



One of Jay Leno's prized vehicles is his 1925 Doble steam car, once owned by Howard Hughes.

## GREAT GARAGES

### JAYRIDING

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He may be the Earth's funniest mechanic — but great vehicles are no joke for the star of *The Tonight Show with Jay Leno*.

If comedy is his payday, then cars and motorcycles, luxuriously housed in his world-famous Burbank garage, are Jay Leno's passion. He lives them, sleeps them, builds them, tinkers with and tweaks them, and, most importantly, drives one or more every day. His hands are callused and often dirtied from them, as his collection is a working one: They all see the road, and he's worked on all of them.

Some people have collections; Jay Leno's collection has him. His cars and cycles aren't possessions like boxed gems once owned by a maharajah or rare volumes on a bibliophile's shelf safely beyond reach. His joys are fired up and opened up — and not just on Sundays.

#### A Moving Century

Jay started his "Big Dog Garage" in 1990, and it now includes 135-plus cars and 100 motorcycles representing more than 100 years of motoring history, from a 1906 Stanley Steamer to a 2010 Corvette ZR1, explains Bernard Juchli, its general manager for the last 11 years.

"Some people just have one brand of car collected — Jerry Seinfeld loves Porsches — but we have everything: steam cars, a turbine, an early electric and the Chevrolet Volt, bikes back to World War II and a Model T," adds Bernard, who jokes that he works about 60 hours a week in retirement maintaining the vehicles.

The garage is a series of connected warehouse spaces that Jay's refurbished or built as space became available. You almost need to hitch a ride in one of the cars to see everything without tiring.

It's an art gallery, too, with dramatic wallsize murals, vintage posters, rare photographs, automobilia, steam engines and large

paintings completed by television studio artists based on smaller pieces that Jay requests for a specific area near the vehicle or cycle to which they pertain.

The most recently acquired building temporarily contains a Tag Systems simulator from Australia. You drive any working car onto its moving spindles, similar to those used at auto-emissions facilities. In front is a movie-size image of a specific track you request from the software. From there, you drive as fast and accurately as you can, with the car, of course, strapped to the structure. I tried the late-model BMW in place, and at about 140 miles an hour, I looked to my left and there was Jay Leno running, a turbo-charged Usain Bolt, step for step with my foot-to-the-floor driving, laughing all the while.

Watch Jay on television and laugh, chortle and chuckle. Watch him in the garage and smile. The garage is his playroom. He's a little boy riding a pony for the first time; this is just big-boy deep-pocket horsepower.

Now, he's stretched half his body out the gull-wing door of a red 1986 Lamborghini Countach, backing it into place in his garage. A few minutes later, he'll pilot his 1963 Chrysler turbine car for a very quick trip on U.S. 5 or 210. Enough fuel and lift and it might beat the next flight out of LAX.

Later still, he's cruising in one of his cherished steam-powered vehicles by White Steamer, Stanley Steamer or Doble or helping maneuver — it's an enervating two-man job — his 1906 Advance steam-powered farm tractor into the neighborhood, where its 13 tons activates car alarms and draws people out of their offices and homes, caressing Fujis and Canons and Nikons, cell phones with photo apps and copies of Leno for autographs. Within seconds, the Internet is rumbling with images of a 62-year-old multi-millionaire living a childhood automotive love on the streets of downtown Burbank. It's a carnival, Mardi Gras, a dream.



Two of Jay's centerpieces are his tweaked 1955 Buick Roadmaster and his double-tweaked 1966 Oldsmobile Toronado.

After taping the nightly television show on most weekday afternoons, Jay drives a few miles direct from the studio to his 116,000-square foot garage, where he and a full-time five-man crew, led by Bernard, fastidiously maintain the hand-selected cars and motorcycles. He's assisted there by Per Blixt, Jim Hall, John Miller, George Swift, John Pera and Bob Sales.

Many vehicles have charging batteries connected to them, and there's a handsome display of ready-to-use Optimas in one of the many connected garages. All cars in the show areas are operational. "Jay likes to drive them and be involved with them," Bernard says. "He's here every day and calls half a dozen times every day to find out about what we're doing."

Project or repair cars are up on the racks, or in waiting, in the original workshop. Welding torches are at them or power sanders or grinders. When we visited, one of these

cars was the maroon-on-black '66 Ford Galaxie his dad, Angelo, bought when Jay was growing up in a rural section of Andover, Mass., just outside Boston.

When the Ford sedan is back on Los Angeles streets, it won't be the same mild-mannered one that his New York City-born dad used as an insurance agent to support Jay's mom, Catherine, and family. Today, it's got a 511-cubic-inch crate motor, a six-speed and Hotchkiss suspension. Tempt Jay, and this Galaxie will have you seeing stars.

#### Home, Home is the Garage

His love for cars started as a young man, reading magazines such as *Popular Mechanics* (which he now writes for), *Motor Trend* and *Road & Track*.

This love materialized when he was about 16, a friend recalls. "One of their neighbors drove home in a new 1966 Oldsmobile Toronado, and Jay fell in love with it," says David

North, who designed the front-wheel-drive coupe for General Motors, which *Motor Trend* honored as its "Car of the Year."

Later, Jay worked at domestic and foreign car dealerships as a teenager and while studying at Emerson College in Boston, when he started as a professional comedian.

"I worked on everything: Renaults, Fords, Mercedes-Benz, Citroen," he recalls. "When I got started in comedy, I worked at the dealerships and did gigs until I was able to drop the dealership job."

In 1987, he began hosting for Johnny Carson on *The Tonight Show*, and in 1992, the legendary talk show host named him as his successor.

That anointing buys you any car you want — including a 1994 McLaren F1, a few Duesenbergs, a jet-powered motorcycle and lots of steam cars. And a Big Dog Garage.

"Jay gets a couple hundred letters each week from people trying to sell him something automotive," Bernard explains.

"If he's interested, he responds and does the buying himself." For example, he recently acquired a project car, another White Steamer, from an East Coast seller, with three or four cubic yards of parts as a bonus.

Jay kindly invited the *Highline* crew inside and offered a few moving thoughts during a morning of fun:

1955 Buick Roadmaster — "I bought this car in 1972 here in California for \$350. I think 1955 is the best year ever for Buick. I drove it for years around town to work and then parked it at my mother-in-law's house for 16 years. Someone left a 'no one loves me' note on it, and I realized I did."

"We began a full resto-mod restoration in 2002 using all GM custom parts, beginning with a 572-cubic-inch Chevy crate engine that develops 620 horsepower at 5,500 rpm. It has a four-speed automatic transmission, Corvette suspension

and Flowmaster mufflers. We painted it Dupont silver and black and made our own 17-inch wheels and spun new hubcaps based on the originals.”

Mark North, David North's son, was riding with Jay in the Roadmaster one day in the LA area, when a new turbo Porsche challenged the old Buick: “The Porsche

1966 Oldsmobile Toronado — “I always thought that this was one of the underappreciated American car designs. Europeans were saying that you couldn't get more than 200 horsepower to the front wheels because of too much torque, but this unconventional car, the first American front wheel drive since the Cords of the '30s, had 385 from the factory.

“It's American engineering at its peak, with a clean natural design and those wonderful flared rear wheel fenders and eyebrow slits above the retractable headlights. It looks like an American car and has that assured ‘We're going to the moon in a couple years' look.’

“When these are old and beat, they look like a dinosaur out of a tar pit, but then when you clean them up, the car is very special. I bought it for \$800, stripped off the original white paint, painted it correct Harvest Gold and redid the interior.

“To hold the 1,000-plus horsepower, we converted to rear wheel drive, installed a new suspension, a Corvette transaxle, twin Garrett turbochargers with dual intercoolers, one in each front wheel well. And, we created 17-inch wheels to mimic the original 15-inch wheels.”

When Jay first revealed the twin-turbo Toronado at the SEMA show about five years ago, he got cheers and jeers. Some thought he had ruined the original car by converting it to rear wheel drive.

Shortly after, Mark put Jay in contact with his dad. David North had been employed with General Motors since 1959 through 1991, working with the legendary Bill Mitchell, who led the GM foray into the high-powered full-size cars with the Buick Riviera in 1963 and the new Cadillac Eldorado in 1967. Educated at the same design school with Ralph Lauren, David also designed cars such as the history-making Pontiac GTO and the Reatta, the Rivas and Eldorados.

David received a call at his home in Montana from Jay Leno.

“There's a guy named Jay on the phone, who wants to talk to you about cars,” his wife, Pat, told him.

“A lot of people are saying I ruined your car,” said Jay, explaining to David what he had done to the Toronado, changing it from front wheel drive to rear wheel drive.

“Doesn't make any difference to me; I designed the look, didn't do any engineering,” David replied.

Jay and David later met at the garage: [www.jaylenosgarage.com/video/clips/1966-oldsmobile-toronado/187722](http://www.jaylenosgarage.com/video/clips/1966-oldsmobile-toronado/187722).

1932 Duesenberg Model SJ — “This car is from the Ed Weaver collection and has the original supercharger. There are only 36 SJs and, with all of the other Duesenbergs, they are all accounted for and known. Randy Ema, the Duesenberg expert, painted this the duo-tone green it is today. It runs on 87 octane and gets about six miles a gallon.

“All of the Duesenbergs were essentially built in 1929. They started with 500 chassis, and it took about 10 years to sell them all. When you sold the car, that is the year it was called. This is a Murphy-bodied car. Some people had a summer body and a winter body. You just changed it like clothes.”

The SJ was the Bugatti Veyron of its day: It outputted 330 brake horsepower and could gallop to 130 mph-plus gnarling through the signature creased, chromed hood exhausts. Nothing approached it, and many consider it the greatest American car ever.

Deusys won the Indianapolis 500 in 1924, 1925 and 1927. Street versions were selling to movie stars, business moguls and royalty for about \$19,000 and more, just as the Great Depression began. Today, they are priceless.

There may be some Deusys in barns somewhere, but, we know where the barns are, Jay explains. Another of his Duesenbergs, in fact, was a barnyard find. The car had rested in an unopened garage from 1946 until just after the Northridge earthquake in January 1994. He and Randy Ema were able to have the barn opened. Jay bought it in 2004 and has kept it in its preserved state, adding tires and working on the mechanicals to ensure that it runs as it did when new.



Jay Leno regularly cruises downtown Burbank in his 1932 Duesenberg Model SJ — one of 36 built.



Jay's 1994 F1 McLaren is one of 106 made. In 1998, it reportedly did 240 mph and remains one of the fastest production cars in the world.



In 1925, Howard Hughes notched 132.5 mph in this very rare steam-powered Doble.

1925 Doble Steam Car — “This is the Doble that belonged to Howard Hughes. In 1925, he did 132.5 mph in it.

“They were very expensive: about \$20,000 in 1925, and they only made about 40. But, by that time it was like making a Betamax when VCRs had already taken over. Internal combustion cars were moving along by the ‘20s.

“What’s so great about the Dobles is that you turn the key and go in three or four minutes. Other steam cars took a lot of time to get going. And, this car can keep going for 150 miles before you have to add water.

“It’s a four-cylinder engine, puts out about 2 million BTUs of heat and has no transmission because of the torque, is quiet but beyond that it’s ridiculously complex. The book that came with the car is always saying: ‘Have your man check this.’ So, you need your ‘man’ to make it work. Still, I’m fascinated with steam. It’s just so basic, so elemental.

“We fabricated some parts — a piston was hitting a cylinder cap, for example — and did the paint in house.” [With the Hughes Doble, the garage acquired a cutaway Doble chassis to show just how

complex the car is. This is displayed across from the working Doble.]

Bernard and crew have just finished up on another Doble in the workshop, which Jay acquired from an East coast owner. Bernard says there may be about 15 Dobles left, with just four or five that run. Jay now has two of those.

“The Doble weighs in at three tons,” he explains. “It doesn’t so much as stop but slows down, so we’re adding disc brakes.”

As with many of Jay’s cars, Bernard and crew update them so that they can run in today’s conditions, on today’s streets. For instance, they add aftermarket fans to ensure the cars do not overheat in LA traffic.

“I’ve never really thought of the cars and cycles as a collection,” Jay says. “When I began, I acquired some and eventually over the years I had a number of them. It’s always been a garage in flux — but always with vehicles that work and are meant to be driven.”

*If you or someone you know has a GreatGarage and would like it to be considered for an upcoming issue, e-mail us at [GreatGarages@highline-autos.com](mailto:GreatGarages@highline-autos.com).*



When Jay Leno drives onto the streets of Burbank with his 1906 Advance steam farm tractor, people listen.