

Oldsmobile 1956

A muscle car with Cold War secrets

Born in 1956, the same year as Mel Gibson, Ingemar Stenmark, and Tom Hanks, the Oldsmobile Delta came into the world just as the space race was heating up. The name “Delta” was in vogue—even NASA used it for its ballistic missile series. And carmakers? They were quick to ride the rocket wave.

This particular Delta—technically an Oldsmobile 88—packed a 5.3-liter V8 delivering 230 horsepower, making it a true performance machine for its time. Some even argue it was the world’s first muscle car. But that’s not what makes this car legendary. In July 1962, during the peak of the Cuban Missile Crisis, a Polish national with an American visa drove this very car through Czechoslovakia en route to Vienna. Officially, he worked for the U.S. Embassy in Warsaw. Unofficially? He was a CIA agent.

And hidden inside the roof liner were microfilm reels—containing photos of Soviet missile bases near San Cristobal, Cuba, just 100 km from Havana. The photos had been taken by U.S. pilot Major Richard Heyser, who captured 928 reconnaissance images. This Oldsmobile carried 115 of them, hidden in the upper-left corner of the roof. But the plan didn’t work out. At the Dolní Dvořiště border crossing, Czechoslovak customs officers were waiting. They knew exactly what to search for. The films were seized, the car was impounded, and the agent was later exchanged in a spy trade. But the car? It still made it to Vienna—this time as state property, assigned to Dr. Karel Petrželka’s security unit. Eventually, it was sold to a collector in Prague and now, it lives with us. A car with chrome, curves... and a Cold War past.