



SCHWARTZ *Report*

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ODE TO THE STATION WAGON

My Webster's Collegiate Dictionary defines a station wagon as: "an automobile that has an interior longer than a sedan's, has one or more rear seats readily lifted out or folded to facilitate light trucking, has no separate luggage compartment [trunk], and often has an adjustable rear window and a tailgate." For my formative early years in real estate, the station wagon was the vehicle of choice for many a successful real estate practitioner. Its original purpose stated by its name was for transporting people and their luggage to and from the train station, airfield, or wherever their longer distance carrier had deposited them. In short, it was the means to the start or the end of their journey and it needed flexibility to accomplish that. Whatever baggage not stowed in the interior of the vehicle could be strapped to the luggage rack on its roof, an important bonus feature. It also was ideal at accommodating the average relocating transferee family of the day who needed to be met at the airport, train, or bus station to begin the search for their new home.



Over the fifteen years or so that I had them, I worked my way through some of Alfred Sloan's General Motors hierarchy from Chevrolet to Pontiac to Oldsmobile. The last of these, and perhaps the most impressive, was the 1983 Oldsmobile Custom Cruiser wagon which had a 10 foot wheelbase, was nearly 18-foot long and stood almost 5-feet high. It also weighed over 4,000 pounds.* This was a land cruiser all right. It had three sets of bench seats, a convenience which allowed the younger or more agile members of the family to be seated in the back. A tour with the whole family with the agent as tour director was therefore achievable, making it easier to tune in to the family's likes and dislikes and to zero in on who the decision maker might be.

Aside from its duties as people carrier, the combination of putting the seats down and the back window open allowed for the transport of multiple sales signs (we put them up ourselves back then), step ladders, fence posts, etc. Almost whatever was required for the real estate business in those days could be accommodated by the Custom Cruiser. I should also point out that some of these features, the folding seats, the luggage rack, the disappearing rear window, the tilt tailgate, and one I

have not mentioned, the automatic door locks, could and would be used in many disingenuous ways. A few noteworthy examples come immediately to mind.

I stopped by a property I had sold on Auburn Mill Road in Hockessin. We were about a week from settlement. It was late fall, cold enough to have my windows up. The owners had moved out and had requested that I check the place and while there pick up the sale sign. The house checked

out fine. Got back to the car, started the engine, then remembered the sign. Put down the rear window, got out of the car with the engine running and thinking only of the sign, I hit the automatic door lock and shut the door, put the sign through the rear window opening, then returned to the driver's side only to find it locked. Effectively marooned there I was with the cruiser running and no place to go. Necessity then summoned some inert acrobatic skills and I discovered that I too could fit through that rear window.

Did you know that the Custom Cruiser could also serve as an incubator? I picked up a mom and her two rambunctious young boys at the Philadelphia Airport. To pacify them for the drive to Newark where we were to meet the dad and begin our tour, she opened a small box of Cheerios and handed it back to them. I owned that car for almost five more years and every week at the car wash I'd vacuum up Cheerios. I conclude from this that the Custom Cruiser was able to incubate a couple of handfuls of General Mills' finest into enough to feed the multitudes.

One last story, this one could have had a more painful ending. I had a split-level house for sale in Westgate Farms which wasn't getting many showings and some were even canceled before the fact. Now, it could have been price but I suspected that the family pets, two large dogs (I'll dub them White Fang and Black Tooth) might have been somewhat off-putting because their bark could be heard from the mailbox out front. There was no basement in the house so for showings WF and BT were to be put in the garage or weather permitting in the fenced rear yard. As part of my kit, I carried enough doggie treats to pacify the Hound of the Baskervilles and always had the bag handy when approaching their domain.

The time of the year was late September or early October. The weather was balmy and mild. For sale signs were in those days much more portable than the monuments we put up today and as Halloween approached kids for a bit of fun would move them about the neighborhood. Inevitably you'd get a call from someone stating your sign is on my front lawn and my house is not for sale. Apart from wisecracking about it being a great time to sell, the only acceptable answer was I'm sorry about that I'll be right over to take care of it. You guessed it. The sign in question belonged back on White Fang and Black Tooth's turf.

No cell phone back then so contacting the owner about their whereabouts would have necessitated going back to the office to call him. Throwing caution to the wind I figured they'd be either in the house or in the back yard.

So I could steal up plug the sign back in the ground and be off before their doggie senses detected me. Wrong and double wrong. Thankfully I'd learned my lesson about the automatic door locks so down with the back window, out with the sign. Then from either side of the house, out raced the Fang and the Tooth. I lost a good portion of my suit coat flinging out the dog treats, and a good deal of pride, but managed to levitate up onto the luggage rack. Told you they were useful. Scrambling through the back window seemed easier this time.

For my money you can have your BMWs, your Benz, your Jeeps, your Suburban or your Range Rovers. I'll take my old Custom Cruiser any day.

**Wikipedia search*



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