

BUSINESS

COMPANY TOWN



ON THE LOT: A Cadillac Eldorado is parked at the Northridge property after being part of a commercial shoot for Bridgestone Tires.

ON LOCATION

Business is cruising for Picture Car Warehouse

The one-stop car shop offers custom-built and vintage vehicles for movies and TV.

RICHARD VERRIER

It looks just like any other car lot in the Valley, with its own showroom, parts department and body shop.

But this business, on the site of a former Cadillac dealership in Northridge, isn't open to the public. Picture Car Warehouse is a one-stop car shop for Hollywood filmmakers where the vehi-

cles themselves are the stars.

There's the iconic yellow Volkswagen bus from "Little Miss Sunshine," the gold Pontiac that actor Dwayne Johnson powered in the thriller "Faster," and the classic 1966 Plymouth driven by Jerry O'Connell in the current CBS series "The Defenders," today valued at \$175,000.

Picture Car leases hundreds of police cars, firetrucks and school buses, period autos and custom-built vehicles to producers of commercials, TV shows such as "Mad Men" and "Castle," and movies, including the upcoming "X-Men: First Class" and "Men in Black [See On Location, B3]

Cars for movies and TV shows

[On Location, from B1]
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Despite the slowdown in production that has squeezed many local service companies as work has migrated out of state, the company has emerged as one of the leading players in the so-called picture car business. Hollywood has long been the center of cutting-edge designs for cars used in films and TV, including the George Barris-designed Batmobile depicted in the 1960s TV series "Batman" and the modified DeLorean in "Back to the Future."

"We opened up in 2003 and we've gone crazy ever since," said Picture Car founder Ted Moser, a veteran transportation coordinator for such movies as "The Town" and "2 Fast 2 Furious."

Moser started with just 25 cars and two employees. Today his company has about 750 vehicles and more than 40 employees, who include painters, mechanics, body shop experts, graphic designers and stunt drivers.

Picture Car moved to Northridge last year after outgrowing its former location at L.A. Center Studios in downtown Los Angeles. Sales climbed to \$4.5 million in 2010, up from \$3 million the previous year, Moser said. Cinema Vehicle Services in North Hollywood remains the largest player.

Moser's foray into the film business began two decades ago when he was running an auto repair shop in Parker, Colo., and he was hired to repair some cars for a TV pilot. "My vision was to build a place where transportation coordinators could find everything they need in one spot," he said.

On Monday, a trailer had just hauled off a 1968 Chevy Cheyenne pickup truck for a scene in the locally filmed HBO series "True Blood." A shiny LAPD car parked near the showroom had just returned from a Sprint commercial shoot in downtown L.A. and earlier appeared in an episode of the TV series "Entourage." And a yellow school bus just featured in the Comedy Central show "Tosh.0" was parked nearby.

Although feature film work has slowed in Los Angeles, Picture Car has managed to follow the business to other states. The company recently shipped two dozen Plymouths, Ford Galaxies and other cars from the '60s and early '70s to New York, where "Men in Black III" is being filmed. An additional 50 cars, many fitted with futuristic solar panels, were sent to Louisiana this year for the upcoming sci-fi film "Looper," starring Bruce Willis.

Steady work also comes from still shoots and commercials. Advance Auto Parts enlisted Picture Car for a TV spot showing sky-diving store employees replacing a battery on a car as it is literally falling out of the sky. Three Honda Civics were especially designed for the aerial shot, which was filmed in Yuma, Ariz.

Picture Car supplied various vehicles for AMC's "Mad Men," including the Cadillac driven by Jon Hamm's character and a 1963 John Deere tractor called for in one episode that was difficult to find. Moser helped find the tractor somewhere in Ohio. "He gets what it takes to make things happen," said Duke Foster, transportation coordinator for last season's "Mad Men."

The company rents out its vehicles for \$350 a day but also specializes in making custom-built cars to match the specific design and type of action called for in a script. In the Ben Affleck crime caper "The Town," for example, Moser and his crew had to install a 350-horsepower engine into a Dodge Caravan that served as a getaway car.

Moser and his team often need to disable computer systems, anti-lock brakes and air bags so cars can perform the way directors want.

"A director will say, 'I want that car to spin the tires, go two blocks, hit the brakes, slide the rear end down the corner and then hit that pole,'" Moser said. "We have to make the cars do stuff manufacturers don't want them to do."

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