

# Spearfish man's LBJ limousine shows evolution from convertible that JFK rode



**SPEARFISH** | On that fateful day 50 years ago in Dallas, the future of the United States was thought to be at stake.

Heightened security measures surrounded a newly sworn-in president, who was whisked from Texas aboard Air Force One, shadowed by Secret Service agents and the widow of John Fitzgerald Kennedy.

In the ensuing weeks, the Warren Commission was established and a sullied Secret Service pondered how to better protect the 36th president of the United States while still allowing him the mobility to leave the White House.

Transporting the president would never be the same.

According to experts in presidential transportation, "The Quick Fix" as it came to be known, involved swapping the convertible parade car that Kennedy rode in at Dallas to limos made of titanium, anti-ballistic materials and bulletproof glass.

"The top was fixed to the car now and included 1,500-pound roof-mounted bulletproof glass, which unto itself cost \$125,000," wrote Michael L. Bromley and Tom Mazza in their 2002 book, "Stretching It: The Story of the Limousine," published by the Society of Automotive Engineers.

"Vulnerable areas were rebuilt with the rare and difficult-to-acquire titanium," the authors noted. "All told, the 1,600 pounds of additional steel armor, the bulletproof glass and other anti-ballistic materials added up to an incredible 9,500 pounds. The entire project cost more than \$1 million, making the car not only the most sophisticated but the most expensive yet built."

The partnership between the Secret Service and the Ford Motor Co. eventually led President Lyndon Baines Johnson to order one of the re-designed X-100 parade cars with a new bubble-glass top and five of the 1968 Lincoln Peterson Model 90 Lincoln Continentals that would transport the chief executive, ambassadors, visiting dignitaries and high-ranking members of Congress through the remainder of his term.



## RUBBER-TIRED REMINDER

One of those gloss-black presidential limousines — still exquisite and regal — drove down Deadwood's Main Street this week, catching pedestrian glimpses and the admiration of a waiter and cook in a local restaurant where its owner stopped for breakfast.

"I thought it was a piece of history that I remembered distinctly," said retired Deadwood businessman and LBJ-car owner Paul Miller, who bought the vintage vehicle in 2002. "I had been looking for a historical limo for 18 years."

More than a decade after acquiring it from the Rockefeller Limo Stable in Virginia, Miller can tell you virtually every detail of the car that wasn't classified, primarily because he's spent so much time under it.

"You can find me laying on my back working on it, sometimes cursing up a blue streak," the soft-spoken 6-foot-4 Miller said. "Thank God I have a friend like Tom Kruzel, a mechanical genius who can figure anything out on this car and has, because no records are available for this vehicle."

Together, the pair re-wired the classic Lincoln and found things that remain a mystery.

"When that car was re-wired from the headlights to the back seat, the wire literally filled a 55-gallon drum stuffed tight," Miller said. "When we got to the back seat there was a 3-inch conduit that must have had a hundred strands of wire. We're not too sure what it was all for because many things had been stripped from the car."

Most of the Lincoln's protective and weighty features were removed in a 1990s overhaul, but it retains its 460 cubic-inch engine, modified cam and carburetor, C-4 transmission and still weighs in at a stout 8,700 pounds. Miller said he remained fascinated by the technology and armament employed to protect a president.

"When you think of what Kennedy was riding in when he got shot and the level of security they went to after his assassination, it was pretty minimal," Miller admitted. "It was like one step up. Since then, it's overwhelming what they had done with the security in the private limousine for the president."

"You'll find electrified door handles to prevent intrusion, tear gas dispensers beneath the car to counter an assault, internal filtration systems to block dangerous gases, GPS monitoring of the president from his heartbeat to location, and worldwide communications set-ups," he added. "I can't imagine the computer system that rides with the president today."



Miller, 68, said when he wasn't tinkering with the car or playing in the four live streams and sixteen dams and ponds he has on his 300-acre property outside Spearfish, he alternately drives a '96 Dodge with a 5.9-liter Cummings diesel or his Toyota Avalon.

"The difference between driving the limo and the Avalon, in handling, is like comparing a Goodyear blimp with an F-4 fighter jet," he laughed. "The limo drives very carefully."

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"I spent the day with Sen. George McGovern and his wife in 2003, and drove him in this car through the streets to Mt. Moriah and Mt. Roosevelt and delivered him to the Saloon No. 10 where we talked for four hours," Miller recalled. "He told me he once flew into LBJ's ranch with the president and when they landed they had four of these limos waiting. The senator spent the next two days at the ranch trying to convince the president to pull out of Vietnam."

"So, this car has got some history," Miller said.

