

LAST REQUEST A FIRST TO CUSTOMIZER

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The **request** was bizarre, said Greg Curtis, whose company customizes limousines and other vehicles. A Detroit funeral home called, saying a family wanted a casket resembling a Mercedes-Benz.

"I thought it was crazy at **first**, but people do strange things," said Curtis, vice-president of R.S. Harper Limousines Inc. in Fraser. "I looked at it **as a challenge**."

In two days, the company designed and customized the casket for Richard Carter, a reputed drug dealer known as Maserati Rick, who was shot to death in a hospital bed Sept. 12.

They bought Mercedes parts -- including a grille, turn indicators and assorted emblems -- and then fitted selected parts on the casket, which was mounted on a homemade cart with custom automotive wheels.

The total bill -- for the casket and customization -- was \$16,000, according to Carter's mother. The cost of customizing a casket is variable, according to Curtis, who thinks a new line of business may have been born.

"Now that I know it can be done, if anybody else wants them done like that we can accommodate them," he said. However, local funeral directors and casket makers say orders for such caskets are few and far between.

"That happens only once in a funeral director's life," said Gerald Godfrey of Peace Chapel, which handled arrangements for Carter's funeral -- including finding someone to adapt the casket to the family's specifications.

While such extravagance is unusual, those in the burial business say a personal touch on a casket often is comforting to a grieving family.

Lincoln Casket Co. of Detroit, which provided the basic casket that Harper embellished for Carter's funeral, occasionally has handled **requests** for personalized caskets, said company Vice-President Frank Sdao.

The company once bolted skis onto the outside of a casket in place of the traditional handles. Another time, the company installed a light inside the casket at a family's **request**.

"If they're willing to pay for it, we'll do anything they want," he said.

CUTLINES

Turn signals and emblems decorate the back of the casket, which was fitted with custom automotive wheels.

A Mercedes grille adorns the coffin's front.

Caption: Photo R.S. HARPER LIMOUSINES INC., Special to the Free Press

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