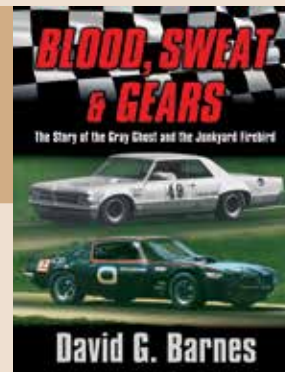


Blood, Sweat & Gears: The Story of the Gray Ghost and the Junkyard Firebird

By David G. Barnes, published by Telemachus Press (2014), softcover, 273 pages, \$9.99

<http://www.telemachuspress.com/Home.aspx>



Reviewed by Thomas J. Byrne

Did you ever have an old car? Maybe it was actually your wife's car. Solid, generally reliable, nothing flashy, nothing that gets your own internal engine revving. Did there ever come a day when you happened to walk past that car, not really looking at it because you see it every day, but on this particular day something caused you to hesitate, to refocus your eyes on that car, and think...What if?? What if I were to bore out the cylinders and add high-compression pistons, stiffen the chassis, tune the suspension, put in a high-performance transmission and competition Hurst shifter, patch up the dings and rust spots in the body, slap on some gumball tires—you know, turn it into a race car? You've had that idea, right?

Me neither.

But Herb Adams did. And he was in a good position to make that fanciful thought a reality. So, aided by a group of like-minded gearheads with the necessary combination of skills and know-how, all of whom he convinced to share his can-do enthusiasm, he did it. And unlike virtually every other car they would race against, they did it without any support from an automaker.¹

The story and its cast of characters has somewhat the feel of a Hollywood "buddy" movie (actually, a "group of buddies" movie)—think *Wild Hogs*, not *The Expendables*, though with a little imagination you can picture Herb Adams as a racing-team version of Major Reisman (Lee Marvin) from *The Dirty Dozen*. Like Reisman, Adams recruits his team one at a time, picking skilled machinists able to deal with the mission requirements: engine and drivetrain, chassis and suspension, transmission

and axle, fuel systems, metal fabrication—everything but an explosives expert. (Spoiler alert: none of the guys are plucked from death row.)

The roster starts with Adams, the leader with a vision and the confidence that he can get others to share his dream. He's the glue (or, in this case, the Bondo) that fills in the gaps, the CPU that makes all the parts work in harmony. Then there's Joe and Tom and Jeff and Harry and Ted and Dutch and another Tom (a later addition who has a much-needed flatbed trailer). They are not as colorful and idiosyncratic as such groups are in the movies, although Dutch's school-of-experience fix for an unexpected defroster problem is as entertaining and dramatic as any screenwriter could have imagined. (All I'll say here is it involves empty beer cans, pop rivets, and duct tape—the only thing missing is a cameo from Tim "the Tool Man" Taylor.)

Last, but certainly not least, there is the one essential member of any racing team: the driver. And here is where the members of Adams's team—Adams himself not excepted—have their first major crisis of faith: How do we convince a proven, top-notch driver to join a team that is turning a seven-year-old family car into a Trans-Am race car with no factory support and no sponsors, and doing all the work after hours and on weekends? How, indeed!

The author is a member of the State Bar of Michigan and was, at one point, corporate counsel for American Axle & Manufacturing, though he identifies himself as an investment advisor on the back cover.² Given all that, one could be forgiven for thinking they have a sense of him. You

know, *de rigueur* three-piece suit—even his pajamas probably have a vest, right?—drinks everything with his pinky up in the air, and so on. But here's the thing. After you've been riding along for a while with Barnes at the authorial wheel, it dawns on you—this guy, at heart, is a gearhead. He loves this stuff. Pinky in the air? Hell no! After reading this book, you'll have a new image of Barnes in your head: a guy who, at the end of the work day, closes his laptop (with its alternating Mario Andretti-Maria Bartiromo screen saver); changes into jeans, steel-toed work boots, a NASCAR t-shirt, and Tigers ball cap; and heads for a bar where extended pinkies are snapped off by custom (if not by law).

Barnes's enthusiasm and affection for cars, racing, and the people who made this dream—Herb's dream—a reality pulses throughout the book: in his description of the literal nuts-and-bolts details of the story, his evocation of the camaraderie of the team, even his word portraits of racetracks and his play-by-play narration of races.

As a reviewer (though even more as just a reader), I feel obligated to point out that there are some speed bumps along the way. The problem, in an overall sense, is that the performance of Barnes's editorial team stands in stark contrast to that of Herb Adams's finely-tuned crew. The book is far too long, by a considerable margin, to sustain its inherent momentum. Its narrative drive is hampered by an overabundance of technical detail which, like a blown head gasket, results in a loss of power. Exacerbating this problem is the frequent repetition of that detail in both description and dialogue.

Another way of describing the problem is in terms of literary genres. On the copyright page, the publisher identifies the book as “a work of historical fiction.” It is, to this reviewer at least, quite obviously a work of “creative nonfiction”—the genres have minimal overlap—and would have benefited greatly from hewing to the guidelines of that genre. Such big-picture structural issues, along with relatively minor hiccups like inconsistencies of terminology and chronology, are part of what a publisher and its editorial team get paid to handle.³ Enough said.

Readers with any spark of interest in cars and auto racing will be—and should be—undeterred by these imperfections. They are easily understood, and forgiven, as the heart-on-his-sleeve passion of a car guy and first-time author, one not well served by his pit crew. So get the book, buckle up your four-point harness, and take a ride—several rides—with the Gray Ghost. And don't be surprised if you start looking at that car in your garage in a whole new light. ■



Thomas J. Byrne clerked for jurists on the Michigan Supreme Court, Michigan Court of Appeals, and U.S. District Court for the Western District of Michigan. Before law school, he was an FDNY firefighter and, before that, a U.S. Navy hospital corpsman. He now lives in Virginia.

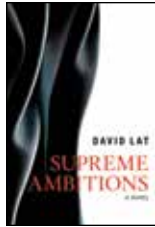
ENDNOTES

1. As the subtitle instantly alerts the reader, this book is about two cars. But the major thrust of the book, both in number of pages and level of reader-grabbing excitement, is the story of the Gray Ghost, and this review will leave the Lazarus-like resurrection of the “Junkyard Firebird” as an unopened present for future readers of the book.
2. The SBM member directory shows he was admitted in 1991 and lists him currently as “Chairman, President & CEO [of] Heber Fuger Wendin Investment Advisors.” Full disclosure: this reviewer was a member of the State Bar of Michigan from 1992 to 2012, but has never met Mr. Barnes, either personally or professionally.
3. The publisher of this book identifies itself as “a ‘work for hire’ author services company.” Telemachus Press, *Who is Telemachus Press?* <<http://www.telemachuspress.com/Who.aspx>> (accessed January 20, 2015).



On the bookshelf

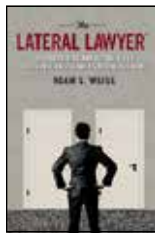
The following are summaries of a selection of new books published by the American Bar Association to support professional excellence and greater understanding of the law.



Supreme Ambitions

By David Lat (watch video)

In this highly acclaimed legal fiction thriller, the author, managing editor of the legal blog Above the Law, brings the reader inside the chambers of powerful, life-tenured federal judges through the lens of law clerk Audrey Coyne, a recent Yale Law School graduate, and her boss Christina Wong Stinson, a federal appeals court judge. Both pursue possible paths to their dream jobs at the United States Supreme Court, and on the way their personal agendas and allegiances to the law collide. *The New York Times* called *Supreme Ambitions* the “most buzzed-about novel of the year.”

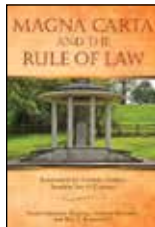


The Lateral Lawyer

Opportunities & Pitfalls for the Law Firm Partner

By Adam S. Weiss (watch video)

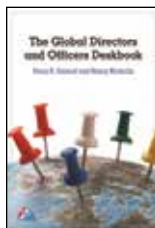
Every year, about 5 percent of the partners in law firms nationwide switch firms, typically moving for superior compensation, to avoid client conflicts, or for greater autonomy and leadership opportunities in what is usually the most significant decision of their careers. In this book, the author, a lawyer and legal recruiter, details how the process of switching firms can be fraught with personal and professional difficulty and risk. He also reveals how that process actually works in the real world—demystifying just how one goes about switching firms as a partner-level attorney.



Magna Carta and the Rule of Law

By Daniel Barstow Magraw, Andrea Martinez, and Roy E. Brownell II

Marking the upcoming 800th anniversary of Magna Carta, this book takes a fresh look at the document sealed in 1215 by examining its impact on U.S. institutions, such as the United States Supreme Court, and presidential power. The book explores Magna Carta's continuing influence on individual rights, international law, and freedom of religion, among other areas. Magna Carta is widely recognized as the foundation for the modern concept of executive accountability and the rule of law that has evolved over centuries, particularly in the United States and the United Kingdom and its Commonwealth countries.



The Global Directors and Officers Deskbook

Edited by Perry S. Granof and Henry Nicholls

This unique book provides an overview of the landscape of directors and officers within and outside of the United States, with particular emphasis on those jurisdictions where the majority of business interests are non-U.S. based. It is structured so readers can quickly and effectively determine the similarities/differences in directors' and officers' liability and insurance. Authors from 26 countries define the specifics germane to their respective locations in terms of statutory and regulatory framework, indemnification, regulatory proceedings, shareholder representative actions, insolvencies, arbitration and ADR, and insurance issues.