

VIP

Secret Service's Better Idea

By Maxine Cheshire

The Secret Service has quietly cancelled a contract for a new 1976 Lincoln Continental limousine for President Ford and ordered immediate delivery instead on a "smaller, nondistinctive" 1975 Ford Motor Co. car.

The customized Lincoln "parade car" which would have cost an estimated \$400,000, was to have been leased for \$5,000 a year under a contract signed by the Secret Service with the manufacturer in 1966.

The substitute vehicle, also armored, will be purchased outright by the government for an undisclosed price. The cost could run to "several hundred thousand dollars," according to one Detroit source who has bid on similar Secret Service modifications in the past.

Secret Service spokesman Jack Warner said that the change is not connected in any way with the economy.

The decision to transport President Ford in a "less conspicuous" car was "protective," rather than a "money-saving" one, he said.

Buying the car rather than leasing it is part of a new Secret Service policy that has been evolving over the last two years, he said.

The Secret Service budget for fiscal 1976, scheduled to be presented to Congress next week, will include a request for funds to buy an unspecified number of new cars, both armored and unarmored.

The Secret Service maintains a fleet of nearly 1,000 "normal" sedans for the use of their agents across the country. But the number of armored cars in their fleet is classified.

President Ford has one, in addition to his parade car. So do Vice President Nelson Rockefeller and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger.

Kissinger's is a 1971 Cadillac, bought from General Motors in the fall of 1973 after it had been rented by the Secret Service for two years.

The Secret Service, in preliminary budget discussions on Capitol Hill held last week, indicated that their previous practice of renting cars has proven unsatisfactory.

Each modification, such as armor-

plating and the installation of bullet-proof glass and nonexplosive gas tanks, must be cleared with the manufacturer that owns the car.

No "technological improvement" can be made as new security inventions come on the market without a lot of time-consuming paperwork.

Neither the Secret Service nor Ford Motor Co. executives will say what model car has been ordered for President Ford or exactly when it is expected to be delivered.

The contract for the 1976 Lincoln was cancelled three months ago. It was to have been used in the next inaugural parade. Instead, President Ford or his successor will now have to ride in the 1972 model built for former President Richard M. Nixon.

That limousine required two years to construct. It was hand-crafted by 10 metal workers, two welders and one stockman.

The Ford Motor Co., more interested in the prestige than the profit at that time, absorbed most of the cost.