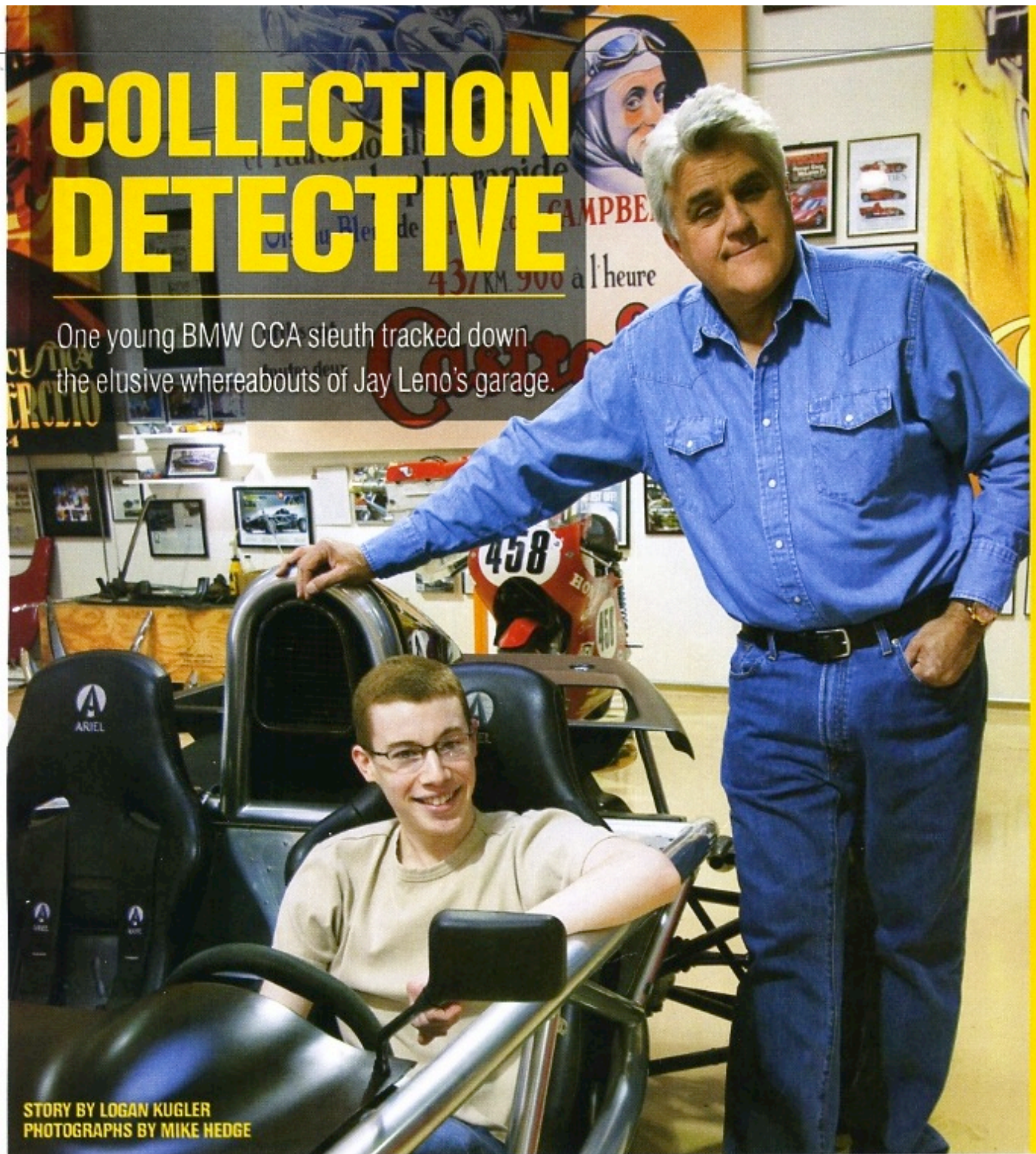


COLLECTION DETECTIVE

One young BMW CCA sleuth tracked down the elusive whereabouts of Jay Leno's garage.



STORY BY LOGAN KUGLER
PHOTOGRAPHS BY MIKE HEDGE

At 5:00 o'clock one Thursday afternoon, I was sitting in my car outside Jay Leno's garage on a tree-shrouded street in Burbank, debating whether or not to buzz the intercom. I had no appointment; in fact, I had been stalking the garage for weeks. The police car parked out front put me on guard, even though I was scheming no felonious plan. I didn't even know what I was going to say; all I knew was that I had this fascination and admiration for Jay Leno and his immense car collection. I wanted to meet the guy, and possibly get a peek at his collection.

After a couple of minutes, I realized I had

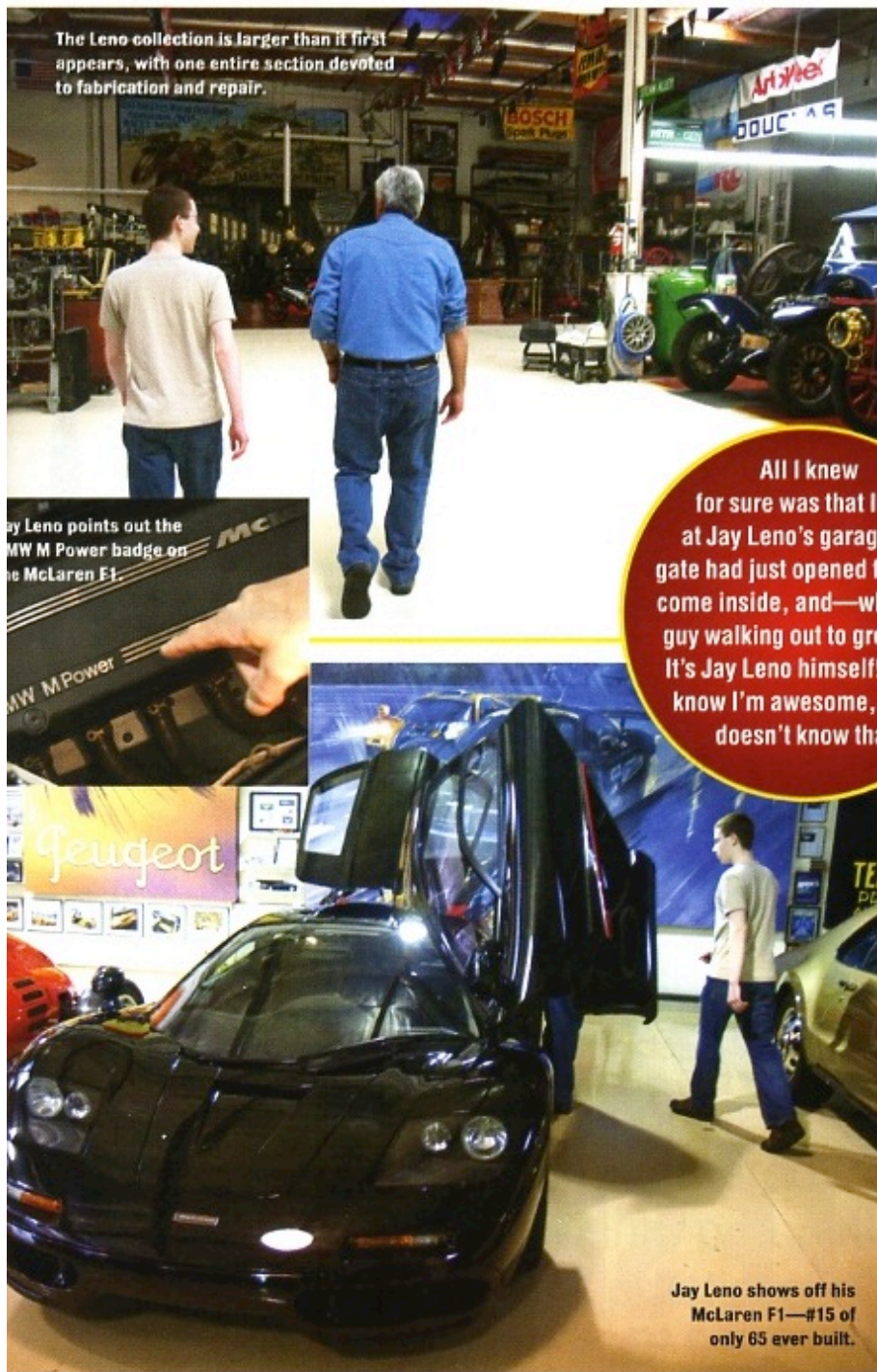
nothing to lose. The worse that could happen? The voice on the other end says "No" and tells me to leave immediately, or maybe a man comes out and chases me away with a stick. I was prepared for both contingencies.

I got out of my car, walked up to the intercom outside the gate, and dialed 000. A man answered; so far no one had run out after me with a stick, so I was at ease. I told him my name and asked if Jay was in. He wasn't—but at least I knew I was in the right place. Knowing that I'd probably never hear a specific answer, I asked if he knew when Jay would be back. "He's out on a ride. He should be back within a half

hour," came the reply. It took me two seconds to decide to wait.

Then I started to think that this was going way too smoothly. Am I really one of the first people to figure out the location of Jay Leno's garage and just show up unannounced? Where was the bureaucratic red tape?

But let's back up for a second. How did I get here to begin with? How did I find Jay Leno's garage? Truth be told, it took a considerable amount of detective work, way beyond my normal research and discovery—down to meticulous scrutiny of the videos on JayLenosGarage.com. When I'd



The Leno collection is larger than it first appears, with one entire section devoted to fabrication and repair.

Jay Leno points out the BMW M Power badge on the McLaren F1.

All I knew for sure was that I was at Jay Leno's garage, the gate had just opened for me to come inside, and—who's that guy walking out to greet me? It's Jay Leno himself! Now, I know I'm awesome, but he doesn't know that.

Jay Leno shows off his McLaren F1—#15 of only 65 ever built.

moved to Burbank earlier in the year, it became apparent that the location of Jay Leno's Big Dog Garage was a secret of sorts in the Valley—and gearhead that I am, I was determined to find it. I looked for every discernible sign of location in the videos, including even sound. After I had five tangible reference points, I started to investigate rumored locations; when I was in the vicinity of any of them, I'd try to identify those reference points. And after just a few locations, I found what I was looking for.

Just fifteen minutes after my conversation with the man on the intercom—he turned out to be the general manager of

Leno's garage—a familiar face turned the corner, driving an AC Cobra 427 replica. It was Jay Leno! The guy I'd seen driving down Hollywood Way in a '60s convertible a year earlier—that's when my quest to find his garage began—and the same guy I watch on television almost every night.

I hopped out of my car as soon as he'd gone through the gate, and I hit the intercom again. "Hi, I saw that Jay just got in. I was wondering if I could say hi."

"Yeah, sure," said the voice. "Come on in." A second later the gate opened. I wasn't quite sure what was happening. How could it be that easy? Had I come on

open-house day? But I didn't see anyone else around; did they think I was the son of some NBC executive?

All I knew for sure was that I was at Jay Leno's garage, the gate had just opened for me to come inside, and—who's that guy walking out to greet me? It's Jay Leno himself! Now, I know I'm awesome, but he doesn't know that. And I've just landed a meeting with him, simply by showing up. Maybe there's some kind of mistake.

There was no mistake. Leno is just that kind of hospitable guy. I introduced myself and he asked if I wanted a tour of his garage; he must read minds. Little did I know, a tour of his garage actually means three different garages!

For the next half hour, Leno personally gave me a grand tour of his garage—and it was beyond impressive. I felt like a kid in a candy store. Every car I had ever salivated over was there: McLaren F1, Porsche Carrera GT, Ariel Atom, Audi R8—the list goes on and on. Leno's garage is packed with more than 100 cars and 85 motorcycles, most of which were built before my time—some before anyone's time. Everything from one-off custom vehicles like the Tank Car and the EcoJet—powered by an 800-horsepower M-47 Patton tank engine and a 650-horsepower Honeywell LT-101 turbine engine, respectively—to classics like the Ford Model T, Duesenbergs, and a 1955 Buick Roadmaster. There were sports cars, first-off-the-line cars (read: serial number 00001) like the Corvette ZR1 and Ariel Atom, race cars, steam-powered cars, and steam engines from the nineteenth century. There were so many vehicles that "roll, explode, and make noise," as Leno puts it, that even the generous time he gave me was hardly enough to see all of his machines.

I knew his collection was immense, but it's impossible to truly understand how much Leno lives, breathes, and eats cars until you see it in person. Without a doubt, as far as jobs come for petrolheads, the Leno's garage staff have one of the best jobs out there. And they're quick to agree.

When I asked Leno which car was his favorite, he said, "I like any car that was ahead of its time, in its time. Like the BMW 2002tii—that was a car that set the pace for small, fast, good-handling sedans. Whenever I get behind the wheel of a 2002 or a 2002tii, I'm always astounded." Leno's favorite modern BMW? The Z8.

One thing's certain. I will never forget the day I figured out all the clues, connected the dots, rang that intercom, and met Jay Leno. ♦