

Disabled man rediscovers the joys of driving after 14 years

Text and photos by Charles E. Buban

ROHELIO Castro arrived early in his office, a bank in Rosario, Cavite, not knowing this particular day would change his life.

As he walked in, he was grabbed by a lone robber who already held at gunpoint his colleague.

Says Castro: "Apparently, the robber who had entered overnight by breaking through the building was waiting for a staff who could open the bank vault. But as more of my officemates were coming in and realized his situation was fast becoming hopeless, he panicked and pulled the trigger."

Unfortunately, the only shot that was fired before the robber was overpowered hit Castro in the back damaging his spine.

Paralyzed

"I came out of surgery paralyzed from waist down. I was devastated to say the least," relates Castro who is now 40-years-old, 14 years since that fateful incident.

It took him some time to recover from the incident but instead of wallowing in grief forever, Castro began picking up the pieces.

He enrolled in a rigorous, physical therapy program to make himself stronger physically and emotionally.

Soon his desire for independence grew.

"After over a decade lapse in car driving, I decided it's time to re-learn," says Castro who installed contraptions in his car so he could control the pedals with his hand.

Disapproved

But the contraption was disapproved when he brought the car for inspection to the Land Transportation Office, a requirement when Cas-



THE CAROSPEED'S ergonomic design fits in almost seamlessly into the driver's cockpit.

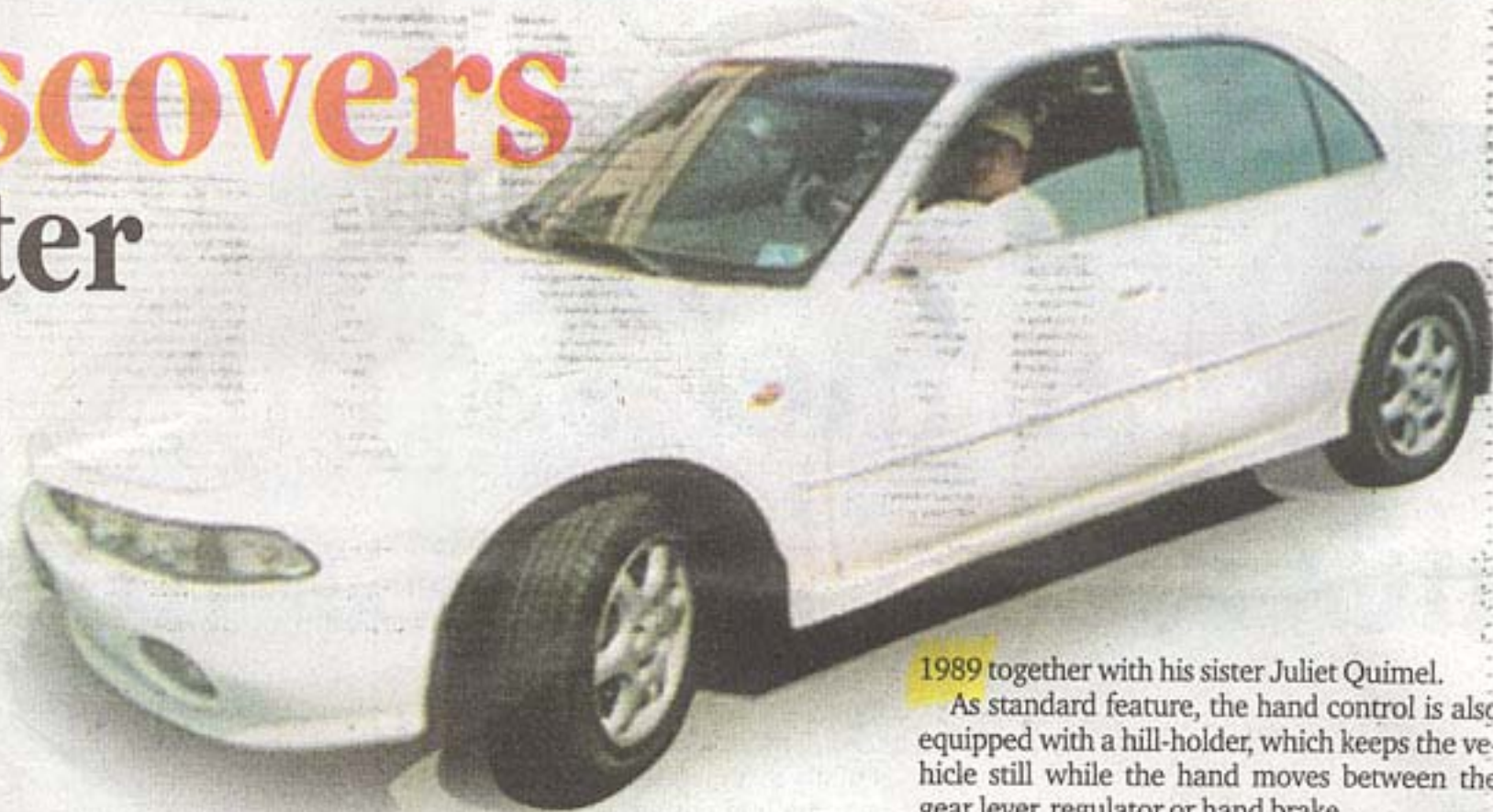
sons shall be allowed to drive motor vehicles, subject to the rules and regulations issued by the LTO pertinent to the nature of their disability and the appropriate adaptations or modifications made on vehicles.

"Help came when I began looking for companies that specializes in converting vehicles so it could adapt to people with disabilities," reminisces Castro.



FOR BEING able to drive once again Castro says it improved his self-esteem as well as gave him hope and sense of freedom.

CASTRO only has to control a stick with his right hand to control the car's accelerator and brake.



His search led him to Caparas Sr. Street in Barrio Ugong, Pasig City where PBC Car Adapt Inc. is located.

PBC Car Adapt is the country's exclusive distributor of products manufactured by Auto Adapt, a Sweden-based company that develops and manufactures car adaptation products and solutions for the elderly and mobility-impaired individuals.

Automatic Galant

As a requirement, Castro needed a vehicle with automatic gearbox so he bought a 1995 Mitsubishi Galant where PBC Car Adapt installed a Carospeed product—a hand-operated accelerator and brake control that would give Castro the right feeling when driving.

"I was excited when I showed the modification, which the LTO approved immediately and afterward, issued me a driver's license. Now I can take myself wherever I wanted to go," says Castro who uses his car for his business (an Internet café) in Rosario, Pasig.

The Carospeed installed in Castro's car is a floor-mounted hand control with mechanical transmission to the accelerator and brake pedals.

"It is ergonomically styled and shaped to fit in with the rest of the car interior since the cables are concealed under carpeting and behind panels. It's so simple: pull the lever backward and the vehicle accelerates, push forward and it

1989 together with his sister Juliet Quimel.

As standard feature, the hand control is also equipped with a hill-holder, which keeps the vehicle still while the hand moves between the gear lever, regulator or hand brake.

Others can use the car

"Unlike other contraptions that makes the car exclusive for the disabled driver's use, Carospeed allows other people to drive the car—deactivate the system and one can again use the pedals. Or whenever his legs feel tired, he can engage the system anytime without much difficulty," assures Carillo.

PBC Auto Adapt has been leading the way in developing and manufacturing car adaptation products for 20 years, Quimel explains.

"All the products that we install are CE-marked and meets safety requirements from all major car manufacturers," assures Quimel.

Apart from Carospeed products, PBC Car Adapt also installs these Auto Adapt products:

- **Carony**—a wheelchair that doubles as a car seat, thus eliminating the need to lift the individual when going in or out of the vehicle.
- **Turnout**—swivel base for car seat to make entering or exiting a vehicle much easier.
- **Turny**—swiveling car seat with lifter for vehicles with higher step up.
- **Carolift**—a lifter system that carries the wheelchair to or from the vehicle's storage area.

"Like our principal partner, we want our customers to be able to return to the lifestyle they enjoyed before their disability," says Quimel.

For Castro it's more than the enjoyment: "Although my paralysis has greatly reduced my mobility, my being able to drive again improved