

Child Prodigy

When Dietrich Seney was two years old, his father would carry him in a satchel and walk to the Golden Gate Park in San Francisco.

Along the way, he would talk to Dietrich about the trees and clouds ... and cars.

“There goes a Volvo – that’s made in Sweden,” Donald Seney would tell his young son. “And there goes a Volkswagen – that’s made in Germany.”

“I was amazed -- he picked it up in nothing flat,” Donald recalls. “Within weeks, he was naming cars on his own. I remember sitting on our porch as a Volvo passed by. He turned and said, ‘That’s a Volvo, it’s made in Sweden.’”

“He was just *three years old.*”

When Dietrich’s grandmother took him to Fairy Tale Town in Sacramento one day, she remembers her grandson rattling off the names and models of nearly every car in the parking lot, one by one.

He was four.

Years later, when the family was driving their Isuzu Trooper on the highway, Dietrich’s mother, Lydia, nonchalantly said, “Look, there’s the same Trooper as ours.”

Dietrich, only six years old at the time, fired back: “That car is a year older than ours. It has round headlights. Ours are square.”



*By Rick Weinberg
California Business Journal*

From the time Dietrich Seney was barely old enough to walk, he could not only name virtually every automobile on the market, but he could also tell you the country from which it originated.

There are notable child prodigies throughout history. Mozart played the harpsichord at age three. By six, he had written his first musical composition and his first symphony at the age of eight. William Rowan Hamilton mastered Latin, Greek and Hebrew at the age of five. By 13, he knew 13 languages.

Seney is somewhat similar ... when it relates to cars.

“Everyone’s memories of Dietrich as a little boy are tied to cars,” says his mother. “He even had the ability to discern engine sounds. I remember my uncle visiting us after he

***“I remember sitting on our porch as a Volvo passed by. Dietrich turned and said, ‘That’s a Volvo, it’s made in Sweden.’ He was just three years old.”
— Donald Seney***

bought a Mercedes with a diesel engine. He was so proud of it and especially the sounds of the engine. He knew Dietrich loved cars so he asked him, ‘Dietrich, what do think my new car?’”

Four-year-old Dietrich fired back: “It sounds like a bucket of bolts.”

Everyone was speechless.

Dietrich has no idea where this uncanny ability came from, particularly since his father “isn’t a motor head.” Far from it - he was a college professor.

“I just remember that I loved the sound of car engines,” Dietrich says. “The sound excited me. It captured my interest.”

His thoughts relating to a car’s style and engineering were also surprisingly unusual for such a young boy.

“I remember sitting in my grandfather’s 1978 Cadillac Coupe de Ville when I was three years old,” he says. “When I looked around the car, I asked my grandfather, ‘Why doesn’t this car have four doors? It’s certainly big enough to have four doors.’”

His grandfather laughed and told young Dietrich that the engineers designed it with style

and performance in mind.

When you meet and speak with Dietrich, you immediately recognize how poised, mature and intelligent he is. He comes from a family of scholars. His father has a Masters and PhD in Political Science from the University of Washington, his mother has a Masters in Government from Sacramento State University and his younger sister Claire is close to receiving her Masters in East Asian Studies from UCLA.

When Dietrich went to college, he had his eyes set on Computer Studies.

“I fell in love with computers at the age of 10 - it was my ‘nerd’ phase,” he says with a laugh. “I was Vice President of the Computer Science Club [at South Lake Tahoe High School] and I figured it was a good way to get out of class to fix computers around the school and get \$100 to throw a big pizza party at the end of the year.”

He soon found Computer Studies were “tedious and boring” so he switched his major to Economics at Humboldt State University in Northern California.

“I like studying the abstract but economics related to the real world,” he says. “I thought that might be a better career path.”

It wasn’t. Economics’ nickname, after all, is “the dismal science.”

“I then realized it was back to the drawing board,” he says.

One day, he returned to his dormitory room frustrated about his studies and his major. He flopped down in a chair and was about to put his face in his hands when he fixated on a magazine on the table in front of him -- a car magazine.

Power Player

That's when it hit him: Why not become an automobile journalist for Car and Driver, AutoWeek or another automotive publication? After all, he loved cars, had tremendous knowledge of them, and he had a knack for writing.

He switched his major to Journalism and graduated with his Bachelor of Arts degree. Meanwhile, his sister graduated high school the same month. To celebrate both graduations, the family took a vacation to London, Paris, Florence, Venice and Rome.

While sitting in their vacation apartment one day in Paris, Dietrich decided that before he might become an automobile writer, he first had to spend time learning even more about cars. No better place to start, he figured, than at a car dealership – “and make a few bucks at the same time,” he says.

One of his best friends happened to be living in Costa Mesa, California. So Dietrich phoned him and told him of his plans. “Well, you gotta come here – there's like five car dealerships right around the corner,” his friend, Conor Robinson, said.

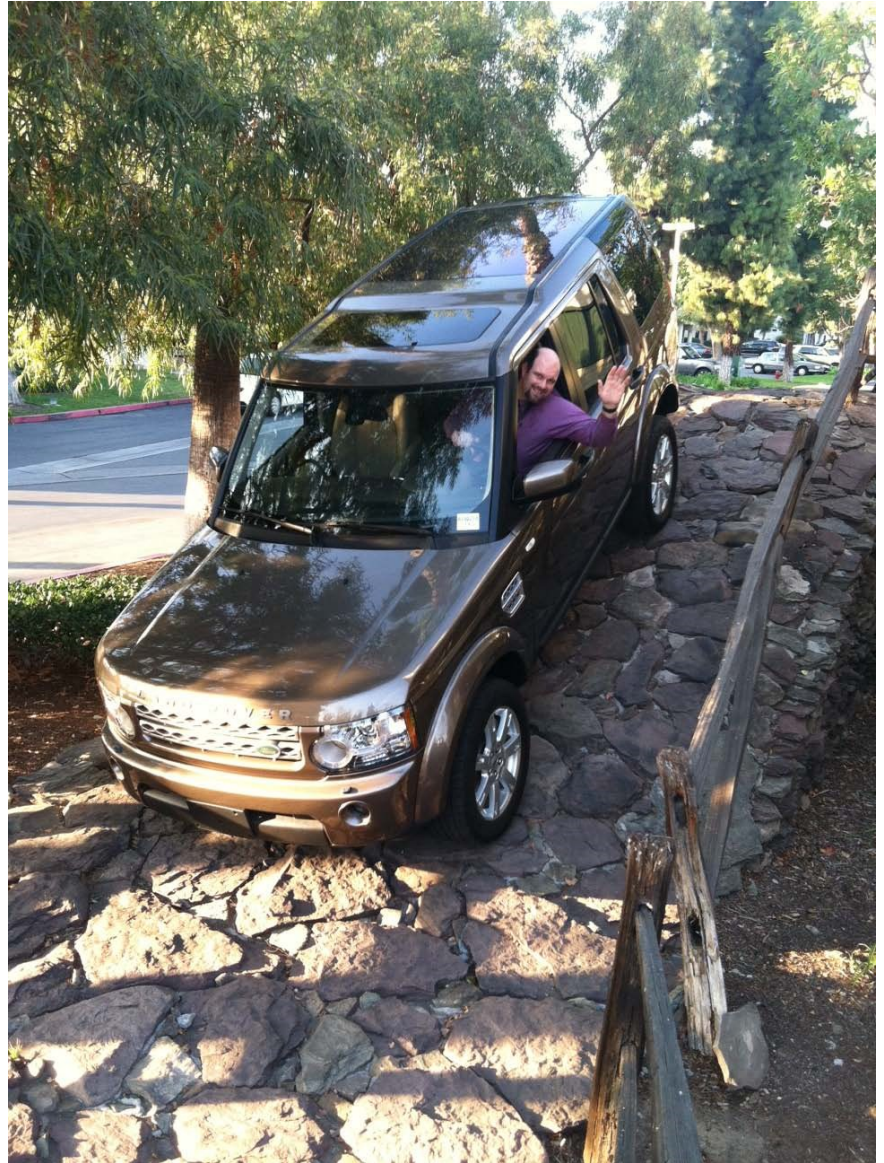
Dietrich agreed.

His first day in Orange County, he walked into a nearby Lexus dealership ... and was quickly dismissed.

“They wouldn't hire someone like me without experience – they had higher standards for the caliber of people they were looking for,” he says.

His next stop was a Subaru dealership.

“I'll never forget that day,” Assistant Sales



Manager Jennifer Sauer says with a laugh. “It was the hottest day of the year -- 100 degrees or so – and in walks Dietrich, sweltering in a three-piece suit.

“That impressed me right off bat. When you put on a suit in that kind of weather, you're serious about getting a job.”

Seney was up front and spoke frankly with Sauer. He told her he had just (1) graduated from college, (2) had no sales experience but knew cars inside and out, (3) planned to become an automobile writer and (4) he wanted dealership experience to learn even more about cars.

“I truly believe Dietrich could have been anything he wanted, but he found that the auto industry is a career, not just a job. Sometimes the ones who are most talented and successful are the ones who had no intention of it being their career in the first place.” — Jennifer Sauer

“I appreciated his honesty,” she says. “He came off as warm, intelligent and knowledgeable. He said he’d probably stay for a couple years and then move on to writing. I had no problem helping someone fulfill their dream.”

As time passed, Seney began to love the sales floor and was becoming more and more successful every day.

“It was very awkward at first,” he says. “I was always comfortable in social situations, but this was quite different. I didn’t know what to say to customers. I had a lot to learn.”

Sauer taught Seney everything regarding sales and salesmanship. Lesson No. 1 was: When a customer walks in off the street, they come for one reason and one reason only – to buy. And they want to deal with someone who is knowledgeable, educated and skilled.

“The easiest way to sell is to figure out what the customers’ needs are and exactly what they want,” Seney says. “Jennifer taught me the importance of investigating a customer’s needs and wants ... why they are at the store

in the first place.”

Seney studied sales techniques, philosophy and the psychology of selling. And he mastered it.

Now he’s riding a wave of success at Jaguar Land Rover Anaheim Hills, one of the most prestigious dealerships in the region and part of the famous Rusnak Auto Group.

“Dietrich is an outstanding member of our sales team -- and I agree completely with the comments and observations of his former boss at Subaru,” says Sven Larson, the general manager at Jaguar Land Rover Anaheim Hills.

“Dietrich is quite passionate and well-informed about the industry – and he likes the one-on-one relationship that you get with customer,” Sauer says.

“I truly believe he could have been anything he wanted, but he found that the auto industry is a career, not just a job.

“Sometimes the ones who are most talented and successful are the ones who had no intention of it being their career in the first place.”

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