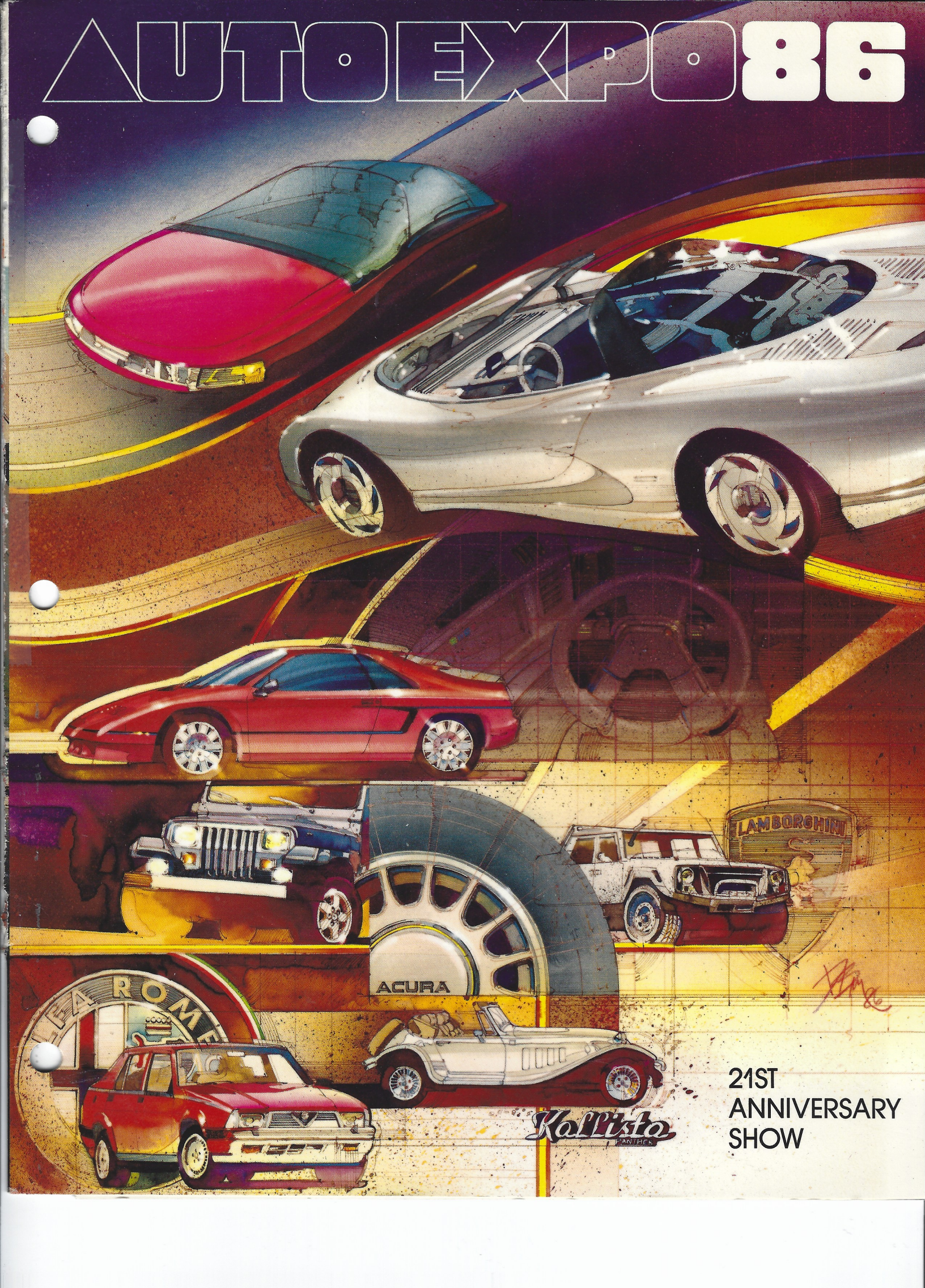


AUTOEXP086



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LIMOS

by Gary Witzenburg

We're floating down the freeway, sipping champagne, watching a movie, in the back of a big blue Lincoln limo.

Traffic floats by on the other side of our one-way windows like so many fish in a giant aquarium. Almost everyone stares at the car, wondering whom it holds, wishing it could be them.

We notice one small sedan keeping pace alongside. Its windows are down, and at least four people are leaning out and waving and hollering at our driver. I pick up the intercom to ask what's going on.

"They want to know who's in there," the chauffeur tells me.

Just then, these people start whooping and yelling and waving even more excitedly. Eventually they run out of energy and the car pulls away.

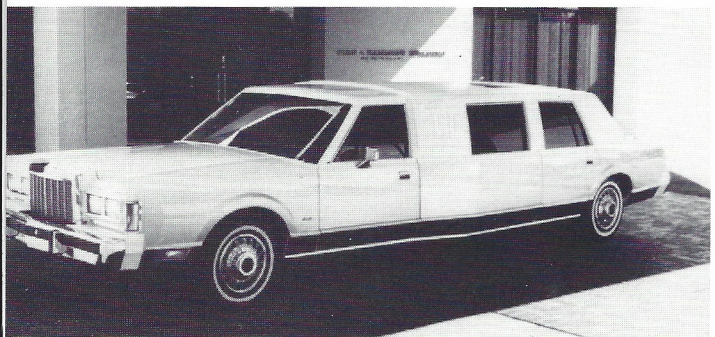
"I told them, 'Bruce Springsteen,'" said our driver. "I wouldn't normally do that, but I thought you'd enjoy the reaction." We did.

You may have been noticing a lot more limos on the road these days. Catch one loading or unloading and you may see someone rich and famous, or a diplomat or some bigshot corporate brass.

Or it might be your neighbor. That's right. The limo livery business is booming, and the majority of its customers are regular folks like you and me.

A "stretch" Cadillac or Lincoln costs \$40-50 an hour to rent (plus tip), and that usually includes a fully stocked bar (local laws permitting) in addition to stereo, TV, VCR, cellular phone, door-

Corporate Coachwork's new Wide-Body is a full 12-inches wider than the standard limousine. Those additional inches allow passengers to sit comfortably with ample room for both leg and seating space.



to-door delivery and all the courteous service you can stand. Split two or three ways, it's not all that extravagant.

The chauffeur knows the best way to get where you're going and how long it takes. He (or she) fights the traffic while you relax or party in back. You're dropped elegantly at the door (no parking and walking) and picked up when you're ready to leave. The car is always there waiting, the chauffeur at your command.

You can go somewhere else for dessert and after-dinner drinks, take a romantic drive, head home whenever you want. There's no worry about drinking and driving. No one can see into the car, and there's a privacy partition between you and the driver. (Consider the possibilities!)

It's a great way to celebrate a birthday or anniversary, a graduation or New Year's Eve. Go to a concert, or just enjoy a night out with special friends.

"Take a look at the average taxi today," says Bob Johnson of limo builder O'Gara Coachworks in Simi Valley, California, "and you see one good reason why limo use is growing in major metropolitan areas. Then there's urban congestion.

"And corporations are concerned about the time their chief executives spend commuting. We find any number

of people who tell us they can put their time to better use because they can work and have meetings in the car."

Dan Williams of Williams Motor Works, Gardena, California, adds: "Social ills, economic problems, traumas in peoples' lives. . . . How do they take an evening and just go out and really enjoy themselves, given all these problems? They do it in a limo. It's not that expensive once or twice a year."

To find a good livery service near you, start with magazine, newspaper and phone book ads.

"Then call a few," advises Greg Childs of Childs Limousine Services in Woodland Hills, California. "How cooperative are they? Are they willing to work with you, maybe give you a break on the rate? Do they charge for travel time? Do they give you the feeling that they really want your business?"

"Ask what kinds of cars they have, and in what colors. Are the beverages extra or included, and what other features to they have? Dependability is most important. Will the driver be on time? Will he know where he's going?"

"A lot of people just shop the rate," adds Ken Faggetter of Pacific Coast Limousine of Woodland Hills and Valencia, California. "But if I were a consumer and really concerned with quality, I'd take time to visit the

company I was planning to do business with, look at their cars and meet some of their drivers, to get a good impression of what I was going to get for my money.

"Still, we find that 30% of our business is word-of-mouth. That's really the best way to find the best service."

Some services make airport runs (a sound investment if you plan to park there for a couple of weeks) and other short trips; some don't. Rates vary (some are negotiable), and so do the cars in terms of age, condition and the way they're equipped. You can usually choose a color, specify how you want the bar stocked, even order specific video tapes for viewing.

About half the people who *buy* limos these days, according to Williams' marketing vice president Robi Sinclair, do it as an investment and/or tax write-off. "Because of the tax benefits," she explains, "it makes sense for a private individual to buy a car and sublease it to a livery company. He has his car when he wants it, and the livery rents it when he doesn't.

"He doesn't have the headaches of housing the car and paying wages to a chauffeur. He gets a percentage of the rentals, makes his payment each month and has green cash money left over.

"We know one man who has more

money than he knows what to do with. He needed a tax write-off, so he opened his own livery company. He put three cars into service, investing the money for a tax benefit. Now he asks his girlfriends whether they'd prefer to be picked up in a limo or in his Ferrari, and they always want the limo. So he's real glad he bought the limos."

And the executive commuter rationale? "We don't know what that executive and his secretary may be

doing in the back seat with the divider window up," Williams laughs. "But if he's got a cellular phone, a dictating machine, maybe a personal computer, he can get as much done back there as he could in his office. It does make sense as a business tool."

Some 30 coachbuilders in this country cut brand new cars in half (or thirds), weld in extensions of various lengths and equip the interiors with the buyer's choice of just about any and

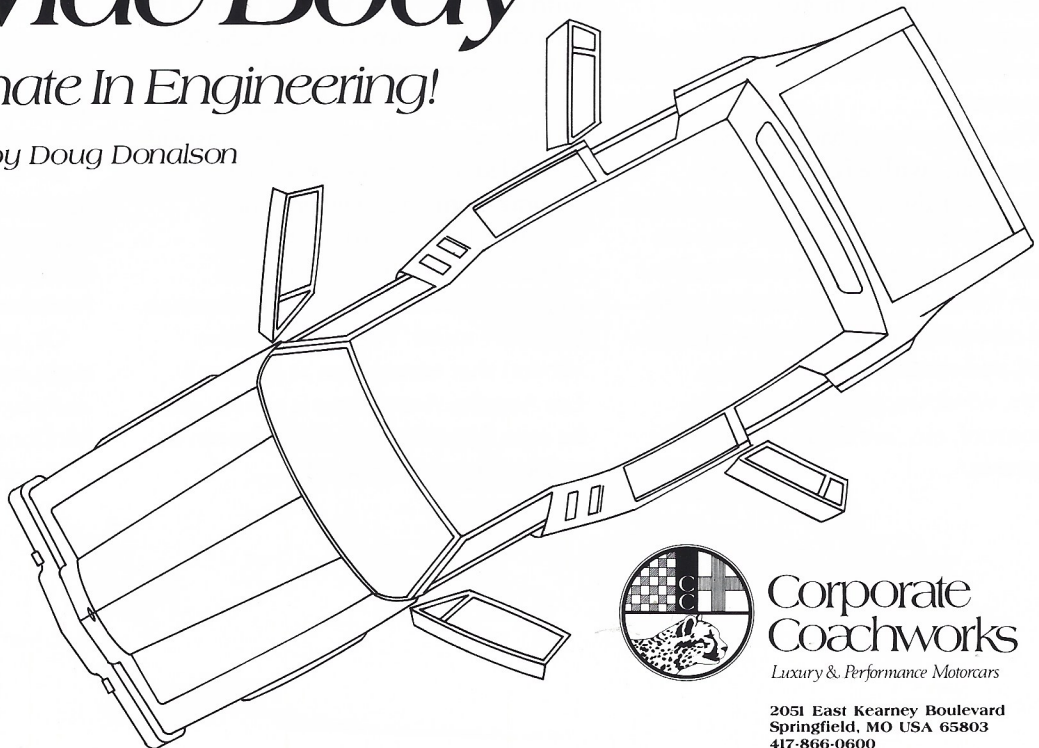
every comfort, convenience and luxury imaginable. This is a difficult and time-consuming process involving a lot of hand labor, and it *must* be properly engineered and executed. Some do it better than others.

Anyone considering a limousine purchase should shop and compare very carefully, since engineering, craftsmanship, service and warranties vary widely. Look for straight lines (no sagging) along the windows, roof and

Introducing... the Wide-Body

The Ultimate In Engineering!

by Doug Donalson

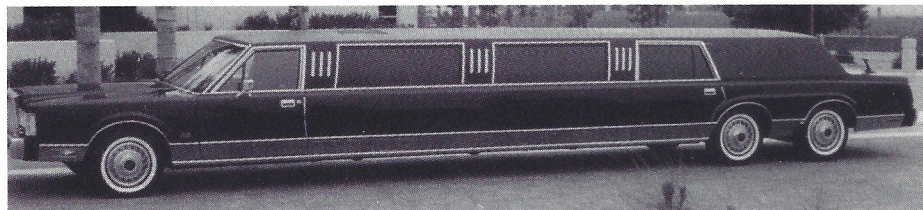


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doors, and check for overall quality and attention to detail.

Also check the builder's and the dealer's reputations with current owners. Compare value for money—what you get for how much—as well as warranties and service policies.

All coachbuilt limos are “stretched” behind the front doors, and some have extended rear doors for easier entry and exit. A “double-cut” car has been cut and stretched again behind the rear doors, which moves the rear seat back behind the door opening for extra comfort, convenience and privacy.

The amount of added length varies from 18 inches to 75 or more. So-called “corporate” limos (for airport, hotel and short-run private use) are the shortest, least expensive and most sparsely equipped, while the more luxurious “stretch” cars (often double-cut) are favored by rental services and their customers.

The car's original back seat plus rear-facing seats, with a furniture-type console (for the TV, stereo, bar, glasses and other equipment) either between them or to one side, give comfortable room for five adults. Upholstery, trim and cabinetry in the nicer cars are first-class, and controls for the various lights, windows, privacy partitions, moonroof, etc., are overhead or in the armrests.

Full-size Cadillacs used to be the preferred vehicles for limo conversions, but the Lincoln Town Car now has achieved at least equal status. “Lincoln changed the styling for '85,” says Williams' Sinclair. “It's sleeker now, and people like it better. Also the Lincoln's interior is wider and has more headroom, the factory warranty is better and service is less expensive. It also has a bigger engine, which is both a plus and a minus—it has more power but uses more gas.”

Most custom coachbuilders do standard Lincoln and Cadillac conversions, with prices ranging from about \$28,000 for the most basic corporate cars to \$65,000 for loaded super-longs. Some also convert Cadillac's new front-drive De Villes, with stretch lengths varying from 18 to 54 inches and prices from \$32–50,000.

Williams recently unveiled a stunning Lincoln-based Renaissance model featuring a painted steel (instead of padded) roof, body-color (instead of chrome) trim, high-performance blackwall tires on cast aluminum wheels and an interior done in an elegant yet contemporary Scandinavian furniture motif. The one-off show version that wowed 'em at January's Los Angeles Auto Show is not for sale, he says, but custom-built copies can be ordered for a cool \$80,000.

Cadillac offers its own corporate limousine, based on the front-drive De Ville, while Chrysler sells a smaller, New Yorker-based car for livery and private use. It sells for a mere \$26,000 compared to \$32,640 for the Cadillac.

Obviously, almost any kind of car or truck can be equipped and/or stretched into a luxury limo. For those who want something out of the ordinary, there are limo conversions of everything from Hondas to Rolls Royces with prices ranging from \$30,000 to \$200,000 and more.

The London Coach Co., Mount Clemens, Michigan, has revived the famous '50s-style London Taxi (with a Ford four-cylinder engine for U.S. use) and offers a luxury “London Sterling” limo version of it for \$26,000. And Royale Carriage Ltd. of Anaheim, California, markets an elegant and very roomy limousine van for \$39,000 and a dual-axle maxivan version (for 10 to 14 passengers) for \$45,000.

So, hey . . . you work hard, you play hard. Life is full of pressures and frustrations and occasional triumphs. Give yourself a break, impress your friends and neighbors: get a limo.

Or, just rent one for the occasional night out. Dress up in evening wear and play the role. Take it to McDonald's. Crash a Hollywood party.

You may never want to drive again!