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Touch-sensitive handles ease door openings

When the driver presses the panel, the door pops open wide enough to grab hold of the door edge.

Larry Edsall / [Special to The Detroit News](#)

Aesthetically, the door handles sticking out from the side of your car are probably anything but attractive. If you suffer from arthritis or some other ailments, those door handles may not even be functional.

Whether you just want to smooth the appearance of your vehicle or want to ease access to the interior, a new touch-sensitive automotive door handle system is available.

Jay LaFrance of Plano, Texas, studied electrical engineering and computer science in college, but has spent most of his career in sales and marketing of aerospace and defense systems that combine electronics and plastics.

His 20-year-old son, Cole, is the car guy in the family.

Cole wants to be a car designer and father and son got to brainstorming about how they could combine their passions.

Thus Magic Touch, which replaces the original-equipment door handle with a body-colored panel and some hidden electrical components.

Touch the panel and the door pops open far enough for you grab the door edge and pull the door open.

For an even more "trick" installation, a clear panel is available for mounting on the inside of a window. Instead of touching the area where the door handle used to be, you touch the exterior surface of the window; the clear panel is sensitive enough to sense your touch and to release the latch.

Cole LaFrance took the idea to custom car creator Chip Foose, who featured Magic Touch on one of the project vehicles he built on his Overhaulin' program on cable television's the Learning Channel.

Magic Touch wires into a vehicle's remote locking system. LaFrance Autoworks has applications for Cadillac Escalade, GM full-size pickup trucks and SUVs, including the Hummer H2, as well as for the Nissan 350Z, Mitsubishi Eclipse, Chrysler 300 and Dodge Magnum -- there's even a Magic Touch lift gate release for the Magnum.

Suggested retail price on Magic Touch for each door is \$399. LaFrance says installation usually takes less than an hour.

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