

Beat: Technology

GEORGE BARRIS CREATOR OF THE BATMOBILE DIES AT 89

CAR DESIGNER OF ICONIC 1966 BATMOBILE

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USPA NEWS - George Barris, the Batmobile creator whose talent for turning Detroit iron into decked-out automotive fantasies earned him the nickname "King of the Kustomizers," has died. He was 89. The cause was cancer, said family spokesman Edward Lozzi....

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George Barris was born in Chicago in 1925 but he moved to Northern California as a child, graduating from San Juan High School in Citrus Heights.

Barris customized cars and buses for TV shows, movies, celebrities and heads of state and was a pioneer in designing small, plastic models of those customized cars. The models popularized his wildly imaginative vehicles all the more when they were assembled by millions of American youngsters in the 1950s, '60s and '70s.

The popularity of his cars caught the eye of Hollywood, and his first film assignments included work on cars for Alfred Hitchcock's 'North by Northwest', 1958's 'High School Confidential' and 1960's 'The Time Machine'.

His biggest impact occurred when ABC asked him to create a signature vehicle for Batman. Barris rolled out a Lincoln concept car called the Lincoln Futura that he had kept in storage for about decade and used that as his base, constructing the car in just 15 days. (THR)

"George Barris could take a vehicle and with a minimum of modifications turn it from something ordinary to something grand and exciting," said Leslie Kendall, chief curator of the Petersen Automotive Museum in Los Angeles, which has exhibited many Barris cars over the years. (LATimes)

He was 'a good example of a kid who grew up completely absorbed in this teenage world of cars, who pursued the pure flame and its forms with such devotion that he emerged an artist,' Tom Wolfe wrote in 'The Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby,' his 1965 book celebrating custom car culture.

For decades Barris worked out of a shop in a modest North Hollywood neighborhood, just down the street from Universal Studios. Passers-by would often be startled to see the Batmobile or another stunning vehicle sitting inside the shop and to meet Barris if they strolled in to check it out. (nbcnews)

The success of Batman and the Batmobile led to more work, including Mannix, The Beverly Hillbillies, Knight Rider and designing the Munster Koach for The Munsters, among others. He also designed novelty cars or performed customizations for celebrities ranging from Bob Hope to John Wayne to Elton John.

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