

DeLorean Motor Company achieved fame, just not success.

The DeLorean DMC-12 sport car became and remained famous as the time-traveling car in the **Back to the Future** movies, but the actual automobile was notorious for years before Marty McFly stepped inside one in 1985.

In 1956, **John DeLorean** took a position at **General Motors** as an engineer for the Pontiac division. At the time, GM was the biggest company in the world and the place to be. He created the Pontiac Tempest LeMans GTO, a new category of automobile that would come to be known as the **muscle car**. DeLorean's path through the upper echelon of GM seemed to set him on course for the company's presidency, but he dreamed of something bigger, the **DeLorean Motor Company**, which he established in Dunmurry, Ireland.



Construction of the DeLorean began in 1978, but the car needed quite a few changes, delaying production to 1981. Engine specs were the first to fall through, with a rotary engine being dropped first for a Ford V6 and then ultimately for a Peugeot V6. The considerably larger engine would not fit in the tiny space allocated for the rotary engine. A rear-engine layout was then decided on, but there were more problems which led to large portions of the car needing to be redesigned.

After even more issues, they had to ask Lotus, the only company that wanted to help move the process along. However, they changed many, many things on the car — the only thing left from the original design was the design, the gullwing doors, and the stainless-steel planked plastic body.

The **gap dimensions** weren't perfect because of the complicated body, the gullwing doors were just too heavy, the electronics were not the best, and the engine ventilation didn't always work which caused overheating. The other problem was that the DeLorean DMC-12 only had 132 hp but weighed 2,866



pounds (1,300 kilos), so it **was not a performance car** at all.

The workforce at the factory was woefully **inexperienced**, and with production already far behind schedule, there had not been time to make sure they were adequately trained. Finally, the higher cost of rework, waiting time, over processing and inventories triggered a high price tag for the finished product. These many deadly "wastes" caused many people to not buy the car.

About 9,000 units of the DeLorean DMC-12 were ultimately built, and **three golden DMCs** were finished because American Express ordered them. Well, those were the last three DMCs.

Critics were thrilled with how the car looked. But the car was underpowered, offered so-so handling, and was neither as groundbreakingly safe nor as fuel-efficient as DeLorean had promised it would be.

Driven into **bankruptcy**, DeLorean had to sell his home in New Jersey, where his nearly 500-acre estate was eventually purchased by Donald Trump and converted into a Trump National Golf Club, which he frequently visited as president.

It is very sad that this project didn't work out. We talk about lean manufacturing methods, achievements, and nice stories of success around it. However, we can also learn from failures in manufacturing, planning and even leadership.

DeLorean died on March 19, 2005, at Overlook Hospital in Summit, New Jersey, from complications after a stroke. He was 80 and had been living in a one-bedroom apartment in Bedminster with his fourth wife, Sally.



Sources:

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