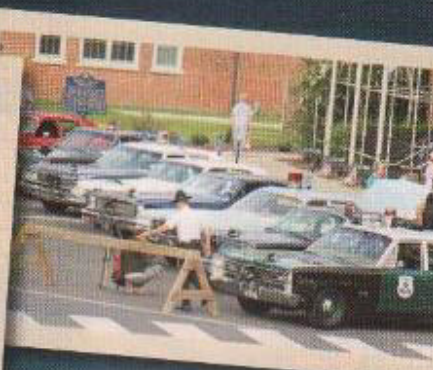


# Answering the Siren Song

Delaware Antique Police Car Association keeps retired patrol cars rolling



BY FRANK ADKINS

PHOTOS BY JENNIFER HAWKINS, EXCEPT WHERE NOTED

**T**hese days, the muscle cars of the '60s and '70s are hot. The folks who grew up during those decades are now middle aged, and some hope to recapture old memories, while others seek to own that special car they couldn't afford when they were younger.

Those of us who came of age during that time swap stories of ourselves as testosterone-fueled teenagers in high-performance machines, pairing up at traffic lights, eager to prove that our car was top dog. And often, it was the unexpected arrival of the Man in Blue, seemingly appearing from nowhere, who put an end to these late-night shenanigans. The threat of getting "busted" was enough to keep us in line much of the time, but even when we gave in to an itchy right foot, who didn't consider, even briefly,

the possibility of losing his driving privilege before dropping the hammer? Although our fondest memories may be of the occasions when we succumbed to temptation, it's fair to say that we owe a debt of gratitude to the members of law enforcement. Had they not been tough on us when we truly needed it, many of us would not have survived the glory years of unbridled horsepower. Of course, we remember the Mustangs, GTOs, and Chargers, but the police cars of the day were as much a part of the muscle car scene as the muscle cars themselves.

While police vehicles once comprised just a small niche in the collector car hobby, over the last decade they have gained widespread popularity. Many police officers are also car enthusiasts, and while it seems logical that cops

Millsboro, Delaware's, Allen McKechnie owns this 1956 Ford Customline in 62nd Military Police Company, U.S. Army, Europe, livery.





would restore police cars, a number of civilians restore old police vehicles as well. Laws concerning the use of these vehicles vary from state to state, but in some parts of the country it is legal for civilians to own and operate marked antique police cars, with certain provisions.

Thanks to the responsible nature of its members and its close ties with the Delaware State Police, the Delaware Antique Police Car Association enjoys acceptance among all police departments throughout the state. Its members are free to travel in their cars without undue hassle, and officers on duty frequently acknowledge the cars by giving a wave or thumbs-up.

The primary focus of DAPCA is to honor the men and women of the law enforcement community. Members and their vehicles are on standby for police funerals and memorial services, attending these functions upon request. They also participate in fundraisers for causes such as the Delaware State Police Museum, the Delaware Law Enforcement Memorial, and the Ronald G. Williams Foundation ([thergwfoundation.org](http://thergwfoundation.org)). In addition, the Association participates in numerous parades around the state as well as annual events, including the open house at the Calvert County Sheriff's Department in Prince Frederick, Maryland, the Chester County Fraternal Order of Police picnic in Downingtown, Pennsylvania, and the police vehicle show at the New York City Police Museum.

Membership is granted via a nomination and background check, followed by voting of all members. The roster is nearly evenly split between active or retired police officers and civilians. Eligible vehicles are those that are authentic police vehicles or accurate replicas at least 25 years old.

Due to the nature of their use, police vehicles suffered high attrition rates. Those that survived their tenure on the street were typically disposed of at auction and served their subsequent owners as cheap transportation or were stripped of their drivelines and discarded. Despite the large number of police-spec vehicles built, finding a genuine example of certain models can be quite difficult. Often, building a replica is the only option.

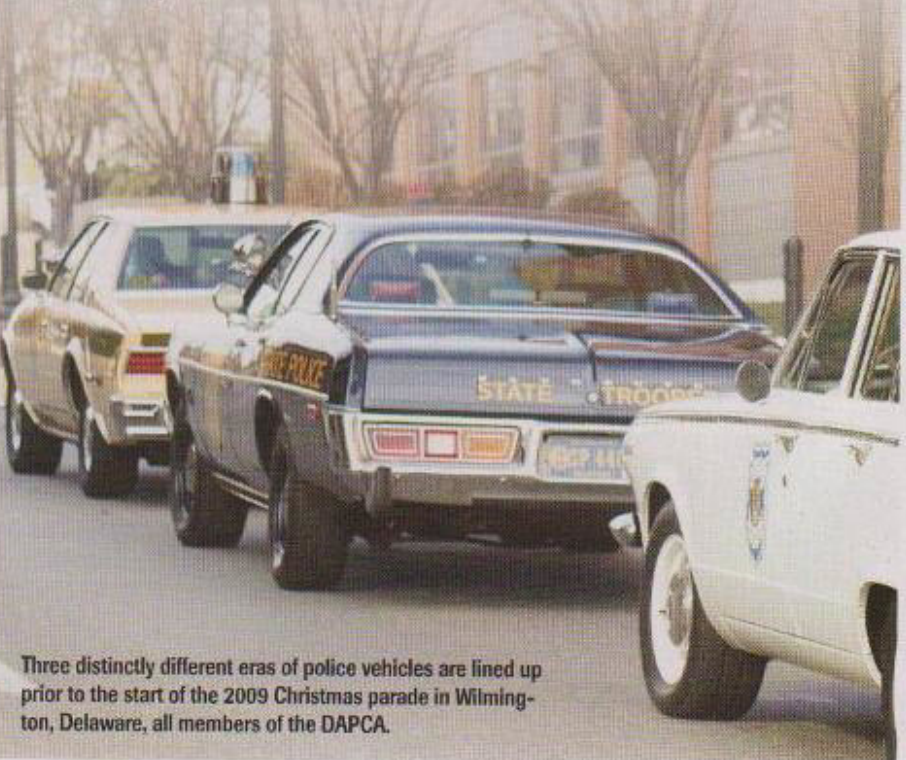
When selecting a police vehicle to restore, most people decide on the department they wish to represent and then contact the chief of that department. Upon gaining permission from the chief to replicate one of the department's cars and learning which models were used by that department, they begin the hunt for a suitable vehicle. Some folks take a



Daniel Bent, of Selbyville, Delaware—who works for the state's Office of Fleet Administration—is the owner of this 1973 Dodge Polara, a replica of one used by the Delaware State Fire Marshal.



This 1968 Plymouth Fury attended; it's restored in New York City colors and is owned by Charles Hastings, of Selbyville, Delaware.



Three distinctly different eras of police vehicles are lined up prior to the start of the 2009 Christmas parade in Wilmington, Delaware, all members of the DAPCA.





Powered by a 440 Police Pursuit engine, this Delaware State Police 1973 Plymouth Fury is owned by Ron and Helen Williams, Smyrna, Delaware.

Sergeant Ed Schreier, a twenty-year veteran of law enforcement, owns this Worcester County, Maryland Sheriff's Office 1966 Ford Galaxie.

PHOTO COURTESY OF ROBERT HERRINGTON



This 1972 Plymouth Fury (New Castle County, Delaware), complete with 400-cu.in. engine and Police Package, is owned by Albert Wysock, of Wilmington, Delaware.

Retired officer Donald Miller, of Malvern, Pennsylvania, owns this unrestored 1966 Dodge Polara in Monroe County, Pennsylvania, livery, which also appeared in last month's Hershey show coverage.



different approach. They start with the vehicle they want to restore and then search for a department that used that model. In all cases, owners outfit their cars with the same lights, sirens, radios, and markings used by their respective departments. Often the departments help with research, and sometimes they donate door shields or obsolete emergency equipment, but never cash. The cars are privately owned, and their restorations and upkeep are funded entirely by their owners, not taxpayers.

Police car owners are no different from most collector-car owners in that they, too, have special bonds with their automobiles. In fact, nearly all DAPCA members own or have owned collector cars other than police vehicles. While they enjoy socializing with other car owners, the police cars have a much broader appeal among the general population. Even if you aren't a car enthusiast, you remember the first time you got pulled over, and who doesn't have a childhood memory of sitting nervously in the family sedan while Dad tried to talk his way out of a ticket? During parades, DAPCA members are greeted by older folks who smile and wave from the sidewalk while being reminded of old times. Young adults and teenagers shout with appreciation, and even kids gape at the line of old police cars idling by with their emergency lights flashing.

DAPCA members agree, it is the ability to bring smiles to the faces of strangers and the feeling of giving something back to the men and women of law enforcement that makes the police car hobby especially rewarding.

Visit DAPCA at their website, [www.antiquepolicecars.com](http://www.antiquepolicecars.com) or on Facebook under Antique Police Cars. 🇺🇸

