

# GLENN BROWN

*Bringing people and cars together has been this Cadillac & La Salle Club president's goal*



BY MARK J. McCOURT • PHOTOGRAPHY BY RICHARD LENTINELLO  
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**Named after the fact that Cadillac was the first production car fitted with a starter motor, *The Self-Starter* is a professional-quality magazine that's published 11 times per year.**

Not all things that end up one way start out the same; to wit, it was his instant dislike of the new-for-1959 Cadillac that stands out to Glenn Brown as one of his first memories of this brand, which would become one of his life's passions. Those over-the-top tailfins and glittery grilles were more than the 5-year-old boy could stomach, being a fan of the relatively conservative earlier models. However, his undeterred interest in the marque would later lead him to work his way up through the ranks of the 7,000-member, all-volunteer Cadillac & La Salle Club, and to hold the office of president for two consecutive terms. There he fostered an environment of openness and inclusion for all Cadillac fans, no matter their background or the state of their vehicles.

"I've been a car person for eons," explains the Oak Park, Illinois, resident and trial attorney for the Federal Aviation Administration. "Being a kid growing up in the late 1960s and 1970s, I got into the muscle car scene, but I had a problem—I literally didn't fit into the Camaros or Mustangs, because I grew to be six-foot-ten. I couldn't afford any of the larger muscle cars, so I went through a succession of older Oldsmobile 98s, which were like cheap Cadillacs; I fit in those comfortably. The first

real Cadillac that I bought was a tired 1979 Eldorado, which was scary to look at, but which rode and drove very nicely."

That Eldorado became Glenn's entry point into a world that he had before only admired from afar; his next Cadillac was a 1965 Eldorado convertible. "I had just finished restoring a 1973 Chevrolet Caprice. I was looking for a 1955 Eldorado, and I stumbled across this Wisconsin car, one of 2,125 built in 1965. The person I bought it from told me that he'd found it on a small used car lot. It was showing 92,000 miles on the odometer, but my guess is that this had been turned back, and that the car had 145,000 or more. It had been painted four or five times, and there were about 10 pounds of Bondo in the passenger door. Someone had started restoring it, but had gone in the wrong direction, because it was refinished with white enamel paint, a vinyl top with a plastic rear window and a blue velour interior. These were all things that I'd have to change so that it didn't look tacky, and I was very involved with its restoration, done at a local shop."

This silver Eldorado is one of six collectible Cadillacs—the others are a 1947 Fleetwood 60S, a 1957 Eldorado Brougham, a 1965 Fleetwood 60S, a 1972 Fleetwood and a 1976 Sedan de Ville—that



*“Running the club was like being a ship’s captain— you have to keep it off the reef, and it’s steady as she goes...”*



**Of all his Cadillacs, Glenn's favorite is this silver 1965 Eldorado convertible with white leather interior. He drives it regularly throughout the Chicago area, mostly during the summer with the top down. His comment, "Everybody's got a Chevy, but not everyone has a Cadillac," is spot on.**

Glenn owns today. It exemplifies the two things that Cadillac means most to him: "Number one is a sense of style. And number two is that symbol that stood for many years: Owning a Cadillac meant that you'd arrived, or that you believed that you'd arrived. That symbolism took a hit during the energy crisis and into the 1980s, but it's starting to come back."

Owning a growing number of Cadillacs was only part of what pushed Glenn into becoming an active member of his local Chicago chapter of the Cadillac & La Salle Club. "I am the child of a General Motors employee, and I believe in buying American. In the early 1980s, I was considering buying a car from an orphan manufacturer. I spoke with a man from that marque's club at a show, telling him that I was considering buying one, and asking if he would help me with information and advice. He told me that he'd introduce me to the president of their club, who was also at that show. He led me over to the man, who was speaking with someone else. I waited to speak with him for about five minutes, but he never acknowledged my presence. Now, I'm not too easy to ignore—I'm a very tall black man who, at the time, weighed about 260 pounds. I got frustrated and walked away.

"There was a vendor at that same show who was selling parts for my 1979 Eldorado. I asked him how much the parts were, and he asked me if I was a member of the club, because he offered a club discount. I didn't know which club he was referring to, so he told me about the Cadillac & La Salle Club. I checked it out, and I joined," Glenn recalls.

"I didn't go to meetings at first, but when I did go, I found a group of 40 people who I didn't know, and who didn't know me. They all had much nicer cars than I did. I was intimidated at first, but some reached out to me, asked about my cars and told me about theirs. These people had the same 'C.A.D.,' what we call Cadillac Acquisition Disease. They were understanding and helpful, and I began going

to more club events.

"I became friends with the regional officers," Glenn says. "In 1994 or '95, the president of our club wanted to host a national event, and I offered to represent them at a C&LC meeting in Detroit, because I was already headed there on business. Thanks to that meeting, I became our regional representative to the national board. I was soon asked to serve as a national table officer, but I declined, thinking that I wouldn't have the time. About nine years ago, a candidate for club president asked if I would sit as his vice president, and after hemming and hawing, I agreed." Glenn himself became president in 2006, and served until his second term ended with the closing of the Grand National on July 17, 2010.

"Running the club was like being a ship's captain—you have to keep it off the reef, and it's steady as she goes," he says. "A few issues came up under my watch. The first was admitting professional cars, as some people complained that they were not factory-made, but we persevered in convincing people that they were Cadillacs and should be accepted nonetheless.

"The issue of modified cars came up about six years ago. Some members wanted to know what we should do about them. I said, 'They're Cadillacs, and we're all enthusiasts.' Many of these modifieds and resto-rods were made from cars that guys in the club wouldn't touch, and they were remade into something useful and attractive. Some people think this type of car isn't worth seeing, and it may not be your cup of tea," Glenn muses. "Cars like this will likely not be winners at our shows because they're not authentically restored, but if they weren't found and modified, they might not be here today at all."

Glenn recalls another story about a modified Cadillac whose owner may not have fit the typical Cadillac & La Salle Club demographic, but whose passion for the brand was as strong as any member's. "I've been trying to make the club more inclusive,"



The Cadillac Ranch outside of Amarillo, Texas, is one of many Cadillac-specific sites that Glenn has visited in his travels; his Eldorado Brougham is a 1957 model.

he says. “We have to get new people involved, people from all walks of life and from different social and economic strata. I met a Latino man who showed me photos of his 1979 Eldorado—it was a low-rider painted with murals, with angel-hair carpeting and a hydraulic suspension. He was very proud of the car, and the workmanship was impeccable. We don’t want an entire show field of modified cars, but that man was a true Cadillac enthusiast. If we could draw him into the club, perhaps we could make him a convert to originality in the future.

“Some clubs are losing 20, 30 or even 40 percent of their membership as the members get older. If we don’t broaden our horizons and open the club up to people who may not look or think like us, the club will disappear. You may not think much of the low-rider, but that guy knows his stuff. You may dislike his candy paint, but can he do a lacquer job of that same quality? Sure! Reaching out to people who have these skills is beneficial. We have to work together in that direction.”

People who are often left on the fringes of the classic car hobby are not the only ones that Glenn reached out to during his recently completed four-year term as C&LC president; he emphasized starting closer to home. “We have to get our families involved, too. My wife, Valerie, continues to tolerate my car addiction, and she may slowly be coming around. And I’ve infected my college-age son, Mathieu, with this old car disease. He’s inherited his grandmother’s 1974 Mercedes-Benz 450, and wants a Cadillac of his own.

“If we don’t involve young people, our cars will become tomorrow’s refrigerators. Your classic 1959 Biarritz might someday be traded in on a new Corolla, because it means nothing to your grandkids. Our club has a Youth Section, and we have to involve our children so that they appreciate this hobby. If we don’t get younger people involved—even people

who don’t look or talk like you—this hobby will disappear.”

Glenn has a positive outlook on Cadillac’s place in today’s collector car world. “More people are recognizing the innovating that Cadillac has done through the years,” he explains. “Being General Motors’ top cars, they originated a lot of the ‘toys’ that have come on the market. They’re excellent road cars, and with a little tinkering, they can be decent in the corners, too. A lot of people are realizing that, especially in the American market, they’re the ultimate. There were some cloudy days in the mid-1980s that tarnished the crest a bit, but people are recognizing the things that the marque has done, even through that time.

“Everybody’s got a Chevy, but not everyone has a Cadillac. If I roll onto a show field full of 1957 Chevys with a ’57 Eldorado, I guarantee you it’s going to get noticed. To an extent, people recognize the fact that Cadillacs are not everywhere, that they’re the top of the line and were what people were striving for, and they realize that it’s a lot easier to restore a Chevy. To restore a Cadillac to a standard that’s as good as or better than that 1957 Chevy, you have to chase the parts or make the parts. People are starting to recognize the workmanship that’s necessary to create a truly fine Cadillac.

“The Cadillac & La Salle Club is doing very well. I think we can maintain and grow the membership. And we have a new charitable affiliate, the Cadillac & La Salle Club Museum and Research Center. They’ve just opened a facility at the Gilmore Car Museum in Kalamazoo, Michigan. We already have a gallery in one of their buildings, and we’ll be constructing our own building when we have the money. We’re here for the long haul, and we’re fortunate that our favorite cars are still being made, so there’s a continual fill-in behind us. I think this club will be around to celebrate its 100th anniversary, and the 200th anniversary of Cadillac.”



Glenn’s 1972 Cadillac is a long-wheelbase Fleetwood model; he presented the club’s Cadillac Herald award to former GM CEO Rick Wagoner in 2008.