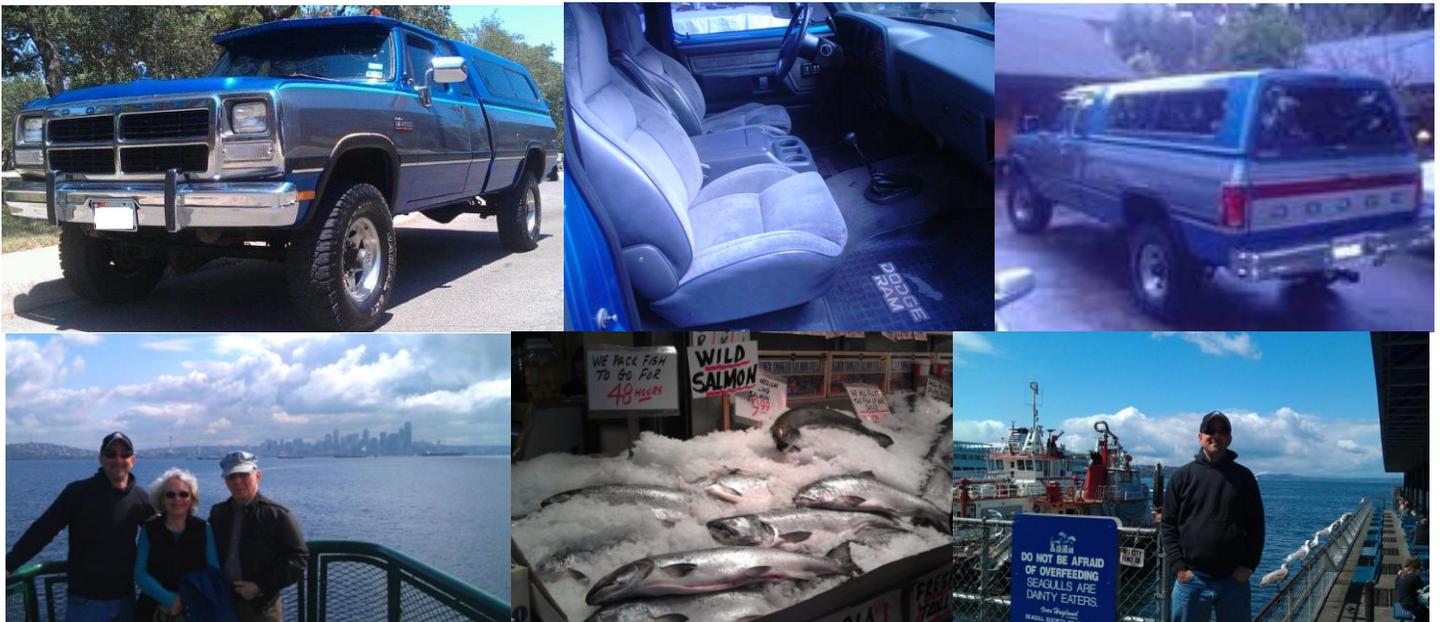


CAR OF THE QUARTER . . .

1993 Dodge Ram by Adam Gelbin

"This is about as far out of my comfort zone as I go"



Back in 2007, just before I moved to San Antonio for a job, the heater core cracked in my daily driver at the time, a Nissan 200SX, and antifreeze flooded the cabin. Instead of getting the car fixed and wanting to focus on the new job and the move, I donated the car to charity. Consequently, I have been driving my weekend only driver, a 2000 Formula Firebird Ram Air, exclusively the past four years.

Now, my mountain bike and my Firebird have never been introduced and knowing that I would not have a daily driver for awhile to haul the bike around in I rented an apartment within seven miles of two parks that had mountain bike trails and bike shops. However, riding the same trails for the past four years has gotten dull and I have been jonesing to replace the daily driver and park the Firebird again. So, I began a search for a replacement vehicle...*about two years ago* !

I wanted an older SUV, something that did not have any computer chips in the engine and something that I wouldn't have a car payment on that I could pay cash for and wouldn't be new so that if I beat it up a little bit I wouldn't care. I looked at 70's and 80's Ford Broncos, Chevy Blazers, and Dodge Ramchargers but had a hard time stomaching the poor gas mileage (sometimes less than 10 mpg).

I actually gave serious consideration to a beautifully restored Dodge Ramcharger in Phoenix that a professional builder had swapped the gasoline engine for a diesel

engine. The diesel engine was attractive because diesels get considerably better gas mileage than the gasoline engines. I even had my sister stop by the new owner's house and test drive it as she was passing through Phoenix! She liked it but the vehicle had too much horsepower (twin turbocharged, 800 HP) and oncoming restrictive smog laws would have prevented me from getting the vehicle to pass emissions eventually. The auto shops up and down my street recommended against the purchase and it turned out that the owner in Phoenix had to sell the truck because the smog laws in Maricopa County had become so restrictive he could not get the vehicle registered anymore.

So, after passing on the Ramcharger I took what I had learned looking at that vehicle and talking to the owner and builder and I applied those lessons to my future search. I decided on a diesel for the gas mileage with the added benefit of pulling power but since diesels in SUVs were rare I started looking at pickup trucks instead. I figured if I bought a pickup and put a camper top on it then it would be like an SUV. I looked at the Fords and Chevys but just liked the style of the 1st generation Dodge Diesel Trucks. Trouble is, they only made them from 1989 to 1993, and they were primarily purchased by general contractors who abused them on job sites and put on a ton of miles. My local mechanic also told me that farmers would regularly crack the frames on the vehicles pulling stumps out due to the terrific torque that the Cummins produced.

So I looked at trucks for about six months and half heartedly bid on them on eBay and I did not have any luck. The trucks were not local, they were all manual transmission, and they were all expensive (\$12K). I couldn't find anything suitable in Texas.

So one night I am cruising the truck classifieds and there she is-the nearly perfect truck: A 1993 Dodge Ram W250 (3/4 ton) 4x4 with a Cummins diesel engine, a camper top, and only 150,000 miles, which, for a diesel is just getting broken in as these engines can go a half million miles or more. The clincher though, was that it was an automatic. Very rare and what I wanted since it would be my daily driver in stop-and-go San Antonio traffic!

It also already had the camper top and a lot of other options that I wanted. So I sent the owner a text message about rust and he said it was relatively rust free and I went to bed excited. My excitement didn't last long. The next morning the listing was gone. I called the owner up and he said that he had removed the listing and was thinking about keeping the truck. This guy was a builder/restorer who had just purchased the vehicle locally. He already had a late model Chevy Silverado and could not keep both. He loved the Dodge and could not decide. I felt fortunate that I had texted him on his cell phone about the rust the night before because if I hadn't I would not have had his telephone number to follow up with him the next day and the truck probably would have been gone forever. So I tell him that I am very

interested in the truck and that when he decided what to do to call me.

Ten days later he calls and says he'll sell it to me which puts into motion a whole series of events like coordinating with my cousin, who lives in Seattle, what weekend I could fly up (Easter weekend was in the way), securing tickets for the flight; making arrangements to pick up \$\$ at the bank in Seattle to pay for the truck; travel arrangements to and from the airport; arrangements to meet with the owner to look at and test drive the truck; choosing a shipper and making arrangements to ship the truck if I decided to buy it; doing an Auto Check search on the vehicle's history; checking out the owner's history on the internet; and last but not least getting my ducks in a row in regards to the title transfer to Texas.

After working virtually every night on each and all of these tasks while constantly keeping in touch with the owner and peppering him with questions and receiving pictures, I finally jet up to Seattle on a Thursday night and meet up with my cousin.

Friday morning he drove me to the truck owner's house in Tacoma. After looking over every square inch of the truck and riding with the owner and ensuring that the truck was not leaking oil/transmission fluid (the seals had been replaced recently) and I paid him the amount that we agreed on and drove the truck away. I then drove to the house of a shipper who agreed to take delivery at their home in Saquamish. With all of that done it was time to spend time with my cousin who I had not seen for at least 10 years.



By the way, this was the first used vehicle I had ever purchased and it was nerve wracking and made exponentially tougher that the vehicle was located out of state (2200 miles away). By the way #2, if you ever want to ship a vehicle contact me because I am now an expert on the sleazy world of vehicle shipping.

So, with the truck dropped off at the shipper, I spent the rest of the weekend eating seafood in Seattle and visiting. I did the "underground tour" which was a very interesting study of Seattle's history. I followed that up with a visit to Fisherman's Warf and Pioneer Park. Seattle is very beautiful and I hope to visit again. Unfortunately, my cell phone was turned off on the flight home out of Seattle on Sunday otherwise I would have gotten some stunning photographs up close of Mt. Saint Helens (lava dome rising again) and some other mountain ranges and peaks. As you can see from the pictures the weather was great all weekend.

Everybody said that the weather had been crappy for the past three months and invited me back because I must have brought it with me (which is unusual for me, I usually bring rain, i.e. every trip to Tucson, still haven't seen the painted desert yet, gah).

So it took a few weeks for the hauler to deliver the truck (it arrived May 9th) and first order of business was to replace the missing sunroof. Yes, the sunroof was missing. Don't ask me where it is, I have not seen it and no one else has either. So, right off the bat \$500 for that and I couldn't park the vehicle outdoors or take it to a mechanic who might park it outdoors until I got that replaced otherwise the interior might have gotten rained on. Talk about stress. Once I got that done I had the vehicle inspected and it passed the first time. I also had the Dodge dealer check out the vehicle bumper to bumper and replace all of the fluids. With all of that done I finally made it down to DMV and after some back and forth with Seattle they issued me Texas plates, a registration sticker, and two weeks later a brand new Texas title came in the mail. Yayyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyy!!

The truck has a couple of nicknames now. I call it "Big Blue". My neighbors just call it "The Beast". It is more of a rig than a truck. It has a 2.5 inch lift and an 8 foot bed with a club cab so it's BIG. The original owner bought it with the top of the line LE package which came with power windows, power brakes w/ ABS, power mirrors, cruise control, auto trans (already rebuilt with Auburn parts), captain's chairs instead of a bench, storage console between the front seats, and security alarm. Other features: pre smog so I should not have a problem with emissions; mechanical fuel injection, i.e. no PCM (Power Control Module) computer chips; single turbo charged; intercooled engine; Dana 60 & 70 axles with 3.55 gears.

The original owner also did many upgrades, including adding "Rams and Roses" etchings to the glass, a windshield visor, airbags under the rear suspension for height adjustment while hauling a load, upgraded Sony stereo with CD player and remote control, window tint, sliding glass window on both the rear window of cab and the camper, trailer tow package, color keyed custom wheels (silver and blue like the truck), custom painted camper to match the color of the truck, and last but not least, a sunroof which I wish he hadn't had installed but he did which makes no sense since it rains all the time in Seattle but whattayagonnado.



I just put a set of new Firestone Destination M/T's on the truck 285 x 75 x 16's. With the tires properly inflated I can get 18.5 miles to the gallon. I added chrome side step running boards back in October. I plan to add secure storage, grab bars in the cab, and rhino line the bed, among other things.

So, as you can see, as well as having an expensive new toy (I got a good deal, though, not including flight to Seattle, shipping costs, sunroof replacement, etc) and a new project, I have a mountain bike hauler, camper, trailer puller and a lot more. This vehicle gets better gas mileage than the Firebird yet can pull a house, go off-road, handle the weather, and haul a ton of stuff including camping gear, etc. etc. It's a Swiss Army knife of vehicles and now I have a truck that can pull the Firebird on a trailer (which is important for someone who moves around a lot). Everyone loves its rare, classic looks and strangers stop me to talk about it and I have already received offers to sell it.

I've put about 3,500 miles on it already including a day trip through the hill country and I am not having any problems with overheating, oil pressure, or leaking fluids. I did have to replace the u-joints and the steering box and fix the car charger for the cell phone because it was shorting out and blowing fuses but that's about it. The drive train has not skipped a beat since I picked it up and all the truck does is run.

I bought a used bike rack from a friend and have used it several times to haul my bike to some local bike trails that were just too far to ride to. I feel as though I have been freed.



I have wanted to park the Firebird in a garage since I bought it so I moved the Dodge to the carport and I rented a garage in the apartment complex for the 'Bird. I can now keep her clean, washed, stored, and put the miles on the Dodge instead. I am using the truck as my daily driver, which is why I wanted an automatic vs. a manual.

Bottom line is that it was a slam dunk as far as how I wanted the vehicle optioned and I am lucky to have found it. I just needed to be brave enough to go to Seattle to pick it up and hand over a boatload of cold, hard cash, which I did. The trip to beautiful Seattle was a wonderful adventure and I got to see my cousin as a bonus but, like I said, it was about as far out of my comfort zone as I get.