

Widowed Mother of 5 Who Invented Vehicle Is Man Who Bilked Thousands & Then Skipped the Country

Wonder Car Turns out to Be Biggest Hoax of Century

Liz Carmichael, the woman who claimed her super-safe, 70 mpg three-wheeler would revolutionize the car business, was too good to be true, just like her auto.

Lawmen from Texas, California and the U.S. Postal Service are now reportedly searching for a 6-foot-tall man accused, among other things, of conspiracy to commit theft — and impersonation a female, namely Liz Carmichael.

Carmichael is believed to have skipped the country along with tens of thousands of dollars bilked from investors and potential buyers who thought the Dale would be a real car.

Nine other officials and employees of Carmichael's 20th Century Motor Car Corp. were charged with conspiracy. Two, Charles Henry Lewis Jr., 39, and Earl William Lively Jr., 47, surrendered to Dallas County, Tex., sheriff's deputies.

Sources close to the investigation say the operation took in as much as \$40,000 a day at its peak, selling dealership rights and options to buy. And only one crudely built prototype Dale, later renamed Revette, ever existed.

CREDIT Carmichael with monumental gall. Posing as a widowed mother of five was only the beginning.

The American news media began hearing about "Mrs. Carmichael" and her Dale last autumn. In a matter of months, the story had reached newspapers throughout the country and even a TV talk show or two.

It seemed too good to be true. Here, allegedly, was the 37-year-old widow of a NASA engineer who held advanced degrees herself, in engineering and business administration, and declared herself ready to take on the titans of Detroit.

Mrs. Carmichael, the story went, presided over 20th Century Motor Car Corp. of Encino, Calif., a previously unknown company, which all of a sudden boasted vast assets to get under way. "Thirty million in green, not just credit," she told one reporter.

"I HAVE this ego thing," she said. "I want to rule the world. Sure, I want to be a billionaire, but I really want the power. I know cars best, so they'll be my medium."

"General Motors? I'll kick the — out of them while they're still tooling up for their 1979 md models. We'll be number one in the industry in 1978."

She also had what looked like a car. Resembling a cross between a Chevy Corvette and a fresh water clam, it promised many great things. And it looked real enough in the photographs.

The two-seater Dale would be in production by spring of 1975. Its brethren, the five-place Revette and the eight-passenger Vanwagon, would come later.

But first came the promises. The Dale would be capable of speeds near 85 miles per hour, and at a more sedate pace, could squeeze 70 miles from a gallon of no-lead gas. A brick wall hit at 60 miles an hour would stop it cold but not hurt it.

IT WOULD cost less than \$2,000.

Twentieth Century Motor Car Corp. claimed it achieved these wonders through "applications of space age technology, improved design and engineering and an indestructible plastic."

The major breakthrough was the plastic, the firm's officers explained.

"It's nine times stronger than steel, ounce for ounce. The formula is secret," Carmichael told a reporter.



Liz Carmichael hoodwinked everyone on her sex and her wonder car.

"The Dale is 190 inches long and weighs less than 1,000 pounds. The lighter the car, the better the gas mileage.

"By eliminating a wheel in the rear, we saved 300 pounds and knocked more than \$300 from the car's price.

"THE DALE'S lightness doesn't effect its stability or safety. It's nearly impossible to roll it over because its low center of gravity always remains inside the triangle of the three wheels.

"It's smoother, easier and safer to handle than four-wheel vehicles. The body is made from rocket structural resin, which is stronger than steel. I drove it into a wall at 30 mph, and there was no structural damage. I didn't get hurt."

And so it went. Mrs. Carmichael did admit in another interview that a 60 mph crash knocked her unconscious. The car, of course,

was unhurt, the six-foot, 175-pounder added.

One more thing. The Dale, its promoters said, would be powered by a two-cylinder BMW motorcycle engine. Special modifications made by 20th Century's "unique geniuses" enabled the Dale to get better mileage from the time-worn design than its German manufacturers ever did.

In all, the firm liked to trumpet, the Dale represented "dollar for dollar, the best car ever built."

IT WILL take the authorities many months to figure out just how many unhappy investors and prospective car buyers took them at their word.

In January, all of a sudden, 20th Century Motor Car Corp. folded its Encino, Calif., tents and set up "shop" in Dalla, Tex. Carmichael said the firm was negotiating a lease of an old Ford plant in that area, a story the

present owner of the building denied.

When the news leaked out that California courts had ordered a halt in the sales of Dale dealerships and stock, Carmichael hinted at a conspiracy.

"Look, this is a private war between me and Detroit's big three," Carmichael told a reporter. "I'm gonna beat the hell out of them, and I never expected them to take it lying down."

"I'm convinced that the California Department of Corporations, which got those restrainers against us, has members on the payroll of Detroit car manufacturers. We can handle it."

THEN A U.S. Postal Service investigator stated that he had posed as a prospective Dale dealer and was told by an officer of the firm that a plant in Burbank, Calif., was tooled up to begin production. Visiting the Burbank site on Jan. 31, he found the buildings to be vacant.

A few weeks later, a design engineer offered evidence to the court indicating that the Dale, or Revette, as the promoters lately preferred to call it, was a fake, patched together from junkyard bits and pieces.

The modification the "unique geniuses" had made to the motorcycle engine was the substitution of a lawnmower carburetor for the original. Dark tinted windows hid the fact there was nothing inside.

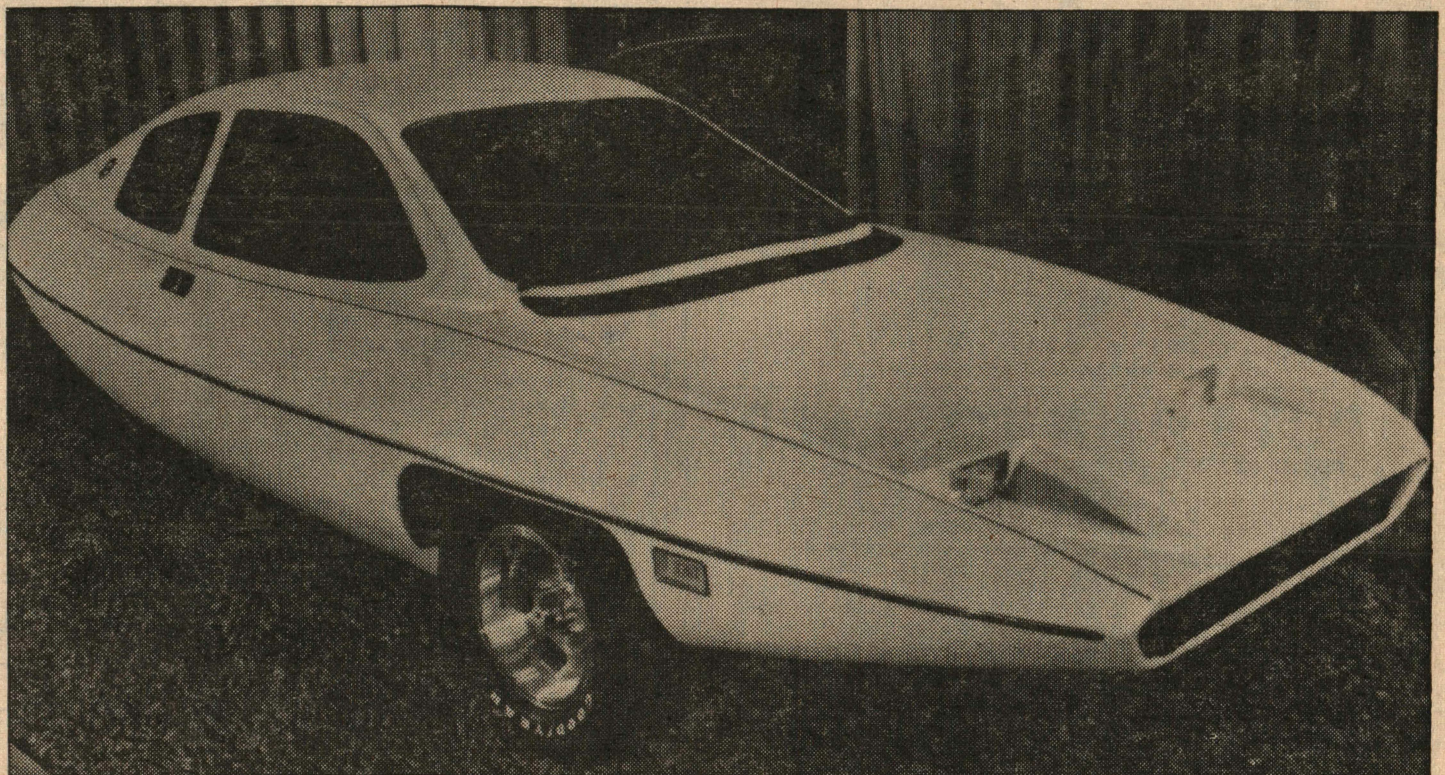
The futuristic yellow body, supposedly made of space age wonder plastic, was actually plexiglass, a perfectly ordinary plastic that a kid with a hammer could shatter.

However, the company claim that the car had three wheels proved true enough, the engineer admitted.

FINALLY, arrest warrants were issued in Dallas County charging the corporation and 10 of its top executives with conspiracy to commit theft over \$10,000. The court also named the company in a temporary restraining order charging violations of Texas' deceptive trade practices act.

Lewis and Lively, the two who turned themselves in, were freed on bond pending further court actions. They and the eight figures at large face two to 10 years in jail and a fine up to \$5,000 on the conspiracy charges.

Authorities are still searching for Carmichael, whoever he or she may actually be.



This supersafe, three-wheeler was too good to be true as thousands found out after sinking their money into the hoax.