

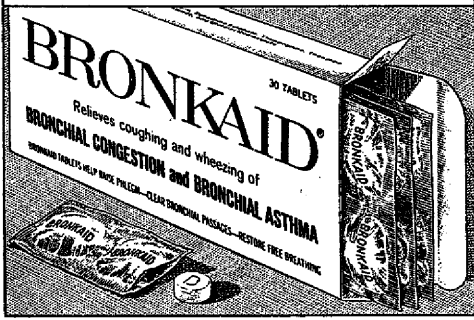
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A Mini-Factory For Super Cars

When the car was being built, none of the company's 130 employees knew who it was for. Obviously though, it was pretty special, even for Hess & Eisenhardt of Rossmoyne, O., believed to be the world's leading maker of custom luxury cars.

At a cost of close to \$500,000, the mystery car had five detachable, bullet-resistant tops, a vast array of sophisticated communications gear, retractable side steps, body armoring, built-in floor lights, automatic door locks, puncture-proof tires, a public address system, dual brakes, a custom rear seat, and a host of other unique performance, protective and luxury features, some of which are still classified.

But H. & E. is not unused to the unusual in cars, and as far as most of the men who worked on it knew, the vehicle might have been for anyone from an oil sheik to a European monarch. As it happened, it was ordered by the U.S. Secret Service for President John F. Kennedy, who chose to ride in it without any of the tops one day in Dallas. After the tragedy, it came back to the shop for a \$90,000 overhaul, and this time there was no doubt who it was for—Lyndon B. Johnson. Chief items in the revamp:

A fixed, bullet-resistant bubble-top, and a complete rearmoring of body and glass areas.

"The job was hardly routine for us, but still it wasn't as unusual as it may sound," says 31-year-old Dan Hess. An ex-Marine and a graduate engineer, Dan is the son of co-owner Willard C. Hess, and the third generation of his family to work in the custom car firm.

"We make anywhere from 20 to 30 custom specials a year, and we are the company in the world producing non-military armored vehicles. As far as I know, there are very few others who know how to strip the body of a luxury car down to its skin, armor it, and put it back together again so it looks just about like any other model of the same car. Also, we've produced cars for every President since Woodrow Wilson, so the problem of making special vehicles in a hurry was nothing unusual for us, either."

Not all special cars are armored, of course, and not all are as complicated as presidential vehicles. The 100-year-old H. & E.'s main business is and always has been making hearses and ambulances, which, since horse-drawn carriage days, have been essentially spec-



CAREER

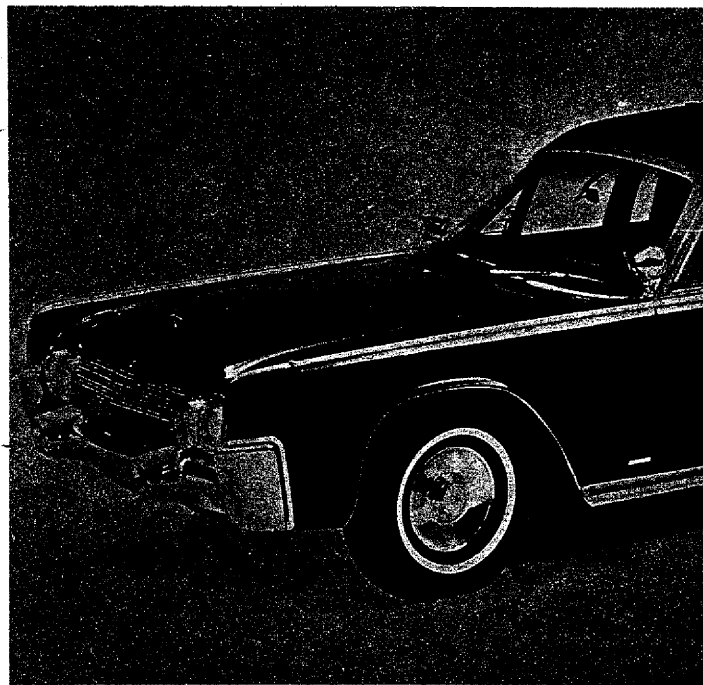


CORNER

INTERESTING PROFESSIONS



Thursday Times
Saturday Times



This limousine

The Kansas City Star Magazine

by Arthur Whitman

ial bodies mounted on Detroit chassis—mainly those of Cadillacs and Lincolns. The firm now makes about 250 hearses and 100 ambulances a year. But since World War II, they have been in the special car business, and some of their orders have been super de luxe, to put it mildly.

One was from a du Pont heiress who wanted a car her husband, a G. M. executive, could enter and sit in with a top hat when they went out on formal occasions. Dan's father, Bill, who supervises design for the specials, came up with a Cadillac limousine with a raised roof over the rear seat. The G.M. people and the lady's advisers were enthusiastic, and H. & E. went ahead with the \$50,000 overhaul—a price necessitated, as many H. & E. prices are, by the need to produce one-shot dies. A special press conference was called for the car's delivery, and after the society and automotive editors assembled, the proud owner came in, took her first look at the car and announced, "It's terrible! I hate it!" and stalked off. But it all ended happily because the car was subsequently re-done with a more rakish roof line, which satisfied the client who

didn't want it to look like all the other cars.

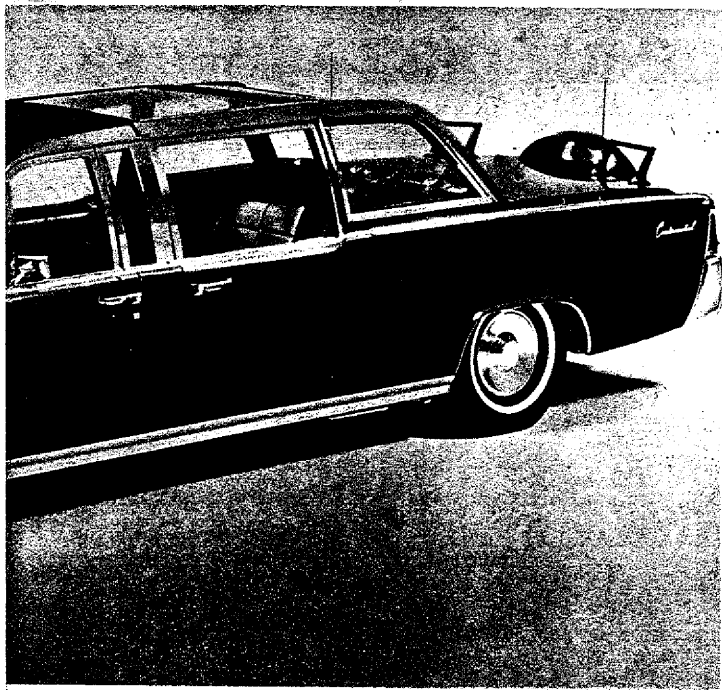
Orders from foreign dignitaries have included a fleet of 20 Cadillac limousines equipped with one-way glass so King Ibn Saud of Arabia could take his harem for Sunday drives in the desert. No one knows if the entire harem fit into the 20 cars, but the assumption is that at least his favorites did. The king was about 60 in 1951, when Aramco gave him the fleet as a gift.

Another complicated special was the Lincoln made for Queen Elizabeth's first Canadian trip. It featured a stationary roof over the driver's compartment and a convertible roof over the passenger space, the only such combination produced in modern automotive times. In addition, the rear seat was divided in halves, and the right half equipped with a small hydraulic elevator that raised the seat and moved it forward.

"Protocol dictates that the Queen must be seated in front of and above anyone else present," explains Dan, "and since she couldn't put Phillip in the back of the bus, we had to figure out a way to get her up front."

Possibly the most troublesome order H. & E. ever turned out was a \$47,000

16 ▶



was built for President Kennedy and overhauled at a cost of \$90,000.

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Lincoln Continental armored limousine for Kwame Nkrumah, who ordered it in 1965 when President of Ghana. The trouble stemmed from the fact that Nkrumah was kicked out of office while the car was being built. The new Ghanaian government spurned such ostentation, and there just isn't much of a market for repossessed limos equipped with AM-FM radio, television, intercom, bar, refrigerator and hidden gun compartment. After a couple of years of haggling, the government of Ghana finally paid for the car, then unloaded it for \$25,000 to Aristotle Onassis, who always had an eye for a bargain.

Although glamor clients and fine design are what get H. & E. the most public attention, armoring cars is its most difficult problem. Most of the information about armoring is classified—if not by the Secret Service or the FBI, with whom all armoring orders must be cleared, then by the company itself.

"The government classifies information because they don't want to tell some potential assassin what weapons will work best," says J. L. Centner, H. & E.'s executive vice-president. "We clas-

sify some because we don't want to make life easy for potential competitors."

Still some fascinating information remains available. There are three basic materials used for body armor, and they are determined by such factors as the degree of protection required, the acceleration necessary, and the weight the armor adds, which of course affects the acceleration.

The first material is laminated fiberglass which adds only about 1,000 to 1,500 pounds to a car's weight. Molded in thin layers to fit the car body shape, fiberglass won't actually stop a bullet, but it does slow it down so that it probably won't inflict a mortal wound.

The second armoring material is case-hardened aluminum. This is specially rolled so that both surfaces are extremely hard, while its core is relatively soft. "A bullet loses most of its initial impact penetrating the first surface. Then the soft, or mushy, core cuts down on the spin before the bullet has to penetrate the second surface," explains Dan Hess. "It's much more effective than fiberglass and adds only about 2-

200 pounds to the weight of the car, which is an advantage over a heavier material when you're trying to accelerate fast and get out of trouble. Still it's not as effective an armor as steel."

The third body armor is laminated steel. Like the aluminum, it consists of two super-hard surfaces shielding a softer core, and will stop a 30-caliber rifle bullet cold. The disadvantage of the material is that it adds 4,000 to 5,000 pounds to the weight of a typical limousine and seriously cuts the speed of acceleration.

Using almost any type of armor almost always requires re-doing the suspensions of the standard Detroit chassis on which most vehicles are built. Heavy-duty shocks must be installed, so must extra springs.

"The chassis we use depend on what the customers want, and it's funny to watch preferences change," says Jim Centner. "When Eisenhower was in, and Charles Wilson was secretary of Defense, Presidential cars were all Cadillacs. When Kennedy came in, and with him McNamara, it all changed to Lincolns, which L.B.J. liked, too. We've

completed one car for Nixon so far which he used on his trip to Romania, and his preference seems to be swinging back to Cadillacs."

Glass is another critical item in armoring a car. H. & E. engineers work directly with glass manufacturers, to design and produce bullet-resistant glass. Exact details are secret, but generally the material is built up of layers of glass and plastic laminated together. Over the years the thickness of glass required to stop or slow a heavy-caliber bullet has shrunk from close to two inches to just about one-half inch, which is a tremendous plus in keeping down weight, but makes the mind boggle a bit in terms of cost. Today's best bullet-resistant glass weighs about eight pounds a square foot, which means a price tag of a mere \$8,000 for the windshield of a Cadillac.

To protect a car's engine, the hood is armored, and a special steel mesh fits behind the front grille. The mesh is designed to allow cooling, of course, but generates its own problems. During parades, it tends to get completely clogged with confetti, and so a special fan must be installed to keep it blown clean. ▶

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Company and government experts carefully examine every detail in overhauling a presidential limousine.

To resist road mines and grenades, H. & E. uses heat-treated steel armoring on the car's underbody, building the armor up in layers to what Dan Hess calls the point of diminishing return. "You ultimately get a thickness that will resist shrapnel of a very high velocity, but a blast that strong would kill the occupant from concussion anyway, so you try to find an optimum in terms of safety and acceleration." In all such matters, the company consults with armor experts at the Army's Aberdeen proving ground in Maryland.

The final armoring item is tires with steel liners. "If a tire is shot out," says Hess, "the wheel plops down on a steel rim and can still travel. It will shred the tire and probably damage the road surface, too, but at least the driver is able to move the car to safety."

The average hearse takes about eight weeks to move through the H. & E. shop and ambulances may take a bit longer. Specials, though, except for top-priority rush jobs, may take six months or more, particularly those that are armored. "Funny," says Dan, "we've been producing fine hearses and award-winning ambulances for a hundred years, but no body but a few trade papers has ever been interested in that. But if we wanted to talk about all our specials, we would have newsmen here every day of the year. I guess that's what we get for going into a 'glamor' business." ❧

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