

My Car

Takin' it to the streets

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From Thursday's April 27/06 Globe and Mail

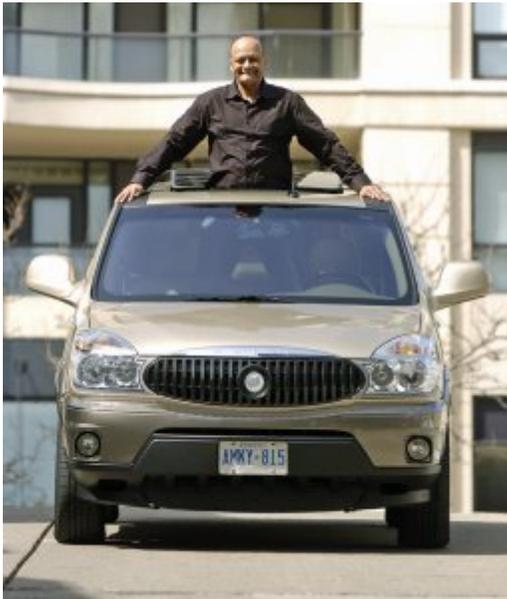
He was on a dead-end road with no prospects. At 15, he was a high school dropout and member of the Detroit street gang, the Motor City Mobsters. He climbed to the top of the ranks as the gang's number one War Lord.

The streets were his home for nearly two decades as he piled up a criminal record and logged time behind bars. But after the gang-related deaths of two cousins, Spider Jones did a U-turn and changed his life forever.

Jones left his gang life behind and started a new one with the help of a used 1958 Oldsmobile he bought for \$300.

"I worked all summer for my uncle. He had a farm north of Detroit. I sweated the fields, man — picking beans, tomatoes, and sugar beet. That was work then.

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Spider Jones' Buick Rendezvous is big and strong, and it holds the road well in bad weather. 'It's smooth-looking, too, like a great fighter,' says Jones. 'Like Muhammad Ali.' (*Tibor Kolley/The Globe and Mail*)

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"I worked all summer for it. I bought it. I left Detroit, I came through Windsor and I was on my way to Toronto. I got up around Dutton and I blew a rod in the damn thing. I couldn't afford to get it fixed so it stayed in Dutton with half my clothes in it. And I hitchhiked the rest of the way to Toronto," he laughs with a deep husky voice.

"Your car is your thing, man. That car was my baby. I was proud of that car, but man, that guy who sold it to me stiffed me. It looked good, but the engine was gone on it."

Success didn't come easy for Jones. He held many menial jobs like shoe shining, bell hopping and bouncing. But he managed to use his street-fighting skills in the ring.

In 1996, Jones was inducted into the Canadian Boxing Hall of fame. The three-time former Golden Glove champion hit the books, too, returning to school to study journalism. Now, he hosts his own radio show on CFRB AM in Toronto, as well as a syndicated boxing series on ESPN/TSN.

He's also a motivational speaker, trying to deliver his message to kids to keep clean and off the streets.

"When I was really struggling — I'm paying a mortgage and trying to send my son to college — we didn't have a lot of money and I used to drive a car that didn't look good. And yet I had the persona, Spider Jones — he's a raging TV personality and ex-fighter, he should have some money, you know. I used to drive junkers sometimes and I'd park a block away so nobody would see what I was driving," says Jones, who was recently voted Boxing Commentator and MC of the Year for the World Boxing Federation.

His worst clunker was a 1962 Dodge Dart. "It had cancer. The front light was hanging. The side mirror was hanging. I was broke, busted and couldn't be trusted back in those days. I remember when they first brought in the little sticker you put on your car, the one for the plate. They used to be pink and I painted mine pink because I couldn't even afford it.

"I'd drive around with the junker. This car was rusty everywhere. It was terrible. It smoked out the back. It would leave this big trail of smoke, but, man, I needed that car to get me back and forth. Times were tough back then. I finally had to have that car junked because the cops were stopping me," says Jones, who was a sparring partner for boxing legend George Chuvalo and former world heavyweight champ Jimmy Ellis. He was also a member of Muhammad Ali's training camp.

"I owned a big '98 Buick. Growing up in the States — growing up in that area where the hustlers are in the street — the players, they called them back then, they drove the big cars. I used to have a Cadillac convertible. It was a '64 Cadillac Eldorado. It was baby blue with red leather upholstery and it had a little record player under the dash back then. I got to Yonge Street and the ladies would just . . ." he pauses and rephrases his words, "It was sort of attracted to ladies. . . . I still love the ride of a Cadillac. Cadillac, that's what a lot of the players and gangsters drive. So I didn't want something too loud, now."

So he opted to lease a 2005 Buick Rendezvous SUV. "I love it. I love looking at it! I like the GM ride — the Cadillac, the Oldsmobile, the Buick.

"They're known for their ride. It just glides on the highway nice and smooth. It's like I'm sitting in my little living room in there.

"Another thing I really like, especially in the winter time, the leather seats warm up. So at least until the rest of the car warms up, my backside is warm," says the author of *Out of the Darkness*, which chronicles his years involved in gangs and violence. Jones is in talks to turn his book into a movie.

Another plus is the Rendezvous' hauling capacity — it comes in handy for lugging around his books. "I do a lot of seminars at about 150 schools across Ontario, New York and Michigan every year. When I do a seminar, I may sell as many as 200 books. That money all goes into my Believe to Achieve foundation so carrying those books is a lot simpler.

"It's a nine-seater. I only use the front seat. The other seats I just push down and carry my books with me instead of shipping them to where I'm going. Without a vehicle of that size, I wouldn't be able to take that many books — to me, books are money, extra cash," says Jones, who is currently writing a self-help book to improve self-esteem.

"It's big and strong. And it holds the road well in the winter and the bad weather. It's smooth-looking, too, like a great fighter, like Muhammad Ali. . . . I like a big car. I feel more comfortable in a bigger car — I'm a big guy, I'm 6-foot-2 and weigh 205 pounds. I don't like a little car. Now that I've driven this, I can never go back to a smaller car.

"I feel successful when I climb into this car, when I pull out of the driveway and you can't hear the engine. You cruise along, hit the highway and you just touch it and it just pulls into traffic. It's smooth.

"The radio has a great sound, too — that's important. My wife laughs at me — the first thing that I do when I climb into a car is I turn on the radio and listen to the sound. If it doesn't have a good sound, I don't care if it's a Mercedes, I don't want it!

"I enjoy driving. It usually gives me a chance to think. I relax when I drive because I don't tailgate. I'm not a speeder. I cruise. If everyone is tailgating, I'll slow down and everyone has to slow down behind me.

"I just take my time. . . . And it doesn't eat up gas big time, unless I start kicking it. You go into those gas stations now, the attendants should be wearing a ski mask. The prices they're asking, eh?" laughs Jones, who has an honorary detective badge from the Toronto police department.

"I can afford a BMW today. I can afford a nice luxury car — to me, this is my favourite car. My favourite ride I'd ever had. I say that to my wife and she laughs!"

It's no wonder he'd pick a 2007 Rendezvous with all the toys to drive the next time around.