



CENTRAL WASH-
INGTON SUNRISE,
MOUNT ADAMS IN
THE DISTANCE.

RIDE WITH CLYDE VII

Close Call on the Klick BY TREY COMBS

I'M CLYDE'S NEW WHEELMAN. It's an honor that is bestowed sparingly, for driving a 1974 Mercury Marquis Brougham to one's favorite fishing hole isn't for everyone.

I found Clyde parked at The Evening Hatch's "Steelhead Ranch," Jack and Jennifer Mitchell's lodge on Washington's upper Klickitat, where he would carry us in style to the canyon water below the ranch.

Circling Clyde for the first time, there were chuckles among those who had assembled for the meeting: lodge managers Jeff and Jan Cottrell; the Mitchells and their kids; me; the guides. Clyde brings hot wattage to long-ago memories for Boomers, when they were climbing the food chain. Everyone else finds him a curiosity.

Two generations before Detroit became a bankrupt third-world war zone, the city was the epicenter for supremacy in automotive design and

the engineering of big, heavy, gas-guzzling cars, the most powerful of these called "muscle cars." Clyde qualified. Beneath the acre of hood was a humungous 460 cubic inch "big block" V-8 that cranked out 360 hp. Add duel exhausts, and Clyde could shoot flames out his rear and lay rubber for a block. The enormous trunk could hold all the tack needed to keep a team of polo ponies properly attired. On balance, the cockpit was small, with a front bench seat that loomed over the back seat, unintentionally creating the finest man cave in the history of drive-in movies. The Ford Motor Company called these cars "Land Yachts," and gave them a spooky smooth ride that could luxuriously deliver four persons to their home in the Hamptons.

But a sea change in public opinion was in the works. Legendary engines would be defanged—the effect of rising gas prices, catalytic converters, and the desire for better mileage. A few greenies were already tooling around in tin cans with sewing machine engines. Jay Leno, a huge fan of muscle cars (to wit his current non-stock 800 hp Oldsmobile Toronado) spoke about this in a *Tonight Show* monologue: "Have you



heard about the new cars from Korea? When you fill them up with gas, they double in value."

There were also comments about needing to downshift these new green cars to get over a cigarette butt. Clyde gloried in these comparisons. He cost a buck a pound, and weighed more than many of today's pickup trucks. Owners boasted about his 0-60 times and nine miles per gallon, facts that went hand-in-glove with high testosterone, serious stones, and, "If you have to ask, you can't afford it."

Clyde has a very slight dent in the right rear panel, the result of a Toyota Prius going splat like a green drake after running into him. The Prius became a hybrid accordion and was nearly totaled by colliding with Clyde's thick, steel body.

I looked over Clyde. No hubcaps on the left side. The faux landau vinyl top was peeling. He will need new tires in a year. The seats are threadbare, and the dash has cracks. But Clyde's golden years have been spent outdoors as a celebrated fishing car. In contrast, I remember visiting Bill Schaadt, and seeing his fishing car. The legendary fly fisherman from northern California simply pushed his pram on top of his car but didn't bother with a rack. The windows were rolled down and hemp rope wound over the pram and through the car. That's how Bill rolled for many years. Clyde never suffered such indignities. As his temporary caretaker, I didn't want so much as a scratch traced back to me.

When Clyde was born, I was chain smoking, drinking port, and banging out a book about steelhead on an ancient typewriter. Each day I'd set a piece of carbon paper between two blank sheets of regular paper, roll the mix into the typewriter, and carefully peck away. A typo had to be erased twice and invariably became an offensive purple smudge that made me crazy. Regardless of the almost hopeless labor—it took months to complete the editing—I would eventually get two copies of the finished manuscript. This was very cool! Two copies, one typewriter—simply amazing!

Some evenings I would walk several blocks to the Town Tavern, a waterfront pub, where I joined struggling writers and stoners who gathered each night to smoke weed, drink sherry, and emote over the torture of their calling. They didn't seem to struggle much, and didn't write much save for a few bad poems, but being barefoot in winter made a statement. "Hey man, ah... far out, man" exhausted the extent of the English language we had in common. After flat-lining, I'd head home and retire to my bed.

This was a sorry way to write a book. A lot has changed since then, especially the use of computers when writing. But in 1974, Clyde was



King of the Road. He still is, nearly 40 years later.

Jeff Cottrell and I drove Clyde from the ranch to the narrow road that leads down to the Klickitat. We were on a fishing trip, already wearing our waders, but I couldn't take my eyes off Clyde's hood. I'd seen that hood in many grainy black and white newsreels documenting world leaders and long ago wars. Drivers don't look out and see hoods anymore. Clyde engenders a sense of great weight, power, and history, and that hood leads the way.

When we reached the small, hard-scrabble town of Klickitat, strung out along the river, we got our first thumbs up. More would follow. Jeff told me that during a drive earlier in the week, a couple flyfishers—faithful readers of this magazine—recognized Clyde and insisted on posing with the car for pictures.

We continued downriver until reaching a pull-out. After parking Clyde, we studied the long, ledge-rock pool below us, a complex mix of currents and depths carrying intense structure bank to bank. Jeff had fished this water many times and shared his knowledge. He said there was plenty of river to keep us flipping through our sink-tip wallets. Fly selection was limited to anything we could cast, from waking dries to bottom dredgers.

We took the short path to the river. Jeff headed to the top of the run; I was happy to begin casting on the water before me. As I waded in, Jeff was already shooting a purple muddler across the river, one tight loop after another. Even with my studded felts, the ledge rock was incredibly slick and treacherous. Jagged chunks of volcanic rock would trap a foot while I balanced in the currents, and the late afternoon sun cast a glare that my polarized glasses couldn't penetrate. I poked along on a ledge-rock island, a few inches at a time, while casting a small conehead, and I never saw the gap in the rock. The dunking took me up to my neck. Once back on my feet, I edged my way to the beach, where I found a huge boulder just below Clyde that was warm in the sun. I stripped down, wrung out my clothes, and hung them on branches. I then realized that Jeff had taken no notice of my floundering. I didn't know that he'd found a player—just a swirl around his shallow-running muddler.

I called out to him, and he looked over at me just as a steelhead took the muddler and went into the air. In that instant, he didn't see the take, just silver in the air. The steelhead was gone.

Standing on the rock, I looked directly up at Clyde, hoping for absolution. Clyde looked down and spoke in a voice raspy with age, but still clear and strong.

"You dumb ass."

Indeed. 🐟