



Cogito Ergo Zoom

By Daniel Charles Ross

Photo: *South Austin, Texas* by Daniel Vidal

We cruised past the closed gas station with a glut of hot cars parked in it. Tim shifted his 1967 Pontiac GTO down to second gear and rode the tachometer needle right up to maybe five thousand rpm. The 400-cubic-inch engine roared and snarled like a chained dragon. As we wailed away in second gear, two cars rolled out into the darkness behind us.

The headlights in our mirrors rocketed up Woodward toward us like anti-aircraft missiles turning toward enemy planes. We signaled into a wide Woodward crossover to the southbound side at Bassett Street.

A wildly modified '65 Buick Riviera rolled in next to Tim and a crappy '62 Ford Galaxie stopped beside me. The Galaxie was not a serious street race car, but a *poseur*. He wanted to be a street racer, but he couldn't or didn't want to spend the money it took. That's actually a thing in racing.

Speed costs money. How fast can you afford to go?

The timeless jet-black Riviera was box stock on the outside, but in its engine bay growled a throaty V-8 with the kind of spiteful intent never envisioned by Buick engineers. The owner had spent a lot of money on it, and that did not work in our favor.

We shut down all four cars and stepped out into the street, like gunslingers.

“Hey,” the tubby kid from the Riv said. “You guys lookin’ to see what those things can do out here?” He stood with arms crossed, but it only made him look defensive and accentuated his thick midsection.

Advantage ours.

“We know what *our* cars will do,” Tim said evenly. “We wanna know what *yours* will do—if you have the balls.”

The Riviera kid laughed like he’d been challenged this way before, and had sent the annihilated challengers home, like trophies of war, strapped to the hoods of their cars.

“Yeah man, I got the balls. You got any money?”

Tim reached into his back pocket and withdrew an envelope thick with fifties.

“Well, all right,” the Ford kid said eagerly. He had a gap-toothed grin and an oily waterfall hairstyle, that sort of surf-wave coming over the front and slicked back on the sides. We looked at the Ford kid like he was a turd—*Not talkin’ to you, jerk.*

“*You* got any money, dude?” Tim demanded. The Riv kid reached into the left front pocket of his blue jeans and pulled out a roll of cash, fanning it back and forth in the air. It looked to be all hundred-dollar bills. A shit-ton of them.

“Asshole, I *got* the money. You got the courage to go along with your daddy’s allowance?”

Tim didn’t take the bait.

“Here’s the deal,” Tim said, deadpan. “One grand, one run, no bullshit. Winner-winner-chicken-dinner. We line up over there at Hadsell Drive and race down Woodward to South Berkshire. That’s a bit more than a quarter mile, but I need less than that to put your shit on the fuckin’ trailer. The first car—*the first car*—to cross South Berkshire is the winner. Agreed?”

Damn, I thought. Who the hell are you, and what have you done with my college-prep pal, Tim?

“Who holds the money?” the Riv kid snarled. He was trying to sound tough now but it just came off as squeaky indignation. “Somebody needs to hold the money.”

Tim laughed an evil laugh.

“Well, it ain’t gonna be *you*, and this idiot”—he pointed to the Ford driver—“has an IQ about two points above plant life, so he’s out. We will hold the money.” He gestured to the Ford kid again. “Your little girlfriend here can ride with my friend and the cash, if that blows your skirt up for you. I get to South Berkshire first, we keep the cash. If you get there first, you get paid. But you are losing tonight, my friend. Bad. Your friends will still be laughing at your ass next September when you go back to do your junior year of vocational school over again.”

“Deal,” the Riv kid said. Tim reached out to shake hands on it and the kid slapped it away. “Fuck your handshake, asshole. Let’s race.” He got back in his

Riviera and burned rubber out onto Woodward.

Tim turned to face me, away from them.

“*Ooooooh*,” he stage-whispered, “he must be a tough guy.” He smiled with confidence, gave me a thumbs up, and went to his car.

Tim lined up next to the hulking Riviera. When the engines sounded like they were about to explode, I blipped my headlights once and they took off.

A smoky blue curtain of shrieks and melted rubber enveloped them, and then the black Riviera lunged forward like it came off the catapult of an aircraft carrier.

A few seconds later, I saw the flashing red lights of two police cars reflecting off the pine trees in the median between north and south Woodward.

Tim was casually driving twenty-five miles per hour in the center lane when I caught up with him. The Riviera was bracketed front and rear by two Birmingham police cars, and officers who looked angry even in the poor light.

When we rolled past him, the kid glared at us something fierce and Tim flipped him the bird. Seconds later, the GTO indeed was the first car to cross the finish line at South Berkshire. We pulled into the Mobil gas station about a block farther on.

“You can get out here,” I said to the Ford kid. “First car won. You can walk back to your girlfriend. She’s gonna be a few minutes yet.” He looked up Woodward to the traffic stop, irritated and bewildered.

We drove a few miles over to our eastside hangout. I got out of my car and into the passenger seat of Tim’s, grabbed his right arm in two hands and shook it forcefully.

“What just happened?!”

He chuckled. “‘Situational awareness.’ I saw those cops lurking on that side street; I goaded that Riviera kid into a big-dollar race knowing he couldn’t resist the challenge. We launched hard, but I shut down.”

I looked at my mastermind friend in frank admiration.

“Then, as you saw, I was the first car to cross South Berkshire. We win. Cogito ergo zoom.”

Cogito ergo sum is a Descartes phrase generally translated into English as “I think, therefore I am.” *Cogito ergo zoom* was an axiom by legendary advertising and car magazine editor David E. Davis.

It means, “I think, therefore I go fast.”