



REMEMBER GOING TO THE movies with my father as a kid, and when I saw this chubby yellow car with the friendly eyes and wide smile for the first time, I fell in love with it right there and then.

I have wanted one ever since, and looked for a long time while living in Germany and even after immigrating to South Africa.

One night while browsing the net, I chanced on my dream machine. Not quite in New York, it was in neighbouring New Jersey, close enough for delivery in the Big Apple. It had to be there for dramatic reasons—taking it out of its urban environment in the heart of Manhattan, freeing it from cab-tivity.

I contacted the owner, a guy by the name of Orlando Lobelo, who seemed nicer on the phone than his name suggested. The car sounded too good to be true. Apparently the vehicle was an original, a highly coveted 1976 A-11 taxicab model with only 90 000 miles on the clock, a Chevy 5.7 litre V8 powerplant and GM's turbo Hydra-matic 400 automatic transmission.

After some research I found out that the cab had once been ordered new at the factory, not by a cabbie, but by the United States Government's DEA (Drug Enforcement Agency) to be exact. That explained the low mileage, powerful engine and almost fossilised donut crumbs in the crevices of the vinyl seats. Real taxi drivers preferred the more 'economical' straight-six. But if you are going to

hunt drug dealers in a two-tonne yellow monster through the streets of Manhattan, you sure do need some forward momentum.

I felt almost part of one of my favourite movie scenes from the *Blues Brothers*. Just after Elwood picks up Jake at the prison and jumps over a closing drawbridge in the new Bluesmobile, he drawls: 'It's got a cop motor, a 440-cubic-inch plant, it's got cop tires, cop suspension, cop shocks. It's a model made before catalytic converters, so it'll run good on regular gas. What do you say, is it the new Bluesmobile, or what?'

Even better, it was going to be my own Yellowmobile, my Cab of Good Hope. I was hooked, completely blinded by desire. Orlando knew it too and added to the myth by telling me he had rented out the car for various movie shoots in New York, including *Carlito's Way*. And yes, Al Pacino had been sitting in the back seat in one of the scenes.

That was it. After looking for a Checker for so many years, I had to buy this particular car, despite a very steep asking price and after seeing only four out-of-focus polaroids of the vehicle. Not to mention the fact the entire Atlantic ocean was between Cape Town and New York.

To cut a long story short, Columbian-American Orlando, with his long sleazy hair and greasy once-black suit, looked exactly like the kind of guy you shouldn't buy a car from.

When he delivered the Checker to our small (but nevertheless still expensive) hotel at Central Park, the front end was almost touching the tarmac and green anti-freeze was pouring out of the radiator. The only 'immaculate' thing in sight was the bundle of crisp dollar notes in my pocket, the balance of payment for the car.

While Orlando was counting out the green bills loudly, after having ordered a triple vodka on ice, everybody in the hotel lobby was convinced we had just sealed a major drug deal. ▶



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**THERE'S MORE**

- The Cab of Good Hope can be hired for promotions and film shoots. Contact Dieter on 0823433229 or visit [www.lossis.com](http://www.lossis.com)
- For more about Checker visit the website of the Checker Car Club of America [www.checkertaxistand.com](http://www.checkertaxistand.com).
- For movies where Checker cabs feature, try [www.imcdb.org/vehicles.php?make=Checker](http://www.imcdb.org/vehicles.php?make=Checker)