

Warren Car Guy Re-creates TV's Talking 'KITT'



Chris Palmer's re-creation of KITT extends to duplicating its dashboard.

by Jim Stickford

It's often been said that the difference between men and boys is the price of their toys.

It's certainly true that no child could afford Warren resident Chris Palmer's re-creation of KITT, the car from the classic TV series, "Knight Rider."

Palmer, 33, has "KITTed" up a 1991 Pontiac GTA Firebird and retrofitted it with parts from two 1982 Firebirds to make it look like KITT (which stands for Knight Industries Two Thousand), the famous car from "Knight Rider."

"I had to do a lot of work," Palmer said. "I had to change the fender, the hood, the rear bumper, the rear hatch, the rear spoiler, the air deflector, the ground deflector, put in 1982 wheels and 1982 seats," Palmer said. "For the initial car, I paid close to \$4,000 for the vehicle, but that was the beginning of the expenses. I've put in close to \$30,000 into the car right at this moment."

Palmer's decision to actually "KIT" up a Firebird came about after he purchased a Knight Rider toy on eBay.

"We all had those big toy KITTs when we were kids," Palmer said. "I saw one like the one I had when I was young on eBay and decided to buy it."

And that got Palmer started.

His hobby is buying up old cars, fixing them up and selling them. He thought it might be fun to apply that effort to create KITT and instead of having a toy, he'd have something as close to the real thing as anyone could get.

Palmer admitted that not everyone in his life thought that was such a good idea.

"I used to have a girlfriend when I started the project," Palmer said. "That was about four years ago. Getting the car pretty much put an end to that. We're no longer together."

In addition to making the exterior of the vehicle resemble a 1982 Firebird, Palmer said he's spent a lot of time adding features to the interior of the vehicle so that it matches the cockpit-like appearance of KITT.

Instead of a traditional steering wheel, the car now has one that looks like the one that actor David Hasselhoff used in the TV show.

The dashboard displays also resemble what KITT's looked like in the show and he even has the electronic red "eye" in the front of the vehicle that scans back and forth just like in the show.

"Kids really love seeing this car," Palmer said. "The show first went on the air in 1982, so it's about 50-50 as to whether they recognize what KITT is. Many think it's a cool car just like on TV. Others think it's

just a cool car, and I have to explain to them what KITT is."

Palmer, who owns a lawn care company with his brother, and works at Tag's Tents & Graphics, said he likes to drive the vehicle.

"I guess I go out in the streets about three or four times a week," Palmer said. "What's the point of having a car like this if you aren't going to drive it?"

Palmer said that he doesn't know exactly how many miles he's put on the vehicle since its retrofit.

The dashboard display looks like the one in the show, but in order to put it in, Palmer had to take out the odometer.

"I take it to shows and let people get in it and take pictures of it as long as they promise not to scratch it," Palmer said. "I recently drove it in a parade that celebrated the 1980s, and I'll be driving it in a pa-



Palmer next to his re-creation of KITT from "Knight Rider." He jokes, "But I still can't get it to talk to me."

rade next year to help raise money for wounded veterans."

Doing all the work took a lot of time and effort, Palmer said. But he had help from friends, including Eric LaFata, who owns LaFata Auto Body. He also did a lot of the work at Sled Alley, a shop in Clinton Township that specializes in custom hot rod work.

Palmer said he likes KITT, but he has his eye on re-creating another 1980s motor vehicle classic.

"I like going out with my friends to the races and it would be much easier if I had a van that could haul everyone. That's why I want to retrofit a van to

match the one in "The A-Team." He hopes to get working on the van in the near future because he loves it when a plan comes together.

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