

~IS YOUR CLASSIC CAR A MOVIE STAR?~

The Discovery Channel Wants To Know

Submitted By G. Harry Ransom

Back in October of 2010 a movie studio in Quebec, Canada sent out an e-mail to numerous car clubs in North America. I received it since I was the president of the local Chevy *Corvair* club, the *Vegas Vairs*. We constitute local Chapter #891 of CORSA, the national club. The studio was looking for a family style car from the 50s or 60s to be used in a documentary about Howard Hughes.

I responded. They wrote back asking "What's a *Vair*?" I told them I had a 1967 Chevrolet *Monza* four door *Sport Sedan*. They replied with "send us some pictures." Their response to the photos was "Perfect." Well, how 'bout that? I asked regarding how many other clubs had responded to their inquiry. "You were it, but, not by default." They stated that they were unfamiliar with the car, but they really liked the looks of my "*Cora Vair*." I was going to be working with some folks with excellent taste, eh?

It was explained to me that the *Discovery Investigation Channel*, a division of the regular *Discovery Channel* was producing a series of programs dealing with contested wills of famous people. This particular episode would examine how the Howard Hughes Corporation denied any and all claims (through the courts) to one Mr. Melvin Dummar who had been named a beneficiary (to the tune of \$156,000,000) in a hand written will supposedly penned by Hughes.

I had some back-and-forth correspondence with the director (let's just call him "Attila") about schedules and locations, etc. The first sticky wicket that arose was that he wanted to film the scenario of where Dummar supposedly rescued Mr. Hughes in Lido Junction near Tonopah, Nevada in December of 1967. I replied that that was an eight hour round trip drive from my home in Las Vegas. He says "Okay, so?" NO, no, no, you don't understand. This senior citizen can't drive that far without cruise control and I wouldn't make such an attempt anyhow in a 43 year old and *mostly original* car. I emphasized that there just ain't no auto parts stores or *same day* towing service between here and there; it's a true desert!

He asks what I might suggest instead? Well, I guess I overwhelmed him with logic since he agreed to meet up near Boulder City which is east of Vegas. We would then head south where the mountain ranges are very similar to those in the Tonopah area. Fine.

By the day of the shoot I had learned a bit more about the history of

what we were about to film. Dummar was an out of work miner and ex Air Force mechanic who was traveling to California from Gabbs, Nevada in hopes of resurrecting his marriage and to secure employment. He had previously applied to Hughes Aviation. See the irony building? I relayed to Attila that an out of work guy in 1967 wouldn't be driving a brand new car like my *Corvair*. He would probably be coaxing along some 40s or 50s vintage vehicle. Says Attila - "Don't worry about it. Nobody's gonna' notice." Well, how about the contemporary and personalized license plates reading "67Monza?" Yeah, same response - "Nobody's gonna' notice." Okay, if you say so.

I guided them to a typical Nevada desert location across from the El Dorado Dry Lake region. They had me drive pass them. They had me follow their open hatch van with only a ten foot gap. They filmed me driving from the vantage point of the rear seat. And then, at dusk, we replicated Melvin's claim that he had pulled off the road to answer nature's call when he saw the billionaire's body on the cold ground.

As directed, I exited the car and slowly advanced to the motionless figure. Attila was very pleased. He said that my awkward, cautious gate oozed trepidation in a manner like John Wayne's walking style. Sorry, he was confusing Wayne with pain; I was stiff and hurting.

Anyway, it was now getting very dark and it was time to relocate to downtown Las Vegas for the finale of the shoot. Dummar claimed that Hughes asked to be taken to *his* Sands Hotel. Wow, this was a Friday night on the *Strip*. How do you keep the pan handlers, hookers, and tourists who were gawking at the *Corvair* out of the picture? And then too, we had all the modern cars and busses whizzing by, not to mention all the flashy neon on casinos that weren't yet open in late 1967.

We finished by shooting a tight though blurry close-up of the right rear of *Cora* while one of the camera crew played the figure of Hughes exiting my *Monza*. Then, I simply drove off into the sunset. That ended a seven hour day for both car and driver. We drove a total of 165 miles and burned well over three quarters of a tank of high-test.

When I received the check for our cinematic endeavors I immediately re-invested the money back into my blue and white "metal mistress." You know how that goes, eh? Hey, if you wanna' be in pictures, better read those e-mails. And, let 'em know that air cooled is cool! *Corvairs* are movie glamorous at any speed!!!