

His custom cars toys for wealthy

Owning a one-of-a-kind car is beyond the wildest dreams of most consumers fighting to keep their heads above water.

But there are still people who have

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cash to invest in the niceties of life.

Dorm Beattie, president of Replcars of Canada (ROC), has not lost customers. He hasn't felt the pinch of hard times at all. The well-heeled are still buying his MIGIs, custom-built 1952 MGTD replicas.

"Fewer people from the middle class (economic bracket) are looking or buying," Beattie says. "But it's the latest rage with the 'haves' or upper class, though."

For most customers, money is no object. Some don't even bother asking the price.

Beattie, 33, a former rock singer who lives in Port Coquitlam, says he's fortunate. "I find this upper-class fad rather interesting . . . One customer has ordered tarnish-proof brass instead of chrome."

Custom built MIGIs start at \$15,000 and go as high as \$30,000 and above, depending on the owner's specifications.

He's looking for a customer for his new concept — 24-karat gold plating instead of chrome. It will sell for about \$50,000.

"We measure your legs. Each car is tailor-made for its owner. It would be like wearing someone else's clothes if you drove someone else's car," he says.

Since Beattie opened his shop at Tilbury Island in North Delta 15

months ago, 18 MIGIs have been built for customers as far away as Halifax.

Including kit cars, he's made more than 60 sales across Canada.

There are usually five cars in the shop at one time and the three jigs assembly racks have been loaded since he started.

Beattie is pleased. Just last week a man called from Pennsylvania inquiring about the MIGI.

"I was happy. He heard about how I build my cars. My reputation is spreading because of the quality."

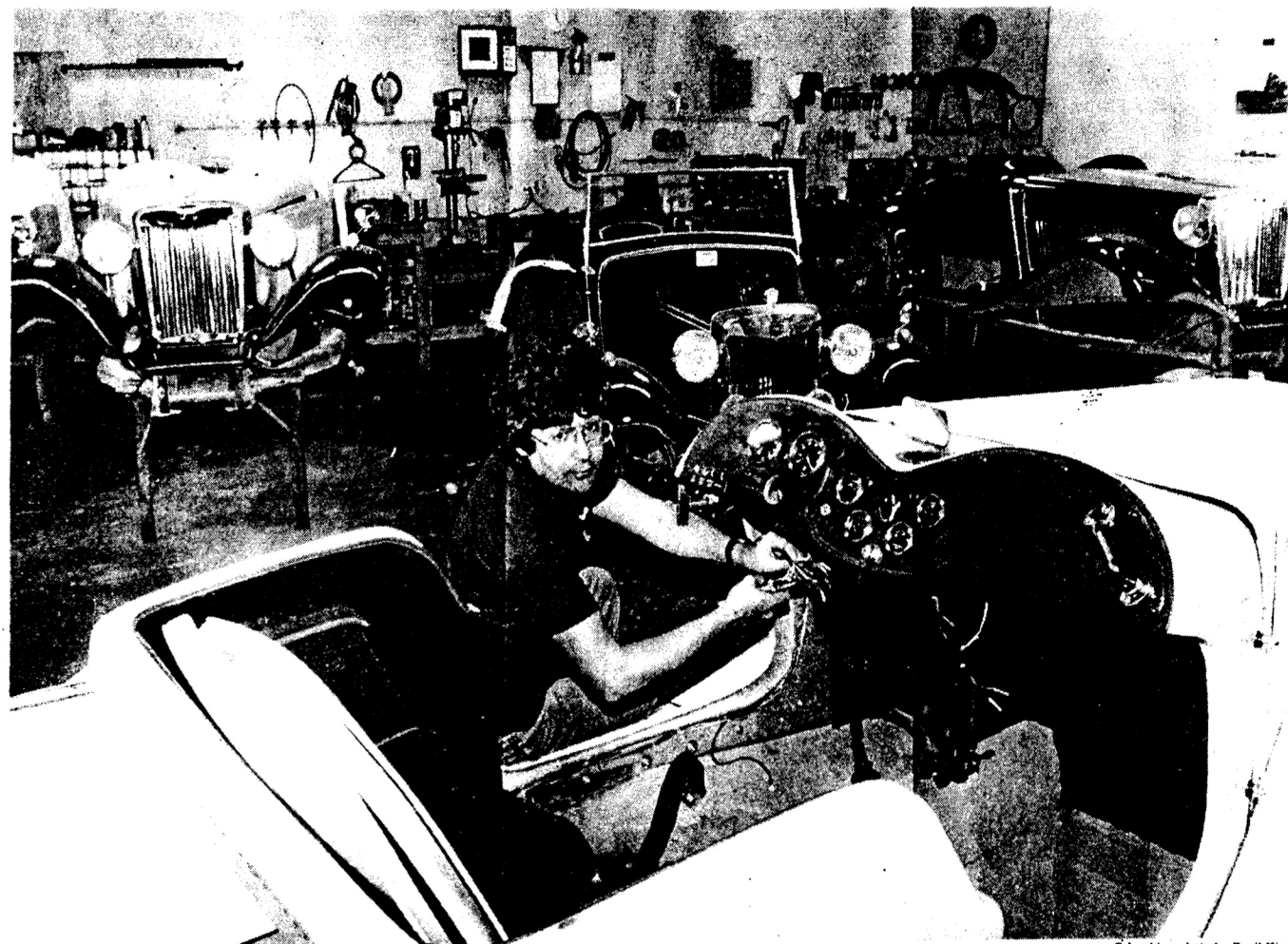
He won't build more than 100 a year. It would turn into a production situation, rather than a careful custom job, he says.

Beattie has five employees in the shop and a sales staff of nine. He claims his customers are the best salesmen.

"The owners are delighted with their cars. They love to show them off . . . Most of them like to come in the shop and get dirty," Beattie says.

The MIGI has a Volkswagen engine built up to Porsche specifications. The high-powered engine is balanced within one-tenth of a gram.

"That means it doesn't fight with itself internally," Beattie says. "It



Dorm Beattie, who builds custom cars, says business has increased, rather than fallen off in the recession. Rich are still buying, he says.

Columbian photo by Basil King

also increases the lifespan and efficiency of the engine."

MIGIs are rust-proof — the body is made from vacuum-formed ABS plastic. The "mild engine" gets about 50 miles per gallon.

"We never have to sell the beauty of the car," Beattie says. "It's a

practical, too. The engines are made in Abbotsford by a good mechanic. A used Volkswagen centre block is completely redone with superior quality West German Volks parts."

Any Volkswagen dealer can service a MIGI, and they're guaranteed unconditionally for the first year.

The do-it-yourself kits start at \$9,200. Beattie says everything he puts into MIGIs is available.

Beattie was wary about building replicas — "especially with a Volkswagen engine" — but he's made a 180-degree turnaround.

"Now I'm absolutely and totally impressed with Volkswagen engineering . . . after all, the engines were designed by Mr. Porsche," he says.

Business is very good for Beattie's company. He just opened a branch in Seattle and is hoping to break into the lucrative American market.