



Lost Wheels

A new book by photographer Dieter Klein contains stunning images of derelict classics in Europe and the USA. Here we present just a few of them

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CITROËN TRACTION AVANTS

France

Part of a 500-strong collection amassed by a scrap-metal dealer in the Champagne region of France, these classic Citroëns represented the tip of a metaphorical iceberg of native machinery. 'The scrap man dealt in all kinds of metal objects but, as he told me, "J'aime les voitures",' says Dieter. Sadly, the Citroëns and all the other cars have disappeared in the last few years, victims of a clean-up dictated by environmental legislation – a fate that is certain to affect many of the other subjects photographed by Dieter.

Don't ever step backwards. If you want to re-position your tripod, turn around and then take a step, so you can see what you're about to tread on.' That's one of the useful tips given to photographer Dieter Klein by a friend about shooting in the wilds of the USA, for taking images of abandoned cars such as the 1974 Pontiac Grand Prix on the opening spread of this feature, found in Wyoming.

Dieter travelled more than 44,000 miles and spent 250 days – plus many more months of planning and research – working on the photos for his 'Lost Wheels' project, which was kick-started by a chance encounter with two old Peugeots on a farm while on a cycling holiday in France. He returned later to photograph them, and then found a 1935 Citroën Rosalie truck, too – which he now jokily refers to as the 'old lady' with whom he instantly fell in love, despite not previously having been a classic vehicle enthusiast.

A long-time professional photojournalist and commercial photographer who lives near Cologne, Dieter shot these images on a Phase One medium-format digital camera that has an incredible 100-megapixel resolution, which accounts for their stunning detail and texture. 'I only adjust the tonal values and colours later,' says Dieter, 'and I never re-touch the images. I hate fake pictures!'



1949 FORD & 1946 CHEVROLET

Georgia, USA

The lush vegetation of the US's southern states is ideally suited to the subtle yet richly saturated style of Dieter's images – not to mention providing a fertile hunting ground for old automobiles. Here, a pair of plastic garden chairs – which fortuitously happen to be green – seem almost to glow in front of a clutch of 1950s and '60s sedans. 'Other than perhaps removing an obtrusive scrap of litter, I never mess with the composition,' says Dieter.

1946 FORD & TRAILER

Nevada, USA

Not quite as abandoned as they may appear, this Ford panelvan and matching caravan (or, as the Yanks say, 'trailer') form part of a DIY outdoor museum in the former mining town of Nelson, Nevada. A notoriously rough-neck place when it was operating, from the 1850s up to 1945, in the early years it was mainly inhabited by deserters from the American Civil War. Now most of it is privately owned and it's home to about two-dozen old vehicles.



1950s PORSCHE 356

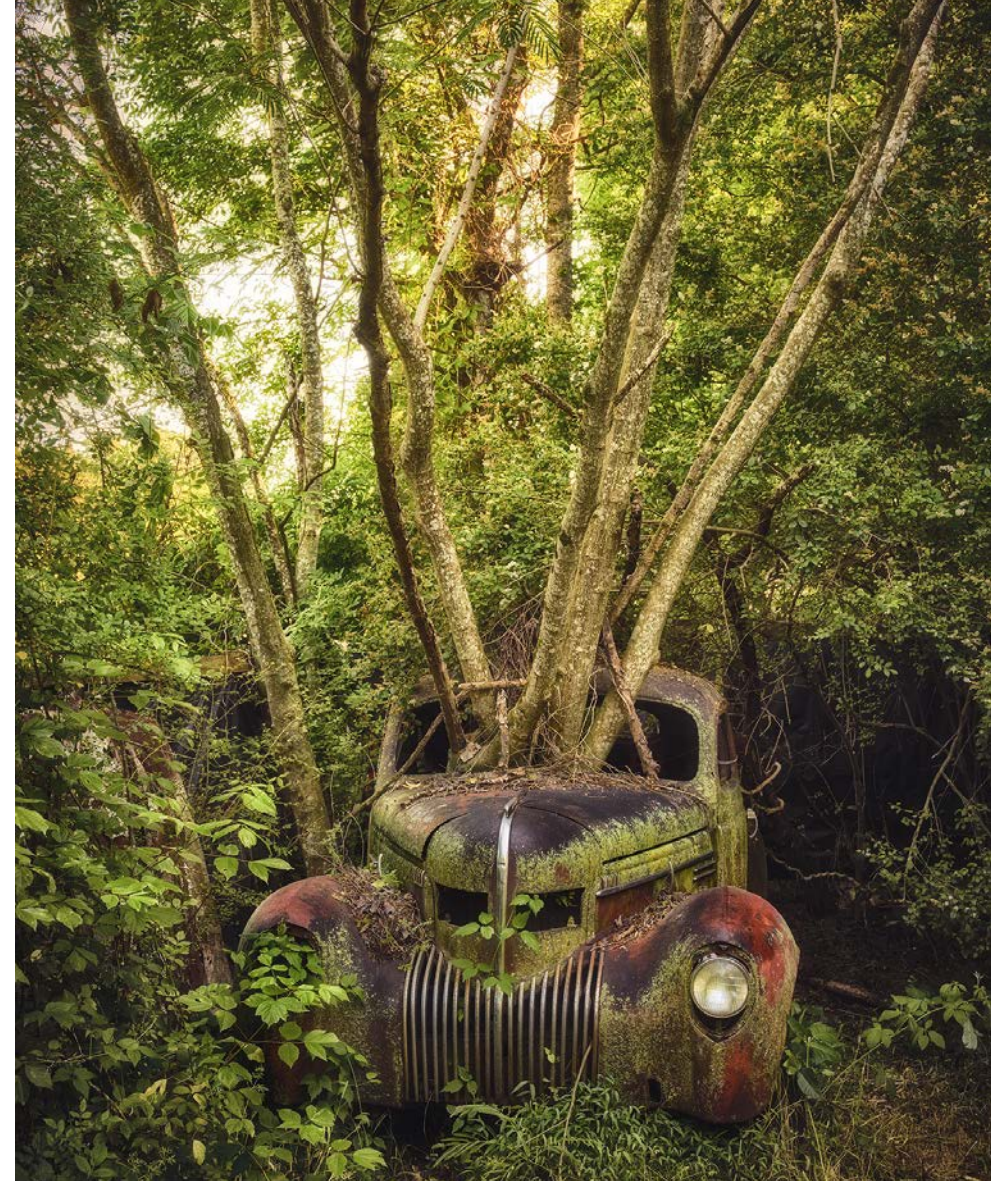
Germany

It may seem utterly bizarre to allow an early Porsche to rot away, but this was a very deliberate act, as Dieter explains: 'A car dealer from Dusseldorf wanted to do something special for his 50th birthday – so for the year 2000 he gathered cars from the 1950s in the grounds of his property and left them to age in the way that he was now ageing. He started with a Jaguar XK120 that he had once rallied but no longer had any interest in driving. People say he's crazy but he doesn't care!'

1939 CHRYSLER IMPERIAL

Georgia, USA

Back in the day, an Imperial was top of the Chrysler range and a very desirable object; 80 years later, this one has literally become rooted to the earth in Georgia, USA. It's one of a staggering 4000 vehicles that make up Old Car City USA, a junk-yard-turned-theme-park created by Dean Lewis, who started buying up scrap cars in 1970. Now his collection occupies 34 acres, with 6.5 miles of walking trails to view it. As a handpainted sign quaintly puts it: 'Don't cry becus it over, smile becus it happened'.



FORD PICK-UP TRUCKS

Florida, USA

Many of the subjects photographed by Dieter are hidden away on private property – 'I always ask permission first; it's the respectful thing to do' – but this collection of Ford trucks sits beside the highway near Crawfordville in Northern Florida. Arranged in chronological order from the 1920s to the 1970s by Pat Harvey, they were originally used on the Harvey family farm and never scrapped as each one fell out of use – so Pat decided to make an artistic display from them to entertain passing travellers.



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SAAB 92s & AUSTIN A30

Sweden

In the forests of Värmland, Sweden, near the border with Norway, is an amazing graveyard of classic cars from the 1940s, '50s and '60s, owned by two reclusive brothers. It's become well known in recent years and has been visited by plenty of tourists and photographers, much to Dieter's dismay. 'It was undiscovered for 50 years but now hundreds of people go there in the summer months, and it has lost that untouched feeling that made it so special,' he laments.



1950s DKW F89

Sweden

Photographed in the same Swedish 'car graveyard' described on the previous page, this close-up of a DKW dashboard being subsumed by nature well illustrates the juxtaposition of vegetation's organic forms with the hard lines and shapes of man's work that so fascinates Dieter. 'I've made two trips here and spent 20 days working from early dawn until the evening's last light, and in all kinds of weather.'

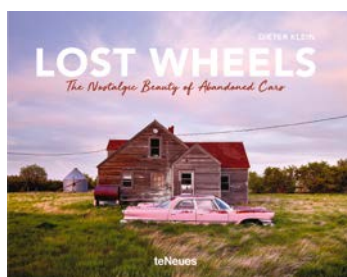


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1950s FULDAMOBIL S7

Germany

Another 'exhibit' from the bizarre 50th birthday celebration in Germany, this microcar is from the surprisingly long-lived (1950-1969) range of three-wheelers that were originally made in the German town of Fulda – although this one, intriguingly, is reputed to be a Swedish version built under licence. Glassfibre bodywork means that it could probably be restored but, sadly, as with nearly all the cars in Dieter's book, that is never going to happen. 



LOST WHEELS, *The Nostalgic Beauty of Abandoned Cars*, by Dieter Klein, is published by teNeues at £29.95 and has ISBN 978 3 96171 258 8. See www.teneues.com for information.