

Alden (Gib) Giberson Oral History

Interview number: 91.1.1673.93

Reminiscences and Interview Recorded: 31 July 1984

Part of the Edsel B. Ford Design History Center Oral History Project

Transcript digitized by staff of Benson Ford Research Center: 2023

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DESIGN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

GIBERSON, ALDEN (GIB)

1984

**Henry Ford Museum
& Greenfield Village**

This is Dave Crippen with another one of our series of interviews with well-known automotive designers. This is July 31, 1984, and we are at the Archives of the Henry Ford Museum & Greenfield Village. Today we are talking with Mr. Alden (Gib) Giberson, who was with Ford for thirty years or more as a designer.

A Thank you, Dave. When I was a kid around twelve -- the early teens -- I was interested in airplanes. I used to build a lot of model airplanes. I always liked to draw airplanes. So, I thought I wanted to be an aeronautical engineer. I went to Cass Tech (Detroit), and I took aeronautical engineering. I fully thought that was going to be my profession, because I continued to draw airplanes and build airplanes. It was a good hobby. I always wanted to be in radio control, but I never did -- I didn't have the money.

I got out of Cass Tech, and I went right in the Army. I tried to get in the Air Corps, but I couldn't because I had something wrong with my back. So, when I went in the Army, I thought maybe I can get in the ground crew -- anything to be around airplanes. So, they put me in anti-aircraft.

Q This is World War II?

A 1944. I was in there for awhile, but nothing much happened. I did take a couple flying lessons, which I had been taking before when I was going to Cass Tech. Come to think of it, I was going to another school: Aero Mechanics School at the end of the runway out at City Airport in Detroit. We used to lay out on the end of the runway and eat our lunch, and that little police car would come out and chase us off.

But, after the Army, when I came back, I went up to University of Michigan [Ann Arbor] and got into engineering. I stayed in that a couple of years, and I didn't seem to be doing very well, so I switched over to architecture. I was having some trouble in school, and I finally wound up coming back to Dearborn Junior College and getting into a few art courses. Eventually, I got married and went to work with my dad at Smith, Hinchman and Grylls. He was chief designer at that time. But I figured I still wanted to get into some kind of art work. I still liked to draw airplanes. So I took a few art courses at Meinzinger Art School and Allen Airbrush

School. I fooled around with that for awhile.

Q Where was Allen?

A Allen Airbrush was in the old Convention Hall, either on Forest or Warren. And Meinzinger was over on Woodward, right about the same place. Quite a few of the fellows at Ford Design had gone to Meinzinger. The really top-notch ones went to Art Center in California. A good friend of mine was Bill Braathen. I knew him when I was younger over on the East side of Detroit. Then he went with Ford in administrative staff, mostly clerical work.

Q At Ford Motor Company?

A At Ford Motor Company. He was connected with Styling over at the Triple E Building, but he wasn't a designer or anything. But he got intrigued with this styling business, and he started to make some renderings of cars. We were at his house one night. His house was in some kind of barracks they built across Middlebelt from the airport out there, and they were all terrible things, but they were livable.

Q For the ex-G.I.'s?

A Yes, something like that. And I saw these things that he was making -- these car designs -- and I said to him, "I can do that stuff." I just never drew cars; I drew other stuff. So I went home, and I made some renderings, too. I probably had a half a dozen of them. He had already taken his in and gotten a job. He was making \$298 a month.

Q Where was he working at Ford?

A In the Design Center. Bill Schmidt hired him in -- transferred him from one department to the other. I got in about a month later. Frank Hershey hired me in, and I got a big kick out of the fact, because, in the meantime, they had had a raise, and I hired in for \$325, so I was making more than Bill for some reason or another.

Q What year was this?

A 1952. We were both working in there for a long time. We used to be together all the time. They used to call us "The Gold Dust Twins." But I went into Advanced Styling with Gil Spear. At that time, he was working on his pet project, the retractable hardtop, which Bill Ford was pretty interested in.

They had a tenth-size clay model that they worked with a little crank. You could make the top go up and down. They were making a 3/8th scale model, which

worked with little motors. It was being made in the metal shop, and that was really a nice thing. That retractable hardtop – they finally wound up making it in '57. I didn't have anything to do with that. I had a little bit to do with the '57 Ford.

Q What were your first duties when you signed in?

A The original Advanced Styling was more a place where they put the young fellows who came in to get accustomed to production work. So, it was pretty loose in the beginning. You were free to do almost anything you wanted to do, as long as it was within reason. So some of the stuff was pretty far out, like some of it didn't have wheels and things like that. After three months or so – Bob McGuire and Dave Ash seemed to like my work quite well, and they put me in the Ford studio.

Q Was that to your liking?

A Oh, yes. That was fine. Exactly what I wanted. It was kind of funny, the reason Frank Hershey hired me in was because – my work was good, but it certainly didn't hurt that I had the New Mexico State symbol in the hubcaps of all my cars.

Q Why did you have that?

A Before I went with Ford, I was working with my father at the Los Alamos Atomic Energy Project down in New Mexico. He was what they called the town planner. He worked for W.C. Krueger Company, and he was in charge of the non-tech areas – the residential areas.

Q Where the scientists live?

A Right. Anything that wasn't a tech area. The tech area buildings were mostly temporary, anyway. But Los Alamos originally was a boys' school, and it was all log buildings down there. The dormitory building was quite a large building. It must have been 80 feet by 30 feet. It was the largest vertical log building, at least in the United States, anyway, but it was *vertical* logs. They had the lodge there. That had horizontal logs. That had a kitchen, a big dining room and rooms where the parents would go and stay when they were visiting their boys.

Q A boy's prep school?

A My wife and I met [Robert] Oppenheimer one night at dinner. We all sat at big tables and had dinner. This one night we were there, and everybody had to tell what they did for a living. Everybody did, and I remember he got up, and he said he was a physicist, and I said, "What is that?" I didn't know him from Adam, you

know. I didn't really know who he was until years later.

Q You knew, basically, what was going there?

A Oh, yes. They used to have test explosions every Tuesday and Thursday in the canyons down there, but they weren't atomic; they were simulated – with dynamite. And you could only take walks up into the mountains on Sundays, and you had to stay within certain guidelines. You couldn't go off one way or the other. They had contaminated sewers in the canyon. You couldn't go down there. But that's where I got the background for the Thunderbird name from down there. Of course, Thunderbird was on everything.

Q Part of the state and regional lore?

A Oh, definitely.

Q Stemming from the early Indian settlers?

A We used to drive from Los Alamos to Santa Fe, which is about 35 miles, to go to stores, because there wasn't much up in the Los Alamos Project. On the way, there were two formations on a mountain, which were really blank spots in the trees on the sides of the mountain. They were all pine and aspen. One of the blank spots they called the "Horse's Head," and I always could see that, but there was another one called the "Thunderbird," and I never really made that one out. I couldn't figure it out. But, I was always intrigued with it, maybe because I could never see it. But getting back to Ford, I think one of the first projects I got when I got into the Ford studio was a little plastic medallion on the rear quarter of the roof of the 1954 Ford – I forgot what they called it, the one with the plastic roof. It was the first car with the plastic roof – 1954 Ford. That plastic roof was really nice. I had a '55 Crown Victoria with a plastic roof, and my wife still thinks that's the greatest car we ever had.

Q There were reports that there were problems on very hot days – that it magnified the heat of the sun?

A It was heavily tinted. It may be that some of the first models might have been clear, but the later '54's were tinted. And then in the '55 and, of course, the '56, they had a nylon screen that you could pull out of the roll bar that went over the basket handle as they called it. You could pull on that and zip it all the way around, and that helped quite a bit. But, it's true, it was really hot when the sun was shining, but

it was a fantastic thing to sit in when there was a thunderstorm and lightning and look up. It was great!

Q Did you have any input into that?

A Not on the plastic hardtop. I worked quite a bit on the 1955 Ford grille. My forte, at that time, was I seemed to get a reputation for doing taillights, so I did the taillights on the '55, '56 and '57 Ford, and, maybe, the '58, too.

Q You did the '55 grille?

A I worked with Joe Oros on that '55 grille.

Q That was our first new car.

A That was our first new car, too. Before that I had the MG TD, which was nice.

Q What was the atmosphere in the mid-'Fifties? You're working on the '55 in about '53.

A The thing I remember most about the attitude of the stylists was they were really excited. When new cars came out, everybody charged up to the Chevrolet dealer, the Oldsmobile dealer, wherever, to see the new cars. I don't think they do that anymore. They're not very exciting now. But every year that was a big project to charge out and climb the fence, if you had to, to look at these new cars. But the spirit was just so fantastic, and the loyalty to Ford was utterly unbelievable -- nothing like what it is now.

Q Who do you think was responsible for that, outside of Henry Ford II, as a symbol?

A Being a family business did help. It was a lot different than working for General Motors, which was so non-personal. And you did get to see Henry once in awhile and William Clay [Ford]. I remember one time when I was in the Advanced Studio, William Clay -- I'd been there a week -- and he came up to the door to come in, and they always kept the doors locked, and I opened the door, and I saw this young fellow out there with his sleeves rolled up and his tie undone, and I said, "You can't come in here." And there was some other guy with him who I didn't know. And, of course, Gil Spear came over and let him in. Then I found out it was William Clay Ford, and the other one was the chief engineer at the time, [Earle] McPherson. I learned fast!

Q It was a fascinating time to be in the Design Center?

A It really was. Even though some of the designs -- especially when they got into the

'58's and '59's -- got to look pretty stupid. The '59 Chevrolet I remember -- I guess it was in '57 or '58. They made a clay model of it, and nobody could believe that anybody would do anything as stupid looking as that. They took it up to the showroom, and everyone laughed at it. I thought, well, somebody has let out some fake blueprints! But then it came out, and that's the way it looked. I couldn't believe it! The '59 Ford didn't look all that great either.

Q They trimmed it a bit, but it still [had fins].

A They stuck the Thunderbird roof on. The Thunderbird was an interesting project, too.

Q Were you drawn into that early on?

A I was in the Ford studio for not more than a few months. We were still in the Triple E Building. I don't think we moved over to the new [design] building 'till '53. There I got pulled out to Bill Boyer's studio, which was under Damon Woods, which was Pre-production. They were working on the Thunderbird in there, and I got put on the interior of that. Then all the other fellows were doing full-size renderings of exteriors. It was an interesting model, in that it was the first model I worked on where the interior was modeled on the same modeling armature as the exterior. So there were modelers working on the outside of the car and modelers working on the inside of the car at the same time.

Q All in one piece?

A All in one piece. The clay armature. They call them bucks. It's the wood armature that you throw the hot clay on and build it. But they did have to make things like the doors thicker than usual, because of the fact they needed enough armature to hold this heavy clay. So the actual dimensions of the car weren't exactly right, at least on the inside. Basically, what the car wound up with was a 1954 Ford instrument panel made a little bit hotter. They put more instruments in. Put some engine turning on it for decoration.

Q They used a tachometer?

A Yes. And the build panels were quite innovative. They had a really swishy armrest on them and an engine-turning decoration on the door panel, too. The seats were pretty normal, as I recall. It looked like it was going to be a pretty nice car. Nobody believed they were going to really make it.

Q Just another advanced model?

A Yes. Everybody thought what would really be nice if they could do it, and the aim was to make it weigh about 2500 pounds and cost about \$2500. I don't know if they hit the weight mark, but they hit the price mark. It was about \$2500. In the first stages of that everybody just called it the "sports car" or whatever they felt like calling it. And, of course, they had many different names on the thing. Every different rendering had a name proposal on it.

I had this damned coffee cup that I brought back from New Mexico, and it had a Thunderbird emblem on it. For some reason or another, I thought that would be a good name for the car. So I was pushing it a bit, and I mentioned it to Frank Hershey, and he thought it might be a good name, too, but they weren't anywhere near picking a name.

Q Was Hershey one of the design executives on that project?

A In my recollection, Frank Hershey was the *chief* designer of Ford styling, and Bill Schmidt was chief designer at Lincoln-Mercury. And over them was Charlie Waterhouse.

Q As a design administrative head?

A His title was the same as [George] Walker took over later.

Q How about Victor Raviolo at that time? Was he an engineer?

A Yes, he was an engineer. I've forgotten all about him. But I do remember him having quite a bit to do with some stuff.

Q I think he and Waterhouse were relatively equal in different administrative spheres.

A Evidently. I do remember when we'd have a show, he was certainly involved in the decision-making area.

Q What input did Bordinat have on the Thunderbird?

A None that I know of. He was in Lincoln-Mercury. Bordinat worked for Bill Schmidt. The big thing about the Thunderbird, as far as I'm concerned, is that somehow or other I kept pushing this Thunderbird and the emblem, and, finally, people began to -- they knew what the symbol was when they saw it on my drawing board. I kept drawing these things. And I was drawing them with two heads. The one on the cup had two heads. And people would come up and say, "That looks dumb with two heads, and why don't you make one with one head." And they'd tell me how to

make it. It kept coming out looking like an eagle or the NRA. I did some with cast lightning. Somehow -- I don't know how it happened.

Q The NRA symbol had a gear in one hand claw and a lightning bolt in the other.

A That was my recollection, yes. Somehow, [the Thunderbird] finally wound up on the models. I guess it was on most of the models. It was accepted that that was, at least, the name they were going to have until they thought of something better.

Q A code name?

A You could look at it that way, but we had developed some medallions and the script for the side of the car. Then we had a big show one day. It was in the warm weather in the summer of '53. They had Henry Ford II out there, Ernie Breech, and [Lewis] Crusoe. I don't know if McNamara was out there, too.

Q This was...?

A Over in the courtyard [of the Design Center] before it was paved, when it was mostly grass, so it wasn't so damned hot out there. After that show, the models of the T-Bird came back with no emblems or names on them. Somebody had said that Henry hadn't liked it, but I don't know if that's true or not. Anyway, we went along for a long time without a name, and they had people submitting names. Crusoe wanted to call it El Tigra, and Dave Ash wanted to call it Deneb, which I thought was a fantastically stupid name.

Q What did that mean?

A That's a star -- D-E-N-E-B. I thought, well, that's a dumb name. Dave usually came up with good names, but that was a bad one. Somebody else wanted to call it Coronado, which....

Q Wasn't too bad.

A The Corvette was already out, though, and I thought that was too close to that.

Q It did have a Southwestern tinge to it?

A Yes. Ken Nelson had a good name, I thought -- Lightning Rod. Hot rods were really popular then. He was from California. He had been a hot rodder out there. He refinished cars out there, too. He's down in Florida now. I think he's chief designer for something. He retired and went to Seattle, and then he moved back. Anyway, things went along, and they had a bunch of names on the car.

Q Were you still pushing Thunderbird?

A No, I gave up on it. One day Frank Hershey called me up on the phone, and he said, "Can you give me some background on Thunderbird? I need it right away. We're going to have a press release." I said, "I thought they chucked the name?" He said, "I've got to have it right now." I didn't know anything about it. I just told him what little I knew about it from down there. He had been down in Taos, [New Mexico] so he knew as much about it as I did. I don't know what he was doing down there. That was an art colony. Gil Trewick, one of the head modelers who had been down there, too.

So, that's how the name got on the car. I read in the Automobile Quarterly later that, evidently, GM had picked the name up, and they [Ford] beat them to the punch by a day or so. They had to call their car the Firebird -- that show car that they were bringing out. So, that's what happened there.

Q As I recall, the first release had a lot of pseudo-lore about Thunderbird. Was this some of the stuff you'd given to Frank Hershey?

A I don't recall what I told Frank. I told him what I knew about it, which was very little.

Q You said he was from Taos?

A He really knew. He didn't have to call me. I told him it had two heads. I was looking at the one on my cup, and that's it. But there were a lot of different versions of it down there, too. All the little souvenir shops in Santa Fe had rainbow man and thunderbirds and all kinds of things with feathers on them. But, there was one thing, it seemed to be related to turquoise. So, on the emblems, we always used turquoise for the color.

Q That was, and is, the prevalent color in the tourist area?

A There's so much turquoise jewelry down there, and silver. Then I found out -- Frank Hershey told me -- that Lew Crusoe had decided to give anybody who named the car a \$250 suit. So I thought that was okay, but what I'd like is a car, or, at least, a discount on one, anyway. At that time I was in a position where I didn't get a discount on anything. So I had this \$250 suit coming, and Wendell Clough, who was Crusoe's assistant, said I had this \$250 suit coming, and I could go anyplace I wanted to get it. So Frank Hershey told me the name of his tailor -- Disner's -- and that I should go there. So, I went there first, and it was really embarrassing all the places I went, because, as it turned out, the most expensive suit I could get, anyway

you wanted to get it, was a cashmere suit. And it didn't make any difference if it was off the rack or handmade, it was \$173. That was it, unless you got one like Elvis Presley with sequins on it or something like that, you couldn't make it above \$173, and there was no way. So I came back and told Frank, "I've been all over, and there's no way I can get a suit for more than \$173." So he said, "Why don't you buy a whole wardrobe. Get a hat, shoes, and all that stuff?" I said, "I could do that." So I went back and priced all that out, and I talk to Frank, and Frank said, "Fine." Then I talked to Wendell Clough, and he said, "Nope, you've got to get a \$250 suit. That's what Lew Crusoe said." I kept getting this, and there was no agreement at all. I finally wound up saying to myself, "Okay, let's say I got a suit with two pair of pants. That would be reasonable. That would be one suit." So I wound up going to Saks. I got a \$95 suit and a \$45 pair of slacks, and they were nice. At that time, that was quite a nice suit. Then the embarrassing part came again. When the suit was ready, I didn't have the money. They hadn't given me the money, and it had been about ten days or so. So I called Saks, and I said I couldn't make it this week; I'll try next week. In the meantime, I was trying to get the money from them, and I couldn't get it. Three weeks went by, and Saks was getting a little disturbed. So I finally had to go in and explain to them what the situation was. It was unusual, but they understood. But it was embarrassing. One of the most embarrassing things was going in to buy a suit and have somebody show you all these materials, like Harris tweeds, and I'd look through them all, and I'd think that's really nice. "How much is this one." "\$125." And I'd have to say, "Do you have anything more expensive?" "You could go to cashmere. It's \$173." So that's the way it went.

Q Where did you finally get the suit?

A Saks.

Q Was it cashmere?

A No, it wasn't cashmere. Cashmere was \$173; I only spent \$95. It was ridiculous for me to get a cashmere suit, because I had the MG TD, and every time you get in the car, you'd drag your clothes over the running board on that thing, and, of course, a lot of times, you had to work on it, because it didn't always work every minute of the day. So I didn't want a cashmere suit.

- Q** So, in effect, you were the person who named the Thunderbird? That is, you gave them the inspiration for the name?
- A** That's my big history at the Ford Motor Company. Other than that, it's been all bits and pieces.
- Q** Did you talk to Crusoe about it at all?
- A** No. I almost called him one night when I got so mad, and I did call, and the line was busy, and that saved me, apparently. I was going to explain what the stupid situation was, because I had spent, probably, a month going to all these clothing stores. With every one of them I'd have to explain what was going on, because they'd think I was some kind of a nut. "You got anything for \$250." The minute I'd explain it to them, they'd say, "Why don't you get a whole wardrobe?" and I'd say, "Well, I can't." They were really immoveable in that.
- Q** How long did you keep the suit?
- A** It lasted a long time. When I got it, finally, it had been such a big to do that Chase Morrisey – he had a pretty good job at that time. It was product planning or something like that. He had damned near insisted that I go up to the showroom and stand on the turntable, and they'd have a show on the suit. But, fortunately, it wound up that I walked to the one end of the studio, and everybody looked at it, and that was about it. Very embarrassing!
- Q** Clough reported to Crusoe that you had gotten the suit?
- A** Oh, yes. I don't think Crusoe ever saw it, at least not that he knew of it. I'm sure he saw it. It was funny. But that was the most notable thing there. What did I get into after that? I guess, they started working on the '57 Ford. I had quite a bit to do with the grille on that and the taillights, again – always the taillights.
- Q** That was one of your specialties?
- A** Yes. The first taillight I did with the backup light in the middle of it was the '56 taillight. That was the first one where they had the backup light in the middle, which was interesting because you had to run the wire from the backup light through the taillight in a way that you didn't see it when the light lit up. In other words, it was going to cast a shadow. There was no way that it couldn't cast a shadow, but you had to put it in a place where it wouldn't be too noticeable.
- Q** Big, fat ones?

- A** Not the '56 so much. The '57 was the big round one. That was huge, and, at that time, it was a little over 7 inches, which, at that time, seemed huge. That one we just made no bones about the shadow of wire; we just made it go straight down, and that was it. It just showed up, and that was it.
- Q** Many of your colleagues speak of the term bezel. In terms of taillights, exactly what is it?
- A** A bezel is what they call it the decorative frame around the headlight. They call it the headlight frame, but we used to call it the headlight bezel and the taillight bezel, so it would be the rim or frame around. If there was a little ring around an instrument on the interior, it would be the bezel. It was not a matter of design, it was a matter of stuffing them in, really – the first double headlights in the '58 Ford. We had to stuff them in the same space as the '57 was in. The '57 had one headlight, and the '58, they decided the competition was going to have two, so we had to stuff two headlights in there.
- Q** How did you do that?
- A** Just jam them in as close together as you can get.
- Q** Were they round?
- A** Two round headlights, yes. They had the smaller headlights. I forget the dimension of them. They went to the two smaller headlights, and they just barely fit. They bulged out at the side a little bit. They went to dual taillights on that one, too. One went up the trunk lid. That was '58.
- Q** The inboard lamp went up with the trunk lid?
- A** Yes. I don't know what they did on the station wagon. There was a problem there. They might have had to go to a single.
- Q** When did backup lights come in?
- A** They were there when I went there in '52, but they were accessories. They were separate from the taillights. I think they were below the taillights, and sometimes they were mounted on the shield between the bumper and the body.
- Q** Later, in the upper triangle above the taillight?
- A** That's right. In '55, that was where the backup light went when you got a backup light. Then in '56, they put it in the center of the taillight, so you didn't have to do that. That 1955 taillight and that little finial up on the top with the backup light in

it was the design that they picked up from the Thunderbird. That was, basically, the rear end of the Thunderbird with the unique bumper. Then the 1954 instrument panel, and the 1955 headlamp bezel off the '55 Ford. The grille was unique and the hood was unique.

Q Speaking of the Thunderbird, they used those little crossed racing flags on the left front fender. Whose idea was that?

A If I were to guess, I'd probably say Dave Ash.

Q Was he a racing enthusiast?

A Oh, yes. He had an MG also. He had a TC. In fact, he had checkered flags on his TC, too. He took the checkered flags and put them on there, too.

Q They were both checkered flags?

A It was on either side, and at one time it was on the hood, too. That was a period where checkered flags went on everything – cross checkered flags. I remember cross checkered flags with crossed lightning underneath it. Hard to beat that for symbolism.

Q Were you able to get the lightning bolts in the Thunderbird ornament?

A Any way you could think of a Thunderbird ornament, I had it: with the wings up, with the wings down, or horizontal. Some of them had lightning bolts, but the original they bought for the car didn't have any lightning bolts in it. It was really sort of an eagle that was made to look simplified like an Indian might designate an eagle. But they had it everywhere. They had that emblem on the valve covers, and then you could buy special valve covers that were cast aluminum and finned, and that had the emblem on it – first on the instrument panel.

In 1960, I was in charge of some interior pre-production, and we did the first coved rear seat. Do you remember the coved rear seat in the '64 Thunderbird? Well, we did that down in pre-production. Jimmy Quinlan and I worked on that, and the front seat was a unique seat, too.

Q Could you characterize those seats in layman's terms?

A Well, with the rear seat, we were doing a clay model in pre-production interior, and we did what we called a coved seat – like a booth in a restaurant that surrounds you. In effect, instead of having two individual seat cushions in the back, you sat back there like you were in a booth in a restaurant, and the seat came around to the

side around you. Theoretically, you could sit sideways, but, of course, you couldn't because of the configuration of the car. There was a tunnel hump in the middle, so you couldn't really do that. But it gave the impression of coming around. I didn't think there was too much chance of getting that seat made, except that George Walker decided he liked it. So the trim shop made one up and proved that it could be done. Then it got taken right out of our model into the '64 Thunderbird -- almost as is. Also the front seats, which were kind of unique in the fact that they only had three small pleats running down the back and the cushion in the center, and then the outside of the seat was just plain, which was really unique for that time. Jimmy Quinlan had a lot to do with that.

Q Back to the earlier Thunderbird, in the late '50's the decision was made to go to a four-seater?

A 1958.

Q Were you privy to any of that?

A No, I had nothing to do with it, except to voice my disapproval. Joe Oros was really pushing that. Probably somebody else was, too. But Joe and, as I recall, Bill Boyer had a lot to do with that first four-seater.

Q Did they think there was a market for it?

A Evidently there was; it sold like crazy. That body style lasted until the '60. That was when they went to the more aerodynamic one.

Q Was Lee Iacocca on the scene by '54?

A No. I think he was still with truck.

Q So it was really Crusoe's car? He was the one that wanted that sport car?

A Yes, Crusoe. It was kind of interesting. This has nothing too much to do with the Thunderbird, except for the fact that this side treatment was on the side on the car for awhile -- that big swash treatment off the '55 Ford, the thing that came from the top of the fender down the side like a big check mark.

Q Apparently, that was Crusoe's passion?

A I always attributed that to McNamara, that he put it on the side of the Thunderbird, but, of course, it came off, anyway. It was interesting where the swash came from. Ken Nelson designed that for the side treatment for the '55 Ford, and then they made a show car that was based on that side treatment. It was called the Mystere

which Bill Boyer did. The whole theme of this car was this big check mark side treatment, which came from the top of the front fender down over the side then hopped back up over the rear wheel. They showed the show car, and then the '55 Ford came out, so they said that was from the Mystere, but, actually, it was just the other way around.

Q That's interesting.

A Not too exciting, really.

Q In terms of dream cars and translating it into production cars, it's really the story of the 'Fifties?

A Yes. I was sent to England in 1960 to train somebody to take over the interior department. The fellow who had Interiors over there had left. They had a good man to take it over, but he hadn't had much experience in that area.

Q At this time you're in interiors?

A I was pretty much in interiors at that time. But, I'd say over the years, it was about 50/50. I kept going back and forth. Nobody wanted me, or else everybody wanted me.

But, I went over, and I was given the task of training John Fallis, who, as far as I was concerned, didn't need any training. That was an interesting experience going over there for me. Actually, the one who was over there who I was sent over to work for was Roy Brown who designed the Edsel. Roy was the chief designer over there. So I was there only on a temporary basis until John Fallis could take over, which only took about three months. I don't think it would have taken that long, I just stretched it out.

Q Everybody seemed to enjoy the tour of duty in England?

A We enjoyed it. We got to stay in an interesting house over there. It was a mews flat. It was, in effect, the old stable house on the alley behind the mansion, and it had been converted into a home. Of course, they all had on this one mews. I suppose all the mews in London have been converted to houses by this time. But the one we had was owned by Mary Churchill, Winston's daughter. She had married a Dutch diplomat, and they were going to the South of France to build a house, and they wanted to rent this out, so we rented it. It had a lot sculptures that were done by John Churchill.

Q Who was John?

A I don't remember, but he still lived in London. I remember having to take one of his sculptures up to his house. He had a mews flat, but he had painted cast iron balconies around all the windows, so it was really a weird-looking thing.

Q Painted?

A Painted flowers on it. It was really weird. I walked up there, and I thought I don't know about this guy. It was interesting. My wife would get a call from Lady Churchill almost every other day. She'd call and ask, "When is Mary coming home?" My wife would tell her she didn't know.

Q This is Clementine Churchill?

A My wife always called her Lady Churchill, and then Lady Jane used to come out to the house once in a while, too, for some unknown reason. Anne Baxter had rented it a year before we did.

Q Frank Lloyd Wright's granddaughter.

A My father hated Frank Lloyd Wright, so, naturally, I did, too.

Q So, your house had quite a celebrity status?

A Oh, yes, it did. It was number 8 Lennox Garden Mews. We had a maid. A maid came with it. You had to take the maid! Cost us the fantastic sum of 34 cents an hour. Mrs. Davies was there everyday, except Sunday. She used to smoke Player's Weights, those little short cigarettes. She was an interesting character. My son was only six or seven then, and we had to keep him from going to first grade there, but just for three months. It wasn't bad. He went back later on his own on a bike trip when he was about seventeen and spent a month. He went all over, went to France and around Europe. He'd like to go back again. I'd like to go back. We went back in 1968 to visit Bob Thomas, who was working over there at the time.

Q Working in Ford of England?

A Right. He was executive stylist of exteriors or interiors, I've forgotten which. They had a nice house over there, too, so we spent a couple of weeks over there. I didn't do any design work over there then.

Q What did you do for Ford and Fallis when you were there?

A Mostly worked on the new interiors, at that time, for their top of the line car.

Q The Cortina?

A It was better than the Cortina. The Escort was the little one with the reverse back window. That was funny, when we were over there, they wouldn't sell me a car. I could buy one at a discount. For some reason, they wouldn't sell me one. So I had to rent a car from Godfrey Davis, who was the Avis dealer over there. I could never get the car washed. When it got dirty, I'd just take it back and get another one. There weren't any car washes around London at all -- zero. The fellow next door to us had an Aston-Martin, and he used to wash his own because that was the only way you did it; everybody did that. I was working with John Fallis on those interiors.

Q Still in interiors?

A Over there, definitely. I came back over here, and I was working for Dave Ash in the Lincoln-Mercury pre-production interiors, and we modeled what turned out to be the 1964 Lincoln instrument panel. That was unique, too. It had the outboard air conditioning registers in a unique place. It made the instrument panel, itself, look like it was floating. It turned out quite nicely.

Q How did you do that?

A The concept of it was that if you took the armrest on the door and went ahead of the armrest on the door, there would be a flat spot for the ashtray. You took the plane of that flat spot and just went toward the instrument panel and then angled up and went around behind the instrument panel and came back down the other side like a big racetrack. So when it angled up toward the instrument panel, we put the air conditioning grille in there, we had a floating big box-like crash pad in the middle of this racetrack that went all the way around, and it sort of just floated there with the instruments and the center two air conditioning ducts and the glove compartment.

Q Was that your inspiration?

A That's always difficult to say. They're all group efforts. I worked on that with a fellow named Dick Blair and, of course, Dave Ash.

Q Dave was the top interior man at that time or one of them?

A He wasn't at that time. McGuire was head of interiors and Dave Ash and quite a few others: Art Miller and...I can't remember how many other fellows worked for him.

Q This was the early 'Sixties?

A Early 'Sixties, yes. We had the lease plan, and I managed to get a new Thunderbird almost every year.

And then, of course, the Mustang became the hot car. I worked on the '67 Mustang fastback. I did that. I was working for Dave Ash at that time in a different studio. I did the fastback. That fastback turned out pretty nice. Then we worked on a lot of show cars. The La Galaxie show car was probably the wildest one.

Q Tell us about those show cars, beginning with La Galaxie.

A When I first went to Ford, the show cars were really, to me, very exciting, because I'd never seen show cars before. I think Joe Oros did the X-100, which was almost like the 1960 Thunderbird. It was almost the duplicate of the X-100 show car. It had kind of an aerodynamic front end and two huge bumper taillights in the back that were supposed to simulate rocket fire out of the back. Everything we did did that. The only thing we didn't do is have smoke coming out of the back.

The other one at that time was the X-500, which Bill Schmidt did, which actually was a better-looking car. That was red.

Q You worked on the X-100?

A No, I didn't work on that or the X-500. They were done when I got there, or very shortly after I got there. The inspiration for all the young designers were those two cars. Then there was another one, it was called Futura. Ken Spencer had a lot to do with it. A double cockpit. That finally wound up being the Batmobile. That's still around someplace.

Q A version of it, yes. The whole concept of the dream cars was a marvelous laboratory for future designs?

A There were quite a few, for instance, that incorporated a parallel action side door, which was really an interesting concept. Unfortunately, it never got into production and never has.

Q How did that work?

A The closest thing to it I can see is the sliding door on the side of the vans now a days. But it was in that concept. It came out from the car first, and then went either forward or back, depending on which way you wanted it to go. It was sort of a half hinged, half sliding door. It enabled you to get a very wide door and yet

not have it stick out too far when you opened it in a parking lot. But it never came off, to my knowledge.

Q Was it ever incorporated into any production car?

A They put it on some prototypes, but it never got on any production car that I know of. I think they were thinking of it at one time for the '57 Ford Retractable. I had one of those, and that was the most impressive car. I used to park it in the driveway with the hood up, and the trunk up, and that roof halfway down. It just impressed people. It looked like it was on the assembly line being assembled. All that huge trunk and no trunk room.

Q Filled up with motors?

A Filled up with motors and one little kind of a square bin in the center that you could put one small suitcase. If you ever had a flat tire, it was the most unbelievable thing.

Q Tell us about it.

A Well, number one, you had to take this metal bin out that was for your luggage. You had to unbolt these wing nuts and take that out, and either throw it over the side of the fin, because you're in the trunk. The trunk opened the other way from the front. So you had to get in the trunk to do that. You had to crawl over the fin to get in the trunk. Then you either had to hand this thing to somebody outside or just throw it over on to wherever you were. Then you had to take up a piece of plywood on the floor, and get that someplace out of the way, and then you had to lift the tire out and lift that over the fin and hand it to somebody. And then get the jack out of that hole, then you had to climb out over the fin and do all the things that you have to do to change the tire and wheel. Then you had to put the other wheel back in there and crawl back in and put all this stuff back together, and you had to have somebody hand you all this equipment.

Q Did you ever have to do it?

A Once.

Q That's exactly the way it happened?

A Right, yes. Fortunately, it was in the driveway, so I had my wife there. But I would hate to have to do that on the highway and on a rainy night.

Q There are some stories about how one of the motors failed, and the top would stop

in mid-air.

A It could happen. I had it happen to me one time. The top wasn't up. We went to get a Christmas tree out in Birmingham, and we put the Christmas tree in the trunk, which was not made to take Christmas trees because you had to leave it halfway open. As I say, it was a huge trunk, but it had all this junk in it. So we drove home from the Christmas tree lot....

Q Did you have a button that you could...?

A On the inside. You could stop it at any point you wanted it to. I put the Christmas tree in the trunk, and I closed the lid down to where it was just against the tree. Then I drove home, which was a couple of miles, pulled it in the garage. Fortunately, the lid was down far enough so I could get in the garage, then went to get the Christmas tree out, and the motors had frozen. It was so cold. It was below zero. The motors had frozen, so I couldn't get the tree out. I shut the garage door, finally and just waited until it warmed up enough to where it thawed out.

Q You didn't emulate Henry Ford and take an axe to the decklid!

A No. I didn't know that he did that?

Q Back in the plastic decklid days -- the early 'Forties.

A Oh, yes, when he was trying to prove that it was really strong. No, I never felt that bad about it.

Q The Retractable Hardtop always seemed to me a sort of stepchild. Did it ever go? Was it popular? It ran for about three years, didn't it?

A Three years, yes -- '57, '58, and '59. They're collectors' items now, but how they sold, I don't know. I think they sold about all they made, but it wasn't a big seller. They assembled them down at -- what do they call it now -- the Pilot Plant down there by Oakwood Boulevard?

Q They called it the Assembly Plant.

A Because it was Continental. They did the Retractable down there, and then the Edsel. Now, it's the Automotive Assembly Division.

Q The Retractable Hardtop -- whose idea was it, who pushed it?

A As I mentioned way back in the beginning of the tape, the concept of it was from Gil Spear.

Q Was Gil Spear, at that time, an executive designer?

- A** No, he was a manager.
They had this 3/8th scale working model of the Retractable Hardtop. The concept was almost exactly the same. It seems to me that an engineer named Bill Smith had a lot to do with the mechanism in the thing.
- Q** It was a series of about 8 motors which controlled the various degrees of...?
- A** They were on a screw jack type thing, and you could stop it at any point.
- Q** This was controlled from the driver's seat?
- A** Just by one button.
- Q** Where was that located on the dashboard?
- A** It was on the lower left. If everything was shut, and you pushed the button, the first thing that happened was the trunklid went up.
- Q** In one motion?
- A** And when you got it to that point, if that's all you wanted, you just stopped pushing the button. If you wanted the top down, you just held it, and it just kept going. You could stop it at any point whenever you wanted to. It was pretty well done. That concept they picked up for the convertible top on the T-Bird and the four-door Continental convertible.
- Q** They came up with a modified version of it, did they not?
- A** The roof was soft, but the trunklid opened the same way. When the top was down, you didn't see anything. You didn't have a boot of any kind to cover it up.
- Q** That was Gil Spear's innovation?
- A** I certainly think so.
- Q** Was he able to push it successfully at the top level?
- A** He had a lot of opposition. He was pushing it against the current.
- Q** That's interesting. What did the rest of the staff think about it? Did they think it was impractical?
- A** They thought it was cute. He didn't really get much backing from engineering until he did the 3/8th. He was doing this in secret, this 3/8th scale working model. When he got that done, you could hardly fight the fact that it worked.
- Q** How did he ever put that tiny thing together with 8 little motors?
- A** Gil was very intelligent, and Johnny Hay, who was a really sharp young fellow in the metal shop. That was his baby down there. A 3/8th scale is the size of this desk.

It's big.

Q I keep forgetting.

A The little 10th scale model that he had was working, too, but that had a key in the side. You just turned the key, and the trunk went up. [Another turn] and the top went in, and it shut.

Q But the 3/8th size was fully operational.

A The 3/8th size was like 5 feet long. It had batteries. I don't think you plugged it in, but it worked great. I don't think anybody got seriously interested in it at that time, but that's what spurred it on.

Q The Thunderbird is behind you and one of the Mustangs, which was largely your work?

A I did the '71 Mustang.

Q What kind of innovations did that have?

A That was probably the wildest fastback. It had more slope on the rear window.

Q By this time, the original '64 Mustang had become rather large, had it not?

A The '65, '66, '67 and up to '70 were pretty much all the same size. They might have been a little bigger.

Q What did the '71 have that others didn't?

A It was bigger, for one thing. It was longer. It was a different kind of animal. It was a lot longer, and, I have say, sleeker. It didn't look cute like the original Mustang, which was great. I see them on the road, and they're [still] looking great. I saw a '71 convertible the other day that looked great, too.

Q Let's use the '71 Mustang as a capsule history. Tell us how it came about. Whose idea was it to change it?

A I was in charge of a studio where we were working on advanced concepts.

Q Who were you working for?

A I don't know if I can remember. [Don] DeLaRossa was the chief whatever at the top, but somebody underneath him. It could easily have been Ken Nelson. We were down in the basement, and I had this really nut of a stylist with me by the name of Jim Kristich, who was really an excellent stylist, but he was kind of nutty. We were trying to get some new concepts for the new Mustang. Between us, we sort of came up with this side view that really had a sloping back window on it, to

the point that you'd think nobody would even think of it because you wouldn't be able to see out of it. But, anyway, we went ahead and did it, and some people liked it. I don't remember who looked at it, but we managed to make a clay model of it. In fact, we eventually made a fiberglass model of it. We made two fiberglass models. It was either a fastback and a hardtop or a fastback and a Cougar version of the Mustang. I don't really remember which it was. Anyway, this one day we had them sitting up in the big studio up on the first floor in the new building. At that time, Bunkie Knudsen had taken over.

Q As president out from under Lee Iacocca?

A But Iacocca was still there. It was very touchy at that time. There was no love lost between the two -- Iacocca and Knudsen. It was a terrible snowy day in the winter, and they decided to have a show outside. There were snow drifts outside the doors where they take the models out, so bad that the hi-lo jacks that they put these heavy clay models on were getting hung up in the snow drifts, and they'd get stuck, and they'd have to get another hi-lo jack to pull them out. But nobody would say we'll get ahold of Mr. Knudsen and say we really can't have a show today. It was "We're going to have to have the show today," and, God, there must have been 8 inches of snow out there in the courtyard. And they got all these models out there, and the clay is freezing, and the dinoc that they use for paint on the outside is getting hard and cracking, and the wind is blowing the paint jobs off. But here comes Knudsen, and Iacocca and everybody with their overcoats on and hats and scarfs out there in the snow, walking around in the snow looking at these models. Neither Iacocca nor Knudsen would give up. "I'm not going to say I'm cold!" Anyway, they finally came in the studios. Quite a bit of snow had blown in through the big doors in the studios, too, and the floor was wet. When they came in, they almost went on their tails because this floor was slippery. In fact, the secretary did. I thought she'd broke her neck in those high heels.

Knudsen came in. And, of course, Iacocca had the reputation of being the "Father of the Mustang." He was certainly the one that pushed it. I would say the one that really designed it would be Dave Ash.

Q Do you think he was the primary designer?

A I would give him credit for that. I certainly had nothing to do with that original

Mustang. Knudsen and Iacocca and all these people came in. Knudsen walked by these two fiberglass models that we had sitting there, and he, out of a clear blue sky, said, "There's your '71 Mustang," and that was it.

Q And that was yours?

A Yes. That was it. I think Iacocca just was probably burning up.

Q Was his candidate...?

A There weren't any other candidates. Nobody was working on it yet. It wasn't time to work on it. We'd done it early.

Q So the ones in the courtyard were just your various...?

A I don't know what was out in the courtyard. It wasn't even a Mustang, it was something else.

Q It was the Friday show and tell?

A Yes, right.

Q But then he came in, and he saw your mockup and said, "That's it?"

A Yes. That was quite an unusual thing. I don't think that ever happened before.

Q Did they follow through on it?

A It was almost exactly...the modification you wouldn't have noticed, and they even kept the big slope on the back window.

Q So what happened right after that?

A Right after that, then they started to work on the models in this production studio.

Q Using your model as the...?

A As the base, yes. That was always sitting there. I really can't remember what those two models were. One of them was the fastback, and I can't remember what the other one was. But, anyway, we started working on a Cougar version of that car, and also taking this Mustang and tuning it up so that it was feasible, manufacturing-wise. But I do recall that I was working on the Cougar version also, which was the one with the tunnel backlight that sort of trailed out onto the rear deck and the narrow grille that came up and bent over the top a little bit.

Q Who had assigned you to do your model?

A It may have been Ken Nelson. It was under DeLaRossa, I remember that.

Q This was still the advanced studio?

A Yes. They had some other weird name for it. They've had weird names for studios,

like product development. One was special projects studio. It was always said of the special projects studio -- that's where I did the '67 Mustang -- that Iacocca had chocolate and vanilla studios, and they needed a strawberry studio, so that was it, so we were strawberry studio.

Q What did that refer to?

A If he wanted three different proposals for one car from three totally different thinking -- not influenced by the other. Rather than doing three proposals in one studio and having them, maybe, all be variations of one design, he got three from different groups.

Q Not a bad concept?

A No, it was an excellent concept, as long you've got the money to pay for that kind of thing, why not do it? It was a good idea. We were strawberry, anyway. I don't remember who was chocolate and who was vanilla. I think that was Lincoln and Ford or Mercury and Ford.

Q That must have been exciting for you to have that happen?

A It was. But it got a little touchy after that, because we started working on the Cougar, and then we had an Iacocca side and a Knudsen side. Iacocca would come, and he'd look at his side, and Knudsen would come, and he'd look at his side. It was a little bit touchy.

Q This was in the late 'Sixties. McGuire had retired?

A Yes, that's true. In fact, he came back while those models were in the studio just to say hello.

Q What did he say?

A Hello.

Q He didn't say anything about your models?

A Oh, no. He didn't give a damn. He didn't care about that. Another weird thing we worked on in that studio was what we called the Bedrock Vehicle. It started out to be a proposal for the Lunar vehicle. There was a competition to design that vehicle, and we got into it very late, actually too late to do anything, but it still sounded like an interesting project. I was working for a fellow named Barney Gardner who designed the consoles at NASA. They've got new ones now, but he designed the original ones. Barney was a pretty interesting guy to work for -- very flexible. And

also a fellow named Dave Wheeler, who was the chief stylist. Barney worked for him, and I worked for Barney.

Q Chief stylist of...?

A Of whatever the name of this studio was. Something like special projects or product development or some weird thing. Anyway, the concept of this vehicle was to build a vehicle. After we gave up the Lunar thing, we decided to build a vehicle that could be made in developing countries with very simple equipment, like a brake press just to bend metal. So we designed it that way. We made the whole model out of foam core. Foam core is two layers of paper filled with foam, and it comes in different thicknesses -- 1/8th inch, 1/4 inch, 1/2 inch -- and it's quite strong for what it is.

Since all these were flat planes, anyway, we just had a wood framework built with wheels and axles on it, and then we put this simulated bent sheet metal over it (the foam core). Put some seats in it and made an instrument panel. Simple. I don't know if it even had a speedometer; it might have just had a temperature gauge and an oil gauge. But that went over pretty well, and they made a working model of it. They got an old, as I recall, Fiat, and they took the body off of it. It was a rear engine, that Fiat, and they made a new body. Carron and Company was where they build a lot of our prototypes out there. DeLaRossa did a lot of things with Irl Brooks. Irl Brooks used to run it. He's dead now. He died about six months ago. And they built this out there and made a running model out of it. And then they took it down to Eastern Market and ran it around down there just to see what kind of reaction they'd get out of it, and they made a 16 millimeter movie of the thing doing different things: running around the test track and going through Eastern Market.

Q Which vehicle is this again?

A We called it the Bedrock Vehicle. It finally wound up being called the T Square.

Q For what reason?

A Because it was sort of in the concept of the Model T, and it was square. That's the only reason I can think of.

Q It had nothing to do with the draftsmen's device?

A No. Although that was a little bit of the cuteness. Anyway, it wound up that the

concept was taken to Australia, and they actually made a production car out of it to use exactly for that purpose.

Q Which was?

A It was kind of an all-terrain vehicle in some ways, but the concept was that it could be built in areas where the manufacturing facilities were very primitive and by people who weren't too skilled. Now what ever happened to that, I don't remember.

Q Did Ford of Australia take it over?

A Yes. That was when another wild guy was down there -- Duncan McCrea. He was, I think, chief designer down there when they did that. But he got all the design of that from our model. He might not admit that, but he did.

Q A utility vehicle?

A They had a name. I can't remember the name of it.

Q For years they used the word Ute as a short term for utility truck. This is much later.

A I never heard that. It sounds reasonable, though.

Q The '67 Mustang was a very popular vehicle?

A Oh, yes. I had one of the fastbacks. It had a silver and a black interior. It was really a nice car. But I got the big engine -- a 390 engine. My, God, it was way too much for that car. I remember it was the first week I had it, I pulled into a gas station on the corner of Telegraph Road and Cherry Hill to get some gas, and I pulled out onto Telegraph Road, and I wanted to get out into the middle so I could make the next turnaround in the island and come back the other way, and I inadvertently stepped on the gas a little too much, and I spun right out in the middle of Telegraph. Oh, God, scary. Fortunately, the light was red, and there weren't any cars coming. It looked hot, too. I bought another used one later on, and it had the same engine -- 390-4 barrel. My wife wouldn't drive the thing. We finally got rid of it.

Q This is the beginning of the muscle cars?

A Yes, really. You didn't have to worry about gas in those days, that's for sure.

Q What about the Knudsen episode with Larry Shinoda? Did that impact on your area at all?

A This had a lot of influence on a lot of people, and there was a lot of animosity.

Larry had a studio right next to the one that I was working in when we did the Mustang. At the time that Larry was at his peak, or almost at his peak, we were working on a car called the Phoenix, which turned out to be the Pinto.

Q That was the code name?

A Yes. So we were all doing models of that car. I was working on that, too. I was working for Ken Nelson at that time. I was a manager under him. Or was it Querfeld? Maybe it was Art Querfeld. It was one or the other, anyway. Art Querfeld was the one who used to like to stay until 3 o'clock in the morning!

Q He never went home?

A He used to go home at dinnertime, and then he'd come back.

Q Then work another eight hours?

A Yes. It was like Saturdays. I worked for him one time, and, son of gun, on a Saturday, Art would come in when the modelers came in at 7:30 in the morning and he'd bring doughnuts in, and he'd stay for about a half an hour, and I'd have to be there so I wasn't late. And he'd bring doughnuts in, then I'd be there, and then he'd go and play golf. Then in the afternoon about 2:30 or so, Buzz Grisinger would come in – and he was the executive stylist above Querfeld – so I would have to stay there until absolutely quitting time, and I wasn't even getting paid for overtime. It was free, as far as I was concerned. But they had me trapped into coming in first thing in the morning and leaving last at night. Anyway, Querfeld was that way. But we were working the Phoenix, which turned out to be the Pinto. And of all the models that were there, and I don't remember how many there were. There were probably six, anyway, maybe eight.

Q Six concept models?

A Yes. They had a show. Knudsen and Shinoda were walking up looking at these models. I don't remember if Iacocca was there or not. But they were walking up, and Shinoda had brought a sketch with him – a little rendering – and he had it on an easel, and he got Knudsen to agree that that sketch was the way they ought to go. Basically, that was the Pinto.

Q Really? It was really his?

A It's awfully close.

Q What were the rest of the models? Did they take any bits and pieces from them that

you people had set up?

A They were all the same size. To my recollection, basically his design was pretty different than the other ones. Then we worked on that one. We worked on the Pinto with Querfeld and brought it into feasibility.

Q There was a general feeling that a small car was the next way to go?

A I always liked small cars. My son had an Austin Mini-Cooper, which was the first front-wheel drive mini car, and that thing was utterly fantastic. So I always thought that was the most -- that was only ten feet long. It's smaller than anything they're making now. It's even smaller than the little 3 cylinder ones that they have -- GM and those two-seaters. Everybody pretty much thought that we should have a compact car. I don't know why. The gas was, maybe, getting a little high.

Q This is the early 'Seventies?

A Yes. The Pinto was a '70 or '71.

Q Aside from the Pinto, which is considerable, what impact did Shinoda have on Ford design?

A The only thing I can remember is that he had a lot to do with the racing -- competition stuff. As far as design goes, I think he had a lot to do with the Torino. The one that he first worked on had a target-like grille. It had a nose that stuck out in the middle. He had a lot to do with that Torino. I don't remember what year that was. That must have been '70 or '71. I'll tell you, the last days of Knudsen were weird.

Q How so?

A They tried to put it back together. I was working for Dave Wheeler, who was a Knudsen man. He was brought in by Knudsen.

Q He was head of what?

A Whatever the name of that studio was I was working in -- whatever that was. Corporate projects I think it was or something -- special development or some weird thing like that. Anyway, our studio was separated from Shinoda's studio by one of the folding walls we have over there, and it goes up so many feet, and then it's open over the other side, 12 feet or whatever. A lot of people -- I was going to say everybody -- hated Shinoda.

Q As a person?

A He was a very obnoxious person, thoughtless it seemed to me and to most of the people I talked to. He was someplace in Europe on vacation when Knudsen got the axe. It was just assumed by everybody that Shinoda was done. The people in the studio over there who had been very arrogant and thinking they really were working for the right guy – he was going to be the one to take Knudsen's place – when this happened, they started waving banners up above the wall "Help! Help!" and other things like "Have mercy on us." They knew it was over. There was a little humor in it in that sense.

Q Was there something about a sinking sun?

A Yes. That was one of them, yes.

Q Can you elaborate on this?

A To my recollection, that was just one of the signs that they put up. A long time ago when I first went to Ford, we used to do other weird things over the wall like huge flying saucers that we'd make up in cardboard and throw over. Rockets. They were still doing matchbook rockets when I left. One time somebody thought it was a fantastic idea of taking the pencil shavings from all of the pencil sharpeners in the studio and dumping in the wastebasket and turning this fan up and dumping them into the fan and blowing them all over into the next studio, which was very impressive. I happened to be in the studio when all this stuff came over. It was very impressive.

Q Tell us about that kind of an atmosphere. Obviously, you are very talented people, apart from many other types of technicians. The creative spark that gave you sort of a puckish sense of humor, plus the fact that you worked such long hours, you must have gotten a little slaphappy?

A Right. Many times my wife was...well, I don't think my son hardly ever knew me. I was working every night and Saturday and Sunday. In fact, that's why I moved back to Dearborn, because I working every night and Saturday and Sunday.

Q You had lived in the suburbs?

A I lived in Birmingham, and I moved back here, and I don't think I worked three hours overtime after I moved back here! But, anyway, it was pretty bad. There was one night I remember when they worked all night and went home at 6 o'clock in the morning and came back after the show and worked that afternoon.

Q You're working to get models ready for...?

A For a show the next morning.

Q For the Friday morning show?

A Usually Friday, yes. But it was bad. Of course, on the other hand, I remember my father worked during the Depression. When he first went to work for Smith, Hinchman & Grylls, he was at work for three days. He slept on the drawing board.

Q In the Ford Design Center they had a sense of camaraderie?

A That was what it was. When you got to the point it was 3 o'clock in the morning, things were getting so ridiculous that you had to act stupid. That was the only thing left to do. So it naturally carried over into the days. We were always doing crazy things, not to hurt anybody, just practical jokes. It just kept you going, and it kept your mind alive, too. You can't sit at that desk all day and say I'm going to think of an idea. You can't do it. You've got to get up and go bother somebody else.

Q But, on the whole, it seemed to work?

A I think it did.

Q You came out with some remarkable concepts.

A And there used to be this tremendous spirit, which in the last few years I didn't see there at all. Now everything looks alike. Even though back in '58/'59, it was getting pretty ridiculous, but nothing looked alike at least. They were all different. And that 1958 Buick Century, I don't think anybody could ever get any more chrome on a car than that car had on it. I think that was probably a world's record, unless Barris did something. George Barris might have.

Q George Barris?

A He was the big customizer out in California. He did the one they used on the Munsters show -- that coffinmobile -- their limousine. He did a lot of custom cars.

Q Did he do any for Ford?

A He did some work for us, and I can't honestly remember what it was. I think he was the one that made over the Futura for the Batmobile.

Q It was a fun time?

A It was really exciting. The disappointing thing to me -- and I have to blame Don DeLaRossa for this -- was when I got demoted from a manager to grade 9. I was grade 11, manager, and I was getting a bonus and a lease car.

Q Can you tell us how it happened?

A I would dearly love to know how it happened, though I can tell you *what* happened. It was just before Christmas, and I was home with the flu. I was working for Dave Wheeler.

Q Who was...?

A He was a chief stylist, and DeLaRossa was like a super chief under Bordinat. Dave called me up, and he said, "How long have you been at grade 9?" like on the Navy ship when you tell the guy his mother is dead! He said, "How long have been a grade 9?" I said, "I'm not a grade 9, Dave, I'm a grade 11." He said, "Oh, is that right? Well, that's funny. That's probably wrong." And I got to thinking, what the hell is going on? I said, "I'll be right in." I didn't give a damn how bad I felt, I came in, and I found out I'd been demoted!

Q Did you ask someone?

A Yes. I asked DeLaRossa, and, of course, he was drunk. He was always drunk after lunch, he and Bordinat both. He said, "Well, I told you six months ago." "Told me what?" He said, "When I got rid of that department." He got rid of the department, and instead of putting me in with all the rest of the managers and saying, "Well, let's take the guy that's got the best performance review or the worst performance review and less seniority and demote him," he just demoted me. He got rid of the department and demoted me.

Q The special projects studio?

A Whatever the name of that studio was. But that left a bad taste in my mouth, and I really never liked Don after that, because that was a very thoughtless thing to do, and I could never go to anybody above him, because....

Q It just wasn't done?

A Well, he and Bordinat -- they both seemed to like my wife, which I didn't appreciate. She didn't appreciate that, either. So I couldn't go to Bordinat. The only one above them was William Clay Ford, and he was never there, and he wouldn't know what the hell was going on anyway. And Henry [Ford II] was drinking quite a bit then, too. Iacocca and DeLaRossa were like that. So that was it. I couldn't do anything.

Q What were you assigned to as a grade 9?

A Of course, I still had a lease car at grade 9. That was an advantage, though I didn't

get a bonus or anything else. I didn't take much of a pay cut, because the top of grade 9 wasn't too far down, actually. It was some. Actually, I did take one because they upped the 11's by \$200, and I missed out on that, so, in that sense, I did. Anyway, I got put in with Dave Ash, who I think they felt would be most sympathetic toward my problem, because I was shook up, which is true. I got along with Dave better than anybody else. So I went back in interiors again.

Q Which was to your liking?

A Fine, yes.

Q By this time Dave was heading up the interior area?

A Yes. McGuire was gone, and he was head of the interiors. We were working on the Grenada interiors and instrument panels.

Q This is in the early 'Seventies?

A I must have been working on something else, because the Grenada came out in '75. But then we did get into the Grenadas, and that was a unique instrument panel. It was quite a good-looking instrument panel for being a cheap instrument panel. I did that one. Obviously, with help of other designers, but I was still in charge of something. Then some more work on the interiors on those cars. I think the last thing I worked on in the interiors was -- not that I designed it, but I worked on it with other designers -- the new Thunderbird instrument panel that was in the Thunderbird just before the one that's out now -- the box. No, it was the electronic one. The black-faced, electronic one, whichever one that was. Then they sent me back over to exteriors again.

Q This is the mid-'Seventies.

A Yes, up until '81. I really only worked on bits and pieces, then I got demoted again by seniority.

Q It was during the Ford shakeup?

A Yes. So I got demoted to an 8, and I lost the lease car then. But if I hadn't been demoted the first time, I would have been okay, because I had much more seniority than anybody else in that category, but when you got down to 9's, there were a lot of old timers that had a lot of seniority.

Q By this time, DeLaRossa had left?

A No.

Q What was he doing?

A He was still there. He didn't leave until two or three years ago.

Q Go back to the Grenada interior. That's intriguing. Can you give us sort of a capsule history of how that was unique, and how it came about, and what sort of concept it was?

A It was unique in that we made the instrument cluster with the components as close to each other as they'd ever been. Also, the concept was to make a good-looking, dressy, classic type instrument panel -- a little bit boxy, maybe -- lush looking, and yet have it be very inexpensive in the base model, and then by adding appliques -- woodgrain and whatever -- to bring it up to a level to where they could have a luxurious model.

Q Luxurious looking?

A Yes, right. If plastic can look luxurious. They wanted the Grenada to have quite a full range from a cheap one up to -- the ultimate of their Grenada, of course, was the Versailles. We did that. Myself and another fellow worked on that.

Q That used the Grenada platform?

A We took the whole Grenada. We didn't do the exterior, we just did the interior. We did the Rolls Royce seats -- pleated -- and took the instrument panel and covered it with real leather instead of the molded crash pad. We made a special woodgrain applique of really glossy wood like you have in a luxury car. Put ashtrays in the armrests and different armrests than the regular Grenada. It came off pretty good, and Bordinat was quite happy with it. That was his baby. That was his idea, because he was trying to get a cheap Seville, and he sold that to -- it was Iacocca. He brought him over here, and we pulled the car out there, and they took a ride around the whole....

Q You had a driveable prototype?

A Oh, yes. We had a regular Grenada. In our metal and trim shop we did the whole thing. Put a fiberglass hood on it, and the metal shop made the grille out of brass and chromeplated it.

Q Had they picked the name yet by then?

A Versailles?

Q Yes.

A Gee, I don't know. Well, it was Lincoln Versailles. I don't know where that name came from.

Q Had it been Bordinat?

A It very well could have been. When I started on the project, it was the Versailles, so, maybe, he did it. I don't know. But that was, definitely, his baby – his concept. And it came off pretty good, but it still always looked like a Grenada to me. I still look at that car with a new body, and, even now, it still looks like a Grenada.

Q Didn't they use that platform for years?

A I guess, so, yes. This new skin is still on the old thing.

Q That must have been fun?

A That was an interesting project. There are little projects like that that I keep forgetting about. They were kind of a pain in the neck, but they were a lot of fun.

Q At this point, did you get credit for these things internally? Did people know that you had come up with these concepts – or, at least, worked on them from initial concepts and had brought them to fruition?

A Sometimes. Not so much in the case of the Versailles, although Bordinat knew. Of course, Henry was the boss. He knew I worked on it and who worked on it, either exterior or interior, so you did get credit in that sense. But I had already been discredited so much with Bordinat that I don't think it would have done any good, anyway. Things like the taillight I mentioned with the backup light in the middle, I got credit for that from Dave Ash, and the two headlights where there was only one, I got credit for that from Damon Woods. I was working for Damon Woods at that time. The '57 Ford grille, which was not a beautiful grille, but it was an extremely big grille and very cheap. I had worked it out this way to make it very cheap. That's what they wanted. Things like that. Definitely the name Thunderbird, I got credit for that, that's for sure, that's no doubt. And the medallion, too, although there were many other ones later designed by other people.

Q But your original was the first used?

A Yes. Things of that nature. But there were other things like, for instance, I had a lot to do with the parking light on the 1956 Ford grille. Well, it was one of those things that everybody had a lot to do with, and I don't think anybody knew who designed that thing. That's the way most things came about. I think the big swash

molding -- that check molding -- on the side of the '55 Ford, at least, I could say Ken Nelson did that.

Q Somebody mentioned that it used to be known as Crusoe's hash mark?

A Could be, yes. He liked it. I know they were putting things like that on a lot of things. I know Dave Ash was so thrilled with the idea that he had me do one that was a loop. It came down the side of the car and made an actual loop and went back. I thought, oh my God, Dave, you're cracking up, but I did it. He always used to ask unreasonable things of me, and he took advantage of me all the time, but he was really a nice guy. Sometimes I used to really dislike him, though, for the nutty things he'd do. He used to take great pleasure in coming up to my drawing table with a long drafting tube and blowing through the tube right in my ear. And then the other thing he used to really love to do when he saw I was really concentrating was -- like you have a drawing table and then in the front there is another table for the guy ahead of you to use if he turns around behind him. It's like a reference table. He had this set of VanAuken bumper guards on that table. They were like bumper guards that you stuck on your bumper. They were auxiliary bumper guards that were about 18 inches high and all chrome with a big chrome ball on the top of each one of these pipes. When I was concentrating hard and didn't know he was coming up, he would come up, and he would push those off on the marble floor, and it would just about send me to heaven. It's things like that that Dave Ash did.

Q On balance, a good, solid...?

A He was a good designer. I say he did the first Mustang. Especially on jewelry items like crests, and instrument panel detail work, and cloth seat trims, he's really top-notch.

Q Did you get into cloth work?

A Not too much, no. Mostly in seat design. The color and trim people upstairs would mainly handle that, because they worked for Dave, too, and Dave had a lot to say about what happened. Some of the most exciting things I worked on was when I was working for Alex Tremulis in another studio that was called advanced styling. We did some cars that are still kicking around -- 3/8ths size models of a flying car. It had a rotor in the front and two in the back. It was called the Volare

Q I've seen pictures of it.

A I was the manager of the studio. Basically, Jimmy Powers designed that car, but I had the concept of it. One of the 3/8th size models in that studio working for Alex Tremulis, who was an utterly nutty guy. He designed the Tucker. We did some pretty far-out stuff.

Q Did you work with him on the 3-wheeled things?

A Oh, yes.

Q Gyroscopes?

A He got really deep into gyroscopes after I wasn't working with him, but I did one 3-wheel one with him that was called the Stiletto or something like that. His thought was that it really should be two wheels. He got into that pretty deep. He had a little model that he had made in the metal shop, and it had a flywheel in it, and it was about a couple feet long. The flywheel had veins on it, so you could take an air hose, and the air would make this flywheel really start to spin fast, and then you could shove this car, and it would go the whole length of the studio, which was, probably, about 60 feet and stay upright from the gyroscope. Then he did that full-size model that's called the Gyrotron or something like that. But, of course, that wasn't a real gyroscope.

Q That must have been a fun time?

A Yes. He was an exciting guy to work with, even though he didn't have a lot of -- Bob McGuire never particularly liked -- he couldn't seem to control Alex. One time, I was working for Alex. Alex was the executive designer, and Bob was the chief over him, and I was a manager under Alex. And Bob called me in, and he said, "Can't you do something to keep Alex under control?" I said, "How can I do that, he's my boss? What do you want me to do?" He said, "Just try, just try. Anyway, do something!" He said, "Try to keep him down a little bit." I used to try to do that, and then Alex would say, "Well, hey, come on, you're not thinking far enough out. I'll get rid of you if you don't get the idea. Don't be afraid." I couldn't say, "Well, I'm supposed to tell you not to do that."

Q An impossible situation?

A Yes. McGuire knew he could trust me, and so did Alex. Alex was a good friend. I liked Alex, but....

Q By all accounts, a likeable guy?

A Oh, yeah. Everybody would accuse him of making up the stories he'd tell, but I don't think anybody could make up those stories. He might have stretched them a little bit, but they were legitimate stories.

Q Did he ever tell you much about how the Tucker came about?

A Yes, but I honestly don't remember. He had quite a few stories about the Tucker. That was a pretty wild operation when they were trying to get that thing going.

Q The Grenada, which was a conspicuous success, should have given you a cachet around the Design Center?

A I got a fair amount of credit for designing that instrument panel, and as it wore on people, they began to realize it was pretty damned good. But, my days were over.

Q Because of the demotion?

A Yes, it was just done. I was too old. They had these young kids coming up. If you didn't make it when you're young, you're not going to make it. I knew that I'd had it, so I thought I'm just going to stay here as long as I have to and leave, because it's no fun anymore. When I'm put in competition with kids who can run circles around me, rendering-wise....

Q The new technicians?

A The new technicians. Their schooling was much better, and they are able to do things in so many more mediums than I was able to. In the old days of the airbrush, I used to be a star, but the airbrush went down the tubes, and they're doing things in other things, like dry mark and things like that and big pastel stuff. I don't know much about that. I never really learned that, and I tried to learn it, but it takes time to learn something like that.

But there really wasn't much going on after that: wheelcovers, wheels and a few more taillights and grilles -- stuff like that.

Q Which was when?

A 1980. I was working with Walt Gollwitzer on the Escort and the Topaz.

Q Did you have any input into those designs?

A I did some grilles. I did a grille for some sport version of the Escort.

Q Which never came off?

A I don't think it did. I don't recall seeing it on the street. But one of the Topazes is very similar -- one of those cars has a very similar grille to it. It almost looks like

they took the wood model I'd made and stuck it in there. It wasn't thrilling; it was just louvers. Everything is louvers today -- louvers and egg crate, and they all look alike.

Q In spite of the glitch at the end of your career, it was an exciting time, and you enjoyed your tenure with them?

A I enjoyed it all, really. The last year wasn't bad. I enjoyed it, but I was just getting tired of it. It's like burning out. I'd had it. I was anxious for them to come out with this mini van.

Q Did you work on that?

A I didn't work on the one that's coming out now, but it was one of the last things before I left that studio where they were working on that, which was probably in '79 or '80. They did a study -- put together all the photographs of all the Japanese vans that they have over there, and I was totally flabbergasted at how many they had and what a variety they had, from very small up to comparatively large, but none as big as what we were making. I just thought it was fantastic, and now I see they've got a Toyota over here now. That looks a little funny. That isn't the one that they had when I was doing the study. I'm anxious to see the Ford one. I think the Chrysler one looks great. I really like it.

The model I'm seeing in the paper is not the real car that's going to come out. If it looked like that, it would be great, but it isn't going to look like that. I know that. If it does, I'll be really amazed. I was over at the Design Center a couple of years ago, and I looked at the model, and I thought, "Boy, that's really exciting."

Q That's an interesting, last-minute commentary where you get into an exciting design, and the product planners take over and chop it to pieces?

A It happens a lot. I was trying to remember the one time on the 1959 Ford. Now, that was a committee-designed car, and McNamara was the committee. But, I remember he didn't even look at the car until everything on it was designed, even the accessory side-view mirror and the antenna. So when he saw the car to say whether he liked the design, it had all the accessories on it and was top of the line. That was really weird. It was worse than any product planner. If you treat product planners properly, you can usually confuse them enough to get your own way! They aren't really as devious as they think they are. I think the designers are more

They aren't really as devious as they think they are. I think the designers are more devious. It was a lot of fun to work with them.

Q It's really the designers who call the tune?

A In the end, yes. The product planners have to, of course, keep the costs and the basic design trend as to what size, price and maybe even color. They might find some color isn't selling well.

Q Is it still a designer's world in the automotive industry?

A That's the most exciting and romantic end of it.

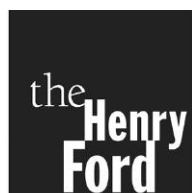
Q Are they still the concept makers?

A If you want to go and look at the new models before they come out on the road, you have to go and look at them in the Design Center showroom. That's where they come from.

Q Wouldn't you say that was an effective commentary on the history of automotive design? It's the designer's concept that usually wins out?

A Yes.

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