

'I learned how to drive this summer'

I was almost 19 during my first newspaper internship in the summer of 1990. I had a driver's license, but I was an extremely inexperienced, fearful driver. For good reason – I was bad at it. I had actually failed my driving test once, which takes some doing.

When I was assigned my first story at what was then the *Roanoke Times and World-News*, I asked, "how will I get there?" (I was hoping for a bus.) My editor cheerfully showed me how to check out one of the "newsroom cars" – all Chrysler K-cars of one type or another.



1987 Dodge Aries K sedan

That whole night before that assignment, I prayed that if I were to crash that car, that I would at least injure myself in some way so that my editor wouldn't yell at me (much.) Nothing too bad, perhaps a broken arm or leg, I thought.

But, I managed to get to that assignment and all the other ones I was sent on that summer without hurting myself or others. Even when it took me an hour to get back because I was too scared to change lanes for my exit. Even when I went down

a one-way street the wrong way once, and even when I scared some pedestrian when I ran up on the sidewalk making a too-wide turn. I persevered even when the rubber brake pad slipped right off, leaving me pressing down on bare slippery metal. These were not the best-maintained cars.

All in all, I remember it as a beautiful first internship. I was such a child. I can't believe they handed me the keys to a car, much less let me write stories they would then actually publish. At the end of the summer during the intern going away party, I was cheerfully mentioned, "I learned how to drive this summer!" and the news editor was all "...come again?" But, too late!

So, thanks to Lee Iacocca for moving Chrysler in the direction of making K-cars, which were modestly priced enough for newspapers to have a few hanging around for reporters, thanks to the Roanoke Times for having those cars, and thanks, anonymous Dodge Aries, for helping me learn how to drive.

Lee Iacocca died July 2 at the age of 94. The charismatic U.S. auto industry executive who led both Chrysler and Ford will [be buried this week](#) in Troy, Michigan.

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