

HUMMER®



Official name: General Motors Hummer division.

Formerly owned by: AM General.

Owned by: General Motors owns the trademark Hummer and the rights to build civilian versions. General Motors never owned nor built the military versions, so received little benefit from them, other than kudos. AM General built the Hummer H1 & H2. GM built the final model, the H3.

Current situation: Hummer sales collapsed in the aftermath of the 2008 financial meltdown and never recovered. The last Hummer was built on May 24, 2010. All attempts to sell the brand failed, so it was closed down.

Chances of survival: Nil •



HUMMER®



a brief history

IN 1979, the US Army asked the car industry to come up with a tough new offroader to replace its ageing Jeep fleet.

The proposed new army vehicle was called the ‘High Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicle’, or *HMMWV*.

It didn’t take long for HMMWV to be abbreviated to ‘Humvee’.

After looking at offerings from around the car industry, the army settled on a design from American company *AM General*, ordering 55,000 Humvee vehicles.

The Humvee quickly became a mainstay of the US army, and a powerful symbol of American military muscle. The Humvee was strongly associated with America's successful invasion of Panama in 1989 and Kuwait in 1991. Victorious American troops riding Humvees made the vehicle into a legend.

But only soldiers got to drive them.



In 1989, macho movie star Arnold Schwarzenegger was filming *Kindergarten Cop* in Oregon.

Legend has it that, while commuting to the movie set, Schwarzenegger saw several Humvees drive by as part of a military convoy. Schwarzenegger actually chased the convoy until it stopped for a rest, then he pulled up, made friends with the soldiers and assailed them with questions about their vehicles.



And, of course, Arnold Schwarzenegger just had to have a Humvee of his own. After all, it was the vehicle of *winners*.



In fact, despite its offroad ability, the Humvee was poorly suited to many kinds of modern warfare. American troops driving unprotected Humvees were often an easy target.

Later Humvees were hastily reinforced with armour, but this made them heavy and unwieldy. The added weight would also sometimes cause the vehicle to break in two.





But in the fantasy world of Hollywood, the Humvee was a magic chariot that made its owner invincible. Schwarzenegger personally made multiple visits to AM General, berating the executives until they caved in and agreed to build a civilian version of the Humvee.

Thus, the civilian version of Humvee – the *Hummer H1* – went on sale in 1992.



The Hummer H1 was horrible to drive, but with people like Arnold Schwarzenegger owning, driving and promoting the brand, Hummer quickly became the ultimate symbol of American swagger.

General Motors, smelling dollars, bought the Hummer company in 1999 and set to work making a more user-friendly version – the Hummer H2.



Underneath the Hummer H2's butch looks was a reworked GM pickup truck with a fancy four-wheel drive system.

Despite respectable offroad credentials, few Hummers ever went offroad. Most Hummers were sold to suburbanites with an attitude, or rap musicians.



There are few vehicles that make such a bold statement as the Hummer, even though the statement is basically “fuck you”. Hummers were a magnet for men with something to prove.



Hummer’s own market research showed that the typical Hummer buyer was vain, insecure, self-centred and had little concern for the consequences of his or her actions on others.



The fate of the Hummer was inextricably linked to the fate of former president George W. Bush (in green, below).

Bush was the latest of three presidents who supported deregulating the US economy, which boomed.



America's apparently-successful 2003 invasion of Iraq, sent both Bush's and the Hummer's popularity soaring.

Hummer sales peaked in 2006 at 54,052 units, but this peak was actually the beginning of the end.

Growing environmental awareness, high petrol prices and ongoing bad publicity took their toll: in 2007 Hummer sales dropped to 43,431 units.

In 2008, America's raging economic boom turned out to be a bubble, and when it burst, the world's financial system very nearly collapsed.





Worse, by 2008, it was clear to most Americans that the invasion of Iraq had been a costly mistake. The most popular war in recent history thus became the most unpopular war in recent history. And, along with the war that had made it a star, the Hummer fell from grace.

With only 20,681 units sold in 2008, Hummer was on the ropes.

And things got worse: in 2009, a massive oil spill off the Gulf of Mexico combined with financial panic and high fuel prices, reduced Hummer sales to total of 5,487 units.

Hummer was suddenly the symbol of everything that was wrong with America.





As GM lurched from crisis to crisis, Hummer became a liability, a relic of 1990s materialism gone sour. The last Hummer was built on May 24, 2010. A proposed sale to a Chinese firm was blocked by the Chinese government. All further attempts to sell the brand failed, so it was closed down. And the Humvee is no longer the vehicle of choice for the US Army •

