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Parsippany-based Avis Budget Group rebounds after surviving a rough year

By [Joseph R. Perone/The Star-Ledger](#)

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JOHN MUNSON/THE STAR-LEDGER

Avis-Budget CEO Ronald Nelson poses at the Parsippany headquarters next to a replica vintage car built for the 1964 World's Fair.

A dozen years ago, Ronald Nelson's wife asked what he wanted for his 45th birthday — besides the usual mid-life crisis.

He said either a motorcycle or flying lessons. She chose the latter, never thinking he would take to the sky. "I had never been up in a small plane, and I didn't like flying commercially anyway," said Nelson, chief executive of Avis Budget Group. "There was this awe the moment I pulled back on the yoke and the plane went up in the air. It just got me."

Now 57, Nelson earned his pilot's license and flies out of Caldwell to small towns across the country whenever he can. His time in the cockpit has served him well in the executive suite, too.

For the past 18 months, he has been trying to maneuver his Parsippany-based rental car company through enormous turbulence spawned by the credit crisis, the bankruptcy of two automakers and investor fears that fewer people are traveling during the recession.

The shares eventually bounced back, soaring from their 52-week low to close the year at \$13.12. The stock was the top performer in terms of percentage increase of all New Jersey-based companies last year.

Another rental car rival, Hertz Global Holdings, based in Park Ridge, finished the year at \$11.92. The stock dropped to as low as \$1.97 last year after an independent research group, Audit Integrity, questioned Hertz's financial risk. Hertz filed and later dropped a libel suit against Audit, then announced a third-quarter profit and a positive credit outlook from rating agency Standard & Poor's.

Nelson, who has been CEO for four years, said the new sales techniques and other efforts by employees to improve productivity should help make the company more profitable when sales volumes come back.

"We had to figure out a path through, and we did," he said.

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To read the entire article click on http://www.nj.com/business/index.ssf/2010/01/parsippany-based_avis_budget_g.html