



# The Criterion

NEWSLETTER OF THE NORTHEAST CHAPTER OF THE PROFESSIONAL CAR SOCIETY  
THIRD QUARTER 1997 GREGG D. MERKSAMER, EDITOR

## MEET AT JOE'S:

### Noreasters Grace Gibilisco Funeral Home Re-Opening Bash



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Dave Wilner's 1850 horsedrawn hearse occupied the prime real estate at Gibilisco's entrance.

host Joe Gibilisco put together a festive, community-spirited shindig with complimentary refreshments and a magic show for the kids by Bunky the Clown. In addition to the eats and entertainment visitors could examine recent upgrades to Gibilisco's 100 year old Victorian landmark building, selected from more than 70 candidates in three states to appear as the "Jimenez Funeral Home" in the major motion picture *City Hall* with Al Pacino and Bridget Fonda, which have tripled the size of the visitation areas and improved access for the handicapped.

The big bash on West Milton Avenue in the heart of Rahway was hard for passers-by to miss, so it attracted several vehicles you wouldn't usually tie to funeral service. These included a lime green hot rod '58 Chevy two-door wagon, the Rahway Fire Department's 1919 American La France pumper ("still runs, still pumps," one of its caretakers assured me) and a circa-1984 GMC armored truck recently



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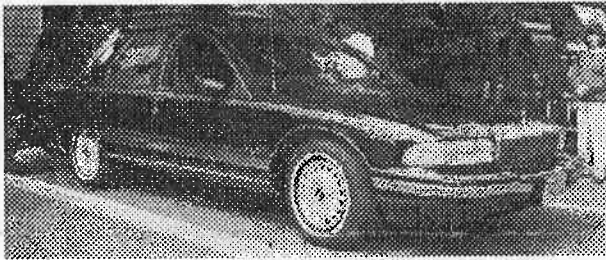
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donated by COIN President Jack Rodriguez to the Rahway Police Department for use as a mobile command post. "We actually weren't interested in the armor," explained Detective Bill White III. "We wanted it because the size of the vehicle was ideal for our department. When we need to do a drug raid twelve officers and their equipment can fit very comfortably in back."

Joined by Joe Gibilisco's unusual 1995 Eagle Necessity hearse, built from a Buick Roadmaster station wagon by stretching the rear quarter panels, the PCS member cars occupied ten prime spaces in the parking area. With Bob Behr's 1949 Flexible Buick ambulance parked right behind it, Dave Wilner's 1850 horsedrawn hearse occupied the place of honor by Gibilisco's front sign.

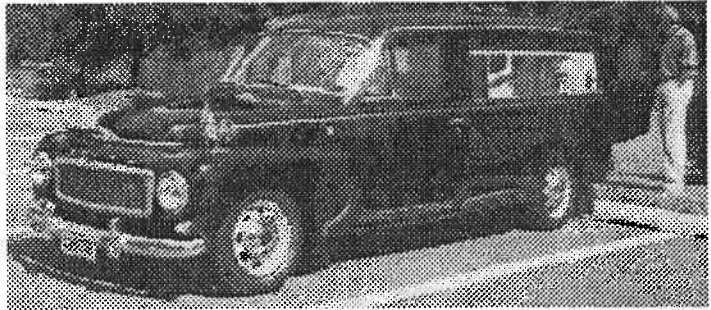


**Host Joe Gibilisco added his own 1995 Eagle Buick Necessity to the vehicle display.**

Adjacent to Paul Vickery's 1956 Miller Cadillac ambulance, Craig Stewart's 1978 Miller-Meteor ambulance was next door neighbor to Bill Marcy's 1978 Miller-Meteor limousine-style hearse.

Parked in front of Gibilisco's free-standing casket selection room, the Heine-bodied, glass walled 1965 Volvo P210 hearse brought from Trenton by Will Van Allen and Gregory Miller was another big draw. Across the parking area three Cadillac flower cars stood in a row; Mike Barruzza's '74 Superior, Bill Marcy's 1978 McClain and Dave Wilner's stretched 1997 DeVille, whose construction is chronicled on page three of this issue of *The Criterion*.

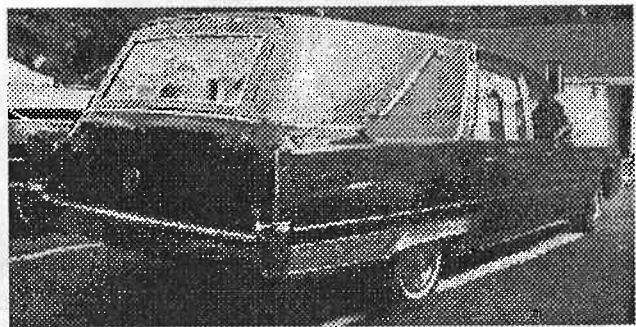
The Gibilisco open house also marked the debut showing of the 1970 Superior Crown Sovereign Cadillac Landau that Jeff & Dale Hedges have owned since spring; it really stood apart with its red paint job and pewter top. "It originally had a Sudan Beige bottom and Cotillion White top," Jeff explained, "but someone tried to give the roof a crinkle finish that



**Glass-walled, Heine-bodied 1965 Volvo hearse brought by Will Van Allen & Gregory Miller was a big draw.**

never stuck, so I had to strip the entire roof with a razor blade." Those who looked beyond the unusual color scheme found this 68,000 mile car to be rust-free and exceptionally complete trim-wise, down to the ribbed appliques behind the fender skirts and the Superior Crown medallion in the middle of the rear door. "The guy who bought it up here was going to a stock car race in North Carolina, saw it sitting on a lot and fell in love with it," Jeff added. "He took the train down, drove it back, owned it for three weeks, got sick and passed away. I learned about the car in an Estate Sale notice in the Jamesburg, NJ *Auto Shopper*."

The casket compartment was also in fine fettle and full of unusual touches, including a cot hook "for take outs" (but no jump seats) and truly eye-catching Art Deco style polished aluminum torches. "Once I had the car in my driveway, two guys got out of a minivan and started looking the car over," Jeff recalled. "One of them whipped out a card saying he was a funeral director from the Phillipines. If my car was a 3-way I could have sold it right then and there."



**Jeff & Dale Hedges' '70 Sup Crown Sovereign really stood out with its red paint & pewter top.**

## NORTHEAST CHAPTER TO MEET NOVEMBER 2<sup>nd</sup>

The election of new officers and a planning session for the 1999 PCS International Meet in Lancaster, PA will top the agenda at the next meeting of the PCS Northeast Chapter, which will take place in Sparta, New Jersey on Sun., November 2<sup>nd</sup>. Hosted by Chapter Secretary Mary Hookway and her husband Jeff, the meeting will begin 1:30 pm at the HQ of the Sparta Volunteer Ambulance Squad. Those that need eats beforehand plan to meet at noon at the nearby Sparta Diner. Here are more detailed directions:

*To the Sparta Volunteer Ambulance Squad HQ, 14 Sparta Ave., Sparta, NJ (bldg. phone: 973-729-7560):*

Route 80 West to exit 34B, or Route 80 East to exit 34 ("Route 15 North, Jefferson/Sparta").

Route 15 North past "Sparta/Lake Mohawk Business District" exit to "Sparta/Route 517" exit.

Turn left onto Route 517 at first traffic signal.

Go straight at second traffic signal, at third traffic signal turn left onto Sparta Ave.

Squad building is on right beyond Grand Union and Dairy Queen. Park in lot just before squad building, or drive between squad building and fire house beyond it and park in rear.

*To the Sparta Diner, 80 Woodport Rd., Sparta, NJ:*

Continue past the squad building to the traffic signal. Turn right. (You can't go straight. This is a jug handle you'll have to go around when you return to the squad building). At Y, stay to the left. (Don't go to Lake Mohawk). Go straight at signal, than make your first right into the Professional Quadrangle and the Sparta Diner parking lot.

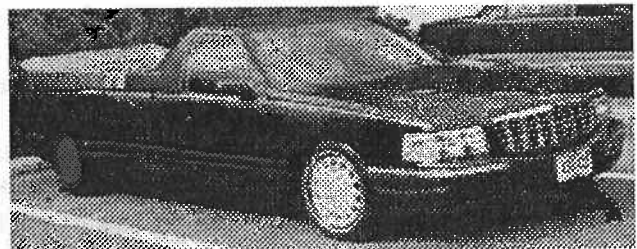
An alternate route directly to Sparta Diner would be to take Route 15 North to the "Sparta/Lake Mohawk Business District" exit, then take Route 181 North. At traffic signal (Pine Cone Lane) go straight. When you see Sparta Lanes and the Theater Center shopping center on right, get ready to turn left into Professional Quadrangle. If you come to a second traffic signal, you've gone too far.



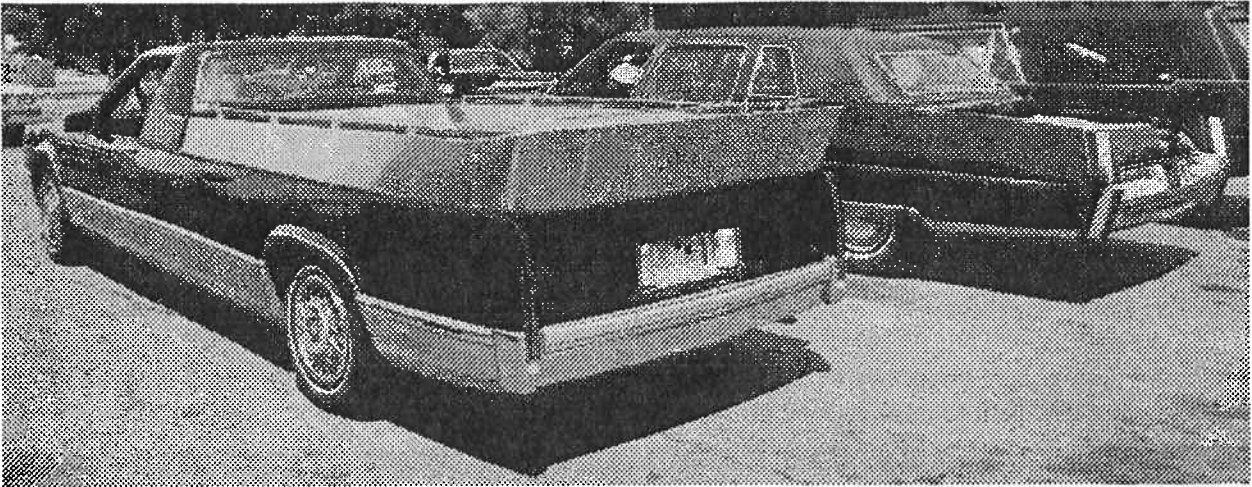
## WILNER WELCOMES THE PCS

On July 20th, PCS member Dave Wilner (*above, at right*) invited the Northeast Chapter to tour the Edison, NJ facility where he houses his 110 vehicle livery fleet. His father founded the firm in 1923, and Wilner recalled that he "started washing cars at nine, and went on the road myself in 1952. I remember we'd trade cars after five years that had gone 20,000 miles. We can do that in a year now." His hearses average 14,000 miles a year, while the flower cars do 7,000 to 8,000 miles annually, the limousines 35,000 a year and the sedans a whopping 80,000 miles. "I'd like to make in a year what I pay in insurance," Wilner quipped as he leaned on the stainless steel tonneau of a flower car, discussing other changes in the livery trade. Though he's converted about 20 Cadillacs over the past seven years into flower cars for himself and a few preferred customers, Wilner feels that "the flower car business is not what it used to be. The cemeteries just don't want the flowers anymore."

Wilner had an impressive collection of vintage



Started the week before the PCS visited on July 20th, Wilner had his stretched DeVille flower car ready to show at Gibilisco's in September.



Wilner's 110 car fleet includes this 1980s front-drive DeVille flower car and 1973 Fleetwood limo.

professional cars on display in the parking lot when the PCS people arrived, including a "2 horsepower" hearse built by an unknown craftsman around 1850 (*see photo page one*) and a Centennial Edition 1976 S&S Cadillac funeral coach.

Almost thirty people from the PCS Northeast Chapter came to Wilner's headquarters for the tour, including PCS Northeast Chapter President Leo Maren, Gregg & Lisa Merksamer, Mike Barruzza, Dottie Forvour, John Casiello, Fred Goerlitz & his fiancé Tracy Carroll, and Jeff & Dale Hedges and her uncle Les Parker from Bognor Regis, England. Ted Collins brought his front-drive 1997 S&S Cadillac hearse from Wilkes-Barre, but reported that "I've only owned it for two weeks so I can't give you a full road test. Our funeral home's always had front drive so it's not a revolution to us." Joined by his wife Elaine and a Lincoln Club colleague named Bill Breitwieser, Harvey Schofield had his unstretched 1967 Lincoln sedan on hand "to tease people, since they've seen a lot of my eight-inch Lehmann-Peterson since 1981. I would have liked to display them side-by-side today, but Elaine won't drive our recreational cars."

In addition to bringing the 1978 McClain Cadillac flower car they in fact purchased from Wilner - who has other vintage professional cars for sale from time to time - Bill & Lucille Marcy displayed their latest acquisition, a rare and exceptionally well-preserved 1978 Miller-Meteor limousine style hearse that came from Connecticut with a two owner history and just

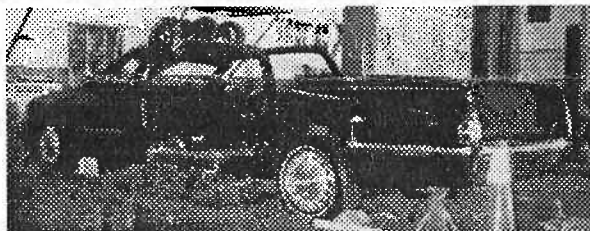
34,000 miles on the odometer. Having learned about the car from a tip passed from Hartford area coach dealer Tammy Parks to past PCS president Paul Cichon and on to Craig Stewart in New Jersey, Bill said "I wasn't really interested in the car but I went to look at it anyway. The minute they opened the garage door I fell in love with it."

New Northeast Chapter member Dave Factor and his wife Dale Zelitch came to Edison in a 1968 M-M Citation Landau hearse that, against all odds, they regularly park on the streets surrounding their apartment on East 6th Street in Manhattan. "People figure it's very bad luck," said Factor, who has also managed alternate side parking with his 1965 and 1972 Eldorado Convertibles and 1968 Fleetwood. Other PCS member cars on hand included Andy Toton's 1970 M-M Cadillac hearse/ambulance combination, the 1965 Volvo hearse belonging to Will Van Allen & Gregory Miller, a sharp-looking 1983 Lincoln Mark VI coupe owned by John Nieliwocki that in fact had 113,000 miles on the odometer and a 1979 Fleetwood Formal Limousine brought by Jon Ponulak, his wife Tammy and brother Stan.

The tour began inside Wilner's paint booth and wash area, where he said that "every car is washed when it's finished for the day, close to 360 times a year." An upstairs parts area stocked mostly 1980-92 rear drive Cadillac components salvaged from wrecked cars, though Wilner recalled having a front and rear bumper for a 1976 model if anyone needed it.

To make efficient use of the garage space on each side of the center aisle, 6-door limousines are parked to the left and the shorter hearses to the right. "I'm partial to Cadillacs," Wilner admits, since "the finished products are better looking and I only have to keep parts, tools and expertise on one kind of car." Most of his hearses are S&S, with a couple of California-built Krystals that "were a good buy when I needed them. As far as quality is concerned, I think S&S is the best but there's not a huge gap and no one builds a perfect car."

As the PCS people moved down the center aisle, their attention turned quickly to the 1997 DeVille being converted into a flower car on a service lift; having arrived the Thursday before the PCS' visit, Wilner had already stretched its wheelbase 32" (versus 24" for the old rear-drive Fleetwood) and he planned to have the car completed in time for the NJ funeral directors convention in Atlantic City in September. Even though it takes two men only about 25 working



days to a build flower car, Wilner stresses that "we don't want to take any chances. We try to make our stretch stronger than the original car by welding in additional steel," and his conversions retain their original door cutouts so that cracks don't appear in the long run. PCS President *Emeritus* Mike Barruzza seemed particularly impressed that Wilner's flower cars had "nice low decks. From the wheel of my 1974 Superior you're lucky to see an antenna or roof on the car behind." The flower beds are designed to be very sturdy with their welded steel tube supporting frames, and Wilner added that "we also put a drain in the flower bed that's as big as a household one. In the old days it was a pencil hole and wood underneath." Each bed is made from seven 4x8 sheets of stainless steel costing Wilner \$300 apiece, so it seems reasonable enough that conversions without center stretches start at around \$8,000 on a customer provided car.

## NEWS IN BRIEF . . .

**Seven professional cars attended the big antique auto show held in New Hope, PA on Saturday, August 9th.** 1st Place prize in the procar class went to Ted Collins' 1967 S&S Victoria end loading hearse, while 2nd and 3rd Place honors respectively went to Mike Barruzza's 1977 Superior Cadillac and Paul Vickery's 1940 Flxible Buick ambulances.

### **Northeast Chapter sweeps 21st Annual PCS International Meet:**

While a full account of activities in Baltimore must wait until the next *Criterion* due to lack of space, I'll report here that the Northeast Chapter collected several class honors at the closing banquet. Ted Collins' 1967 S&S & Bill Marcy's '78 M-M tied for 1st Place in the Postwar Hearses, while Mike Barruzza earned 1st Place prizes in the Flower Car and Hi-top Ambulance classes with his '74 & '77 Superior Cadillacs. Harvey Schofield's '67 Lehmann-Peterson Lincoln tied for 2nd in the Livery Class, while 3rd and 1st Place honors among combinations went to Mahlon Thompson's '53 Henney Packard Junior and Andy Toton's '70 M-M Cadillac. Paul Vickery's '56 Miller Cadillac and '40 Flxible-Buick earned 3rd and 1st in the Lo-top Ambulance category, while Craig & Roseanne Stewart's 1976 M-M Cadillac tied for 2nd among Hi-top Ambulances and won the Medic's Choice Award. With so little space left to recall the comraderie of PCS Baltimore, it especially pleases me to add that Bill Wright, a former Noreaster now living in Daytona Beach, Florida, took home the PCS logo clock made by Karen Toton and raffled off as a fundraiser for the 1999 International Meet we'll be hosting in Lancaster, PA.



## CRITERION CLASSIFIEDS:

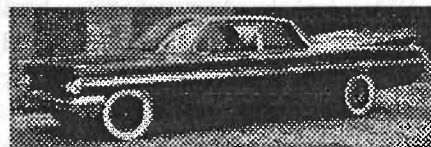
**1940 Henney-Packard Series 1801 Hearse/Ambulance.** Restoration started, body sandblasted and primered. Covered dual sidemounts, 3-way entry. \$3,500. Joe Napoli, (201) 251-9746.

**1950 Chrysler Crown Imperial Limousine.** Complete and running but needs restoration. \$3000. Sal Anicito, (201) 440-5337 days.

**1958 S&S Cadillac Victoria Hearse.** Good running condition, new exhaust. Needs restoration. Best offer. Anthony L. Perito, (718) 931-6149 (Bronx, NY).

**1958 Eureka Cadillac Limousine-style Combination Coach.** Original gray finish with matching crinkle-finish top and optional rear wrap-around corner windows. This 44,000 mile car attended the 1978 and 1982 PCS International Meets before going into carriage house storage in 1986. Asking \$6,500. Carlton Ham, (603)934-4913 or e-mail whtmtman@aol.com. **Also selling 1967 Miller-Meteor Cadillac Embassy Flower Car**, one of six built during 1967 model year. 50,000 miles, Inverness Green with black crinkle-finish roof. Trophy winner at several PCS International Meets and the 1995 Cadillac-LaSalle Grand National in Albany. \$15,995.

**1962 Pontiac Flower Car Prototype by Armbruster Stageway.** Hand-built one-off stretched from a 2-door Catalina by the factory in Fort Smith, Arkansas. Complete and running but needs restoration. Seats five. Hi-compression 389 2-barrel police/taxi motor. Best offer. Dave Csimbok, (908) 541-2794 or e-mail AMCXpress@aol.com.



**1964 Checker.** Black 6 cylinder, "three on tree," 39,000 original miles. Used to chauffeur a monsignor around Jersey City, solid but needs restoration. \$1,200. John Nieliwocki, (908) 722-7256.

**1974 Superior Cadillac High Top Ambulance.** Complete equipment and emergency lighting, 93,000 miles, some rust on hood and rear quarter panels. \$1,000. Jim Spahr, (610) 527-0223.

**1977 Superior Cadillac Funeral Coach.** Russet red exterior, black interior and Landau-style top. 66,000 miles. Tape deck. Newly inspected and excellent running condition. Needs body repair on passenger side after being sideswiped by a deer. Asking only \$900. Brian Stahl, (412) 563-4779 or E-mail hogid@ix.netcom.com.

**1981 S&S Cadillac Victoria Funeral Coach.** Black, 75,000 miles, \$3,500. **Also selling 1980 Cadillac Metropolitan Standard Wheelbase Flower Car Conversion.** Features tonneau cover, 70,000 original miles. \$4,900. Bill Marcy, (201) 342-4871.

**WANTED:** Pre-1916 Brass Era procar or police car. Any type considered if it is brass trimmed. Information and photos please. Sam Jaffe, 32 Woodcrest Drive, Scotia, NY 12302 or (518) 399-5910.

**WANTED:** 1959-74 Cadillac Ambulance. Mike Murphy, (301) 577-7923 or E-mail murphy\_m@bls.gov.

**WANTED:** 1971-6 M&M or S&S Combination or Limousine Style Hearse. **Also selling 1984 Armbruster-Stageway 6-door Limousine.** E-mail George Tower at tower@tiac.net.

**WANTED:** Repair/Service Manual for 1970s Superior Flower Car deck. Mike Barruzza, (215) 788-8105.

## CRITERION CALENDAR:

**November 2nd (Sun.), Sparta, NJ:** PCS Northeast Chapter Meeting, 1:30 pm at the headquarters of the Sparta Volunteer Ambulance Squad. See page two for details and directions.

**December 6-7 (Sat.-Sun.), Timonium, MD:** 8th Annual Street Cars of Desire Show, Maryland State Fairgrounds Cow Palace. Benefits the Epilepsy Association of Maryland. Cutoff date 1972. Advance registration required, \$20 before 9/30/97 and \$23 thereafter. For more info: (410) 876-3842 until 9 pm.

# THE PROFESSIONAL CAR SOCIETY

*"Dedicated to the restoration and preservation of vintage ambulances, funeral cars & livery vehicles"*

## NORTHEAST CHAPTER

### CHAPTER PRESIDENT:

Leo M. Maren III  
369 Chestnut Street  
Stirling, NJ 07980

(908) 647-3738  
caddy@bellatlantic.net

### SECRETARY:

Mary M. Hookway  
201 Glenside Trail  
Sparta, NJ 07871

(201) 729-8083

### VICE-PRESIDENT & ACTIVITIES DIRECTOR:

Bill Marcy  
349 Lookout Avenue  
Hackensack, NJ 07601

(201) 342-4871

### CHAPTER CO-TREASURERS & MEMBERSHIP DIRECTORS:

Andrew & Karen Toton  
765 Livezey Street  
Philadelphia, PA 19128

(215) 483-2078

### CRITERION EDITOR & NATIONAL PCS PUBLICITY:

Gregg D. Merksamer  
37 Hardscrabble Road  
Briarcliff Manor, NY 10510

(914) 741-0957  
Merks62@prodigy.com

### CRITERION PUBLISHER & PCS PRESIDENT EMERITUS:

Michael A. Barruzza  
700 Beaver Street  
Bristol, PA 19007

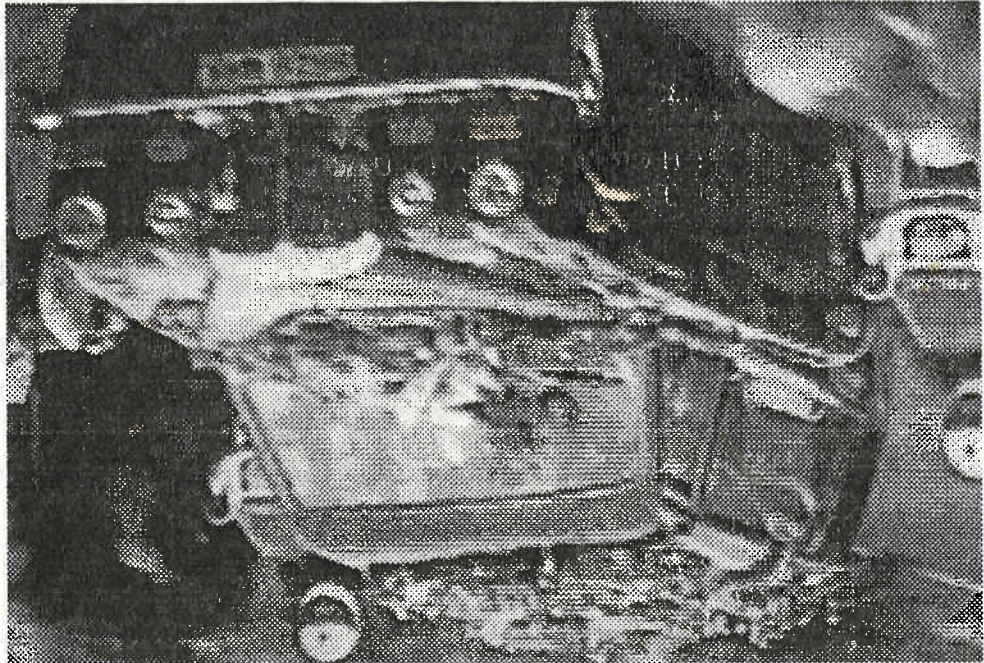
(215) 788-8105  
Fax: (215) 788-1931

Servicing Professional Car Society members in New Jersey, New York and Pennsylvania, the Northeast Chapter of the PCS operates under a charter granted by the Society's Board of Directors on August 19th, 1986. Subscription to this publication is by membership in the Chapter through the Membership Director listed above. **Membership in the national organization of the PCS is a prerequisite to membership in any of its regional chapters.** Details on joining can be obtained from National Secretary Beverly Ruff at P.O. Box 9636, Columbus, Ohio 43209 or by accessing the official PCS home page at <http://www.professionalcar.org>.



In a scene now etched into our collective memories as vividly as John-John's last salute to his father, the funeral coach carrying Princess Diana is garlanded with flowers as she leaves London for the last time. Thanks to the rooftop flower rack, many of the tributes tossed from the roadside actually stay. Just one hears, registered B626 MRK (the first letter implies that this Daimler is a 1984 model), served the Princess of Wales for the week before her funeral. - *BBC TV*

**FAREWELL,  
QUEEN OF HEARTS:**



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700 Beaver Street  
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