



H2 SUV: Take five!

Unusual cars often have an unusual history and the creation of the H2 SUV is a prime example. In the summer of 1999 Clay Dean, then responsible for the design of Chevrolet and GMC, and his team were working on Chunk II, the planned eye-catcher for the Detroit Motor Show 2000.

Work at this time had proceeded to a finished clay model of a no-compromise off-road vehicle. At the same time secret negotiations between AM General and General Motors had also come a long way. What was missing was a GM vision for a new Hummer (back then still lower-case). And thus, Dean was tasked with sketching the first renderings for an H2, all by himself, at home and without his team.

His first sketches showed a car that exhibited the typical attributes of the brand. All four wheels – large, impressive and with deep off-road tread – were located as far as possible in the vehicle's corners, just like in the HMMWV. Added to that were narrow, steep bunker-design windows and the characteristic front grille with seven vertical slits that later should lead to a drawn-out legal battle with DaimlerChrysler, where this front styling was falsely considered copyrighted for the Jeep brand.

By August 1999, enough information about the talks between David and Goliath had leaked that the next stage on the way to the Hummer concept car could be ignited. If a deal with AM General could be reached in time plans were made to show an H2 concept instead of Chunk II in Detroit.

And what the GM designers came up with over the course of the next five months was really a humdinger – or better yet – a HUMMER! After the final design of the concept car was approved – Dean's team won out over two other GM design teams that had created alternative design sketches for the H2 – the game was on: During the following four months, all designers and model builders in his department worked around the clock to build the concept car.

On its way to the GM news conference, where nobody expected the new HUMMER in the first place, and while still on the enclosed truck, the concept car was brought into a condition where it would at least stand up to the glaring lights of media flashbulbs. The final finishing touches were then administered during the course of the three media days, at night, on the stand at the show. But the immensely positive responses made up for the grueling work during these months. By the way, it is not known how many divorces were the result of the first HUMMER H2 prototype...

Just like secretly hoped, the public response to this appearance was overwhelming. The H2 gained so much momentum there was no turning back for General Motors! Terry Henline, an old hand in the GM design department, was therefore tasked with transforming the concept car into the H2 production design.

And even though nobody really expected it: When the first H2 rolled off the production line just barely two years later in April of 2002, the design of the original concept car was clearly evident – at least on the outside.