



1973 CADILLAC COMMERCIAL CHASSIS

HISTORY OF THE COMMERCIAL CHASSIS

THE PROFESSIONAL CAR

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FRONT COVER - For the better part of this century, the backbone of the professional car industry was the "commercial chassis", a special long-wheelbase chassis supplied to hearse and ambulance builders by the major auto companies. Engineered to the special requirements of professional car builders, the factory-built commercial chassis appeared in the early 1930s and was produced in various forms through the mid-'80s. But the auto industry's continuing "downsizing" finally killed the traditional commercial chassis off at the end of the 1984 model year. Since that time, Cadillac and Buick have supplied Superior/S&S, Eureka and Collins with special "coachbuilders kits" -- stripped down rear-wheel-drive passenger cars and station wagons. Our Cover Photo shows a load of 1973 Cadillac Series 69890 commercial chassis leaving the Cadillac Motor Car Division plant on Clark Avenue in Detroit for Ohio. The auto haulways headed south down I-75, dropping off chassis at the Superior Coach plant in Lima; the Miller-Meteor plant in Piqua and the Hess & Eisenhardt (S&S) plant in Rossmoyne in suburban Cincinnati. Cadillac supplied the three coachbuilders with 2,212 of these 157.5" wheelbase commercial chassis that year.

INSIDE BACK COVER - There were essentially two kinds of commercial chassis -- the one-piece, long-wheelbase units supplied by Cadillac and Packard, and those which were cut and extended by the coachbuilder. The Flixible Co. of Loudonville, Ohio was one of the smaller hearse and ambulance builders which cut-and-spliced its own chassis, in Flixible's case supplied by Buick. This 1938 Buick funeral service trade publication ad shows a completed Flixible-Buick chassis. Note the sidemount wheel wells in both front fenders.

BACK COVER - From 1926 through 1935, The Studebaker Corporation marketed its own professional cars, the bodies for which were supplied by the Superior Body Co. of Lima, O. Several other hearse and ambulance builders including A.J. Miller, Eureka and Knightstown also mounted hearse and ambulance bodies on lengthened Studebaker chassis. The ovoid headlamps identify this well-preserved ambulance, just out of storage, as a 1933 Studebaker. The body appears to be by the Knightstown Body Co. of Knightstown, Indiana.