

# My Police Car

This would be about 1967 or 68. I was a feckless bachelor living in a basement apartment in Daly City. My job with IBM had me driving around the City, fixing punched-card equipment for IBM customers. I needed a reliable car for this, and my current car was not.

Somehow I became aware that the State was holding an auction of used vehicles, and I went. It was a silent auction; you just walked around the yard looking at the parked vehicles, and submitted a bid on paper. I put in what I thought was too low a bid on a used California Highway Patrol cruiser.

Thanks to the internet, I can show a picture of how the car would have looked before it was retired from duty:



For the auction they had removed the gumball machine from the roof and painted the doors black, but otherwise that's how it looked when I first saw it.

To my surprise, my bid was successful, and I was now the somewhat chagrined owner of a large black Ford Galaxy sedan with an immense V8 engine. (If this had all happened a decade later, after the release of Star Wars, I'd have surely named it "Darth".)

But it ran, and was reliable, and I used it. Although all police symbols had been removed, it still somehow radiated police-like menace. People around me on the street drove very carefully and legally. I could tell when the person ahead spotted me in their mirror; they slowed down.

One official accessory had been left on. It had a spotlight on the front fender (you can see one in the picture above). With a handle inside you could turn the spotlight to shine on whatever you wanted. Somehow that added to the menace.

Its acceleration and speed were remarkable. I didn't have the nerve to really push it, but once I yielded to the pleadings of an acquaintance who was crazier than I. It was a dark night on a suburban street. He settled behind the wheel and floored the gas. As the speedometer climbed past 100, he cried "Dave, *I love your car!*"

Although I enjoyed the CHP cruiser for a while, it really wasn't me, somehow. I bought a different car, an altogether nicer one (a lemon-yellow Pontiac as a matter of fact). I sold the cruiser to another rather shady acquaintance. He moved away and never bothered to change the registration, so I got notice of parking violations from southern California for a while. Then all was silence.