# Zimmer has 'Golden Spirit'

## *Exotic cars found to sell in any type of economic climate*

By Michael Langberg
Sun-Sentinel Business Writer

Detroit is no longer in the dream business. Back when gasoline cost 25 cents a gallon, automobiles were decked out with tail fins, ornate grillework and other stylish but unnecessary luxuries. Today, American cars seem to have all evolved the same boxy profile.

For the frustrated motorist who still wants to turn heads while driving down the street, Zimmer Motor Cars Corp. is creating $55,900 fiberglass fantasies in a small factory on SW 12th Avenue in Pompano Beach.

The "Golden Spirit" is every luxury car of the 1930s that never was. Flared fenders delicately arch over wire wheels. Large leather straps hold down the trunk. An eagle defiantly spreads its cast metal wings atop the radiator.

But unlike any of the classic automobiles by which it was inspired, the Spirit holds a modern V-8 engine under the hood, the seats have air-powered lumbar supports and air conditioning is available at the flick of a switch.

For Zimmer Motor Cars, part of Zimmer Homes Corp., this flight of fancy is a vehicle for down-to-earth profits.

By the end of this week, Zimmer Motor Cars had already driven 31 completed cars out of its factory and had a healthy backlog of 83 automobiles on order. The company aims to produce 350 cars a year starting in 1982.

While Zimmer executives won't discuss specific financial details, it's a simple multiplication problem to realize 350 autos a year at $55,900 each will equal sales of $19.6 million. Indeed, Zimmer Motor Cars expects to be running in the black by the end of next month.

The Golden Spirit is a butterfly that, before emerging from its cocoon at the Zimmer factory, begins life as a prosaic Ford Mustang. Zimmer strips the Mustangs down to their chassis and passenger compartments, adds a 38-inch extender to the front end and then rebuilds the cars with a custom body and interior.

Plans for creation of the Golden-Spirit first began to take shape about two years ago.

Paul Zimmer, chairman and president of Zimmer Homes Corp., was watching the market for his company's products wobble through another recession. (Zimmer Homes builds mobile homes, small motor homes and customizes van interiors. For the first three quarters of 1980, the company reported sales of $63.3 million and net income of $157,000.)

Although still managing to turn a profit in the middle of bad times for the manufactured housing industry, Paul Zimmer wanted to use his company's skills to build a product that would sell in any economic climate.

He found an answer in exotic automobiles.

"There is an increased demand for the specialty autos that Detroit no longer produces," Paul Zimmer declares. "The American love affair with the automobile continues."

And so Zimmer Motor Cars Corp. was founded as a subsidiary of Zimmer Homes and set about creating a car.

Examining the desires of buyers for the handful of exotic cars which are hand-built in small shops around the country, Paul Zimmer decided that customers felt nostalgic — particularly for the automobiles of the 1930s. At the same time, these buyers didn't want to sacrifice the safety and comfort of a modern sedan.

The Golden Spirit first took shape in a sketch by Paul Zimmer that was fleshed out by company engineers. Exterior designs were based on the most memorable features of the classic Duesenberg, Mercedes, Cord, Cadillac and Packard. Under the hood and inside the passenger compartment would be the best and most modern components.

Robert Zimmer, Paul's 28-year-old-son and sales manager of Zimmer Homes' van conversion division, was made vice president of the new company.

The first model was completed last fall and the Golden Spirit was introduced to the world at the Miami Auto Show in November.

But it is round dollar figures, not the sleek curves of the Golden Spirit, that Paul and Bob Zimmer insist is the attraction for them in exotic automobiles. Neither father nor son owns one of the cars they produce.

"The philosophy of this company is really simple," says Bob Zimmer. "Whatever you do, you do to make money.

"This is actually a very well-timed business decision. Our business (in exotic cars) is not affected by recession. We are dealing with a clientele that has money regardless of market conditions."

Unlike manufactured housing, where 90 percent of purchases are financed, Paul Zimmer says "the market we serve pays cash."

Even though the Golden Spirit looks like nothing else on the road today, producing the auto is not as radical a departure for Zimmer Homes at it might seem at first glance.

The company already had experience customizing vehicle interiors and handling fiberglass — the two major production steps in manufacturing the Golden Spirit.

More to the point, Zimmer Homes had decided to shut down its van conversion facility in Pompano Beach (The company now does most of its manufacturing at plants in Georgia, Texas, Indiana, Pennsylvania and Kansas). Zimmer Motor Cars now employs 43 production workers and 11 managers in the Pompano shop — a shop that would otherwise stand vacant.

Production of the Golden Spirit starts with destruction.

A white 1981 Ford Mustang is driven onto the shop floor where all the body, except for the roof and doors, is cut off. Machinists then extend the wheelbase from 104 to 142 inches. Special steering and brake mechanisms are installed.

Fiberglass body parts, which are manufactured in a separate area of the shop, are then bolted on the chassis. After receiving three coats of primer and eleven coats of paint, exterior fixtures such as the bumpers and headlights are installed. Final step is customizing the interior with special seats, AM§FM tape cassette player and paneling.

The end result is about 500 pounds heavier than the original Mustang and gets about 15 miles per gallon in city driving — although mileage is not a prime consideration for customers buying a $55,900 automobile.

Golden Spirits are available in three colors — beige, dark blue and red — and there is only one option: a turbocharger for the engine. "If they try to change something, they'll only be downgrading what we've already done," Robert Zimmer says of any customer interest in additional alterations.

Once past the quality control inspectors, who occasionally include Bob Zimmer, the autos are sold through a national network of 17 dealers. Zimmer does not sell directly to the public.

Locally, the Golden Spirit is distributed through Bradford Motorcars Inc., which has its main showroom at Griffin Road and I-95 in Dania.

"Our customers want a unique car with the basic look of the '30s, but able to be used for today's driving," says Chuck Ernst, Bradford's chairman.

Bradford represents a dozen exotic auto manufacturers and has already sold ten Golden Spirits.

Ernst rates Zimmer Motor Cars as one of the top three manufacturers in terms of quality and desirability of product. The auto industry annual *World Cars 1980* counted 17 exotic manufacturers in the United States last year along with the domestic Big Five (American Motors, Chrysler, Ford, General Motors and Volkswagen).

Staff photos by TERRY TOWNSEND

**Above, Zimmer workers sand down a 'Golden Spirit' body prior to painting. At left, workers mold fiberglass body parts. Below, the front end of a Spirit dries after receiving one of eleven coats of paint.**

The other two companies high on Ernst's list also produce autos resembling those of the 1930s: Excalibur Automobile Corp. of South Milwaukee, Wis., (reportedly the oldest and largest in the industry) and Clenet Coachworks Inc. of Santa Barbara, Calif.

Exotic cars, Ernst contends, can be a practical investment. The original Clenet, introduced in 1977 for $37,000, was produced in a limited edition of 250. Today, a 1977 model fetches up to $85,000. This year's Golden Spirit, Ernst says, will enjoy a similar appreciation.

Who buys a Zimmer Golden Spirit?

"A wealthy individual with substantial means to afford such a car," says Robert Zimmer. "A person looking for something that sets him or her apart.

"There arealot of Mercedes, Rolls Royces and Cadillacs on the road. The Golden Spirit is something different."

# *British Leyland says its losses have trebled*

The Associated Press

LONDON — British Leyland, the state-owned British auto giant, says that it lost $875.7 million last year, more than three times its loss in 1979.

Despite the loss of more than a million British pounds a day, BL chairman Sir Michael Edwardes said: "I believe BL is moving out of the trough. Survival was still the name of the game for 1981-82."

Edwardes said that the company — which since 1975 has received $4.7 billion from successive British administrations to prevent its collapse — would continue to lose money for another two years, but that prospects looked brighter for the future.

He blamed the losses in car and truck sales on lack of competitiveness, high interest rates — which make British goods expensive in foreign markets — falling demand, and what he termed unfair foreign competition, particularly from Japan and Spain.

"BL has repeatedly pressed for negotiation with Japan, with Spain and with Comecon (East bloc) countries who trade unfairly and who collectively took 18 percent of the United Kingdom market last year," said Edwardes. "We want open access to their markets."

Edwardes added: "It is quite iniquitous that Spanish-built Fiestas enter this country paying one-ninth of the duty that is paid on a Metro going to Spain."

BL's recovery hopes were pinned on the new, fuel-economy Mini Metro which, Edwardes said, is now the best-seller in Britain with 10 percent of the market.

Domestic sales at that level, even without exports, put the Metro ahead of the break-even point, said Edwardes.

BL's latest losses were mainly from car operations, down $585.20 million over the year.