the white collar pyramid, around 550 people here at Chrysler. I immediately started to devote my attention, both here and and at home on weekends, to the development of a new organization. Once I established that and carefully reexamined it, I sensed that I could establish a goal for myself, and I

really have to applaud the Chrysler management. They didn't lean on me in the development of this. They weren't looking over my shoulder, and they didn't pressure me to achieve it, but I established it for myself and for what I believe to be the success of the product design office as well as Chrysler Corporation. Obviously, my organization is not large. As you look at the numbers in engineering or look at the numbers in manufacturing, I'm really a very small organization. But, nonetheless, I did what I could to make a contribution to what I thought was extremely important.

So I reduced the size of my organization down to 220/225 people, so that's a reduction of some magnitude. This part of it was the result of my establishing goals for the cause in order to be a supporter of what I recognized as important to the company that we get our break-even point down to a million cars a year. It's the nature of the business, partially, that you establish for yourself a level that can, in a car market of eight or nine million cars annually, be profitable and enjoy ten/eleven percent of the market, and you establish your head count, as well as your facilitized side of the business, to represent that one million cars a year. And the management of this company did that, and in a small way, I made a contribution to that.

It was very successful. The numbers, rather than being a dramatic, devastating kind of reduction, offered me an opportunity to employ a management style which I was better equipped to do and had more of a sincere desire to function with a reduced number of people. Because the empire-building side of these huge encumbered organizations, the purpose of those is, in many instances, goal building of a different sort as far as the leaders of those organizations are concerned. That existed here.

I know Gene Bordinat was a tremendous leader and a very devoted builder of the organization to the number that it was when I left. It was a huge organization, and that was important to him. To function with a more efficient and smaller organization is better suited to meet my goals. So the 225 people worked out quite well.

We immediately started devoting ourselves to some of the areas that were not part of the operation here. I'd been a car-building devotee for much of my career, so we started immediately to record our approved as well as our clays that we considered to be important candidates for consideration. We started a program of having those built outside in fiberglass.

It served two purposes for me: One, I could establish these cars that represented the various product lines -- the Dodge line, the Chrysler line, the Plymouth line -- plus the series differences which had to be addressed. Previously they hadn't done that, so I don't know how they made those decisions, but they did not build fiberglasses or have them built outside. There was only one fiberglass, to my surprise. When I came to work here as a consultant, I was anxious to see the K-Car, and there was just one K-Car, and it wasn't here, and I asked about that. It wasn't here because it had been shared. As far as the investment was concerned, it had been shared with marketing, and the cost of it had been shared between the design center and marketing. Knowing marketing people as I did, it was gone, and they had it. I don't know how.

Q Six months or a year custody?

A Yes, right. They're really hardball players on that score. So they had the car, and nobody really understood that work should have

already been done on the facelift. They were so concentrated on the fact they were going to introduce this car. But prior to the introduction of that car, the year following and the year following that should have been thought about, but it wasn't thought about, and there were no cars. So I started going outside to have these models built much to the shock of the people in the organization. There were some misgivings about what I was up to.

Q Had it been practiced at Ford?

A No. We built most of those inside at Ford in great numbers because Bordinat had these incredibly big shop operations. My God, I don't know whether you've visited the whole facility over there, but it is an incredible place. You've got a metal shop, fiberglass shop, and a plaster shop, and a wood shop, and a trim shop. And not little shops. These are big operations, but that was Gene's approach to business.

Q They [planned to] have a wind tunnel, but it was eventually axed?

A Yes, it was. But Gene wanted the wind tunnel. That's another funny story because Gene had always wanted a garage. We parked our cars in front of the building, and in the wintertime and inclement weather it wasn't the greatest thing in the world. William Clay Ford parked [in] the first spot, and then Bordinat and then myself, and it went right down the line, all under a roof that covered the entrance to the building. But during the winter, it was pretty raw. You'd go to your car and get in there, and you'd have to scrape the snow off of it. So Gene had longed for a garage, and Gene, being an ingenious fellow, decided that the way to get a garage was to get another building, and what better would serve as the cause than to have the building house a wind tunnel.

Q You'd traditionally gone off site to have wind tunnel capabilities?

A Yes, as we do here, down to Lockheed in Georgia, as well as some other places. Ford had a temperature wind tunnel -- a very limited wind tunnel where they could do cooling studies and things like that, but never had a.... It was quite a large one, as I recall. I was in it a couple of times during my career, and it was impressive, but it was not engineered as a full wind tunnel as they have at General Motors. But the two-edged sword that Gene carried there was the wind tunnel and the garage, so it had a little humor.

Q I remember eating at the design center cafeteria -- being across the street -- and noticing the pecking order. I noticed for several years you enjoyed driving the things that you probably had a hand in -- the designer Lincolns?

A Yes, right. I stayed with those. I worked on the Mark program -- the IV and V, and those were, to me, the luxury car. They were just fabulous.

Q Did you have a hand in getting the various designers involved like Givenchy and Bill Blass and others?

A No. I may be incorrect about this, but my judgment tells me that it would be something the head of K & E would do -- Leo Kelminson. He's very active in that area, and he's a mover and shaker, and that would be the kind of thing that I would credit him with.

Q Could you take us back to 1979 when you accepted Lee Iacocca's offer to come to Chrysler? It's interesting that a key figure had already come over from Ford -- Harold Sperlich -- even before Iacocca. Could you describe that situation in terms as it impacts on product

design and what Iacocca's directives were to you? How many years did you have to come up with a new line of cars? How did you work that out in terms of -- you've mentioned that you slimmed down your department to a leaner mix, and you were succeeding someone who had a different point of view than you and Iacocca? Can you expand a bit on that in terms of product design and product mix and whether Sperlich had any hand in that?

A Right. From the standpoint of product mix, Sperlich was, at that time, vice-president of product development. I considered myself a very important participant with product development, although I reported directly to the chairman. But I had a common interest in the goals of product development, and while I have felt that it's important that product design not report to them, that's a personal opinion. In some companies, they do, and some companies, they don't. We don't. As well as being involved in design, a very important part of my thinking during my career has been in an area that is called product planning. As I've said earlier in this interview -- and I've spoken to various designers during my career about this -- that the importance of a designer avoiding grunt status, is that he use his head and think about product as we see product planners coming to represent the thinking side of the business.

So in approaching the business, as I saw it as part of my domain, I started to work on car lines, and I devoted considerable time to long-range plans for the company, as far as product was concerned. I developed a vehicle that was called a G-29 which took the G-24 and proliferated it into an area that I thought was extremely important to the company -- the goal was to give us an Olds Cutlass fighter in a coupe. I thought it was a very beautiful car. I still have it down in storage. I think I was right to this day. Unfortunately, nobody agreed with me.

Q Not even the chairman?

A No, no. I have to say, also, that there's no question [that] things would be different today with the financial circumstances we're in. [Then] the money was extremely short, and for them to approve a two hundred and fifty or three hundred million dollar program of meeting my goals, would have been next to impossible, but it was an impossibility that I thought was very important to this company. The Olds Cutlass has enjoyed a long period of success and, reputationally, has been important to General Motors and Oldsmobile, and I wanted to go after that. I used to, in conversation with the chairman and others, talk of the G-24, in less than complimentary terms, and I'd refer to it as a "Boy Racer" because it's a class of vehicle which is "youth oriented." Yes, it is, but there are other youthful people who want a more acceptable notchback coupe, and, so, this to me was a "Boy Racer." But I finally tired of that reference, and the world moved on.

Q Can you describe it in some detail?

A I used, basically, the front end of the G-24, so it had a very sporty and aerodynamic look on the front end, but I used a roof that, in miniature, was like an Eldorado -- a blind-quartered roof with quite a vertical back light. Ironically -- although it's different scale, and it's a more lean and a more sporty car -- it has a lot in common with the Cougar that Ford brought out. It's quite similar to the Cougar except it didn't have a quarter window. It had a blind quarter, because I was trying to get a mass over the rear wheel in relationship to the rear wheel, and it met my demands. It was, and is, a beautiful car.

Q How far did they get? To the fiberglass driveable?

A No. Not the driveable, but I did do a fiberglass of it. In fact, they never saw it here in the company at all until I finished it. At that time, I was getting into the challenge approach of doing product plans and programs plans, and, for the designer to do those effectively, not only does he have to use his head, but he has to get these cars built. Coming out of Ghia and building twenty cars a year, I've been into that a long time. I had the autonomy there, so I designed the cars and built the cars, either in steel or fiberglass or hepplewood and some driveables -- the cars that suited my program strategies. And here, to the limitations of the money I had to spend, which was somewhat restricting, I started to perform pretty much as I had at Ghia. So I built this G-29. I had it built outside in fiberglass, and had it painted black. I showed it to the chairman as part of a committee that the chairman asked that we organize here called the product design committee. The product design committee is intact to this day.

Q Under your chairmanship?

A No. The chairman is the chairman. I'm the vice-chairman of it.

Q Does it include other areas like product planning?

A Yes. We include product planning, we include engineering, and we include the president, the vice-chairman, we include the head of manufacturing, at his request, and it makes sense. I was a little reluctant to expand the membership, but I could see the judgment in doing that. It's just that, as the membership grows, they get a little more difficult to control and to manage and to keep the thing running efficiently and smoothly because a lot of the members -- although we just had one of these meetings yesterday. I was pleased that there's been a maturity developing with the existence of this.

We have now a super committee called the OTC. It's Mr. Bidwell, and Mr. Iacocca, and Mr. Greenwald and Mr. Sperlich. That committee deals with the things of most magnitude to the company from a business point of view as well as product. There's a subtle degree of duplication between the OTC and the PDC, but the PDC is still functioning, and, as I say, yesterday I was very impressed with the absence of unsolicited kinds of comments that originally were always a problem with the committee as it grows. It must be human nature because there seems to be a judgment on many people's part that they must say something, and the category that they most frequently use is to say something negative or, even more risky than that, to try to be humorous, because those are not things that I, as the person who finds -- you know, places the importance of this kind of committee. And it is important, but I'm the person who is victimized by behavior like that. But it was very mature, and it ran very well.

And the thing that is always in evidence, is that the chairman is very gifted in the area of product and the importance of the actual design. He is a real participant.

Q Stemming from his long experience at Ford?

A Yes. It's something he brought into the world with him. But he is unusually well equipped in judging design, as is Harold Sperlich. Harold is very devoted, as is the chairman, to detail and to the importance of quality. As the chairman is devoting himself, publicly, through promotional opportunities in speaking to the public in the United States about Chrysler and what Chrysler's goals are. Their primary goal is not to be biggest but be the best, and he expresses it so well, and it is so much him, knowing him as I do. It's not something that some advertising

person or promotional person has written for him or developed for him. It is Lee Iacocca speaking, in all candor.

Q You feel the force of his personality.

A Oh, you do. It's impressive. I've been watching the TV series. The second of those I saw just recently. I've really been impressed with him. I recognized immediately that you couldn't really buy that kind of person. You couldn't get a movie actor to do it. It's really incredibly valuable. He not only has become very good at it, but the devotion, the honesty, the credibility come through. It's really impressive to watch, and it's impressive to have the good fortune of being a part of these meetings where he speaks out and critiques what we've done here. He's very accurate and very helpful, and we try not to give him ammunition by doing something that raises so much doubt that it encourages him to speak out. So I always consider myself more successful if he is quiet and if he says he likes it. That's wonderful.

Q Who at Kenyon & Eckhart came up with -- or was it someone on the advertising staff here -- the thought of Lee Iacocca being the actual Chrysler spokesman?

A I think it was Leo Kalminson, but I'm not certain about that.

Q Isn't he a person who Iacocca worked with [during his] years at Ford?

A Yes, he is. Right.

Q It was quite a coup getting the whole [agency]?

A It really was. It said something about how Leo felt about Iacocca, to come over to Chrysler when you have an account like that at Ford. That raised a lot of eyebrows and generated a lot of conversation. It's

a gutsy thing that you don't witness very often. But that would be what I would guess is Leo's handiwork.

Q Was there any joking in the executive committee meeting that this was becoming Ford country in terms of former Ford executives now working for Iacocca?

A I've heard the remark a number of times, but not too frequently. But I've heard people say that, and it's always been in a good-natured climate. It may not have been good-natured, but I didn't notice it. I wouldn't have known if it wasn't. I'm not terribly sensitive about that, but I took it to be good-natured.

Q But it's interesting, to an outside observer, that he picked the people that he worked with well and harmoniously and whom he felt could make a signal contribution to the recovery of the company.

A Yes. I was very honored by being given this opportunity and always have been. I've described it, all too frequently, as being the highlight of my career, and I'm very sincere about that. It really is. It goes way beyond financial considerations, and it covers a broad range when I make that statement. But, as I alluded to earlier, the atmosphere here, the people within Chrysler who are Chrysler people, the people that I mentioned referred to themselves when I first came here, as the survivors. Those people have really represented a very important part of my life because they have exhibited qualities that are rarely found in business [and were] way beyond my expectations. I've mentioned human nature. I thought, my God, you have a situation where there is so much bad, these people are going to have an attitudinal situation that reflects the concern about their future, and it'll express itself in ways that are not particularly pleasant.

Q You expected to find a demoralized...?

A Oh, yes. They weren't demoralized at all. They were unbelievable in the spirit and the way they approached their responsibilities and their jobs. I've mentioned it from time to time because it's part of a number of things that I've observed. I've been very conscious of their acceptance of me, which has been, obviously, a very important thing to me. I'm an outsider coming from Ford, and I'm reducing the organization by fifty percent -- some areas of the organization here, as high as seventy percent. So I'm not, obviously, so naive as to think that I'm loved and everybody thinks that I'm the be all to end all. I'm not saying that, but let's just say that they have been extremely supportive and very nice and just excellent people to work with. I'm very honored.

Q In other words, Mr. Iacocca had created, in large part, this atmosphere for you?

A He had. No question about it. The previous Chrysler management had changed, as it does in most companies. Certainly, we went through a series of changes in the upper echelon at Ford over the many years. At Chrysler, they had had to endure changing management, and with some of these top people come some characteristics that are not necessarily comforting and reassuring to the individual worker. They work hard, and I'm sure they did -- tirelessly -- but they were aware of some of the management that existed here at Chrysler that raised serious doubts about them as individuals who didn't demonstrate the level of concern for the individuals who contributed so much. Mr. Iacocca leaves no doubt that he cares, and he's interested, and he is devoted, and those things have been a pillar of support that the people here at Chrysler have enjoyed.

Q Would you take us back to that initial presentation of the Cutlass buster?

A In pursuit of this G-29, which I had felt so strongly about for the company as a companion piece to the G-24, on the basis of the G-24 being, as I characterized it, a boy racer, appealing to youthful people who want a sports car. Obviously, the world out there is full of cars of that type. This was of some concern to me because Chrysler had no established reputation in this particular area. There had been some toe in the water things over the years at Chrysler but nothing really as total as the G-24. I was attracted to the success of the Olds Cutlass and the need for Chrysler to reinforce, in the youthful area, a vehicle that would qualify, because Chrysler had the Mirada, and the Cordoba, and the Imperial, which were three outstanding designs which they couldn't give away. [It was] incredible. People wouldn't buy them, and I won't go into why. I don't know that I know, in detail, why that transpired. But one of the concerns that I saw signs of was that they had no family relationship. There was not a line of cars, like in Oldsmobile, which has some breadth to it. You have a Mirada and a Cordoba sitting there -- two nice-looking coupes -- but, apparently, something is missing. You have to give it more breadth, and it was in pursuit of that that I wanted the G-29.

When I finished that car, it was painted black. I had it covered in the dome. I had the committee seated at the conference table in the dome, and I had the lights down low with just [enough] for the conduct of the meeting up to the introductory point of the car. I had arranged to have the spotlights come on the car and the cover removed. It really was

a high-impact car. The management really was shocked by it because it was, as self-serving as this could be mistaken for, beautiful, as it is today. They oohed and ahhed and embarked on some comments, which this kind of a situation can enlist. It's rare to show something and have them all join in unison and agree that it's beautiful. I've been around too long to expect that. They usually embark on a series of comments that kind of cut you off at the ankles. Nothing personal. It's the nature of human beings.

One of the members of the committee did think it was attractive. Then one of them thought that the roof, being as static as it was, by design and intention, was not appropriate with this aerodynamic front end. It went into a series of comments that were tolerant, and then some that were unflattering.

I came out of the meeting with a comment from the chairman that made me feel somewhat reassured, although I knew what the end was going to be, that it was worthy of a financial analysis being done, at least.

We followed that presentation with another one -- a week or two later -- which contained the work of the analysts where they had had an opportunity to establish the investment level and to establish the timing. They did a job on it, like they do frequently.

Q Stacking the deck?

A They stacked the deck, really. There was no question about it. They jacked the figures up a bit, so it was harder to swallow as far as the decision is concerned.

Q Why do you think there was the collective opposition to something?

A The single most important factor was the very real shortage of money. I had already embarked on what I felt was a very important series

of cars. That's the E-Class cars. We derived the front drive version of the New Yorker from that E-Class base and lengthened the wheelbase three inches and gave it more substance, so that family of cars was underway. From the investment level, that's taxing to a company that's on the ragged edge. We had to keep the pursuit of the T-115 alive.

Q Which was?

A That's our van that we have -- the mini van -- and that's a high-investment program. So there were other things. It wasn't that somebody singled me out to shoot down that day. But I really feel that it would have been an excellent car for us. In reality, the opportunity to -- we could have opened an additional plant, or we could have filled up the one plant with the volumes of both G-24 and G-29 and done extremely well with it.

Those are crossings in the road, or a Y in the road, that you take during your career, and many times you wonder how it would have been if you'd gone down the other direction. I'm quite convinced it would have been a successful car. It wears very well, that car. I've had it out for my own review, privately. I've had it in the dome. I did it when Ford introduced the Cougar just to see -- I got a Cougar -- rented one -- and one of their Thunderbirds as well. We've got another car that's coming in '86 -- the J body coupe -- and I wanted to [take] our J coupe and compare it privately with the Thunderbird. We've had the Thunderbird and our J coupe, [of which] we'll offer a Dodge and Chrysler coupe version. I had a pretty good idea of what I expected to turn out, and it came out even better than I expected. We did very well in the market research, comparing the two cars. Did beautifully.

Q Mr. DeLaRossa, could you expand on your feelings for what you have accomplished in design in the last five years and what you [see] ahead in the next five years?

A I would like very much to do that. We've done an outstanding job of handling the K-Car, which I had very early when I came over here. When I saw the photographs of it in Lee's office, and when I actually saw the car -- there's a little interesting vignette on that. The people at Chrysler in the design organization made some surprising comments about the K-Car. As much as they liked it, and many of them had actually worked it, but, particularly, the ones that hadn't worked directly on the car, they thought the K-Car was a bit high and bit boxy. I took a different tack entirely on that, because when I could get a K-Car -- the preproduction models -- I did an analysis over here in a parking lot of the K and the X-Car from G.M. My opinion never changed about the cars.

The X-Car was a non-event to me. It's not offensive, but it is not a car that draws your attention on the street. I had the feeling, and, I believe, I'm right, that the K-Car is an attention-getter. It's a very positive statement. It is a good statement. It says, "Look at me," and it looks like quality, and it carries six passengers, and, architecturally, it's not a potato. It's a squarish architectual car, but it is so, in an inoffensive way. It's a very nice design, and I looked forward to that car, from the very start, having a long life, which it will have. I've worked on a lot of them from its origin, up to today's product which is coming out -- the '84. And we have a freshening action that we've invested in for the '85 and '86. It's very nice looking. A very important evolution of a well-designed, original concept.

I've also had a chance to lead the organization in pursuit of the T-115, our mini van that's out on the street today, which is very successful. We're going to be expanding that to include a Chrysler line, as well as the Dodge and Plymouth, and also we're going to stretch it fifteen inches. At some point in the future, we'll offer a V-6 engine as well as turbo-charging. So, these are all positive steps. Additionally, we've done the J-Body coupe family. And we just finished the replacement of the K-Car, which will come out in '87. It's a completely-new car. But I'm pleased to say that we had a consciousness, or an awareness, of the background of the product. I'm an evolutionary-oriented person. So, it's a fresh car -- very modern. A heavy departure from the original K, but there are elements in the design that will attract owners of K-Cars back to Chrysler Corporation.

Also, we have the new LeBaron. This will follow and expand the LeBaron offered today. And that LeBaron stays through '86 in an evolutionary way of the four-door and two-door. Those remain in the marketplace. And then we have the H-Body, which I worked on, in production now. Production is headed toward introduction very shortly. And that's an effort to fill an area that shows up as something of a void in Chrysler's product line, and that is the important youth market. While we've enjoyed success, our owner body is, generally, in the fifty/fifty-five year and older category, and that worries the management. For obvious reasons, we should attract more young people to our cars. And we do attract them with our G-24, true. We did, in a limited way, with the Shelby Charger.

Q The Laser?

A And now the Laser's a G-24. We did the Shelby Charger in collaboration with Carroll Shelby that was on an L-24 chassis or vehicle. We did special colors. We worked with him on that.

Q And the Daytona?

A And the Daytona. But we need a four and five passenger, Euro sedan very badly. And we have it this Fall. It's a very strong car. That's the H-Body, and that'll be offered in Dodge and Chrysler. I have to listen every fall to the negative attitude of marketing and sales people whose primary mission in life is looking at ten-day reports, so they always are a bit thumbs down about your new products. They have spent a lot of time worrying -- trying to worry the chairman -- and let us all know that we may have had a clinker here. But it isn't going to be. It's going to be fabulous -- it really is.

Q If I were to ask you to sum up your design philosophy in a few pithy sentences, what would that be?

A From a philosophy point of view, it's to exploit, effectively, an incredibly outstanding opportunity for a human being to be a participant in the creation of products that you don't style. You do design, you do think, you do look at the totality that you can give this subject that demonstrates that you're aware of the total picture. And you don't do funny cars. You consider all of the aspects of market, of importance of evolution, and the importance of your role in the context that it's extremely important that the designer never be casual or withdrawn in any way that reduces his importance and reduces himself to [what] I've characterized as grunt status, where he is exploited by others, because that only happens when he doesn't live up to his responsibilities and

challenge. We challenge things that we don't believe are right for the company. That's extremely important. If somebody wants to reduce or limit something because of cost, we are obliged to challenge it. We challenge decisions that engineering makes, decisions that product planning makes, as far as our VMI is concerned.

Q VMI?

A That's our profit -- vehicle profit. It's a measure that they use to determine the profit that will be generated with a particular decision, and it could be the feeling that the customer might experience in the operating of a switch, or the feeling of the knob, or the way the lettering is handled on it. If it looks cheap, if it's a device that is difficult to handle and to move, those things are all very important to the designer. It's not appropriate, although it's frequently, in my experience, been a failing of designers to criticize others -- criticize engineering, criticize product planning, criticize management. The complaining about the subjects is a very unfortunate thing. We don't have that condition. I don't permit it. I haven't encouraged it. We don't have that condition at Chrysler. It's an understanding among the design staff here of what our goals are and what our responsibility is. And management has been supportive in that regard. They expect it from us, and it has its rewards, quite frankly.

Q One last, not so frivolous question, did you ever think of reviving the DeSoto line?

A No, I really haven't. I'll have to look into that, and, perhaps, the next time we're together, I can react to that. I don't know. Because that was an interesting-looking car. I think it's a good name.

It did fail, but it doesn't have a connotation that the Edsel has. The Edsel would be hard to breathe life into, no slight intended for Edsel Ford, certainly, but it's something that people will hang on to for generations. In the case of the DeSoto, I don't see any reason that we'd have to take our lumps from the press. Those people thrive on that kind of thing, so a few eyebrows would be raised. But it would be interesting to look at it.

They made a design statement that was extremely good and would be adaptable to today's shapes. I'll give that some thought and talk to you further about it.

Q Thank you, Mr. DeLaRossa.

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