

GEORGE BARRIS
1925-2015
King of the Kustomizers



George Barris, the "King of the Kustomizers", died last week. His passing at the age of 89 touched everybody at the Amelia Island Concours. It seems that everyone here has a really good George Barris story.

The highpoint of his long involvement with the Amelia Concours must have been 2004, the year Amelia celebrated the custom Mercurys, the "lead sleds" of the early fifties.



George with "Big Daddy" Garlits at Amelia.

"George was in his glory," said Bill Warner, founder and Chairman of the Amelia Island Concours d'Elegance. " He was really on his game when the Hirohata Mercury, with which he and his brother, Sam, were so identified, was presented at the reviewing stand. We asked one of our models to dress in a style that would relate to the car. Out she stepped in a stunning snake skinned body suit with a boa around her shoulders. George did not miss a beat, diving out of the judges stand in order to share the limelight with our beautiful addition to his beautiful car.



"George was creative, at times bombastic, and quite the showman. He could rival P.T. Barnum if he was so inclined. As an accomplished photographer, he supplied Robert Petersen all the material he would need to tell the Southern California lifestyle story through the pages of Hot Rod and Rod and Custom. As teenagers on the east coast, our dreams were signed, sealed and delivered every month by George Barris and his "Kustoms". He, indeed, was one of a kind and there will never be another like him".

Barris was at the height of his considerable powers in the 1960s. He modified the Lincoln Futura concept car into the original Batmobile for the Batman television series. It sold for \$4.62 million at auction in 2013. By then, George Barris was already famous. Kids built thousands of George Barris-designed plastic model kits. The Beverly Hillbillies rode in a truck based on an ancient Oldsmobile that was another Barris creation. So did the folks who lived at 1313 Mockingbird Lane, the Munster Koach and Drag-U-Lawere both Barris-built. Barris built customs for Sonny and Cher, Elvis, Ann-Margret, and a host of the Hollywood "A" list.

ORIGINAL 1966 TV BATMOBILE

By George Barris



"In the early years of the concours, we'd go to dinner on Thursday night with many of our friends, and it was always a mixed bag of greats. One evening we played Name That Tune at the Beech Street Grill with the distinguished actor, Edward Herrmann, Johnny Rutherford, Donnie and Bobbie Allison, Jim Hall, and Bill Spoerle (from the Indy museum). It was a night I will never forget and once again, George was "on his game" what a man, and what a life. We should all be so lucky."



A chandelier at the Ritz-Carlton anoints George as King of the Kustomizers along with Chip Foose and Beau Boeckman (both great customizers in their own right).

About The Amelia Island Concours d'Elegance

Now in its third decade, the Amelia Island Concours d'Elegance is among the top automotive events in the world. Always held the second full weekend in March, "The Amelia" draws over 250 rare vehicles from collections around the world to The Golf Club of Amelia Island and The Ritz-Carlton, Amelia Island for a celebration of the automobile like no other. Since 1996, the show's Foundation has donated over \$2.75 million to Community Hospice of Northeast Florida, Inc., Spina Bifida of Jacksonville, The Navy Marine Corps Relief Society, Shop with Cops, and other deserving charities. The 21st annual Amelia Island Concours d'Elegance is scheduled for March 11-13, 2016. For more information, visit www.ameliaconcours.org.



Amelia Island Concours d'Elegance
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