Ok, here are all the different cars I have owned (in chronological order)—all 21 of them. NO, I don't own them all NOW. A lot of the pictures are not of the actual vehicles … I just snagged some similar pix from the web.

1) 1967 Dodge Dart GT 2-Door Hardtop—Bought from the first owner, who still had clear plastic seat covers protecting the vinyl (people used to do that … a long, long time ago in a galaxy far away). Mine looked just like this except it was a Forest Green, top and bottom. It lasted two weeks, then it was stolen … and was then shot up by West Virginia troopers after the thief ran their roadblock. Dodge sold a racing version of this car 'in primer' (unpainted) with a big Hemi engine—I recently saw one of those go down the lane at Barrett-Jackson for $300,000.

2) 1969 Chevy Nova—Bought from son of man who owned a local painting company. His son used it through his years at East Tennessee State University. This picture has the right color … and the look is also correct, with the wide "60s" tires sticking out of the fenderwells in the back and the chrome wheels and all. I didn't have that big hood scoop, though. And the rear end on mine was jacked up like a drag racer, and I had shag carpet in the rear window panel. No fuzzy dice or bobbing-head dog, though. I got pulled over a lot to have my rear bumper height measured (back then the idea was to have your rear bumper as high as possible, not to low-ride). Once, I flicked a cigarette out the window, then stopped for an ice cream cone. When I returned most of the rear seat had burned up. These days, this car is in very high demand by collectors.

3) 1973 Mercury Montego Coupe—Coupe means 2-door, you know. Good part-time college job meant I could easily afford an upgrade. A ***white*** vinyl interior (try and find *that* these days), Carolina Blue exterior … with a navy vinyl top. I am telling you, it was a very, very sharp color combination - at the time anyway!

At left is a cheesy picture of me from my college days standing in front of the actual car. I was an usher in a wedding wearing a tux that matched the car … so my very sweet and pretty girlfriend at the time insisted that I put on a swagger so she could snap this picture !! The car was driven for one year by a Bristol, Tennessee L-M dealer's wife. Maybe 12k miles on it when I bought it. Note carefully the 102 inch CB antenna flailing off the back bumper.

David Pearson used to run one of these puppies (dressed in the rare GT version) on the NASCAR circuit. The picture at right is the same car (in the 4-door sedan flavor), as it appeared in the 1985 film "Death Wish 3." The picture below is a stock corporate beauty shot of the vehicle a couple of years later, when it was rebadged as the Mercury Cougar.

4) 1974 Mercury Montego Sedan—Sedan, as in four-door. Something unknown went wrong with the engine on the '73. I still think someone did something to it. Paid $1,000 difference and left my engine troubles behind. Basically I bought the exact same car again. My '74 was Carolina Blue outside (again) with a navy blue vinyl top and navy brocade cloth interior. I put a little CB antenna on this one, it was on a hinge mounted to the lip of the trunk—you could open the trunk and fold it inside when you weren't using it.

5) 1970 Fiat 128—Shady used car dealer somehow conned me into trading the Montego for this lil' white hunk 'o junk that lasted six whole weeks. Clutch went. Windshield shattered from cold. You name it, it went wrong. Traded the title for the junkyard towing fee. Kick me hard. It came with a university **faculty** parking sticker on the bumper though, so for those six weeks I parked on campus sidewalks whenever I felt like it. This picture is pretty accurate.

6) 1978 Fiat 131—It looked horrible in most colors, but in this true golden flake metallic, it was a snazzy boxy thing. The interior was done in black vinyl, as here. Bought as a demo from same place that stole the Montego from me. I had a cool Swedish brand stereo put in it. (Handic, a company long out of business). It had a string of little orange bulbs across the face. When you turned the radio dial, the single lit bulb functioning as the pointer would change … the light "rolled" to the left or right. The string of lights also signaled volume level, pulsed to the sound, etc. They sold zillions of 131s in Italy … but they couldn't give 'em away in America. This car had a tendency to cut off while going down the interstate. Fiat quit selling cars in America about two years after I bought it. Some of my fondest memories come from this driving this car, tooling down Interstate 81 on cool fall Friday afternoons, listening to jazz cassette tapes and leaving my work worries behind me … on my way to see the young woman whom I thought I would someday marry.

7) 1980 Olds Cutlass Supreme Brougham—Three promotions at the truck factory in two years meant it was time to upgrade my lifestyle. I "ordered it from the factory" (meaning I specified every option on the car they then the factory built it for me) … but only owned it about six months. Then the truck company's finances suddenly looked dim. I sold it at a big loss when I was getting ready for my new job out in Nevada … while the truck factory was going Chapter 11. This is actually a picture of a 1978, but the look is extremely similar—I had the sky blue "Landau" roof on metallic midnight blue exterior shown here. The interior was dark blue velour with plush velour "couch like" seating. The 1980 had a better looking nose. Mine had the much snazzier "real spoke" wheels. Actually the factory built this car twice. The dealership called to tell me to come pick the car up, then when I got there, I found out the parker had ripped the front end off the car … while driving it to their gas pump (you USED to get a full tank of gas for free with a new car), it got swiped by a speeding "lot lizard." I had to wait another six weeks while the factory built another one. This was one of the best-looking cars inside and out that I ever owned. But given my new company was giving me a new car … and driving this car through every rut in the cowboy country of Northern Nevada would only ruin it … well, parting with it was the only reasonable thing to do.

8) 1972 Big fat Oldsmobile… or was it a Buick? I don't even remember what model it was. I don't even remember what color is was. It was generally similar in size and style to car # 16. It was total trash. Maybe I gave $250 for it. And that was too much to pay for it! After I sold the Cutlass, I still needed something to drive the last month or so until I flew out to Nevada. The owner simplified my disposal plans by putting sawdust in the transmission. (It's the oldest dirty trick in the car selling book, used when the tranny can't hold any fluid since the seals are rotten. It runs great for 500 miles .. while the tranny gears are mushing up the wood … then it eventually and suddenly locks solid.) You should never have to experience having a driveshaft rip right out from under your car at 60 miles an hour, almost bashing its way into the inside of the car, then see it through the rear-view mirror, laying in the middle of the road. I had to pay someone to haul the car off the highway shoulder. I ended up renting a car from Avis the last few weeks before leaving for Nevada. The day I was leaving, I dropped the car at Avis, then a woman I had been dating drove me to the airport.

9) 1980 Ford F-150 Pickup (driven, not owned)—the construction company's "company car" when I worked in Elko, Nevada. This is a picture of the actual truck. Stripped, no radio, rubber 'carpet.' And I thought I was going to get a big fat Caddy or something. Heck if you were the project manager, you only got a Ford Grenada. But hey the company paid the insurance and gave me a gas card! I drove it to Reno many times and even to San Francisco one Christmas. I totaled it in Wyoming. I stuck the nose out into a busy intersection at the wrong time … that being at the time a huge commercial utility truck was passing through the intersection at about 50 mph. Everything in front of the firewall disappeared, some of it was just laid out flat on the highway, other parts were strewn up the road for hundreds of yards. It was a very, very close call for me. My boss didn't seem to see the brighter side of the situation. He didn't give me another company vehicle.

10) 1975 Volvo 264 GLE—Mine was a rust color like this … lucky for me since it was plenty rusty when I bought it. Puttered around Wyoming in this high mileage and one time luxurious Volvo when I didn't get another pickup from the construction company—what, didn't they trust me anymore? Dumped it when I left out West. No one needs a rusty 180k Volvo to park everyday in New York City. Well at least I can say I once owned a top-of-the-line Volvo when they were still square and good and cool … and not made by Ford Motor. Actually, it was pretty fun to drive … while I had it.

11) 1976 AMC Pacer—Remember this classic from "Wayne's World?" A few hundred bucks, since it was pretty old when I bought it. This is about the right color. Puttered around in this one for a year or so after I left NYC to live down south again for a while. It had a good amount of mileage on it. A full 360-degree view for the driver, low and wide to the ground. Big seats. Good gas mileage, as I recall. You say it was odd. I say it was comfortable ! It was round … when round wasn't cool. Sold it when I went back to NYC for a while.

12) 1968 VW Bug—$750. You know what they looked like. Mine was … again … Carolina blue trimmed in rust spots. Another car to putter around in when I was back in Virginia for a while. Lasted 6 weeks, oil leak, engine locked solid. At that price, I wouldn't have cared about a durn oil leak … if only the seller had told me, I would have gladly poured a quart in it every morning. I caught a ride to the dealership. I told the salesman the 15 year old Bug was still sitting out on the highway with no engine. He said, "Yeah, I think I know about how much it's worth." He actually put down on the paper that he was giving $750 trade-in. Of course, car salesmen can push numbers around to make them look like anything. I suspect what he really did was charge me an extra $100 for the tow truck. For a long time, I saved the plastic ice scraper I found under the driver's seat … showing it off to friends as my "$750 ice scraper."

13) 1981 Fiat Strada/Ritmo—As I said, the dealer "gave me" $750 against the Bug to buy this one. The Strada about 10k on it, so I saw it as a good deal. I put a lot of miles on it and it got good gas mileage Fiat ultimately sold the blueprints for this car … to be used as basis for the Yugo, probably the worst car ever built. Nuff said. ***Plastic*** door handles? I ran it up to about 100k or so. Driver's door wouldn't open from the outside when I sold it. I cleverly left the door ajar (or discreetly opened it through the open window from the inside) as needed until the papers were signed. Know anyone else who's owned THREE Fiats? Mine was more of a Microsoft Blue in color. Most older folks don't even remember ever seeing one these things on the road. Little wonder.

14) 1984 Ford Escort Pony—"Pony" meant 'absolutely stripped,' Unlike this picture, mine had empty gutters where the rubber door moldings (to ward off parking lot dings) should have been. Non-color-coordinated black seat belts. Rims, not hubcaps. Cheapo all the way. Bought used with 4k on it at a Caddy dealership, the same one where I swapped Montegos. How such a car ended up on a Caddy lot is beyond me! Ran it up to 100k in three years commuting to my high school teaching job. Believe it or not, it was Carolina Blue … again !

15) 1983 BMW 320i—Getting a car somewhat easier on the ego than the Pony was part of "Plan A" (the license plate I put on the Pony to remind me that I should always be working on something ***every day*** to improve my lot in life). When I left high school teaching behind and went back to business—the furniture business—I could upgrade. Plus the high school principal (whom I didn't like) had a Beamer, so I just had to show him up. It was white, as in the photo, with a blue interior. It had been hit in the front quarter and reworked. So it required a few extra alignments along the way and I wore the one tire quicker … but the steering didn't actually 'pull" and so really no problem-o ! Plus the guy that owned the little car lot where I got it was strapped for cash, so he gave me a real deal. Too bad all the speeding tickets I got commuting on the Interstate with the Pony surfaced on my insurance just after the trade. Suddenly, my insurance payment was twice my car payment!! I put up with this indignity for about two years, but ultimately I gave up. I decided to find something else to drive for a while … until the tickets lapsed off my record.

16) 1975 Buick Electra 225 Limited Coupe. I sold the BMW to a co-worker and bought this. The old 'street name' for the 225 model was "Deuce and a Quarter." The B&W photo at right is the actual car. The color photos are of a very similar car that I snagged off the web. My friends called this car the Blue Whale. It had a **Carolina blue exterior … again … one more time**! (And I had yet to live in North Carolina … perhaps it was a omen …) It had a 'spongy soft' white custom vinyl top. The color photo of the interior is a 'spot-on' match with the actual car (except for the dangling triple gauges).

Well, my insurance did go down. On the books this car was almost worthless when I bought it. Paid cash, so no collision insurance was required. The older gentleman who owned it had garaged it on behalf of his son for many, many years (who apparently didn't want it). It may have had about 70k on it, but it was a 13 year old car when I bought it! Accordingly, it was in amazing good condition. Every inspection sticker was in the glove compartment, documenting that it had been driven no more than 4,000-6,000 miles per year.

5200 pounds of Detroit steel. Eight miles to the gallon. 450+ cubic inches of iron under the hood. Power steering so pumped that you could steer the thing with a pinky in a ten degree arc. Velour seats more comfortable than a couch. **Six** cigarette lighters. More space in the rear cabin than most cars today have in the *entire* cabin. A true land yacht. Believe me, people have long forgotten what a ***full-sized*** luxury car is.

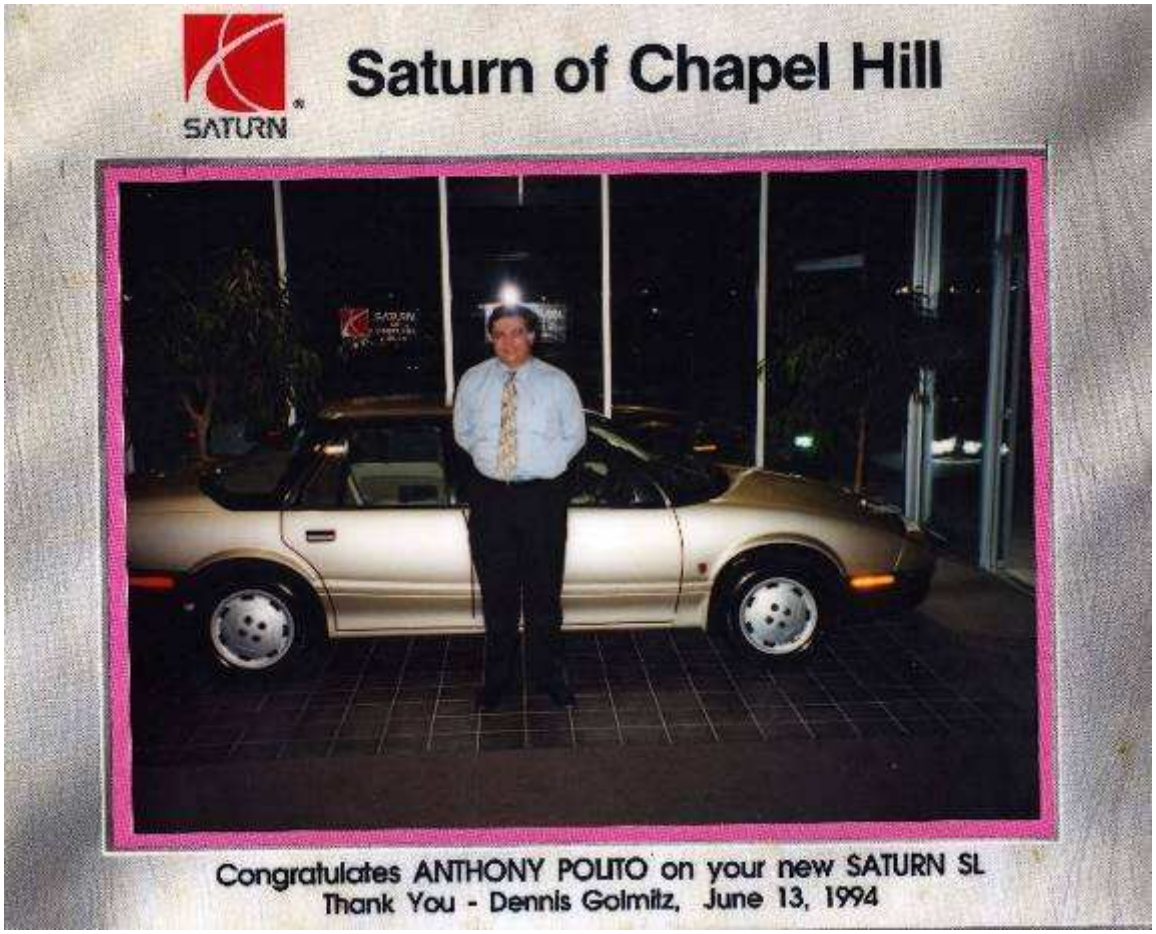
This car was built on the same production line and was essentially the same model as the '75 Caddy Eldorado.

I got forced off the Interstate near Statesville NC by two big rigs while driving it and it took out two metal signposts … and the ashes didn't fall off of my cigarette. Any less of a car and …

Of all the cars I ever owned this is the one I most wished I could have kept for a full body-off restoration. If I hit the lottery, I am going to find one and do it.

17) 1989 Hyundai Excel GLS Sedan—Well, 8 mpg was not going to work for commuting to Durham for my MBA program. At the time, the Hyundai Excel had the reputation for being the worst built car in American showrooms. However, it was also the least expensive new car in America … and so they sold pretty well. Just the kind of car I needed since I was going to burn zillions of miles up in a relatively short time. I found a repo with 11k at the local dealership. White exterior, dark blue velour interior. Someone in Jacksonville, NC had taken a SECOND note against it to add on ground effects, wild interlacing blue and red stripes running up, down and all over the sides of the car, spoiler and such. Actually, it didn't look all that bad … well it looked better than a plain white one. By this time I had learned how to drive a hard bargain on a car—after the papers were signed the dealer tried to get another $75 dollars out of me … I turned the tables on the salesman, squatting in his 'hot box' for hours, refusing to pay it. (The little cubicle where they sit you is called the 'hot box' or 'sweat box' … because they leave you in there to sweat for hours while they run in and out trying to get more money out of you. But I showed them how I could sit in the 'hot box' and make THEM sweat … as long as I sat there, he couldn't use it to sell other cars. That $75 was going to cost him dearly, so he caved.) Every part on the car wore out at 50k. After I replaced it all, it went along without problems for another 55k. I burned all those miles onto it during the commute and running back and forth to Durham (and then to Greenville when I was a temporary lecturer at ECU). I expect I was the only person in the 1990s to finish a top five MBA program driving America's cheapest, junkiest automobile. Of course, Korean auto manufacturers have come a long way since then … but the question is … have I?

18) 1994 Saturn SL Sedan— (Pictures on next page.) Well, I figured the Excel (with 105k on it) would surely die during the PhD program in Athens, Georgia … then what would I do? No job—no car loan. If I had understood Athens better, I might have tried to do without. (They have a huge campus and city bus system there.) This Saturn was pretty stripped and sold for just $11,000—still, it was a lot of car for the money at the time. And they were built very well to boot. The gold metallic with black fascia trim was about the snazziest looking color match up they offered. The cloth interior was a matching beige/gold. They didn't sell them in Carolina Blue. The car was a true bargain. While it lasted, that is. Which was about eight months and 9,000 miles. At which time one of UGA's athletes who was "celebrating the weekend" ran into the back of it at 45mph while I was sitting at a stoplight. I got knocked into the roof and clear into the back seat. It knocked me so silly, I couldn't hold a piece of silverware in my hand for a week. Heck, I couldn't even remember where I lived to tell anyone how to take me home. The athlete's $500 clunker went to the junkyard. My car went to get $7,000 of repairs, including a straightened frame.


SATURN
Saturn of Chapel Hill
Congratulates ANTHONY POLITO on your new SATURN SL
Thank You - Dennis Golmitz, June 13, 1994

19) 1996 Cougar XR-7—$10,000 in cash and a heavily-repaired Saturn is all it takes. This was a demo sitting on the showroom floor. The exterior color is correct, it had a saddle leather interior. I drove the salesman crazy. He spent two hours showing his boss how he could squeak another $50 out of a broke PhD student. Then he spent another hour trying to find the financing. (No job, remember?). After the papers were typed up … no going back on the deal … I suddenly remembered to 'mention' I had "10k cash down." Within five minutes, the showroom door slid open and the Cougar was mine. The salesman was ticked. He tried to pull a few fast ones (like forgetting to install the LoJack system I paid for), but he didn't get by.

I installed the coolest Blaupunkt sound system (called the Toronto in the US market) and matching CD changer. They dropped right into the middle and bottom DIN slots in the console. Instead of a pop-off face to deter theft, the Blau ran on a keycard (like the card you get at Kinko's with a lil' gold square chip). No cardo, no worko-radio. When you popped the card out, a little flashing orange 'tongue' stuck out to show thieves something they'd be needin' was missing. The card also memorized your pre-set stations, names of CDs, etc. You could change the color of the display to any color you wanted. The changer went in the bottom slot. It had five slots and five buttons – just push a button and that CD played. I'll never find another sound system that I liked as much as this one.

20) 1999 Cadillac DeVille—When I got a real university job I constantly looked at new cars but I couldn't bring myself to trade. I was still very happy with the Cougar seven years later (with only 60k miles). By that time, however, those things that just wear out with time (or # of starts) no matter how few miles—alternator, seat belt retractors, cracking leather seats, fading paint, etc. etc—well they were all starting to go. Then one day the dealership screwed up a $1000 engine warranty job … and asked me to pay for the re-do. Nope, no way, nada. Goodbye Ford Motor Company.

The Cougar was by this time only worth about $6,000 on the books … but fixing all that stuff would have run several thousand. It was time to let someone with a gift for mechanics become the second owner. This car seemed to epitomize a middle-aged man trying to look classic yet snazzy. You be the judge. People often said the car "looked like me." I suppose they meant like Tony Soprano. I bought the car with about 30,000 miles on it. Not a scratch on it … except where they had pried the first dealer's nameplate off the trunk. It still had all the paperwork in it, showing it was owned by a local person who had taken good care of it. The salesman didn't have much luck getting me to give on the price of the car … or my trade … but he stashed some extra money into the APR … but I liked the car, so I let him do it.

The sound system was touch-screen! Sirius radio built-in. Then some Pioneer 3-ways up front and Pioneer 5-ways in the back. And you could put mp3's on camera memory chips and plug them into it and play them. I customized a Caddy graphic to display on screen. Ummmmm.

21) 2006 Toyota Avalon Limited—The Caddy hit 70,000 miles and the dealership was nickel-and-dime-ing me to death. I'll miss it all the same. Not a week went by without someone saying I looked good in it. And I need all the help I can get. I suppose it was the day THE DEALERSHIP broke something while it was in the shop, handed it back to me that way and told me I might have to pay to have it fixed … well that was the day I decided I'd had enough of General Motors. It was time to practice what I preach … that being the superiority of the Toyota Production System and Japanese quality…….

I decided to replace the that "Plan A" license place (that went all the way back to car #14). There is a new morning-after contraceptive pill called "Plan B"—so I wasn't sure what people would think my license plate meant … and I really didn't need to find out. I considered SENSEI, the Japanese term for teacher, often used to refer to masters of the Toyota Production System … but it was already taken. "Kapeesh?" seemed to go with a big black car driven by a New York Italian … and it also captured the "flavor" of the "persistence/determination" idea behind "Plan A." This car is an Avalon Limited, no GPS. The mods are:

- **Black OEM mudguards**.
- **Center console woodgrain**. It took a ton of research to figure out how to get this stuff !
- **OEM Sirius sat radio**. Which came with a the weird, chunky antenna above the front windshield AS1 line.
- **L. L. Bean WaterHog monogrammed floormats**.
- **35% (legal) tint**.
- **Yokohama TRZs**. I dumped the OEM Michelins right away. OEM tires are ALWAYS cheap and wear out quick. First I tried Yoko V4s but the TRZs last even longer and make for a softer ride.
- **SonyEricsson HCB700 Bluetooth kit**. Very cool. That's the gumstick-shaped readout on the dash and the black dial on the center console. When I start the car, the thing powers up and wirelessly absorbs my cell phone's book. Then I just turn the dial to look through the names to call someone. The mike is mounted next to the sunroof control; I gave up the front dash speaker for output.

Also, I've jerry-rigged an in-dash/console MP3 AUX plug-in … without actually invading any of the wiring or components of the OEM audio system. Anyone could do the same sort of thing to their own car.

Ingredients: Monster RadioPlay 300 Wireless In-Car FM Transmitter for MP3 players (which sounds pretty durn good for what it is … and apparently a lot better than other brands). $50.

Griffin 10024-AUXCBLC, 6' Coiled Male-2-Male Aux Audio Cable. $15.

Datapro.Net 1223-06C, 6' Female-2-Female Panel-Mount Stereo Mini-Phono Cable. $15.

Universal DIN pocket kit. $15.

Recipe: Remove top of entire center console. Pull out utterly useless cassette deck from lower pocket in front dash and toss it in the trash. Install DIN pocket to back of center console where nose of cassette deck used to protrude. Drill ¼" hole in back center of DIN pocket. Undo the retaining nut on one end of the Datapro cable, install the one end of the cable into the drilled hole, then use retaining nut to hold in place. Run the other end of the Datapro cable to rear box area of the center console. Ream out a hole in bottom of rear box in center console just large enough to thread through the other end of the Datapro cable. Thread the entire molded end of the Datapro cable through the reamed hole, then reinstall top of center console. Poke a small hole in the felt pad that lays in the bottom of the rear box and stuff the Datapro cable through that. Plug the Monster RadioPlay 300 Transmitter into the 12V cigarette lighter inside the rear box and attach the other end of it to the dangling-dongling Datapro cable. Plug one end of the Griffin coiled cable into the back of the DIN pocket.

Ta-da. The DIN pocket (behind the push-to-open door) is a stash for both the coiled cable and the MP3 player … and a pack of cigarettes.

That's it … TWENTY-ONE cars !