

BIG ROCK

By James Collins

In 1968, an associate of mine bought a beautiful house on Long Island. He had a wife and a couple of kids and was a retired merchant Marine engineering officer. Innovative and adventurous, he always looked at things from a slightly different perspective. His new house sat on a small rise and had a great view of the surrounding neighborhood. He and his wife discussed this and he thought that a large boulder would look wonderful on the top of this rise. All around the county, there was a building boom going on and construction trucks were everywhere. Mickey took his Citroen and started touring the construction sites. He came across one area where the rock of his dreams was sitting off to the side of the road. This was round, the size of a small desk and weighed about a ton. Mickey went to the construction site supervisor and asked if the rock was for sale. When the supervisor said yes, Mickey, without any negotiation, offered him \$75. The Foreman then had Mickey open the trunk of his car and he directed two men with a forklift to lift the rock and place it in the trunk.

Mickey was ecstatic until he got home. He then realized he had not quite thought this problem out as well as he could have. Mickey did not have a forklift to get the rock out of the trunk. However, Mickey never hesitated to try to solve a simple problem, after all, he was a retired naval officer used to handling strange problems under difficult conditions. Mickey thought about this for a while, analyzed all the tools at hand and came up with a plan. The Citroen was an unusual car manufactured in France. It had independent hydraulic suspension for the front wheels and the rear wheels. Mickey discussed his plan with Jane his wife and incorporated her into the operation.

In Mickey's mind, it was a simple plan. He positioned the Citroen facing the house with the Boulder positioned just a little ahead of where he wanted it to reside. He then got big hawser ropes, tied them around the Boulder, and affixed them to the rear bumper of his wife's new Mazda, which was pointed down the hill. Mickey rolled the car down the hill until the ropes were taut.

"Jane I'm going to jack the front of the car up with the hydraulic lift and drop the rear down. Then I am going to beep the horn to signal you to gun the Mazda down the hill. At the same time, I am going to gun the Citroen towards the house. When I feel the rock exit the car, I will beep the horn twice to signal you to jam on the brakes and stop the Mazda. The inertia associated with the boulder should keep it in place and it will slide out of my car and land right here."

The plan was great, the timing was great, but the execution was terrible. Parts of the plan worked exactly as anticipated, however not everything had been considered. Mickey positioned the car, adjusted the hydraulics, beeped the horn and both he and Jane gunned their engines at the same time. Everything shook; the car pulled out from under the rock, as Jane roared down the hill, and braked to a stop when she heard the two beeps. Unfortunately, the ropes still held the rock, which started moving. Once the Boulder started rolling down the incline, it built up speed and rolled past Jane's car. Unfortunately, the rope did not detach from the Boulder and once it passed Jane's car, the Boulder was

in command. It spun her car around, tore off the rear bumper and one fender and continued on its merry trip until it reached a flat spot and rolled to a stop. Luckily, for Mickey, it stopped approximately three feet from the property line, on his side. To this day, it resides there in all its splendor.

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