GHOST SCOUT: The 1981 Scout That Never Was

The Scout jig was just about up when this image was taken in May 1980. This is the same SSV Coupe that is in the Auburn Cord Duesenberg Automobile Museum. May 1980 is also when the official announcement came that the Scout Division was going up for sale.

Composites allowed very easy translation from idea to reality. Here are just six of many ideas presented at a planning meeting in 1976. The "Sports Enthusiast" concept on the top left was approved as a first step, but the "Family Cruiser" just to the right is pretty sharp. The "Mini-Van" on the top right was prophetic and even resembles the Dodge Caravan that came later, but since it was on a 4x4 Scout chassis, it would be more to our liking than the Caravan.

EVEN FOR A COMPANY IN FINANCIAL TROUBLE, work on future models must continue to the very last. Such was the case for International in the '70s. Even as International Harvester (IH) was discontinuing their light trucks in a 1975 consolidation move, the company green-lighted a project to develop composite bodies. International had long been interested in composite technology to simplify the development of new body styles and lower production costs. Implementation costs held the idea at bay until the mid-'70s when those costs became manageable.

International hired Dr. Leo Windecker in 1975 to spearhead research on composite bodies. Windecker, a former dentist who had become an expert in composites, had adapted existing technology to design and build composite

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We can't thank the Auburn Cord Duesenberg Automobile Museum in Auburn, Indiana, enough for taking the time and making the effort to bring the SSV Coupe down from its display on the second floor for us to shoot outside. This was the first time it's been out since the early '90s. It hasn't run since it was driven to the museum in 1983 for the presentation and has been preserved exactly as it was then. The odometer shows 204 miles. It was built from a '79 Scout II Traveltop that rolled off the line March 20, 1978 and was a complete Scout but special-ordered with certain deletions and additions knowing it was slated for conversion. The body was removed at the prototype shop and the composite body installed. There was very little adaptation required for the chassis, just some extra body mounts that bolted on.

The SSV-100 prototypes were all hatchbacks with hinged rear glass. The door windows were non opening, a feature that was likely to have been upgraded in production. The bumpers and swing-away carrier were signature features of all the SSVs. All the finished-out SSV-100s we've seen had sunroofs.

aircraft. The Windecker Eagle was a successful design that received FAA certification. Forming a viable company to produce the Eagle would forever elude Windecker, but what he had learned along the way gave him the specialized skills IH needed. The initial focus was the commercial truck line but eventually turned to Scouts. The corporate goal was to learn the process by developing a salable product.

International set Windecker up in a Midland, Texas, research facility that doubled as a small-scale production facility for prototype bodies. Development started in early 1976, and the styling department produced a variety of designs, including compact motorhomes and stylish SUVs. Approval for development was given for a sporty two-door hatchback with a T-top and soft doors, built on a Scout chassis shortened to a 95-inch wheelbase. They called it the SSV, for Supplementary Scout Vehicle (we'll call it the SSV-95), and it was intended as a low-production sporty special for the '81 model year with a run of up to 4,000 units.

The Fort Wayne, Indiana, Scout plant got their first composite body in February 1977, and a test SSV was completed rapidly. It wasn't fully finished but immediately went into test and demo mode. Eventually it was "dolled-up" and made the rounds of IH facilities, shows, dealers, and even race events. As that was happening, more SSVs were produced for crash tests.

The prototype shop was given the job of shortening a standard Scout chassis 5 inches and attaching the SSV body. Most were built-out only enough for the crash or road tests, but a handful were dolled-up as demonstrators and show rigs. The first of many crash tests took place in May 1978 at the Fort Wayne Test Track. The results were generally good, which was a relief since data on the behavior of composites in a crash was in short supply. As weak links were discovered, evolution of the body design took place. The exact number of SSV-95s crash tested is unknown, but the initial plan called for 19.

By October 1978, the SSV had evolved into a hatchback coupe with hard doors mounted on a standard 100-inch wheelbase Scout chassis (we'll call it the SSV-100 Coupe). The Coupe body was highly revised from the SSV-95, going from a seven-piece assembly to 16 parts. At least three Coupes were finished out as demonstrators, but most were destined for road or crash tests. It isn't clear whether any Coupes were crash tested. Photographic evidence and surviving SSV chassis indicate at least four crash-test Coupes were assembled, but likely there were more. About 30 SSVs of both types are estimated to have been built.

In the latter half of 1979, IH's financial woes seemed on the mend, and that's when new CEO Archie McCardell challenged the United Auto Workers Union to a game of

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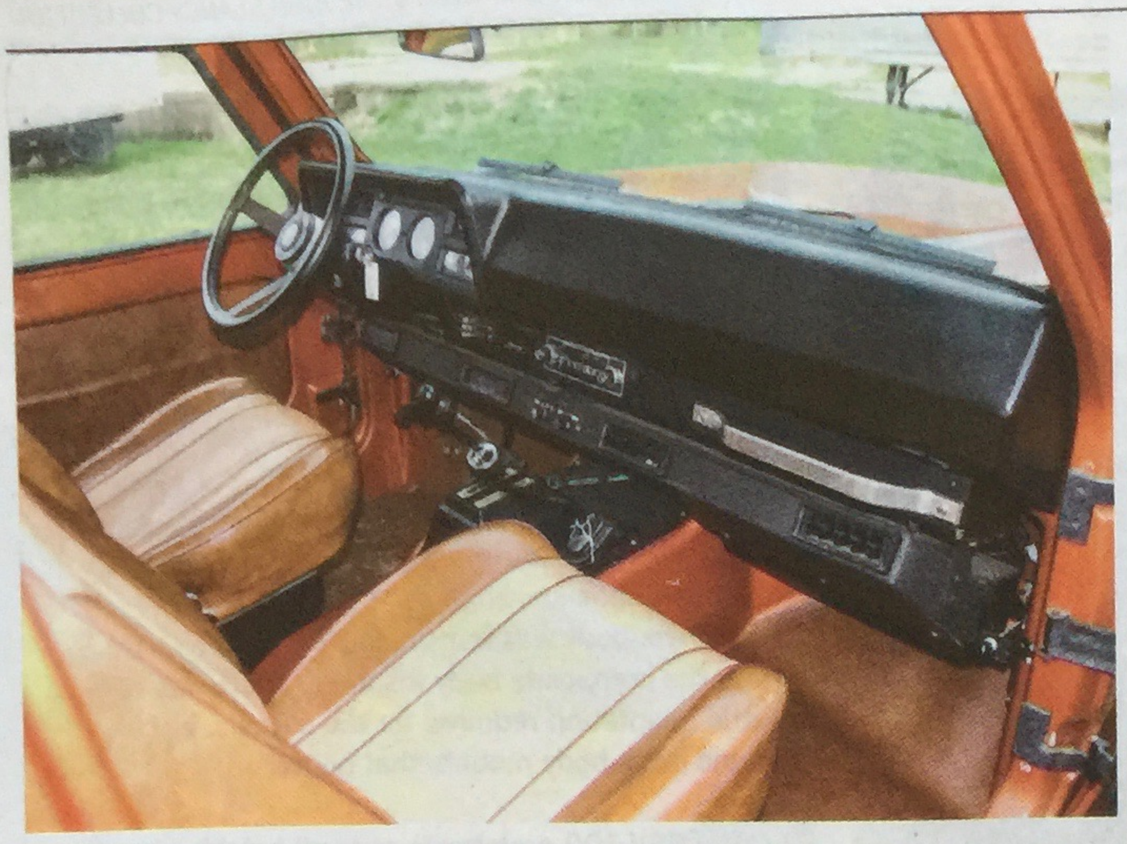
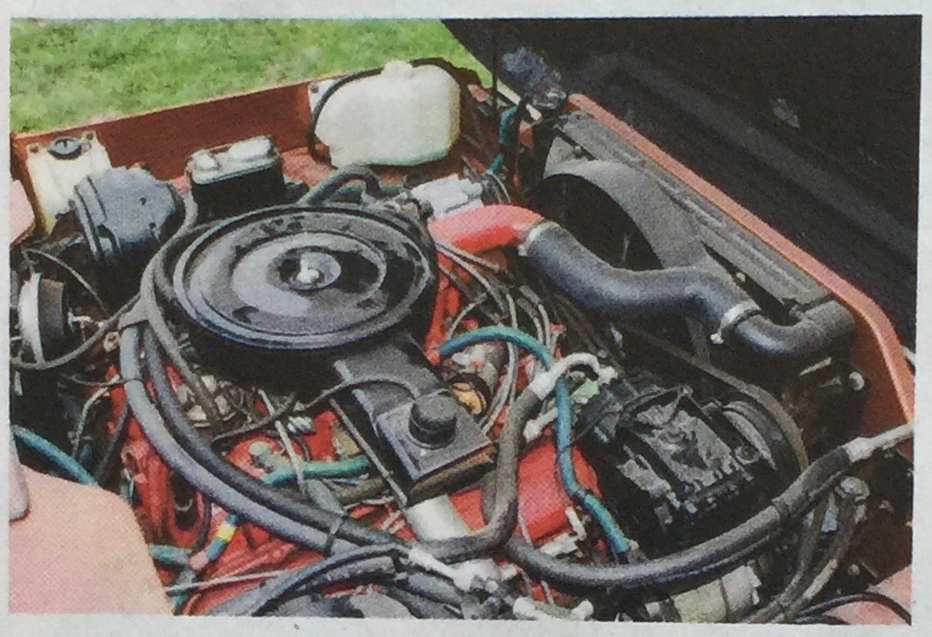


This dash was a standard Scout piece—standard for the '81 model year, that is. One of the big improvements for the '81 Scout 350 and 450 models was this new dash design. The style of the seats was a feature that was likely to have appeared in the regular '81 Scouts. There was no back seat in the SSV prototypes, and it doesn't appear one was intended for the production model.

AT A GLANCE

Vehicle: '79 Scout SSV Coupe prototype
Owner: Auburn Cord Duesenberg Automobile Museum
Estimated value: Priceless
Engine: 345ci V-8, IH V-345A
Power (hp): 150 @ 3,500 rpm
Torque (lb-ft): 263 @ 2,000 rpm
Bore & stroke (in): 3.875 x 3.656
Comp. ratio: 8.05:1
Transmission: 3-spd automatic, TF-727 TorqueFlite (IH T-407)
Transfer case: 2-spd, Dana 20 (IH TC-145)
Front axle: Dana 44 (IH FA-44)
Rear axle: Dana 44 (IH RA-18)
Axle ratio: 3.07:1
Tires: 10-15 Goodyear Tracker
Wheelbase (in): 100
GVW (lb): 6,200
Curb weight (lb): 3,850
Fuel capacity (gal): 19
Min. grd. clearance (in): 8.5
e (deg): 45 (est)
e (deg): 20 (est)



A standard V-345 four-barrel, complete with catalytic converter. This engine cranked out 150 net horsepower and 263 lb-ft of torque. An interesting fact about the upcoming model years was a phase-out of these old-school IH engines. A 225ci Chrysler Slant Six was slated to be the base engine for 1981 or 1982, and there were a large number of Slant Six–powered Scout test units running around in 1980 (at least two survive). Product planning docs showed that 318 and 360ci Chrysler V-8 engines were likely to replace the IH V-8s.

chicken. The goal was to negotiate better terms and reap lower costs. The result was a nearly six-month strike. Projects like the SSV were slowed or halted, but more importantly, the strike was enough to push IH over the financial cliff. By the time McCardell was ready to back down, the IH execs had decided to put the Scout Division up for sale. A potential buyer for the Scout line was immediately found, but those negotiations ended in the summer of 1980 when the consortium of buyers dissolved. When another buyer didn't come through, Scout production ended on October 21, 1980.

Even before Scout production stopped, International began selling off equipment. That included just about all the SSVs. IH was hesitant to sell the prototype fiberglass bodies, so they were removed for disposal and the chassis sold as parts. Two complete SSVs are known to have survived to current times (a third is probable), as well as three partially complete SSV-100 chassis and two bodies (one very early SSV-95 and one Coupe). Of the complete SSVs, two are 95 inchers and one is the Coupe you see here. It was donated to the Auburn Cord Deusenberg Automobile Museum, Auburn, Indiana, by International in 1983. The presumed survivor is that first SSV-95. It was reportedly seen at an auction some years ago but its current location is unknown. A second SSV-95 that was shown extensively back in the day was given to a big IH truck customer, and recent images show it stored in nearly perfect condition.

Over the years, the SSVs have been dubbed "Scout III." That is incorrect terminology we would like to set straight. Supplementary Scout Vehicle, or SSV, is the correct term. What this rig would have been called in production is unclear. The only other name seen is *Bajero*, and that doesn't seem a likely prospect. Scout III was bandied about a little in the very beginning, but it generally referred to a totally new Scout in development for 1984 or 1985. It's clear from the last big product planning information that International was moving away from the traditional Scout designations. Proof is found in the 1981 Scout Preliminary Model Information, dated April 1980. The 100-inch Scouts were being renamed the Scout 350, and 118-inch units were to become the Scout 450. A letter designation would follow the numbers to indicate trim level, such as the Scout 350DS (DS for "Designer Series"), a high-end 100-inch Scout.

Historians have doubted the market viability of the SSV Scouts. They may have been too specialized to succeed in a market that was rapidly going four-door and upmarket. Then there are rapidly evolving crash test standards that may have made them more difficult to get on the market. Product planning documents from 1979 show a push towards a more exclusive, low production, upmarket Scout with more per-unit profit at a lower sales volume. In fact, their planning looks a lot like what Range Rover North America did later in the '80s with great success. How big a part the SSV would have played in all that is unclear, but it showed the Scout Division of International Harvester was creatively fighting back against the market forces working against it. If they could have hung on just a few years to when SUVs became the rage, some of you might be enjoying a new Scout today.

If you want to know more about the SSV and Scouts in general, look for *Scout Encyclopedia* by Jim Allen and John Glancy from Octane Press. It will be on sale about the time you read this through Octane Press, Super Scout Specialists, and just about all book retailers. **FW**

When you visit the Auburn Cord Duesenberg Automobile Museum in Auburn, Indiana, this is where you will find the SSV. It's on the second floor of the south wing, toward the back. It's in a display highlighting cars built in Indiana. This is a must-see for Scout fans but only if you are a die-hard Scout fan will you be able to walk past all the other jaw-dropping cars to see it first.

SOURCES

Auburn Cord Duesenberg Automobile Museum
260/925-1444, automobilemuseum.org

Scout Encyclopedia
Octane Press
512/334-9441, octanepress.com

Super Scout Specialists
937/525-0000, superscoutspecialists.com