

Classic Car Born In Farm Machine Shed

A little known enterprise in southern Minnesota has produced some of the most unique automobiles in the world over the last 30 years.

Although they're often used as hearses and limousines, the exotic cars from Prinzing Motorcoaches have also been sold to wealthy individuals all over the world.

Owner/designer Max Prinzing's cars run on either gas or ethanol. In 1979, he invented and patented the first engine in America to run on 100 percent ethanol. His design preheats the ethanol through an upper radiator hose.

Built with Kevlar and surgical stainless steel, Prinzing bodies have a lifetime corrosion-free warranty.

"These cars don't go out of style, and they never rust," says Prinzing, who also built his first classic luxury car in a machine shed on his 70-acre farm in 1975. He wanted a Duesenberg but couldn't afford one. The Duesenberg brothers grew up on an Iowa

farm and built their classic cars without any formal education past the eighth grade. They now sell for \$1 million.

Prinzing, with help from his wife, Mavis, built his first car - a convertible with a rumble seat - in the farm machine shop, combining Duesenberg, Rolls Royce and Packard styles. He still uses the same technique today - build a model out of plaster of Paris and then make the tool-and-die molds. Each of his nine model took about six months to mold. The latest, a six-door limousine, hits the market this fall.

Prinzing cars are all about quality: sturdy chassis frames with four cross beams, modern automatic engines, wooden steering wheels with hand-carved panels, and options such as mink floor mats, wet bars and other amenities. Prinzing says his favorite car is The Madam X, the only 4-door convertible on the market. Other models



Max Prinzing builds one of the most unique automobiles in the world - the Prinzing Motorcoach. Built with Kevlar and surgical stainless steel, Prinzing bodies have a lifetime corrosion-free warranty.

are: The Baron, Princess Wedding Car, The Countess, Dakotah Eagle, Classic Hearse and 5-Window Sport Coupe. Two more models are in production.

The \$100,000 to \$150,000 vehicles serve well as limousines and hearses. He only allows 1,000 cars to be made of each model.

His vehicles appeal to all types of people. In 1977, on a visit to his Minnesota in-laws,

the late singer John Denver tracked down Prinzing. Denver purchased a Baron roadster with a rumble seat. Jay Leno and Neil Diamond also own Prinzing's.

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He's Hooked On Chain Link Fish

"I brought some scrap chain link home and started playing around with it. All of a sudden, there it was - a fish," explains John A. Rocchio about how he got started making his chain link fish. He has worked around chain link fence for decades, first installing it, and now as shop foreman at a St. Paul, Minn., fence company.

In his spare time he enjoys woodwork and "making something out of nothing". Friends and neighbors liked his first fish, as did his former boss, Steve Hoopman.

"Steve said he hadn't seen anything like it," Rocchio says. After one sold for \$1,000 at a charitable auction, Hoopman encouraged Rocchio to make more. Hoopman sells them through his company, Keller Fence Company - North, Inc., in Grand Rapids, Minn.

The 11-gauge chain link is lightweight and bends easily in one direction. It drapes naturally into a fish form. "The diamonds are

small enough to give the effect of scales," Rocchio says.

He starts with a 1/4-in. rod to shape the skeleton - from mouth to spine to tail. The belly is 18-gauge perforated steel from recycled industrial dryer drums. Fins and other parts are made of scrap steel.

Rocchio uses a hobby argon gas welder to tack weld everything together, then primes the fish with a protective galvanized paint, before spraying it with enamel paints and airbrushing in details.

"My favorite is the larger-mouth bass," Rocchio says. "I can make them look like they're almost smiling. They have unique coloring with light and dark green."

He has created many species in metal: walleye, muskie, bass, trout, barracuda and some artistic versions. The fish can be mounted, freestanding or attached to a weathervane or mailbox. Rocchio has num-



John Rocchio uses lightweight chain link to make decorative metal fish. "The diamonds are small enough to give the effect of scales," he says.

bered and signed more than 60 fish already, and has a copyright pending on his design. He does commissioned work based on photos or fish species and sizes.

"They're totally unique, which makes me feel really good," he says. "I never stop thinking. There might be more ideas."

Fish start at \$250 and can be purchased

through the Keller Fence Co. website.

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He Rebuilds Popcorn Wagons For Fun

Making popcorn at Bob Anderson's shop is as pleasurable as eating it. The Chetek, Wis., man has a variety of restored and hand-built popcorn wagons to choose from, including a couple of rare horse-drawn Cretors wagons. The Chicago-based company was owned by Charles Cretors, who patented the process for popping corn in seasoned lard and butter oil in 1893, and added a popping unit to his peanut roasting carts. It wasn't long before popcorn had gained top billing.

The wagons were hand-pulled, self-contained concession stands powered by white gasoline (Naphtha) to generate steam that ran a steam engine. The engine operated the popper, peanut roaster and even blew a crowd-attracting whistle. After 1900, larger Model C and Model D horse-drawn models allowed vendors to tow the wagon to events. A few other companies also sold popcorn wagons, but Cretors were the best known.

"They were the most popular because they were built to last out of steel and wood. Other popcorn wagons were all wood so they wore out faster," says Anderson.

The retired dairy farmer used to restore and build horse-drawn equipment as a side business. After retiring, he focused on building horse-drawn carriages for commercial use. "But I always wanted a popcorn wagon," he says. "I

bought my first one 25 years ago. I restored it. When I sold my carriage business, I started restoring popcorn wagons for others and myself."

Like the early 1900's, some of his buyers use them for vending businesses, while some buy them for collections or as an investment. Others buy them to simply enjoy and pop popcorn for family and friends.

Anderson has old parts and machines to restore full-size popcorn wagons and to build 1/3 and 1/2-scale models. He uses original restored wagons for patterns, but instead of the gas-fired poppers, he installs hanging electric poppers in the wagons. He uses oak wood and makes the doors and windows, but contracts with others to paint and do the upholstery work.

Besides wagons, he has also restored a popcorn truck, which was more expensive and complicated since he had to overhaul the truck and rebuild the frame. Depending on the complexity and model, he sells his popcorn wagons and trucks from \$1,800 to \$35,000.

"They're all challenging and fun. I wouldn't do it if I didn't enjoy it," says Anderson, who is 81.

He has a personal collection of restored antiques and replicas including buggies, pedal cars and sleds. He has enough projects to last him about a year, including restoring a horse-drawn hearse, a miniature milk wagon - and



Bob Anderson restores full-size popcorn wagons and also builds 1/3 and 1/2-scale models. A 1/2-scale Cretors D horse-drawn model is shown above.



This popcorn truck was made by mounting a reproduction body on a Ford Model AA truck chassis.

more popcorn wagons.

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