

IT'S MINE

Blame the Dukes of Hazzard

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FOR THE CALGARY HERALD

The Dukes of Hazzard left an indelible stamp on Vulcan resident Neel Roberts.

In 1979, when the wildly popular TV show started, Roberts was 14 years old. And for him the car was the star of the show.

The car was a 1969 Dodge Charger R/T finished in hemi orange with a Confederate flag decal on the rooftop. It was dubbed the General Lee.

"The Dukes of Hazzard TV show definitely planted the seed," Roberts says. "That show (and the '69 Charger) would have been the genesis of my appreciation for all things Mopar."

The Dodge Charger, introduced in 1966, was Chrysler Motor Corp.'s answer to the fastback explosion started by the Ford Mustang and the Plymouth Barracuda — but on a larger scale. Based on the midsize Dodge Coronet model, the Charger packed some serious performance under the hood.

Base engine in the Charger was the respectable and bulletproof 318 V-8, which produced 230 horsepower.

Several engines — including the 383 V-8, 426 Hemi and the 440 V-8 — were available throughout the model's run, essentially from 1966 to 1974.

After 1974, the Charger was repositioned as more of a luxury



Greg Williams for the Calgary Herald
Neel Roberts bought his dream car, a 1969 Dodge Charger, on eBay.

model nameplate.

In 1979, Roberts didn't have a driver's licence or the funds to purchase what had become his dream car. He had to wait 25 years.

"I started searching eBay for 1969 Dodge Chargers," Roberts says. "I had always watched the newspapers and magazines for a Charger, but thanks to the computer and the Internet (vehicle shopping) is a lot easier."

He found the '69 Charger featured there in August 2004. The car was listed on eBay Motors,

and Roberts thought the photos of the Charger looked good. He called the seller in Wapello, Iowa, and was told the car — which had a 383 V-8 with a four-barrel carburetor and a four-speed transmission — did require some work. Specifically, the body needed a little straightening, the motor had to be tuned and the suspension wanted some attention.

Basically, the car was a little rough around the edges, but was drivable as is.

"I felt he was being honest about what he was offering,"

Roberts says. So, he placed his bid and ultimately won the auction, paying between \$12,000 to \$13,000 US.

After winning, Roberts prepared his documents so he could bring the car home across the border — a process he says is easier than many people might think.

Roberts rented a U-Haul trailer, hitched it to his GMC Canyon pickup truck and made the run to Iowa.

After getting the car home, Roberts had his mechanic, Manny Noualy, go over the Charger from front to back.

He was provided with a list of everything the car would require before it could pass an Alberta out-of-province inspection and be registered and plated.

Roberts began searching for the items he needed, including new door pin hinges, upper and lower ball joints and gas tank retaining straps.

After taking care of some minor mechanical issues and fixing the front suspension, Noualy declared the Charger ready for the road.

Roberts is enjoying his eBay purchase, and reliving his youth through the 1969 Charger. But, five years from now, he says he would like to perform a complete body-off restoration.

"Everything works on the car and the interior is perfect, so in the meantime I'll just drive it and enjoy it."