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If you were accustomed to the luxury of "stately Wayne manor," you'd probably choose a \$250,000 Lincoln as your anti-crime vehicle, too.

That's exactly what Batman did when he was looking for his famous Batmobile. It's not becoming of a millionaire socialite like Bruce Wayne ("true identity of Batman") to chase arch villains in a popular-priced car.

Batman's choice was an experimental car called the Lincoln Futura, a 19-foot "laboratory on wheels" built in 1955 for a quarter-million dollars by Lincoln-Mercury Division to gather engineering data and public reaction to styling innovations.

Handcrafted in Ford Motor Company's Dearborn, Mich., Styling Center, the one-of-a-kind Lincoln Futura created widespread interest 11 years ago with its twin-bubble plastic canopy top, functional rear fender air scoops for air conditioning and brake cooling and pushbutton transmission, an industry first. It was powered by a 500-horsepower Lincoln engine designed for racing and other high performance uses.

While on a series of appearances at auto shows and other public events throughout the country, the Lincoln Futura caught the eye of a Hollywood executive who arranged a starring role in the 1956 production of a Debbie Reynolds--Glenn Ford film called, "It Started With A Kiss."

Following the movie-making stint on location near Madrid, Spain, the Lincoln Futura went back on the road in the U.S., this time as a theater box office builder.

Soon, however, the Futura suffered the fate of many a movie star -- type-cast and over-exposed, no further roles were offered. It was returned to Dearborn and drydocked, its career apparently ended.

But George Barris, a Los Angeles car customizer saved the day in a style that Batman himself would envy. He purchased the car on speculation for an undisclosed price and shipped it to his Kustom Kar City for possible later restoration and use in a science fiction movie.

Last fall, when producers of the Batman series were searching for an automobile for the caped crusader's campaign against the forces of evil, Barris had just what they wanted.

"I had just three weeks to change the Futura to a Batmobile," Barris said. "I put 10 men on the job, set up a double shift, and made the deadline."

He changed the exterior color from pearlescent frost white blue to "velvet glow bat fuzz black" trimmed with fluorescent cerise. The clean, sloping hood of the Futura was reshaped into a bat face, with a long scoop extending down to the grille area to form an accentuated nose.

The Futura's prominent rear fins, which were precursors of later Lincoln styling themes, were extended to seven-foot length and fluted at the ends to create a batwing shape. Between the twin bubbles over the cockpit, Barris installed a center roll bar, police-type flashing light and "left and right trouble shooters." Three "anti-theft rocket tubes" are mounted on the rear deck where once a circular antenna was located.

Full wheel cuts on the Batmobile interrupt the Futura's sweeping side styling treatment and a "turbine exhaust tube" and a pair of parachutes have been added to the rear. The parachutes are said to permit the dynamic duo to make full-speed 360-degree turns during a chase.

Not so evident to TV watchers or gangsters in Gotham City are some of the most destructive crime-fighting tools ever devised. The "eyes" of the Batmobile contain laser guns which emit beams capable of cutting through rock or steel. If a villain dares to block the road with chains or cables, large blades project forth from the "mouth" to slice through them. More rockets also are mounted in the "mouth."

In the cockpit of the Batmobile are a host of gadgets, including a Batscope equipped with a revolving closed circuit TV camera, an electronic receiver connected to the computers back at the Batcave, and a Detect-a-scope which keeps track of Batman and Robin's movements, and an automatic fire-fighting element.

The Batmobile retains virtually unchanged most of the major specifications of the Futura: 129-inch wheelbase, 225-inch overall length, and 5,500-pound weight. Height was reduced four inches to only four feet. Still powered by the Lincoln racing engine, the turbine sound and flames are special effects.

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