



James Smith, left, and Bob Smith chat across the engine of a restored Dodge Charger General Lee at Smith Bros. Restorations.

# Hazzard-ous Lifestyle

*Brothers turn vintage Dodge Chargers into General Lee replicas*

*Jeanie Senior*

**B**rothers James Smith and Bob Smith Jr. have built a business on General Lee—not the Civil War general, but General Lee the car, which became as much a star on the television series “The Dukes of Hazzard” as the show’s actors.

In the series, which ran from 1979 to 1985, cousins Bo and Luke Duke regularly triumphed over the rascally

authorities of fictional Hazzard County, Georgia, thanks in no small part to General Lee’s speed and spectacular jumps.

The car—a 1969 Dodge Charger painted brilliant reddish-orange—had several distinctive features, including “01” on the side, a Confederate battle flag on the roof and a brush guard/push bar in front.

James and Bob, longtime fans of the show, started their restoration business after attending a Dukes Fest on the East Coast, where they met cast and crew members. When they heard there were plans to jump a General Lee at a future event, they volunteered one of the Chargers

they had collected and restored as a General Lee.

Seeing the car “got a lot of people inquiring,” James says. “Within a short time, we had orders lining up.”

That was about seven years ago, and led to the advent of Smith Bros. Restorations, which specializes in Dodge Chargers.

The brothers have done authentic restorations of the General Lee ever since, shipping completed cars from their Lyle-area shop to buyers from Kentucky to Canada and Ireland. Their work has been profiled in Mopar Collector’s Guide, The New York Times and Muscle Car Review.

It’s not hard, Bob says, to paint a



*Above, James performs a stunt in a General Lee. Below, a promotional photo from a Hazzard Homecoming. Photos courtesy of Bob and James Smith.*

1968 or 1969 Charger orange and stick some numbers on the side. What Smith Bros. offers, however, is a more comprehensive—and accurate—General Lee.

Of their attention to detail, James says simply: “Most people don’t research as much as we do.”

During the show’s run, the cars varied. There essentially were three different General Lees, and most customers know which car they want. James and Bob are responsible for the precise details.

The Smiths’ knowledge of the car has been considerably augmented by the friendships they have made through the years with many members of the Dukes cast and crew, including the stuntmen who drove the General Lee and the people who built the cars.

The Smith Bros. office is a mini Dukes of Hazzard museum, crowded with model cars, posters and

autographed photos from the show, many featuring General Lee.

At the Dukes gatherings, James says, the lines that form to get the stars’ autographs can stretch across the property.

“The stunt guys are easier to talk to,” he says. “And for my brother and myself, coming from a car guy point of view, we formed a bond very quickly.”

One of their friends and mentors was the late Rich Sephton, who was Warner Bros. shop foreman in the 1980s for “The Dukes of Hazzard” series.

There is a tribute to Rich on the Smith Bros. Web site, [www.smithbrosrestorations.com](http://www.smithbrosrestorations.com).

“He was a wealth of information,” James says.

A General Lee from Smith Bros. isn’t cheap. The base price for a General Lee package, with the brothers supplying the Charger, starts at \$45,000, goes to \$65,000 for a midlevel package and upwards

for a custom car.

“It’s kind of like a wish list for the customer,” Bob says. “We start with the base price and they start adding amenities: air conditioning, disc brakes. Some want pretty much everything, and we let them know the price.”

For the past dozen General Lees Smith Bros. has built, buyers were told the approximate start date would be a year to 18 months before delivery. Now the wait is two years.

James and Bob strip a car down to its bare frame and rebuild it so when it is complete, it has a lot of new body work, a quality paint job, correct push bar, roll bar and wheels, restored gauges, a rebuilt engine, rebuilt brakes, rebuilt front end and transmission, a new fuel tank and lines, a new windshield and a horn that plays “Dixie.”

The push bar is especially authentic because the brothers have the original jig that was used to build the push bar for the TV series.

Except for the paint job, done at a shop in Hood River, James and Bob do all the work on the cars.

“We grew up with a dad who could do anything,” James says. “We’ve been working on stuff since we were 5 years old.”

Both brothers also have other jobs. Bob is associate pastor at Lyle Celebration Center. James is a professional stunt driver whose signature stunt is driving a car on two wheels, called the ski car stunt.

Even though “The Dukes of Hazzard” has been off the air for almost 25 years, its popularity flourishes around the world.

“It’s bigger in the U.K. than over here” Bob says.

That probably explains the General Lee Smith Bros. recently restored and shipped in a container to an architect in Ireland.

The brothers are not worried about running out of cars to work with.

“There’s still a lot of Chargers out there,” James says. “We’re trying to do a much nicer car than what the person is paying for. That’s never bad for your reputation.” ■

