



JOHN COLLIER/Detroit Free Press

John Z. DeLorean left General Motors in 1973 and later ran his own firm, maker of the gull-wing DeLorean sports car.

EX-GM EXEC DELOREAN FORETOLD OF TROUBLES



**TOM WALSH VISITS
DELOREAN GRAVE
AFTER HISTORIC FILING**

Ages before the General Motors Corp. bankruptcy and CEO Rick Wagoner's firing ...

Long before the 1992 GM board revolt that deposed ex-chairman Bob Stempel ...

Even a decade before H. Ross Perot derided GM's board of directors as "pet rocks" ...

John Z. DeLorean set America's automobile industry abuzz in the 1970s as the first high-profile prophet of doom for GM.

DeLorean was a shooting star, the man behind the first Pontiac GTO and Firebird, vice president of all GM car and truck production by age 48.

Then he stunned the auto industry by resigning in 1973 and skewering GM in the book "On a Clear Day You Can See General Motors."

On Tuesday, I visited DeLorean at a Troy cemetery to tell him about GM's bankruptcy. I thought somebody should.

■ WHAT WALSH SAID TO DELOREAN. 3B



REGINA H. BOONE/Detroit Free Press

John Z. DeLorean is buried in Troy.





TONY SPINA/Detroit Free Press

Chevrolet Division Manager John DeLorean with the Vega in 1970.



1979 Detroit Free Press photo

DeLorean started his own car company and steered it into bankruptcy.



MARTY LEDERHANDLER/Associated Press

John DeLorean answers reporters' questions in New York on Feb. 19, 1982.

WHAT WOULD DELOREAN SAY?

"Someone had to tell you, John," I said Tuesday, brushing away dead grass clippings from the bronze memorial marker over his grave, "and I wasn't sure who else would."

Then I blurted it out.

"General Motors filed for bankruptcy yesterday."

Cars and trucks whizzed by on I-75 and Long Lake Road outside White Chapel Memorial Park Cemetery in Troy, where John Z. DeLorean's ashes were buried in 2005, in a gravesite next to his mother's.

If DeLorean had any reaction to my news, he didn't let on.

But I thought he should know.

DeLorean, after all, was the brightest rising star in the world's largest industrial company at the zenith of GM's power in the 1960s and early '70s.

Chief engineer on the first Pontiac GTO muscle car in 1964, he headed the Pontiac and Chevy divisions before running all GM car and truck production in 1972. The jet-setting DeLorean socialized with Hollywood stars and owned pieces of the New York Yankees and San Diego Chargers. He looked destined to run all of GM one day.

Then, abruptly, he quit in 1973. To work on social issues, he said.

But instead, DeLorean spilled out his memories and frustrations about the stifling GM culture to J. Patrick Wright, then of Business Week magazine, for the book, "On a Clear Day You Can See General Motors."

Initial publication was set for 1975, but DeLorean balked, fearing that backlash from GM would scuttle his plans for DeLorean Motor Co., which later made the stainless steel gull-wing car best-known from the "Back to the Future" movies.

Wright published the book on his



HE COULD RELATE TO FORMER FIRM'S WOES, TOM WALSH WRITES

own in 1979. It was a sensation, establishing DeLorean as the first prophet of GM's collapse, a scenario virtually inconceivable at the time.

"The system and management are stifling initiative. Leadership and innovation are impossible," DeLorean said in the book.

More stinging words: "A fault that GM has had for a long time is its feeling that, since it sells more cars and trucks than anyone else in the world and makes far more money than any other automotive company, the GM way is the only way."

And a criticism often made of GM bosses in later years: "We seem to forget that a cloistered executive,

whose only social contacts are with similar executives who make \$500,000 a year and who has not really bought a car the way a customer has in years, has no basis to judge public taste."

What, I wondered, would John Z. say today of GM's fate?

Would he wink and say, "I told you so"?

Or shrug matter-of-factly, knowing he had run his own sports-car venture into bankruptcy, too, then got himself charged with cocaine peddling (later acquitted) in a cockamammy scheme to save it?

As I looked down on his simple grave, with ashes below and only the dates of his birth and death, plus an image of that gull-wing sports car on the small bronze marker, I decided on the latter.

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