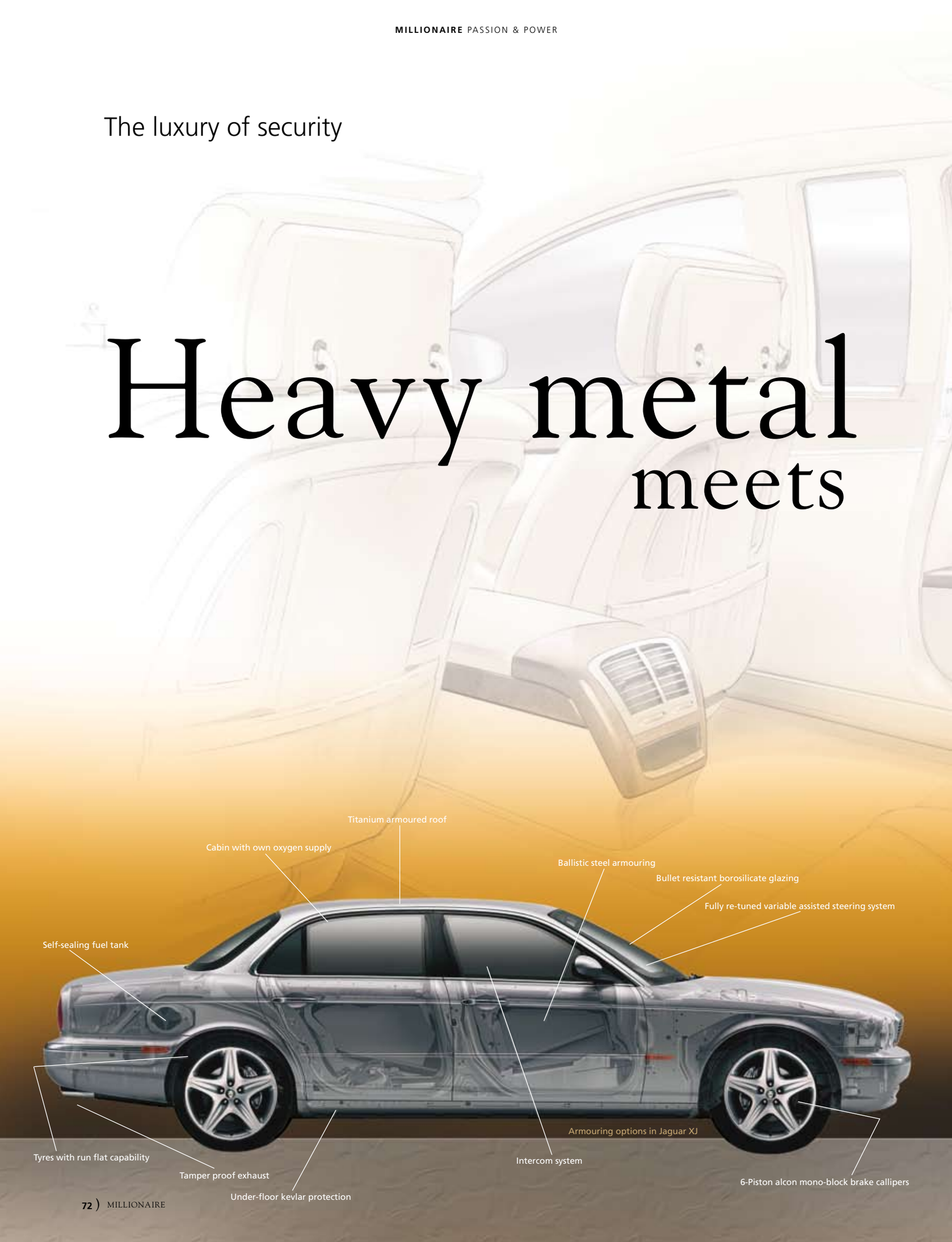
The luxury of security

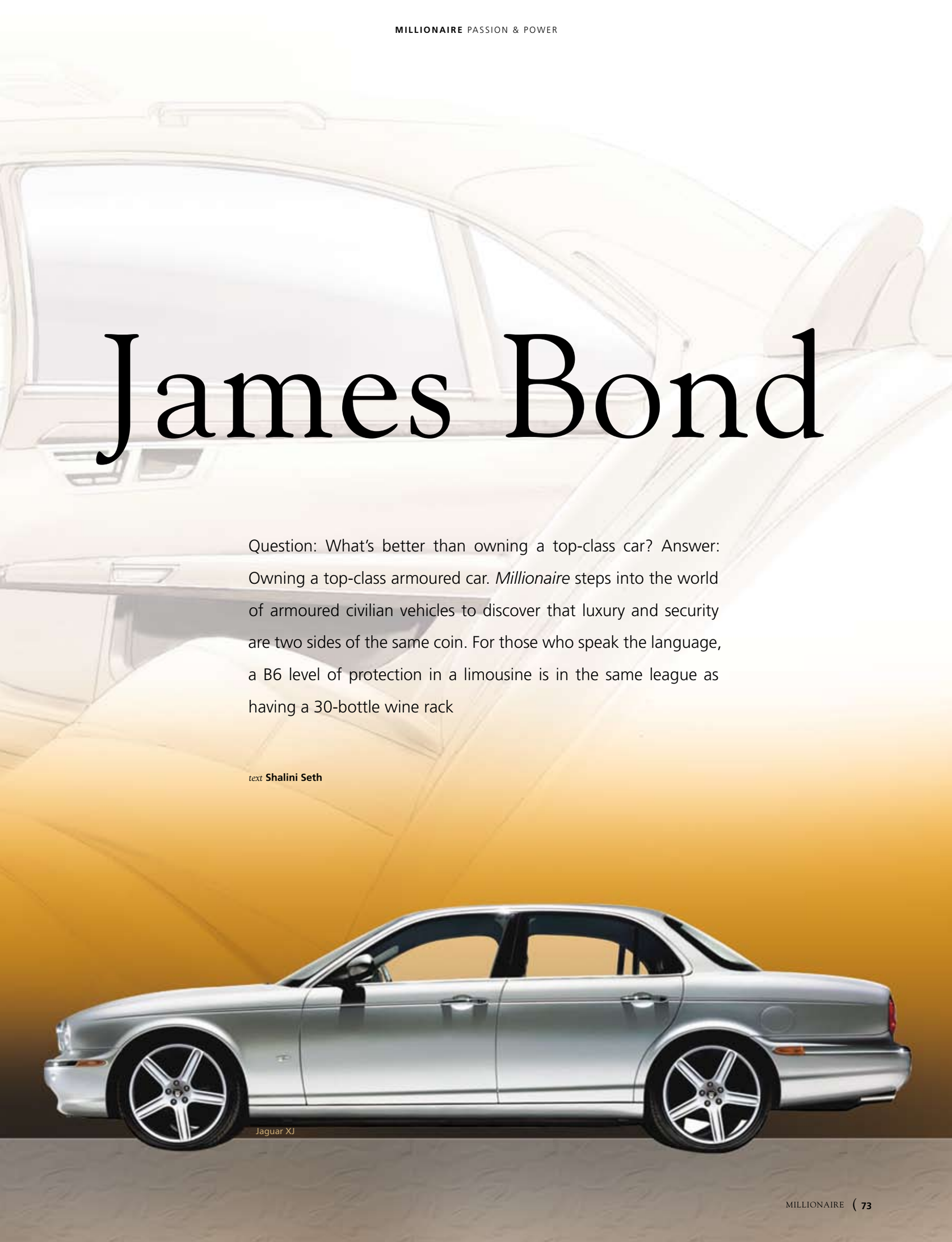
Heavy metal meets



James Bond

Question: What's better than owning a top-class car? Answer: Owning a top-class armoured car. *Millionaire* steps into the world of armoured civilian vehicles to discover that luxury and security are two sides of the same coin. For those who speak the language, a B6 level of protection in a limousine is in the same league as having a 30-bottle wine rack

text **Shalini Seth**



Jaguar XJ

It is not often that a James Bond movie – or two – becomes essential research before you go shopping. But when you are out shopping for an armoured car or kitting up your existing one, it would certainly help.

Whether or not you want an armoured car is not the question. The question is: Do you need one? "Most people do not drive over 80 miles an hour. So why do they need such horsepower? You don't go from zero to 60 in four seconds. So why do you need the capability? You don't need it. But you want it. People don't need an armoured car – but they want it. Because having horsepower means that if I need it, it's there. Having the armour means that if I need it, it's there," says Matt Burke, Centigon's ballistics expert, over tea in Abu Dhabi's International Defence Exhibition, where the commercial armoured vehicle manufacturer is displaying an armoured Mercedes Benz S-500 and the armoured version of the new Chevrolet Suburban 2007.

"Everything that you see in the James Bond movie, apart from the diving White Lotus, has been done by us," Burke says.

Frank Mauersberger, Centigon's Director of Sales for the Middle East, completes the thought: "No diving car and no flying car. Everything else is an option." Burke continues: "The creativity of writers and people in the entertainment industry is equivalent to the boys and their toys in our company." He lists smoke screens, anti-rolls, retractable automatic guns and emergency egress as some of the things his company spends tens of millions of dollars to research.

Armoured vehicles were destined to cross the territory between utility and fantasy ever since Leonardo da Vinci dreamed up the earliest one in plain black and white. "I shall make covered chariots, which are safe and cannot be assaulted…" says the text on a folio that contains pen and water-colour drafts for a scythed chariot and a tortoise-shaped armoured car, reinforced with metal plates, which can be dated to around 1487.

The idea of an armoured car as a luxury vehicle – or as the ultimate toy for the most powerful boys – is not all that far-fetched. The first of these vehicles was made by Rolls Royce in 1914 during World War I. Today, Combat T98, International MXT-MVA and Rhino Runner are at the extreme end of luxury with security.

One of the latest ones is Range Rover's fully armoured Vogue, designed to resist attack from machine gun or hand grenade. When Rolls-Royce Motor Cars announced the launch a new armoured version of the Phantom, it was with the highest current international protection rating. Why? "It is the highest level of protection being offered currently. Our customers expect the very best. In the automotive premium segment almost every manufacturer is offering armoured vehicles. The super luxury segment needs to offer this as well," says Peter Schoppmann, Regional Director, Rolls Royce Middle East.

LAVISHLY SECURE

"People who can afford a luxury car can afford an armoured car. Not many poor people can afford an armoured car, so typically it is a richer person who wants one. A rich person does not want to drive around in an ordinary armoured car. They would rather have a luxury Audi, BMW, Lexus or Mercedes," says Burke.

Centigon specialises in both – armouring and extreme luxury. Burke talks about putting helicopter guns in 24 Suburbans for a regional government. ("Like the movie 'Black Hawk Down', where you see this gun go vrrrrrrrr… 3,000 rounds per minute.") In the next breath, he explains the intricacies of luxury – such as using certain pieces of wood that perfectly match the grain used in the car, or a lime green body and, once, even a hot-pink stretch Cadillac – all armoured.

"The customers want gold railings, or leopard-skin seats, 30-bottle wine racks... The bar in the limousine might have a gold structure. On the other hand, some people require us to maintain samples of all ballistic materials that were used in the car so that if there is ever a problem we can go back and look at the material," Burke says, explaining the overlapping nature of security and lavishness. "As far as the interiors go – if you have



Limousines are not only about luxury but also about security



The interior of an armoured luxury Suburban

ever seen the television programme 'Pimp My Ride' – nothing is too outrageous. If they see it on that show, they want it.

An Espresso machine in the car, massaging chairs, a 42-inch flat screen TV... Some of these are need-based systems. A customer decides that people have tried to attack him in the past with gas – so, a private, pressurised air system is installed in the vehicle.

THE CLIENTS

The Middle East is the second-largest market of armoured luxury cars. "The United Arab Emirates is very lucky that it has an affluent market base and very little threat. In the Middle East, armoured passenger vehicles are at least as popular as they are in regions of similar status. In Latin America, which is the largest armoured-car market in the world, people carry handgun-level protection because people come at them trying to steal their cars. The Latin American market is the strongest market, then the Middle East, and then, by number of vehicles sold, it will be Africa, then Europe. Among our main markets for armoured SUVs in the Middle East I have to mention Saudi Arabia and Iraq. The UAE is the most significant purchaser of armoured luxury vehicles in the Middle East," says Mauersberger.

"The UAE is more a hub than an actual base market," says Burke. Plans include the opening of a showroom in Dubai in the third quarter of 2007, which will feature armoured SUVs, sedans and luxury limousines.

Centigon is not the only one. In 2005, when Jaguar, with Centigon as its armourer, introduced its first-ever armoured passenger vehicle – XJ Long Wheelbase – it made its world debut at the Eighth Middle East Motor Show in Dubai.

Armoured to European standard EN1063 levels BR5 and BR6, it protects from firearms, blast attack, robbery, kidnap and carjack. With the demand for armoured vehicles on the increase, DaimlerChrysler Middle East responded with the introduction of a special protection version of Dodge Durango back in 2004.

The clients are heads of state, protocol offices, large corporations and the military. As far as need goes, armoured cars are considered almost essential for all high-profile figures in dangerous parts of the world, with President George W Bush's vehicle said to be the most advanced ever. One of the first armoured cars built for a political personality is thought to be a limousine by engineering firm O'Gara-Hess & Eisenhardt (now Centigon) for President Harry S Truman in 1949. On the other side, in Antwerp, the Minerva Motor Car, a luxury automobile manufactured till just before World War II, is the stuff of tourist tales. You are told that that gangster Al Capone was driven around Chicago in a Minerva.

Recently, after baby Suri was born, Hollywood actor Tom Cruise invested in a bullet- and gas-proof Jaguar worth £100,000 as a response to death threats that he received.

Burke explains: "There are definite markets where people buy armoured vehicles as a status symbol. They choose an armoured car based on style, which is why we spent over $2 million developing the S-Class. Because the S-Class is the primary mode of conveyance for the affluent market." >

The armoured Mercedes S600



THE SECURITY

Brag value and Bond aside, what does it mean to have an armoured car? In the most secure of these vehicles, the transparent side glass will be more than 6cm thick – capable of withstanding direct arms fire. Despite the playground value of the cars, the experts customising them take their job very seriously. Minutiae are considered and taken care of – the aim being to keep the occupants alive in the worst-case scenario.

Centigon's armouring menu runs from handgun protection to military-grade protection from blast and assault rifle attack. Add-ons include fire-suppression systems, tear gas, smoke canisters and flash-bang grenade ejection systems for crowd dispersal.

The rest of the passenger cabin consists of armour plating of walls, pillars and the roof with overlapping reinforced steel and other bullet-proof composites. Much of the customisation is need-based. "We can do smoke screens – huge puffs of smoke. Let's say I wanted to do a detour or I wanted to return fire, or I wanted to emergency egress and do not want people to see what I am doing. So, I put out huge, huge amounts of smoke," says Burke.

Today's top-range cars can withstand sustained direct fire from AK-47 and M-14 rifles, as well as the effects of grenade explosions. Undercarriage protection became a priority in 1992, when Italy's top anti-mafia judge Giovanni Falcone was assassinated by a bomb placed in the road surface of a motorway.

An armoured limousine can weigh 3,550kg, or 7,800 pounds, but goes from 0 to 100kph in 7.5 seconds. The standard long wheelbase XJ is, due to its aluminium construction, a genuine featherweight at just 1,639kg. When the conversion has been complete, the Jaguar tips the scales at 2,780kg.

Another measure that has started appearing in top-class armoured models is night vision capability. Vehicles such as the presidential Cadillac deVille use an infra-red camera to scan the road. The heat signature of all objects ahead is converted into a view of the road which is projected onto the inside of the windscreen. For those who fear attack, this technology can provide clearer images of people or objects than headlights, even in the dead of night.

You can have hidden weapon compartments, strengthened bumpers for ramming other vehicles off the road and, in extreme circumstances, concealed gun ports in the doors.

All of this can exist and not be seen. Burke says: "The biggest reason people come to us, aside from the lifestyle and the quality, is the clandestine nature of our work. The best craftsmen leave no seams.

The goal for our company is to make a vehicle that looks just like an S-500, but is no longer just an S-500. We don't want people to know that our customers are in armoured vehicles. And I don't want to take away from that. That is what they are paying for."

Civilian armoured cars are either factory produced, such as the BMW 7-Series High Security and the armoured Audi A6 and A8 cars, or, as in the majority of cases, retrofitted versions of series cars. A customised vehicle is made by replacing the

BOND WITH THE BEST

Bentley Mark IV — Contrary to the films, James Bond's official car in the Ian Fleming novels was a grey 1933 Bentley convertible. The car featured a 4.5-litre engine with the Amherst-Villiers supercharger.
1965 Aston Martin DB5 coupe – Featured primarily in 'Goldfinger', this is the most famous Bond car of all. Refinements include bullet-proof front and rear panels, oil slick, smoke screen, machine guns, rotating licence plates, telescoping tire slashers, tracer-receiving console and, most famously, the passenger ejection seat.

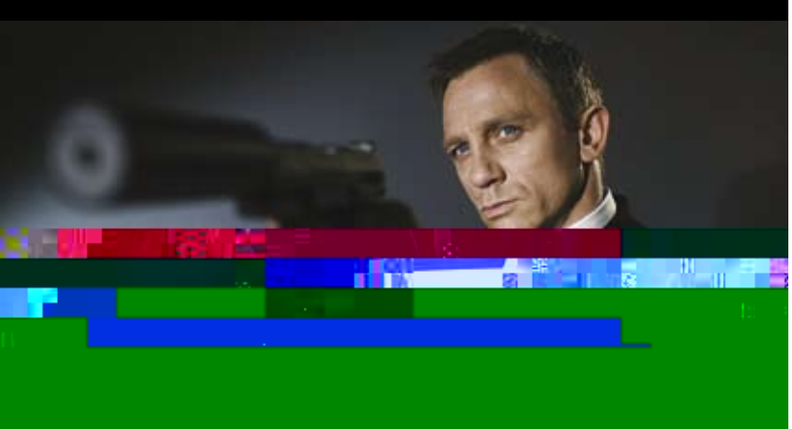
Aston Martin DB Mark III – Gadgets include switches to alter the colour of the front and rear lights, reinforced steel bumpers, a Colt .45 pistol in a trick compartment under the driver's seat, and a homing device. Aston Martin DBS V12 and Aston Martin V8 Vantage – Featured in 'The Living Daylights', it comes with extending side outriggers, spike-producing tyres, missiles, lasers, signal-intercepting smart radio, head-up display and rocket propulsion. It could also self-destruct.

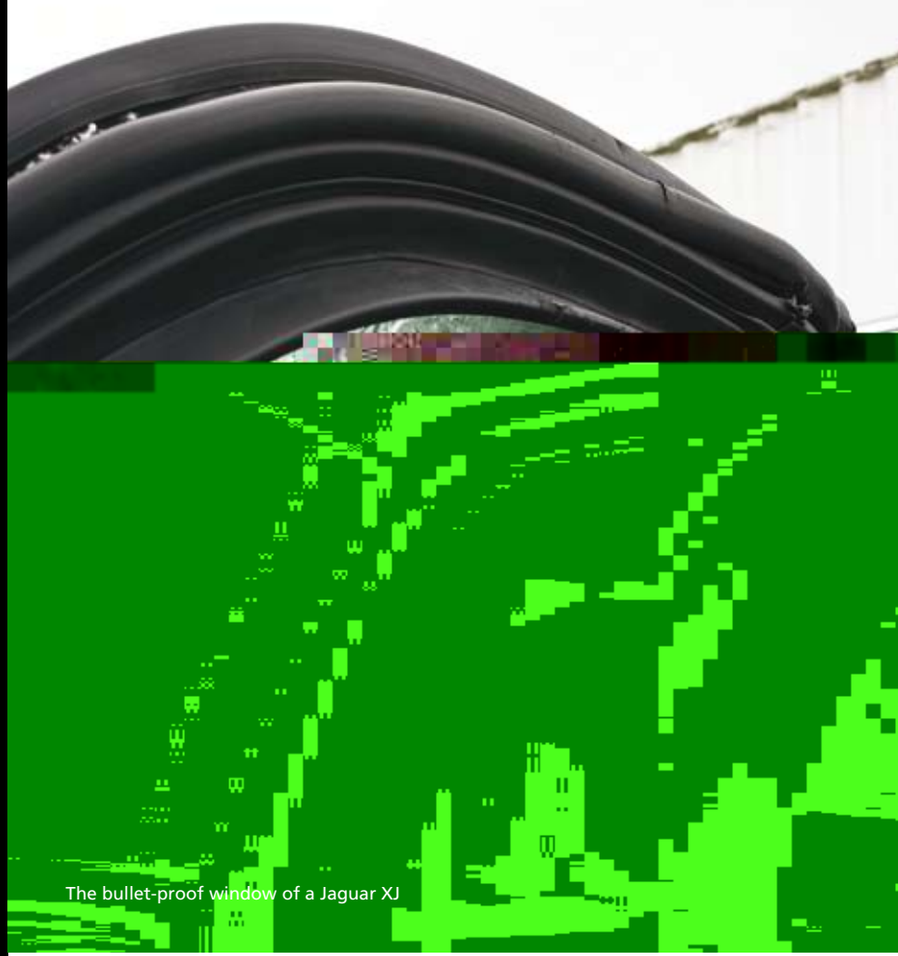
Aston Martin V12 Vanquish – Featured in 'Die Another Day', the car is equipped with front-firing rockets, hood-mounted target-seeking guns, spike-producing tyres and a passenger ejection seat. The Aston was also equipped with adaptive camouflage, a cloaking device that allowed it to become effectively invisible at the push of a button.

1977 Lotus Esprit S1 - Featured in 'The Spy Who Loved Me', the Lotus had surface-to-air missiles and rear-firing adhesive sprays to blind pursuers. The main feature of the car was, however, its ability to transform into a submarine. Once transformed, it could unleash depth charges, harpoons and a smoke screen.

2001 BMW Z8 and BMW 750iL – Featured in 'Tomorrow Never Dies', the bullet-proof car came equipped with a security system that would deliver electric shocks to intruders unless disarmed by Bond's mobile phone. It also had a security compartment in the glove box that wouldn't allow anyone access without Bond's fingerprint. It could be controlled remotely by Bond's cell phone, which opened up to show an LCD screen displaying the driver's view of the car. Defence mechanisms included rockets mounted in a hidden hatch in the roof, self-sealing and re-inflating tires, a cable-cutting device in the front hood emblem, tear gas sprays and caltrops that dropped from the bumper.

1937 Rolls-Royce Phantom III – Featured in 'Goldfinger', the car owned by Auric Goldfinger was used to smuggle gold by recasting all of the body panels in gold and shipping it from place to place.
AMC Matador – Featured in 'The Man with the Golden Gun', the vehicle is converted into an aircraft.





The bullet-proof window of a Jaguar XJ

windows with bullet-proof glass and inserting layers of armour under the outer skin of the car, a labour-intensive process that takes a few weeks. Presidential vehicles are known to take more than a year, Burke says.

THE COSTS

A properly armoured car doesn't come cheap. A full-on NIJ Category Three Lincoln BPS (Ballistic Protection Series) will run you approximately $140,000. A lesser-armoured International Armoring Corp Hummer H2 costs $99,000, including vehicle.

"The stretch S-Class with 7.5cm raised roof armoured to B6 level with an inside partition with a flat screen coming out of the partition, your own bar inside the car is amongst the most expensive cars in the world. They can go up to €900,000. We have made cars for over a million dollars. For example, we are making two vehicles for a royal family in the region that are $3.8 million each," says Burke.

A customised Ford Excursion can cost well over $300,000. Many armouring packages, excluding the cost of the car and interior accoutrements, start at around $100,000 and go to about $145,000, and a fully armoured vehicle with a complete interior can cost $365,000. The most basic armoured car starts at $70,000. Fine leather seats, wood consoles and entertainment/surveillance plasma screens are common; there are also more elaborate requests. Compared to the cost a Gulfstream jet at $42 million, it is not a high price to pay. >

THE CARS

Lincoln Town Car Ballistic Protection Series is billed as an affordable armoured car that can thwart attacks from handguns, hunting rifles and assault rifles. The car, touted in marketing literature as having "the highest level of ballistic protection commercially available", sells for about $145,000.

For BMW, Mercedes and Audi, armoured cars are a referral business. They do not advertise these vehicles, which are produced on high-security assembly lines and stored under lock and key.

BMW has its own section dedicated to producing armoured cars, called International Direct Sales. Here, they can sell you a 5-Series, X5, or 7-Series with bullet- and bomb-proofing and even provide advanced driver training for evading attackers.

Mercedes has been offering a light-armoured S-500 Guard since 2001. The company has been building special protection cars since 1928. One of its earliest models, a 1935 behemoth, the Grand Mercedes, was better known as Emperor Hirohito's limousine. General Motors has an armoured version of its Cadillac DeVille.

Maybach launched the special-protection version of the high-end luxury saloon in late 2003. Based on the 6.17-metre-long Maybach 62, the Maybach Guard is able to resist not only mechanical violence and attacks involving the use of heavy implements, but also protects the occupants from handgun bullets up to .44 Magnum calibre. This means that this version of the luxury saloon meets all the requirements of the European B4 level.

Companies offer more than 700 bespoke armouring solutions. The best examples blend in with their automotive environment, whether that is Hollywood (Mercedes S-Class), Mexico (Jeep Cherokee), or Brazil (Audi A8).

The Combat T-98, built by the St Petersberg-based Combat, a long time manufacturer of armoured vehicles for the Russian military, armoured car, bank and security industries, is said to be the fastest armoured 4WD in the world. The 8.1 litre 340 bhp Vortec V8 can push the T-98 along at over 180 km/h, and in addition to leather and woodgrain fittings, you can order almost any level of active safety feature, from gun ports to a full roof ring to carry a machine gun. Prices start at $138,000 for the base model, and you can spend an extra $100,000 just improving the grade of armour to anti-tank level.

The company claims that it is built to customer orders only. The orders ranged from 20 in 2005 to 60 in 2006, selling vehicles in the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Estonia and the USA.

If you live or work in São Paulo or Riyadh, you will armour your Range Rover or Jaguar XJ8 to defeat the weapon du jour. In Mexico City, multibillionaires drive armoured Jettas or Camrys to blend in. Burke says, "The Suburban was the workhorse for the Middle East. Unfortunately, it has been typecast as the armoured car. Prior to the movement of armoured vehicles in the region, the Suburban was not a very prevalent brand. Now it is, but it is most typically armoured. Land Cruiser is a very popular brand because it was readily available via Toyota in the unarmoured versions prior to it being brought in the armoured version. Range Rover works the same way. The affluent market



loves the Range Rover and I don't blame them." An armoured Hummer is also a vehicle of choice.

AN INTIMATE DECISION

Manufacturers call buying an armoured car, an intimate decision. Burke lists some of the factors that he requires his client to list when a request or an inquiry first comes in: "What region are you living in? What region are you working in? Why do you feel the need for an armoured car? These are all standard questions. Is it because of a rival company, a rival family, a rival sect, religion, a rival country?" A personal security assessment includes questions such as: "Are you in danger of carjacking, robbery, kidnapping, a revenge attack, an assassination attempt, or all of the above?"

All these are necessary to know what level of protection to assign. "A great example is that in the Middle East the primary weapon is the Kalashnikov AK-47. That is because after the separation of the Soviet Union all these weapons were utilised as sales either by corrupt individuals or countries that were trying to infuse money into their national economy. The Middle East being a proximal region, they had easy access to all this weaponry.

"In Latin America, with the exception of the corrupt drug individuals, the availability of anything above a handgun is not prevalent. In America, the odds of being attacked by an assault rifle… it's far more likely that lightning will strike you or a meteor will hit you," he says.

The customer also needs to get a character certificate of sorts. "When I start talking to the customer, I know something about them already. We do our homework. Typically, if a customer says that he wants to buy an armoured car, we set up a meeting, but then we find out about them. We are required to track the sales of our vehicles. We won't let our vehicles go into the wrong hands. We want to make sure that they are used as a defensive tool, not as an offensive tool. It is a requirement by US law that we track and register with the State Department the sales of our vehicles," Burke says.

Russian oligarchs with bodyguards and rappers with expensive toys notwithstanding, this is a market that begs to be taken seriously. But do the sales go up each time there is a new Bond movie? Burke says: "I wish that were the case, since I really love James Bond. But I would say the market fluctuation depends on the threat in the given region. That is boring, I know. I wish it were the case, but…" ■

YOUR ARMOIRE OF ARMOUR

Remote start with electronic bomb scanners
Fire-suppression systems
Sealed compartments with air supply
Public address systems
Tamper-proof exhaust pipes
Roof-rail handles for security staff on foot
Armour around battery, radiator, engine block
Fuel-tank seal to prevent explosions
Night-vision capability
Five-inch-thick plate all around
Anti-shred tyres able to run with punctures or bullet holes



Electronically-equipped interior of a luxury Suburban



METEBRONZ
MOBİLYA

METEBRONZ
G-12, Al Mehzar Center, P.O. Box 21312, Dubai, UAE. | Tel: +971 4 2624334, Fax: +971 4 2624335 | e-mail: metebronz@emirates.net.ae | www.metebronzmobilya.com