



Pendleton resident Jesselee Leachman has turned his 1998 Oldsmobile Aurora into a Zombie Outbreak Response Team car.

Staff photo by E.J. Harris



A skull decal and fake blood adorn the fuel door of Leachman's Zombie Outbreak Response Team car.

Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Zombie-mobile prowls Pendleton's streets

By PHIL WRIGHT
East Oregonian

When the zombie apocalypse hits, Jesselee Leachman of Pendleton will be ready. Or at least ready to drive through the hordes of shambling and rotting dead.

Leachman, 34, is the owner of a 1998 Oldsmobile Aurora he bought two-and-half years ago and decked out to become the "Zombie Outbreak Response Team" unit. He gave it a name: Zom-B13.

Because that looks something like the word zombie.

Multiple decals adorn the worn exterior, from the large response team logo on the hood to bloody hand prints here and there. Leachman said he has no plans to rectify the weathered look.

"There's no perfect cars in the zombie apocalypse," he quipped.

The only non-zombie sticker on the car, he pointed out, shows his support for the University of Oregon. The small decal replaces the lead "A" in Aurora on the car's rear.

Leachman said he wanted a reliable daily driver and the Olds checked that box. The four-door sport sedan packs an eight-cylinder engine powering a front-wheel drive and tips the scales at about 4,000 pounds. Leachman said the ride gets about 15 miles per gallon.

But he also wanted to decorate the car in a fashion that was "kind of under the radar," he said. He scouted around online for possible exterior decals and spotted the zombie theme. That worked, he decided, because it played on the overall popularity of zombies in popular culture. The designs also lacked trademarks, he said, a bonus that allowed him to adapt the looks as he saw fit.

While the ghoulish monsters of movies and TV shows are about consuming the flesh of the living,

Leachman said he recalled in his youth hearing the Kingston Trio's tune, "Zombie Jamboree."

"That made Zombies sound a lot more fun than they are," he said. "But, I think, it may be they are fun."

Fun became the aim of the Olds, even if it's macabre. Especially the fake arm he sticks out the trunk. The rubbery prop scared one woman so bad at the Pendleton Walmart she almost called police, Leachman said, but ultimately clutched her chest and laughed.

"I've had people stop and look, and another took pictures of the car," he said. "A lot of positive response."

When people talk to him about the car, he'll ask if they have seen any zombies. Their answer is, of course, no.

His reply is, "You're welcome." Children also take to the car, he said. They appear "intrigued and

interested" rather than frightened. And he said the clients he serves on the graveyard shift at ColumbiaCare Services, Pendleton, get a kick out of seeing him arrive in the zombie mobile.

Last year he installed flashing green LED lights that blaze from the top interior of the windshield. He said he knows better than to run the LEDs when he drives because of the law. He wanted something similar for running lights, he said, but police advised him against it.

Leachman for the past two years drove Zom-B13 in the Dress Up Parade at the start of Pendleton Round-Up week. About 10 others have been willing to don makeup and outfits to play along in the presentation.

"My group of zombies and hunters," he said. "That was a lot of fun to put together."

The entry took second place for vehicles in this year's parade.

Leachman continues the undead motif on his own back. He said he

RIDE OF THE LIVING DEAD



Jesselee Leachman, who works in residential care services, says he transformed his car for fun.

Staff photo by E.J. Harris

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— Jesselee Leachman, automotive zombie enthusiast

went to DG Gifts, Pendleton, for help with the car decals, and the business created his zombie response team jacket, complete with fraying cloth at

the shoulder. Zombie designs adorn his T-shirt and ball cap as well.

Leachman grew up in Eastern Oregon and graduated from Pendleton High School, he said, and the car is a way to connect to the place he considers his home. He said he would have the car out Tuesday during Halloween, perhaps in downtown Pendleton, where children trick-or-treat merchants.

"The community that gave so much to me as a teenager here, I'd like to give back to," he said. "This is just something in the community, it's not a business. It's for fun. Something for the community to be involved in."

Other vehicles in the community also play on zombie themes. One passenger car in Pendleton sports

a decal for Umbrella Corp., the fictional company responsible for a outbreaks of all kinds of bad in the Resident Evil video game and film series. Leachman said he heard of a pickup with a zombie theme, but he has not seen that.

Leachman said he is entertaining ideas for what more he can do with the car, perhaps charitable organizations could use it as a draw for events. He also might add decals and other elements, perhaps in time for next year's parade.

"Hopefully next year," he said, "I'll have a zombie dance troop."

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