

Dale Crawford

Dale Crawford was born October 4, 1940, in Redlands, California, to William “Bill” Edward Crawford and Beatrice Wheeler Crawford. While he was an infant, Dale’s family moved to Modesto, California, where Dale grew up. His parents were originally from Elkland, Missouri, and Marshfield, Missouri, but they had moved to California during the Great Depression. Farming had proven unprofitable in Missouri; so they went west as fruit pickers, not an uncommon experience during that era for people from the region.

In Modesto, Dale’s dad soon purchased land and began operating a dairy farm. Dale’s early youth was spent morning and nights tending to the herd. To this day, he has an aversion to dairy cows. When he was about twelve years old his father sold the dairy herd and started crop farming. The family grew watermelons for market. Not long after this, his dad bought another farm and added peaches, almonds, and walnuts for harvest. These were better days for Dale, especially since a Ferguson TO-30 was used for the hard work. He remembers that his dad was a good farmer. The local FFA sent students to their place for instructions on farming. It probably came naturally to Mr. Crawford and the family since both sets of grandparents had been farmers. Dale and his two younger brothers managed to resist any urge to farm. His brothers continue to reside in California, one in Santa Barbara and one in Vacaville. At the age of ninety, his mother lives in Modesto, California.

By the time he was sixteen and not working on one of the two farms, Dale became immersed in the California mania for drag racing. Every community, it seems, had some form of drag strip. Dale and his friends not only competed in racing they built the cars from the ground up, including the engines. We now know where Dale gets his mechanical expertise for restoring his hit and miss engines. Dale’s favorite drag car was a 1954 Chevrolet.

After graduating from Downey High School in Modesto in 1959, Dale continued to work on the farm, but soon began working in a grocery store. His next job was driving a dump truck. He obtained all his licenses and permits for truck driving, which would set the stage for his eventual career in cross-country driving.

Still in his early twenties, he met Linda Thomas, an Arkansas girl who was visiting relatives in Modesto. Her cousin, Ovie Barnett, was a best friend of Dale’s, and Ovie introduced the two young folks. Linda lived in Wheeler, Arkansas, and soon returned home. They corresponded often, and soon Dale drove his Corvette to Arkansas on a visit. After returning to California, Dale, ever the romantic, sent an engagement ring in the mail. She said, “Yes,” and the couple married in 1964 and set up housekeeping in Modesto. That was fine, but Dale said it kept him broke sending her back to Arkansas for her visits with her folks. Dale had been really impressed with Arkansas’ park-like green forests, which contrasted with the sparse vegetation in his area of California; so it was an easy decision in 1967 to move to Arkansas. Dale and Linda have three surviving children. Sadly, one child died at the age of two. Their children live in Springdale, Little Flock, and Bella Vista.

In Arkansas, Dale used his experience as a truck driver to get employment with the Willis Shaw trucking company. He drove nationwide for Shaw and liked the job, but the pay system left some to be desired for a young family. He was paid by the trip and paid monthly. After driving for Shaw for a few years, in 1975 Dale heard that Wal-Mart was hiring drivers. This interested him since the pay was \$3.00 per hour and pay was every two weeks. He went to work for Wal-Mart in 1975 as the #23 driver hired by Sam Walton. This is impressive in that Wal-Mart now has over 7,000 drivers.

The first twelve years, Dale drove a moving van for the company. This job paid more than the pay

for regular drivers. He was kept busy moving new hires to the Bentonville, Arkansas, headquarters of Wal-Mart. His most recognizable person to move was David Glass, who became the head of the company for several years. Notably, Dale, on a moving assignment, was the driver of the first truck with the Wal-Mart logo to enter the state of California. He remembers how difficult it was to get the permits to enter California on that trip and on subsequent trips into the 1980s.

In the late 1980s, Dale began driving between warehouses in the southeastern part of the U. S. He drove a route between Georgia and Florida and a route between South Carolina and Virginia. He made two trips a week delivering freight and mail between the warehouses. At the time, Wal-Mart had its own company mail system; therefore, part of the load would be mail and part freight. He also regularly delivered payrolls for all employees in the region. On one occasion, he was stranded in an ice storm at Jackson, Mississippi, and all paychecks were late.

Dale was in the company of Sam Walton on many occasions. Sam knew Dale by name in spite of the many employees in Wal-Mart. At a time when the nation faced serious fuel shortages, at a company meeting at a store in Camdenton, Missouri, Sam was concerned about keeping his trucks on the road. He drew Dale aside and asked what it was like obtaining fuel for trips from a driver's perspective. Dale told him that it was necessary to make extra stops for fuel to obtain it wherever available. During their conversation, which lasted about an hour, Sam vowed that his trucks would have fuel even if he had to buy his own refinery.

Dale retired from driving for Wal-Mart in 1998 after having driven an amazing 4.2 million miles. He saw many changes in the trucking industry. Perhaps one of the most impressive was the tracking system which came into being. When he started driving, it was necessary to stop and telephone his location and other pertinent facts to the home office. During his career, computers began tracking the trucks but not as efficiently as today. Today, satellite tracking can follow the complete route of a truck and know where it is at any time and what cargo it carries. And too, Dale said trucks today carry a "black box" much like airplanes. If an accident occurs, the speed of the truck, the use of brakes in the event, the force of the impact, etc., will be recorded. Dale drove in all forty-eight states and Canada during his driving years. It is nice to hear him say, in spite of all the places he has visited, he likes Northwest Arkansas best.

Since 1985, Dale and Linda have lived in a home in a Little Flock, Arkansas, neighborhood built by Tired Iron member Jake Layher (See Tired Iron Newsletter of Nov/Dec 2008 for his biography). Dale knew Jake's daughter who worked at Wal-Mart truck dispatch at the time. Dale and Linda attended her wedding reception at Jake's house in Little Flock, and they saw the new home next door and soon bought it. All this is significant in Dale's membership in Tired Iron since Jake and Dale joined at the same time.

Jim Caylor, Dale's brother's father-in-law, was a restorer of old engines and a member of EDGE&TA, Branch 13, in California. In this small world, Jim gave Dale the phone number of a Tired Iron member back in Northwest Arkansas by the name of Randy Gallaway (See Tired Iron Newsletter of Sept/Oct 2006 for his biography). When he returned to Arkansas, Dale called Randy and learned all about Tired Iron. In a few days, Dale and Jake visited a Tired Iron display of tractors and engines at the Lakeland Marina on Highway 71 in Springdale. They both joined the club and have been active members ever since.

At the time, Dale didn't have any engines. He soon bought two engines from Eddie Ridener, another Tired Iron member. The engines were an LB International and an incomplete but running Fuller Johnson pump engine. He now has fifteen old engines, some of which are quite rare. This total number of engines should rise after an upcoming trip to Missouri where some engines are waiting for him to come and get. His collection also includes several engine-operated implements. They include

two metal saws, several water pumps, and two corn grinders. His favorite engine exhibit is his 8 h.p. Witte engine which powers a big buzz saw for sawing logs. Dale is any club president's dream member. He willingly and frequently trailers his exhibits to events all around Northwest Arkansas where crowds of people gather to hear about his engines. He will be even more popular when he completes his newest project to connect a fan to one of his engines to cool off the crowd when the temperatures soar. Dale serves as an excellent ambassador for Tired Iron at these special presentations and at our shows as he attracts people from all walks of life to Tired Iron.

Besides collecting and restoring engines, Dale enjoys RVing. Notably, from about late December until late March or early April, Dale and Linda journey to Aransas Pass, Texas, for the winter. They enjoy the warmer weather and a circle of friends there. We miss them at the monthly meetings during that time, but they always make it back in time for the spring show. For all that he does and for all Linda's patience in allowing him to use so much time with Tired Iron, we thank you both.

