

## **Motorloway – A Tour for Real Cars**

I seldom forget the anniversaries of my loved ones, but last month I let one slip by.

Just over 50 years ago, on March 16, 1961, the Jaguar XKE made its debut at the Geneva Motor Show in Switzerland. My XKE was manufactured in 1969, but any excuse for a party.

If you're not familiar with that model, it is one of those seminal sports cars that look like its going 100 miles an hour while standing still. It's often mentioned in the same breath with Corvette Stingrays, notably in music lyrics from the 60's.

I've had an eclectic variety of cars throughout my life, starting with my uncle's 1961 Ford Falcon station wagon when I was a junior at Iowa City West in 1970. It was followed by a Fiat 850 sport coupe, my grandmother's unreliable Mercedes sedan, an Opel Manta (my first new car, edging out a Mercury Capri), a BMW 320i, an Audi A6 and my current car, a 340 horsepower 2005 Dodge Magnum station wagon (ahem, Sport Tourer).

As you can see, I have no brand loyalty whatsoever. LuAnn, on the other hand, comes from a Chevy family. In the 50's and 60's it was common for entire families for generations to own either Fords or Chevys, exclusively and rabidly so.

Even so, GM isn't getting rich with her help – she's owned only two cars in the 32 years I've known her. Her 1977 Monza Spyder is enshrined in the back of our garage on four flat tires, and a pristine 1992 Blazer is her daily commuter.

When I was growing up the only other readily-available non-Big 3 vehicles were Volkswagens, which were driven mostly by hippies. Japanese cars were in their infancy here; only traitorous penny-pinchers drove those rice-burners.

None of these cars were reliable, and were usually incontinent. “Kids nowadays don’t know what real cars are,” an old-timer told me recently. Newer cars are soulless modes of reliable transportation that require no emotional investment whatsoever and a degree in electrical engineering to operate, let alone repair. Back then cars had personalities – they had to be coddled, cajoled, complimented and caressed.

I’m old enough to remember my dad pulling into the Phillips 66 station and having two guys in spiffy uniforms run out to pump the gas, wash the windshield, pop the hood and check your fluid levels which were always running dangerously low even though they had topped them off when you were there last week. But you usually had to remind them to check the tire pressure.

The Jaguar has peacefully coexisted with my other cars since I bought it in 1983 in a fit of testosterone-induced temporary insanity. It’s certainly not what you’d call reliable transportation - it serves mainly to remind me that old cars are temperamental, demanding and expensive (much like spouses) and that one is more than enough. (Bumper sticker: *“The parts falling off this car are of the finest British manufacture.”*)

Even when the Jag was running well (thanks to Riverside Sports in Swisher) it wasn’t getting much use and I felt like getting rid of it every minute that I wasn’t actually driving it. It’s more affordable than its exotic looks might indicate; my unrestored XKE coupe has never been appraised higher than a year-old Ford Taurus.

Fortunately, it survived my halfhearted attempts to sell it, because in 1997 I learned about a semiannual classic car tour called Motorloway. It’s kind of like RAGBRAI, except for classic cars instead of bicycles and without the exercise. It takes a different route every year, and over the last 14 years LuAnn and I have visited probably every town in Iowa large enough to have a paved road.

If you own an ambulatory motor vehicle over 25 years old, take the “For Sale” sign out of its window and look up [www.motormemories.com](http://www.motormemories.com) on that

newfangled Internet you keep hearing about. The June tour starts in Cedar Rapids and it's a great way to spend a long summer weekend.

*Dave Parsons buys motor oil in 50-gallon drums, co-owns a business on the Coralville strip and is a member of the Press Citizen Writers Group.*