
In Memory of Roman Bratasiuk

From what Roman Bratasiuk told me his love affair with American Motors happened instantly, was permanent. In 1971, when I was still playing with electric trains, Roman was a young teacher shopping for V8 muscle. By then Big Three's offerings had grown in size, if not power. Mary Richards' white 1970 Ford Mustang, in scenes at the beginning of her new show, signalled an intermediate shift that would do the bigger-and-bigger car's sales no good.

The Camaro and Firebird were in a new svelte iteration, as of 1970, but not as muscular. Challengers had come along, in small numbers. And Roman confessed to me: he barely knew of the existence of the American Motors Javelin.

His dream-car shopping took him to Bay St. in downtown Toronto, auto-row at the rear end of the era of multi-storey urban car dealerships (Addison's with its GM lines would hang on until the 2000s). Making his rounds he went into O'Donnell-Morrison, 945 Bay St., which some of you may remember as a large American Motors store, successful and perhaps the AMC dealership of our dreams, with Big Three pretensions and access to inventory.

The showroom was at the Bay St. sidewalk level and, said Roman, "I looked around." Shiny bread-and-butter AMCs filled the place — the new Sportabout, Ambassadors, a refreshed Rebel was now a Matador. He poked around, as you sometimes can do in auto dealerships.

Past the parts department, up a ramp, in the shop, a new blue Javelin AMX sat in a service bay. Was it 'electric poly blue' (going by the car now, and the colour charts at plane-thoustonamx.com), or originally 'dark admiral navy blue,' as his younger friend Doug McDonald lately recalled to me in a Facebook message?

He was told that the car was unsold. Roman asked the price, which was right (perhaps a shade under \$4,000, all in). The look was perfect as most of us think, and he bought it.

Did Roman know he would have this car for the rest of his life? What does it take, to pull that feat off? A certain loyalty, to long-ago choices; resistance to flighty fashion's effect on one's lusts; psychological and mechanical fortitude, for when a daily driver reaches the tipping point, needs repairs. It was an era when people traded often and cars were virtually a throwaway item. Roman's philosophy — "liked it then, like it now" — prevailed. His long and rare affair with his Javelin AMX, with its mighty 401, competed, we now think, only with his love for Irene Ouimette, his spouse.

Roman's still-blue (but which is it?) '71 is right now front and centre on the Northern Ramblers website. After his death on Dec. 17 I wrote the following on our Facebook page: "What would Roman do?, is, I'm sorry to say, how we will now have to respond, in the club, carrying on our business now. I wrote to him, 'You have been frank with us, and brave, and kept up your duties with, as is said, a stiff upper lip.' "I am guessing that, over the years, you have saved a few people yourself. Wayward students, perhaps. I know you jump-started strangers stuck in parking lots, sourced hard-to-find American Motors parts for friends.

"You are a man of good deeds, done with little fuss . . . you are an authentic gentleman, Roman. The Northern Ramblers are grateful." *Roman was treasurer of the club, it was he who took your membership orders, dispensed mass emails, fixed problems. The death announcement at Turner and Porter in Toronto is here, if you can type this in, <http://bit.ly/3roA96E>, or a search will work. The Facebook post is here, <http://bit.ly/3ooGdKI>. Lots more tributes from friends in and out of the car collecting scene are here, <http://bit.ly/3rwxWGt>. Got some memories of Roman, to share? Send to Alf, alfredholden@gmail.com. - ALF*



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