



From HMMWV to the HUMMER H2

Anyone who has ever had the pleasure to ride in a HUMMER H2 knows of the immense attention this automobile garners anywhere it goes. Wherever someone gets out of an H2 they're sure to be bombarded by questions from passersby of all ages. Everybody wants to know something about the American giant. And when the conversation turns to fuel economy (as it often does), the subject inevitably is reduced to: HUMMER = military vehicle.

And this is where pretty much ten out of ten questioners are dead wrong: The H2 has nothing in common with the HMMWV except the fact that it was built by the same company, AM General.

The success of this vehicle paralleled the rise of CNN to worldwide news leader: With the start of 'Desert Storm' ground operations on February 24, 1991, thousands of US military vehicles crossed into Iraq. And the US news network was with them around the clock. It helped turn this war into a priceless and arguably most successful TV product placement campaign of all times. This daily TV presence generated so much demand for a civilian version capable of successfully fighting the daily rush hour battles that AM General had no choice but to give in to the pressure.

But first things first: In 1979 the US Army solicited bids for developing and producing a 'High Mobility Multi-Purpose Wheeled Vehicle,' or HMMWV for short. Less than one year later AM General, an established defense contractor, started road testing the first prototypes of its design for the new vehicle. The AM General concept proved to be the most convincing to the US Army and beat out competition from General Dynamics and Teledyne.

In March of 1983, the US government ordered an initial 55,000 HMMWVs in 15 different versions. That same order was increased to 70,000 units by 1989 while simultaneously an additional order for 33,331 more vehicles was placed.

After just three days of storming through the desert, the coalition forces drove Saddam Hussein from Kuwait on February 27, 1991. The war and its media coverage also had a profound influence on the name of this military vehicle: TV commentators and soldiers alike referred to it more and more as the 'Humvee' – the tongue twister HMMWV was relegated to the history books and the technical documentation of the US Army. The constant barrage of TV coverage from the Middle East produced some favorable collateral damage: AM General had to spend increasingly more time answering questions from prospective buyers about a civilian version. Some of those potential customers even went as far as sending in blank checks that AM General had to send back with regret, even though development of such a version had begun as early as November 1990.

One of the most persistent and probably the most popular potential buyer was Arnold Schwarzenegger, who at that time was the highest paid actor in Hollywood with some 20 million US dollars per movie. It is not known whether the former Mister Universe used his muscles or his Terminator pump-action shotgun to finally convince AM General to let him drive his kids to school in a Humvee.

AM General custom-converted an HMMWV especially for the actor – and only after the Pentagon agreed to let them market a civilian version.