



THE REAL BLACK

By Al Dente

Photos by TheBruntBros

Oldtimers and oldtimer wannabees may remember the golden age of radio, and those adventure heroes that boomed forth on vacuum tube-generated soundwaves. One popular crimefighter whose appearance we conjured up in our imagination based on the voices and sound effects that mixed with the ever-present AM static was The Green Hornet. Created by George Trendle, The Hornet and his sidekick Kato first took to the airwaves on Detroit, Michigan radio station WXYZ, way back on February 18, 1936. The series ran until 1952. Now, what would a nostalgia story be without a little bit of trivia thrown in that can make you really sparkle at parties? So check out this tidbit. The Lone Ranger, whose concealed identity was John Reid, was as popular on radio as the Hornet. The Hornet's secret identity was Britt Reid, who was said to be the great grand-nephew of the Lone Ranger. Guess the crimefighter genes were passed on down the line. In the case of the Lone Ranger, Tonto saved his life and became his partner. In the case of The Green Hornet, Britt Reid saved Kato's life and Kato became his lifelong servant. The Lone Ranger had Silver (a white stallion), and his call went out: "Hi Yo Silver." Tonto's spurred his horse on with "Gettup up Scout." The Green Hornet had The Black Beauty (a highly modified '66 Imperial) and the line in his script was, "Let's roll, Kato." No one wrote in a tag line for Kato, poor guy (do we have a discrimination case here?)

After the Hornet's radio series ended, the crimefighter who protected "the rights and lives of decent citizens" in some unnamed city, sorta went into hibernation. He awoke on September 9, 1966, to find himself on television in The Green Hornet series that would run until July 14, 1967, when it was canned after 26 episodes. Starring right up there with the Hornet and Kato was their crimefightingmobile, Black Beauty.

There were only two original Black Beauty Imperials built by Dean Jeffries and used on the TV set. The first now resides in the Petersen Museum in LA. It was purchased years ago for an astounding \$193,000. Could be a record for an Imperial. But that car is completely incorrect as to its interior and effects. While the car's outward appearance is correct in "as seen on TV," all of its hidden effects, (rockets, switches etc) are not.

Now, Green Hornet fever is starting up again with the release of the movie bearing his name. We'd tell you more about the film, but our calls for information and photos to Sony Entertainment/Columbia Pictures were not returned. Just as well. Rather than lease one of the original Black Beauties, the studio created their own cars so they could get more in licensing fees and avoid having to pay royalties to Dean Jeffries for his design. The studio used '64 and '65 Imperial 4-doors and eventually built 29 cars. Their creation is a ripoff of Jeffries' car—an effort to satisfy the old TV fans and to create new fans. The



BEAUTY

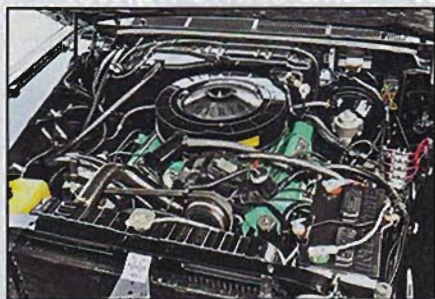
The Green Hornet's luxu crime fighter mobile was a rolling arsenal 1966 Chrysler Crown Imperial.



The Green Hornet's Black Beauty '66 Imperial with all its features retracted. The car has rams that deploy 1" x 2" steel tubes that flip down in the front and rear, to be met by matching fitted clamps in the floor, so the Imperial could be flipped upside down and stored under the floor of the Hornet's alter ego, Britt Reids' garage. The floor rotated to bring up Reid's '66 Chrysler 300 convertible.



The Beauty, with its door handles shaved, may have been the first application of electric door openers activated by a handheld remote. The driver's sun visor was a green shield that allowed him to see the otherwise invisible "infra-green" light from the green headlamps, so the Beauty essentially ran in the dark at night.



Original 11K-mile 413 has been freshened and fitted with a Hughes cam for more torque. Engine compartment has been detailed. Car came with all its assembly line belts, hoses, clamps and wires that were replaced for reliability, but were stashed away.

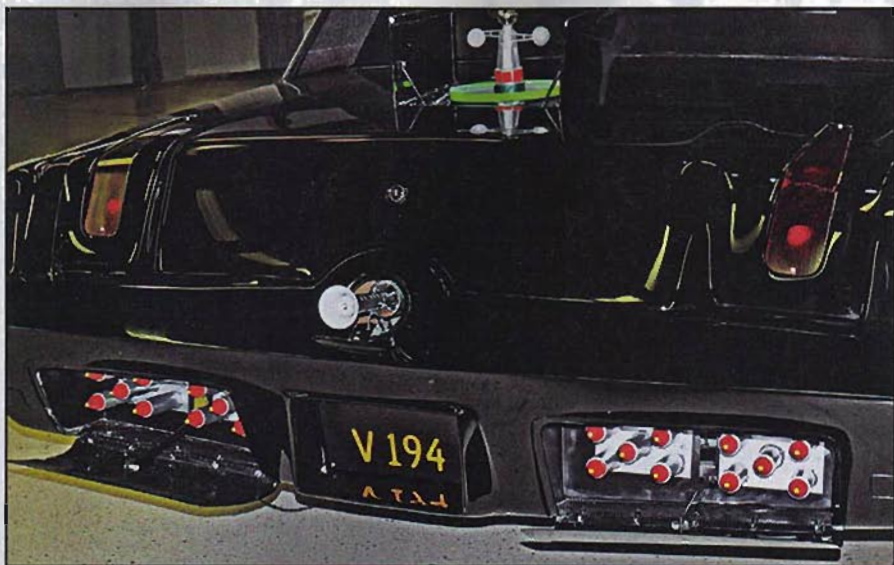


Exterior of dash is stock, save for the speaker connected to the internal PA system and for radio signals. The wheel is a non-tilter, and there were no seatbelts or spare tire. Upholstery is the standard black leather.

huge guns on the fenders are over the top, and overall the car's design looks rough and amateurish compared to the sleek Jeffries design. And if that weren't bad enough, the movie cars are Chevy-powered (barf!), where the originals ran with their factory 413s. So, for a look at the "real" Black Beauty (#2) created by Jeffries for the Green Hornet TV series, crank up your big 12-inch black and white Crosley TV set and come along for the ride (so to speak).

Black Beauty #2 was created out of necessity as a backup in case the first car broke down which could bring the entire production to a standstill. The #2 car differs from the #1 (in the Petersen Museum) most notably in the grille. Behind the horizontal front grille slats are the vertical support rods, something unique to Black Beauty #2. During the restoration it was revealed that these items were painted black for use on the set perhaps to make the car look more like its sister. Also, Black Beauty #2 has the non-tilt steering wheel whereas Black Beauty #1 has the Tilt-A-Scope version. Both columns were available on the '66 Crown Imperial models. Additionally, some of the angles on the car differ slightly from Black Beauty #1 but this is to be expected since both cars were custom-built by hand and are one of a kind.

Once the Green Hornet TV series was



At the rear are more rockets and the oil slick gun which is connected to an oil tank in the trunk. Karl did not want the trunk shown to keep his secret stuff secret from all the Beauty clone builders out there. Not shown are the retractable brooms to sweep away telltale tire tracks and the rams that attach to the garage floor. The doohickey on the decklid is a closed circuit TV scanner that comes up through the trap door in the lid and flies away to capture images of the bad guys. This was a forerunner of today's Predator drones. Push a button and the scanner returns to base and descends out of sight as the trap doors close.



The Black Beauty front end toys show the gas gun protruding from the lower center grille. This shoots out a green cloud of knockout gas to temporarily disable the bad guys. More serious are the rockets at each corner. The rockets use heavy steel tubes attached to a very heavy steel plate. The tubes have very small holes for the igniter wiring which was hidden. The rocket tips were individually machined from acrylic. The headlights rotated between the greenies and regular sealed beams. Not shown are the two rams that clamped the car to the rotating garage floor. All the special features on the Beauty are fully functional—so watch out!

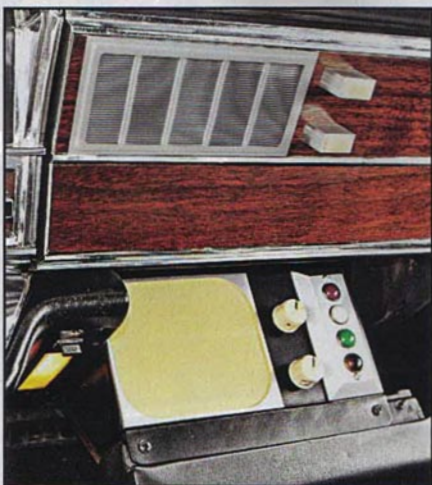
canceled, both Beauties toured at various car shows throughout the country in '67 and '68, after which Jeffries returned them to the 20th Century Fox studio in Studio City, CA. The movie folks offered Jeffries the cars for \$1500 each, but he declined saying if he wanted one he would just as easily build it from scratch.

Both cars apparently sat until 1969 when Jack Button, President of Shipman Ward Typewriter Company, expressed interest in the cars. Button was a business associate of George Barris, and had bought several one-of-a-kind show cars from him. Barris put Button in touch with William Dozier, producer

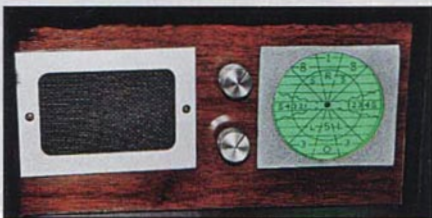
of both the Batman and Green Hornet TV shows, and the sale of Black Beauty No. 2 was made. Button kept the car until 1971 when he sold it to Chicago Historical Automotive Museum owner, J.J. Born, who was looking to stock his museum in Highland Park, IL. It is assumed at this time the car was repainted, door art work added, pinstripes added and the wheels replaced in an effort to make the car look fresh for the new museum display and in keeping with the style and look of the '70s. This makeover is often a point of confusion for some seeking information on the Black Beauty. Barris, seeing the potential to market such a car on



Opening the glovebox and center compartment reveals a telephone with the clickety-click rotary dial, and a tape recorder for recording bugged conversations and playing back through the car's PA system.



Flip-down front TV allowed Kato to view same images as rear TV from the flying/hovering decklid-deployed scanner.



Front seatback also has a compartment for a radio frequency scanner (military, police, Batman, etc.) and speaker.

the car show circuit built what is believed to be the first clone of the Black Beauty in the summer of 1974, which came to be known as the infamous "sunroof" car.

Born displayed the car in his museum from 1971 to its closing in 1985. Most of the vehicles in the museum were sold at auction, and Beauty was snapped up by a local Chicago-area cardiovascular surgeon named Constantine "Dino" Tautoles. He showed the car from 1985-1990, and then sold it to Nick Dieter of Cleveland Ohio's Vintage Motorcars Showplace, then Ohio's largest classic car facility. In March of 1991, the car appeared in Chicago at the HeroCon and was displayed with the stars of the Green Hornet, Van Williams and Wende Wagner. Both signed the car's rear desk at that time. Must've been

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The car had Ansen Sprint II wheels when Karl bought it. Years before, he had picked up three sets of Appliance Plating wheels (for no particular reason), which are TV show-correct and are mounted on the Beauty now.

a bad omen, because the same year, Vintage Motorcars went out of business, and their cars were auctioned off by Kruse auctions.

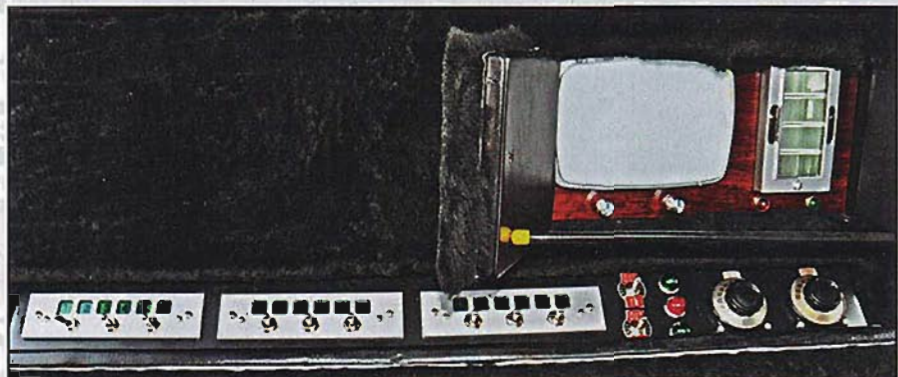
The high bidder on Black Beauty was 78-year-old Opal Wall of Sturgis, MI. Wall had a passion for cars—especially black cars, and was an original owner of a black mid '50s Thunderbird. Her daily driver was a 1969 Lincoln Continental. During her first two years of ownership she displayed the Beauty at Gilmore's Car Museum in Hickory Corners, MI. Then, she tucked it away in a private garage less than a mile from her home.

Karl Kirchner, a Mopar and Green Hornet devotee always had a dream of owning The Green Hornet TV Series Black Beauty Imperial. When the first Black beauty built by Jeffries surfaced in the early '90s (it had been privately owned since being sold by 20th Century Fox), most everyone thought that this was the one and only TV show car built. But documents—including the VIN—in the glove compartment indicated the existence of a second Jeffries-built Imperial. Karl found out about it, verified the information with Jeffries and traced the car through its VIN to the aging Miss Wall. Negotiations ensued and Opal agreed to sell, but she died before the deal was finalized (what, she couldn't wait a couple of weeks?) Karl did eventually purchase Beauty #2 from her estate.

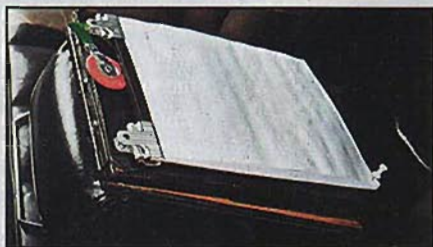
The car was mostly complete, but the signature green headlights were missing along with some other items. Originally a Chrysler executive car that was sold directly to 20th Century, the odo showed only 11,000 miles. Karl originally was set for a body-off resto, but reconsidered as he felt that it would erase the real provenance of this car and remove too much of the hand of the creator (Jeffries). So Karl so went for a "sensitive restoration" using vintage components exclusively. All the electrical connections use the old-style bright solder-on connections as opposed to the modern colored crimp-on connectors. Same for all the indicator lights and switches that needed to be replaced. Those green headlights had



Flip the front passenger seat forward and you'll see the compartment for Kato's mask and a cylinder which contains Kato's change of clothes. The cylinder also houses two small green electronic bugs and the winged hornet darts which he threw to sting and temporarily immobilize the bad guys—a forerunner of today's oft-used Taser. You also see Kato's earphones for listening to bugged conversations.



Compartment in front backrest opened for TV to pick up images from the flying scanner. Two large rotating knobs were non functional. Indicator lights and switches to the left were a master power function and for deploying the rams that attached to fixtures in the garage floor. The three big switch consoles controlled all the special features—oil slick, front and rear rocket doors, decklid scanner trap doors, scanner platform elevator, rear brooms, headlight and license plate rotation, etc.



Rear seat center armrest drops down and holds a writing pad. The armrest further unfolds into a desk that was signed by Van Williams (The TV Green Hornet), Wendy Wagner (Hornet's secretary) and Dean Jeffries (car builder). Too bad Bruce Lee (Kato) never got to sign it.

to come from England as they are Lucas units and were very pricey.

When Barris had the car he added a few more features such as front brooms to sweep away tracks the bad guys might fling, to complement the original rear ones to sweep away the car's tire tracks in dirt. Karl removed all of Barris' gizmos to bring the car back to its TV series authenticity.

The original 413 Imperial motor was treated to a freshening—new rings and bearings and didn't even require honing. While the car came with all its factory-original belts, hoses and wires, Karl replaced these (stashing away the originals) in the interest of safety and reliability, as he plans to drive as well as show the car. He did make one modification, though—he had Hughes grind a special cam to give this 5000+ lb. beast more torque.

So be forewarned. If you're driving in the fast lane, and a big black Imperial zooms up behind you and flashes its green headlights, you'd better yield or risk getting gassed or blown up with rockets by the driver wearing a black mask.