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Excelsior-Henderson, Is this a Cruiser Built for Love and Money?

by Crash Casey

The other Saturday I made one of my infrequent appearances at the office. We were revving up to put together issue #27. Laying on one of the tables was an invitation from Excelsior-Henderson to an editors' conference scheduled on the following Monday. Despite the fact we were in production, it was decided that I was the one that could be spared. After mulling over the fact that this made it seem like I was the least useful guy on the staff, I decided, "what the hell". I wasn't going to question an assignment that got me out of the office.

I took our two inch file of Excelsior-Henderson stuff and headed home to educate myself. I poured over articles that had appeared in USA Today, The Wall Street Corporate Reporter, Inc Magazine and dozens of others. I scanned all kinds of earnings reports and buy recommendations. I knew a ton of stuff about this corporation.

I was ready to set out and see for myself what exactly was going on with this CORPORATION. See there in lies one of my own personal prejudices. I spent five years working for a well known Twin Cities company. And from that experience came away with a hatred for the life draining, creativity stifling, individuality killing, phony fostering, incompetence promoting house of slow death referred to as "corporate culture".

Thus I have a zero tolerance policy for presentations given by polished corporate skills. I've sat through tons of them--and in an earlier life given dozens of them. Usually you can tell which books on presentation people have read. Despite a



considerable amount of dread I was willing to sit through all of this in order to see the factory and get a close up look at the Super X

When I arrived on Monday morning I got stuck in the car with no way to get my wheelchair out. Expecting to be treated like a huge pain in the ass I called the corporate phone number and spoke to Holly. Feeling kind of stupid I explained my problem. She enthusiastically assured me that it was okay and she would send someone right out. That was when I met Steve. A great big guy who's smile was even bigger than his substantial size. He helped me out of the car and we went into the building. There at the reception desk was my new friend Holly. She welcomed me and sent me into the conference room feeling warmed by her smile.



Having had to deal with my wheelchair etc., things were already well under way as I entered the conference room. There sitting by the door was Dan, Dave and Jennie Hanlon; cofounders of the company. They bequeathed upon me big old smiles and let me know I was welcome. The rest of the morning was taken up with presentations by the Hanlons as well as Allen Hurd, VP Engineering, Tim Leary, Historian and

Joel Norenburg, Director of Marketing, among others.

As the presentations got underway I began to get confused. All of these people were using a technique I had never seen employed by corporate types before. Slowly it began to dawn on me what they were up to. The wily buggers were talking sincerely and passionately from the heart.

I had come to learn about a corporation and what I was seeing were very real people that were in love with what they were doing.

As the morning drew to a close, we prepared to break for lunch. We went into the giant lunch room and broke into informal groups. I happened to end up at a table with four or five editors and Dave. This was my opportunity to study a Hanlon with his guard down. As we ate our lunch I peppered Dave with questions, looking for a chink in his armor of pleasantness and sincerity. You can imagine my frustration when I found him to be one of the most honest and down to earth guys I had met for a while.

After lunch we went on the tour of the 160,000 square foot factory. More than looking forward to seeing the state of the art production facility, I was anxious to observe the line workers. There had to be some oppressed worker types there.

At one point we were watching a woman standing and buffing a gas tank. This is the

kind of job that I personally would last about two hours doing before I lost my mind and went ballistic. When this gal saw us looking at her she shot us this great big grin. At this point I began to wonder if there wasn't some sinister plot afoot. Maybe they were pumping some kind of happy gas into the place.

I wound down the day by spending some time with Tony Pink who is the Styling Director. That is to say he's the guy that gets to craft the looks of the Excelsior-Henderson. I had no reason to doubt his enthusiasm. After all he's probably got one of the ten coolest jobs in America.

As I made my way to the parking lot in order to leave, I continued to notice one constant variable whenever I came face to face with one of the Excelsior-Henderson employees. They all looked you directly in the eyes and smiled. It occurred to me what was going on in this facility. These people were here because they wanted to be and were involved in something they all found exciting.

I now had a glimpse into what it must be like to create something of this magnitude from the ground up. Of the difficulties in not only making it physically happen but to get all these employees as well as the investors to see your vision and come along for the ride.

As I wound my way back to the Twin-Cities, I thought about something that Dan Hanlon had said in reference to creating a motorcycle. That you had to give it a heart, skin and bones for it to become real. This is also what they had done for their company. As I headed home I realized I envied each one of those 210 people I had left behind.

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