



1070 S&S CADILLAC VICTORIA

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THE DOWNSIZED 1977-1979 PROFESSIONAL CARS

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ON OUR COVER The Professional Car Society was only a few months old when General Motors introduced the American auto industry's first "downsized" cars in the fall of 1976. All of GM's full-sized 1977 passenger cars, from the lowline Chevrolet all the way up to the Cadillac Fleetwood, were smaller and lighter than the 1976 models they replaced. General Motors' massive downsizing program had a major impact on the professional car industry which had to make do with a similarly downsized Cadillac commercial chassis. The introduction of these smaller, yet significantly more expensive, funeral cars had a devastating effect on the U.S. professional car industry. Almost overnight the combination coach, the deck-type flower car and the Cadillac-chassised ambulance disappeared. The principal feature in this issue tells the story of the first-generation downsized funeral coaches which were offered for three model years -- 1977, 1978 and 1979. The coach on our cover is the 1979 S&S Cadillac Victoria Landau, the only model left in Hess & Eisenhardt's product lineup following the traumatic downsizing which forever changed the U.S. funeral car industry.

INSIDE BACK COVER - Warning signals -- mechanical and electronic sirens, roof lights, beacons etc. -- have emerged as a popular hobby within the professional car (and old fire engine) hobby. Many PCS members avidly collect and restore old lights and sirens once used on ambulances and combination coaches. One of the most interesting professional car warning devices was the "Silent Siren" which was introduced 50 years ago. Mounting on the lead car's grille, this visual warning device had a purple lens with white frosted "Funeral" cross. (Tom McPherson Collection).

BACK COVER - When the all-new, downsized 1977 professional cars were introduced, there wasn't a single deck-type flower car among them. Four years would pass before Superior Coaches revived the coupe-type flower car in 1981. In the meantime several conversion builders continued to turn out small numbers of flower car conversions of standard-wheelbase Cadillacs. The 1979 Cadillac Flower Car on our back cover was built by McClain Sales & Leasing Inc. of Anderson, Indiana.