

A Good Goodbye

with Gail Rubin



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How to Recreate a Famous Jaguar Hearse

by [Gail Rubin](#)

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The cult classic film *Harold and Maude* features an awesome piece of automotive engineering: the Jaguar hearse Harold constructs after his mother takes away his beloved 1959 hearse (a Cadillac Superior coach, owned by a collector in Modesto, CA). Sadly, the original Jaguar hearse was destroyed during the filming of the movie in 1971. But there's a new hearse in town!

A man named Ken Roberts started work to recreate the original Jaguar hearse from *Harold and Maude* in 2013.



Gail Rubin in Ken Roberts' Jaguar hearse inspired by "Harold and Maude"



Ken Roberts

"I was a friend of George Barris for 13 years," explained Roberts. "When George sold his Batmobile for 4.2 million dollars, I got to thinking, what other cars are out there that would be iconic? I immediately thought of the little hearse from the movie *Harold and Maude*."

After asking his friend Don Kessler to do a national search to see if any such vehicle existed, they found none. Roberts explains, "So, one day on the phone I said to him — stupidly — why don't we build our own?"

That launched a search for the 1971 Jaguar convertible roadster that was featured as the gift Harold's mother presents to him, with a big red bow

on top. That model car was found and purchased from the private collection of a Las Vegas Jaguar dealer.

But it turned out that the model used to make the hearse was actually a 1967 Jaguar XKE 2-plus-2, a hardtop model. "Bad planning aside, we went out and bought another Jaguar hardtop," said Roberts. "Then the challenge became, how are we going to build it exactly like the one in the movie?"

Determining the Details

They carefully examined 35 still frames from *Harold and Maude*, studying the images with a magnifying glass and even a microscope to find out exactly how the vehicle in the film was built, determine the precise details and the parts. It took 40 months to build out the vehicle, with some false starts and problems.



The back part of the hearse came from a Japanese import, married to the Jaguar 2-plus-2 body. The landau bars came off of an American sports car. Inside the back of the hearse, there's a Jaguar emblem instead of flower holders.

The back hatch opens by remote control, like a modern-day SUV. In

the back, a banjo case holds items representing the fake suicides Harold would stage to upset his mother. Harold picks out notes on the banjo at the end of the film.

When Roberts displays the hearse at Jaguar judging competitions and shows, the song by Cat Stevens "If You Want to Sing Out, Sing Out" plays on a repeating loop, powered by an alternative battery.



Only after the car was completed, and Roberts had the opportunity to meet the designer/builder of the Jaguar hearse, did he discover the back door of the original vehicle didn't open. The script didn't call for it.

"I think I could build it again in half the time for half the money, knowing what I know now," said Roberts.

Showing the Jaguar Hearse

Now that the car is completed, Roberts is taking it to Jaguar Concours d'Elegance competitions in western U.S. states, where it is winning "Best of Show" and first place awards in its category.

Harold and Maude was filmed in the San Francisco Bay area, and the hearse will be at two events in the Bay area in September. First, at the [Western Railway Museum](#) (home to the Pullman car that was Maude's home) on Saturday, September 17 for "Harold and Maude Day." Then on September 24-25 it will be at the [Pacific Coast Fog Fest at the City of Pacifica](#), which adjoins Mori Point where the car was driven off the cliff at the end of the film.



Roberts has offered to hold celebrity pet funerals with the Jaguar hearse, for a price. Since the cargo space is too small for a full body, he figures it would work for a pet funeral. Given the popularity of cremation, he could easily carry an urn of a celebrity's cremated remains with attention-getting style.

In addition to showing the car at other automotive competitions, he's also interested in bringing the hearse to public events where it can win popular vote awards.

Want to find out more about doing something with Ken Roberts and his Jaguar hearse? Contact his friend Don Kessler, Resources Manager of the Ken Roberts Collection at 541-840-0240 or email dkvrod@gmail.com.



Ken and Glenda Roberts and the Jaguar hearse

And check out "Hearses Through History," a collection of film clips I put together. It includes a few choice