



Armored SUVs for Oil Sheikhs

In 2010, Estonia joined the club of countries with their own car industry. In February, the first official VIN (Vehicle Identification Number) was issued to the Kombat T98 armored estate car, built near Tallinn, and this autumn a sedan version of the vehicle will be launched.

TEXT: TÕNU TRAMM, WHATCAR.EE

Estonia has produced cars in the past. During the Soviet period, several models of buses and delivery trucks using a Soviet GAZ rolling chassis were produced in Tartu under the TA logo. After the restoration of independence, there were talks of a Lada-based fiberglass sports car called Vilgas. And today, a clone of the Lotus Seven, named Estfield, is manufactured in Tartu, though this tailor-made fun car does not count as a serious automobile. But until now, Estonia had no VIN code for its own auto industry. However, things changed in 2010, when the VIN of Kombat T98 began with the number V69, indicating Estonia as the country of production. With that, the automotive industry of Estonia was officially born!

It's the fastest
armored car in the
world

How the Kombat Came to Estonia

To tell the story of the Kombat, we have to go back six years. At that time, an Estonian citizen of Russian origin, Gennady Lazurin, was working in the aviation business. One day his son saw a strange car on Russian TV, and it left a strong impression on him. The vehicle, called Kombat, was created by Dmitri

Parfenov, the same man who, together with Gennady Hajnov, constructed the sports car Laura in 1985. The last Soviet leader, Mikhail Gorbachev, had liked this car so much that he gave an order to establish serial production of Lauras in St. Petersburg. Fortunately for mankind—but unfortunately for Laura and her creators—the Soviet Union ended with a whimper, so Laura never got built. Parfenov then began to produce armored cars for money collectors, a flourishing business in the new Russia. In 1998 he decided to create an armored 4x4 vehicle from scratch. The new car was called Kombat, and the origin of the model name T98 is obvious.

"My son liked the Kombat so much that he persuaded me to buy one," Lazurin recalls.

On a visit to Lazurin's mother-in-law in St. Petersburg, they went to Parfenov and bought a Kombat. Although the car is built mostly of American parts, and every official General Motors dealer should be able to repair it, Lazurin would service his Kombat directly at the plant. "We visited my mother-in-law frequently, and every time we did we brought in the car for a tune up," says Lazurin, adding that his Kombat, the only one in the Baltic states, never had a single problem.

From Aviation Engineers to Automotive Experts

The aviation business was not going well for Lazurin and his business partners. However, since their airplanes had serviced the Paris-Dakar rally and the anti-terrorist coalition in Afghanistan for many years, they knew where to find the world's most solvent customers, and what type of cars they needed. That's how they struck upon the idea to bring oil sheikhs together with and luxury SUVs. Additionally, Lazurin was reminded of what Dmitri Parfenov had once said: "In Russia it is very difficult to produce world-class cars, because there are problems with the quality of materials, craftsmanship, supplies, and high customs duties. But it's a piece of cake to produce cars in the European Union." Now was the time to act. Aviation engineers were quickly taught how to produce automobiles, and a company called Combat Armor Group was established in Estonia. The first Kombat prototype was produced in Estonia in 2009. An oil sheikh bought it immediately at a car show in Abu Dhabi. In the autumn of 2009, the company presented two more cars at a show in Monaco: a station wagon and a sedan. At the exhibit, some visitors like the cars so much that they offered to pay a price that far exceeded the real value of the Kombats. "Although the sedan is not as expensive as the station wagon, we were offered over 400,000 dollars for it," recalls Lazurin. The men needed money badly to start their business, but they could not sell their only exhibition pieces. Though the deal wasn't made, it made clear that the enterprise has some perspective.

Worldwide Interest

Gennady Lazurin's business partner Vladimir Baulin admits that the interest for their production is really great. "Our station wagon,

Kombat T98 Wagon Personal Armored Vehicle

Curb weight: 4150 kg.
Length: 5150 mm.
Height: 2100 mm.
Width: 2100 mm.
Wheelbase: 3500 mm.
Ground clearance: 300 mm.
Track width: 1760 mm.
Transmission: 6-speed automatic Allison 1000
Transfer case: Autotrack 4 WD 2-Speed
Fuel capacity: 140 l.
Top speed: 180 km./h.
Acceleration: 0-100 km./h. 10 sec.
Duramax: 6600 V8 turbo Diesel engine
Max power: 365 hp. at 3100 rpm.
Max torque: 704 Nm. at 1800 rpm.
Additional information:
www.combat98.com
Source: Combat Armouring Group



however can be converted to almost any special-purpose vehicle, be it police, fire engine or ambulance", says Baulin. "If the revolt starts, it is often a matter of life and death how fast you can reach the airport. Our Kombat is the fastest armored car in the world, having top speed of 180 km/h and accelerating from 0 to 100 km/h in 10 seconds", he adds.

Employment For Up to 100 People

There are currently eight people who work on assembling Kombats. It takes about three

months to produce one car, and there are up to six cars in production at the same time. Taking into account the body works, which are outsourced, there are now about 40 workplaces associated with Kombat production; if there will be more orders, up to 100 people could be hired. Some parts come from Daimler-Benz, in Germany, but most of the car (engine, chassis, transmission, interior, etc.) is of American origin, and belongs to the family of GMC Sierras/Chevrolet Silverados. Therefore, the cars produced in Estonia meet all technical requirements developed by General Motors specialists. Kombat also offers excellent handling; in spite of its size and weight, you feel as if you were behind the wheel of an SUV.

The Kombat T98 station wagon weighs more than 3.5 tons, so you need a special driver's license to operate the vehicle. But in autumn of this year, the company will launch a sedan version with a curb weight under 3,500 kg., so a driver with a regular license can drive the car. True, the Russian-made sedan weighs 3,750 kilos, but the Estonian version uses many aluminum and plastic parts to reduce weight. Estonian Kombats also are designed differently, for example, the cabin is more spacious and the roofline has been changed. The cars are produced accordingly to three armor classes. The lowest is B3, which protects drivers from, say, Glock and Makarov pistol bullets. Better armor (B6 and B7) also offers protection against Kalashnikov machine guns and even grenades. The Kombat's body is constructed to absorb any impact, be it a bullet, another vehicle, or an explosion.

Of course, these cars are not cheap, and, as usual, the final price depends on how much and what kind of luxury accessories the customer wants. "Considering a military or police car without any luxury, prices start at about 100,000 euros, but currently produced B3-class luxury SUVs cost about 148,000 euros. This is the same price as a Mercedes S 600. I wouldn't say that this is too high when your life could depend on your car," says Gennady Lazurin, adding that the Kombat is a tailor-made vehicle, so serial production is not planned. Thus is it also impossible to name the highest possible price of the car. "There are no limits. Just the stretch of the customer's imagination," concludes Lazurin.

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