Back to the old school

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Forgive me if you?re not into cars, but there?s more than one lesson to be learned from the upcoming face-off between US car blog Jalopnik and GM?s global head of product development, Bob Lutz.

First, a bit of background. Back in September, Lutz issued an impromptu challenge as part of GM?s ?May the best car win? campaign. The 77-year-old offered to take on any comers; him driving a stock Cadillac CTS-V, with challengers free to choose their own unmodified production saloon.

Jalopnik - a Gawker Media title with around 1.8 million monthly readers - took him up on it, originally planning to field an AMG C63.

And here?s where it gets interesting. By the time the duel was confirmed, Jalopnik had found that Mercedes ?wasn?t too keen on the idea?, and had switched their car of choice to Jaguar?s XFR. Yesterday, just two days before the event, Jaguar pulled out for reasons which aren?t entirely clear.

Here?s Bob Lutz?s response on hearing the news:

> I think it means that the European high-performance sedans are excellent, even superb cars, but quite possibly not ready for racing laps right out of the show-room. The CTS-V is not only quicker, but will, in totally untweaked, stock form, run hot laps at any race track until it runs out of fuel. Transmission oil and diff oil temps are stable, engine oil temp doesn?t go up, brakes get a bit more pedal travel, but don?t fade. The street tires get a tad greasy, but handling and control remain excellent. ?May the best car win?! (It wins automatically if the competitors won?t show up!)

Lutz pulls off a perfectly-judged balance between the diplomatic show of respect, and flagrant, nose-thumbing showmanship: before a wheel turns in anger the stunt looks like a PR-coup.

And here?s my point: we Europeans like to look down on American cars, and yet our best makers are apparently running scared of a straight-up challenge.

Similarly, marketers like to bang on about the changes wrought by social media and the new web, and yet

here?s a classic bit of route-one marketing, showing us that there?s life in an old dog yet.

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