

NEWSLETTER

OF THE SOCIETY OF AUTOMOTIVE HISTORIANS, INC.

MAY 1981

ISSUE NUMBER 72

President's Paragraphs

As promised in this column previously, this issue of the SAH Newsletter contains a detailed review of our current finances as compiled by your Treasurer, George Ward. I hope it helps you understand why a raise in dues had to be initiated and why we must watch our current expenditures very carefully indeed. We are not out of the woods yet but it appears we have broken free of the heavy undergrowth.

Despite our monitoring of expenses during 1981 we, along with individuals and organizations, will fall victim to increases over which we have no control. The most prominent of these is the postal increases now being debated in Washington. We know it's not a matter of *if*, but rather a question of: *how much?* We are currently seeking ways to economize in the areas of paper and printing but there is a point of no return here where the economies collide with the scale of production. A simple fact of printing is that up to a point it costs less to print more on a unit basis. Typesetting and printing preparation cost about the same whether the print run is very modest, like ours, or for a 100,000 circulation run of an 8-page stock market newsletter.

Without dwelling on the subject to the exclusion of our mutually shared interest and purpose—the study and accurate dissemination of automotive history—I want to assure all of you that the entire SAH board and officers are committed to making 1981 a year in which we recover our financial stability so that we can go forward confident that your many worthwhile pursuits and projects will have a vehicle in which all of you may share your work and knowledge. That vehicle is the Society of Automotive Historians.

David W. Brownell

Editorial

It's good to see the Society so active, our new Southern California Chapter is off to an excellent start and has issued its first newsletter. Member Jim Petersen of Michigan has done an incredible job of making a complete index for the SAH Newsletter #1—70 and Automotive History Review #1—12. He has offered the index to the Society to use in the best way to benefit our organization, so we may be able to reprint his good effort and offer copies to you, the membership. This matter will be taken up by Society officers. Thanks, Jim, it is sincerely appreciated. A future issue of the SAH will see an excellent article on race cars by honorary member Jerry Gebby, and Michael Sedgwick has one in this issue on the little-known luxury Fiat 2800. Keep those articles and photos coming; I like to try and keep an equal balance of material in the Newsletter but need special help on non-USA vehicles.

W. E. Gosden

Chapter News

The first regular meeting of the Southern California Chapter of the SAH was held at the Los Angeles County Museum restoration shop and warehouse, 1815 South Flower Street, on February 18, 1981. There were 36 members and guests in attendance.

Since this was the first official meeting of the Chapter, in lieu of minutes of the previous meeting, the secretary read a summary of the November 3, 1980 organizational meeting.

The Treasurer read a report of funds on hand and announced that 16 members had paid to date. The Director then introduced Walter F. (Frank) Robinson, former SAH president from Bellevue, Washington who talked about the Society and its aims and activities.

Director John Meyer then introduced the Chapter officers for 1981. The Director commented on the committees for the SAH and read a list of them. He then called for a discussion from the floor on the directions the Chapter should take in implementing the aims of the Society and what to do about committees on the local level.

J. Neal East suggested that we further the historical aims of the

Notice

This will be the last *Newsletter* that you will be receiving from the Society of Automotive Historians, if your dues are not currently paid for 1981. Don't risk letting your membership lapse in one of the most unique societies in the free world, an organization that provides you with a platform to debunk historical frauds in automotive history.

The SAH is *your* platform to record and document new and previously unknown facts of history that you have discovered through your efforts and research—a place to share these very important finds, a place to preserve them and not let them pass into oblivion.

For the coming year we have many plans for the *Newsletter*, for its continued improvement and expanded coverage of automotive history. Don't miss it.

If you have not paid your dues please send \$20.00 (US) to: Charles Betts, Jr, 2105 Stackhouse Drive, Yardley, PA 19067.

Walter R. Haessner, Chairman
Publications Committee

Society by taking action to contact persons who have retired to the Los Angeles area who may have previously held strong positions in the auto industry. He further suggested that some form of standard press release might be circulated to the various community newspapers advising of the existence of a local chapter of the SAH and in this way locate persons who could be interviewed for the oral history segment of the chapter activities. He offered to prepare a press release for future use by the Chapter.

Future meeting places and locations were discussed. Randy Ema offered his facilities in Orange County for a future meeting date, and it was decided tentatively to hold the next quarterly meeting at that location.

Director Meyer brought up the question of Chapter projects and suggested a meeting devoted to technical methods of preservation of documents and photographs, citing a recent Kodak publication devoted to the latter. In view of the considerable interest displayed by the members in this topic, it was decided that a future meeting be held in the form of a seminar devoted to document preservation.

Following a question from the floor concerning the techniques and methods for conducting an oral history interview, Randy Ema commented on the legal and proprietary considerations involved in such activities. It was suggested that this topic be included in the next seminar, and Randy Ema agreed to make a detailed presentation at that time.

A suggestion was made from the floor that the newsletter include items concerning the particular fields of interest of chapter members. The newsletter editor agreed to publish notes of this nature for all who sent the necessary information to him.

A report from the floor indicated that the photo business conducted by Dick Whittington had closed its doors, and concern was expressed about the future of the antique photo collection. No one seemed to know the current status of operation.

The Director then introduced the principal speaker of the evening, Jim Zordich of the Los Angeles County Museum, who presented a very interesting account of the automobile collection in the Museum, the fourth largest publicly owned auto collection, with approximately 59 historical vehicles ranging from 1904 to 1953. The Museum also main-

tains a large collection of periodical literature which is available for study by qualified scholars and historians.

After adjournment of the meeting, the members and guests spent an enjoyable hour inspecting the several original, unrestored vehicles in the Museum warehouse.

Bill Cannon, Secretary

Henry M. Leland Chapter

The Autumn, 1980, meeting of the Henry M. Leland Chapter of The Society of Automotive Historians was held at the Campbell-Ewald Company (CECO) Reference Center in Warren, Michigan, on Thursday, November 13, 1980

After a welcoming salutation by Director George P. Hanley, Mr. Tom Tucker, Vice President and General Manager of CECO talked briefly about the history of the agency and its relationships with both Chevrolet and General Motors. He also discussed some of the subtleties of automotive advertising and explained the purpose of the Reference Center. Two additional CECO staff members were next introduced: Elizabeth Smith, Reference Center Manager and Susan Sassaman, reference librarian.

A brief business meeting followed:

Jeff Godshall submitted the following officer candidates for 1981:

Director	James K. Wagner
Assistant Director	Richard P. Scharchburg
Secretary-Treasurer	Douglas A. Bakken

The slate was approved by the members.

Mr. Hanley then discussed his experiences in searching for the bankruptcy files of the Freeman Motor Company during which he learned that such files face the likelihood of being destroyed. This tragedy can be avoided by turning them over to an appropriate repository or by "exercising" them. The latter is done by requesting to review a particular file and stating the name of the company and the date of its bankruptcy. In addition to urging all of us to "exercise" these files, Mr. Hanley said he would submit a similar plea to the total Society membership through the newsletter.

Following this the meeting was adjourned and a tour of the CECO Reference Center began.

Mr. John P. Harrington, who works on the Ford truck account at the J. Walter Thompson Co. advertising agency, was a guest.

1980 Auction Report

At the 1980 annual meeting and banquet at Hershey, Pennsylvania SAH members and friends enjoyed an auction for the benefit of the SAH Awards Endowment fund, started in 1979 by the Board of Di-

rectors as a means of placing the awards funding on a more solid and stable foundation. The auctioneer, then treasurer, Howard L. Applegate, has announced that the proceeds from the auction were \$980.00. This money will be added to the Awards endowment fund which now totals \$1,513.76.

Those individuals and companies who contributed items to the 1980 auction include: Classic Motorbooks, Car Exchange magazine, John A. Conde, Automobile Quarterly Publications, Cars and Parts magazine, The Ford Motor Company Archives, John M. Peckham, Car Collector magazine, Marshall Naul, Hershey Region of the Antique Automobile Club of America, Walter MacIlvain, Thomas Stewart, Charles Bishop, Lamm-Morada Publishing Company, Bookman Dan Publishing Company, Michael Lamm, Thomas E. Bonsall, Detroit Public Library, David L. Lewis, Motorbooks International, Crestline Publishing Company, Krause Publications, Nathaniel Dawes, Pat Chappell, James J. Bradley, Thomas Warth, Chet Krause, Applegate and Applegate, Special Interest Autos magazine, Aztex Publishing Company, John Montville, Keith Smichel Associates, George Dammann, William S. Jackson, Chris Halla, Dave Brownell and The Franklin Mint.

Members who wish to contribute to the Awards Endowment Fund should write directly to the new treasurer, George B.P. Ward, Jr, while inquiries about the 1981 auction should be sent to President Dave Brownell.

SAH—Statement of Financial Position as of 12/31/80

(Unaudited)

Assets

General Fund			
Checking account—Hamilton Bank	\$	840.21	
Savings account—Hamilton Bank		14.98	\$ 855.19
Awards Endowment Fund			
Savings account—Hamilton Bank			526.65
Publications Endowment Fund			
Savings account—Hamilton Bank	\$	1211.05	
Certificate of deposit due 2/19/81—Hamilton Bank		10000.00	11211.05
Total Assets			\$12592.89

Liabilities

Current liabilities—unpaid items			\$ 1262.80
Net worth—fund equities			
General Fund	(\$	407.61)	
Awards Endowment Fund		526.65	
Publications Endowment Fund		11211.05	11330.09
Total Liabilities & Net Worth			\$12592.89

SAH—Statement of Income and Expense for the Period 1/1/80 through 12/31/80

(Unaudited)

General Fund

Income

Dues	\$2940.00
Sale of publications	109.00
Sale of Banquet Tickets (annual meeting)	1546.00
Proceeds of Hershey auction	930.00
Sales of library remnant	664.00
Interest	114.76
Other	23.45
Total Income	\$6327.21



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SOCIETY OF AUTOMOTIVE HISTORIANS' OFFICERS 1981

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Expense

Printing	\$ 4139.40
Postage	2061.94
Mailing service	1208.69
Telephone	184.98
Xerox	125.95
Annual Meeting Expense	2352.25
Cugnot Awards	230.00
Miscellaneous	175.10
<u>Total Expense</u>	<u>\$10478.31</u>

Excess of expense over income (\$4151.10)

Awards Endowment Fund

Income: Interest-savings account	\$ 26.65
Expense: None	0
<u>Net Income</u>	<u>\$ 26.65</u>

Publications Endowment Fund

Income: Interest—savings account	\$ 213.76
Interest—certificate of deposit	997.29

Expense: None 0

Net Income \$1211.05

Proposal to Reopen Birthplace of Speed Museum

(Ormond Beach, January 20). . . At a meeting in the Ormond Hotel today the board of directors of the Birthplace of Speed Association voted to open negotiations with officials of the City of Ormond Beach for the purpose of reopening the speed museum which had been closed last September by the Historical Trust due to losing money.

It was pointed out at the meeting that the Museum deficit was less than five thousand dollars annually and due mainly to the fact that no admission was charged.

In its two years and eleven months of operation the Museum had more than 10,000 visitors from the United States and 26 foreign countries. It has had correspondence with libraries, museums and historians from England, France, Switzerland and the Argentine.

The Museum has been recognized by the Society of Automotive Historians as headquarters for an area chapter and has worked with Daytona Beach Community College in the annual National Conference of Automotive Educators.

Five thousand dollars of the funding which led to the Museum's opening in 1977 came from the Birthplace of Speed Association which was established in 1956.

Major Robert E. Berry and William R. Tuthill, present board members, were among its founders.

John Rae Honored By Society For The History Of Technology

John B. Rae has been awarded its highest honor, the Leonardo da Vinci Medal by the Society for the History of Technology (SHOT). Now senior professor emeritus at prestigious Harvey Mudd College, one of the Claremont Colleges in Southern California, Mr. Rae also taught history for twenty years at M.I.T. While there he wrote his classic one-volume history of the automobile industry, *American Automobile Manufacturers: The First Forty Years*. This and other books on automotive history are manifestations of his pioneering work in the serious study of the history of technology. He was one of the organizers of SHOT and has served as its president. He is member 58 of SAH and was Publications Chairman for a time. He lives in active retirement in Claremont, California, working on still another book which will be of interest to SAH members.

Byways of History: The Fiat 2800

As one who visits the U.S.A. quite frequently, I am constantly astonished at the number of rare variations on mass-production

themes that happened in the 1930s. Even a flying visit to a small private collection ends up as an exercise in historical education. What is unusual, however, is to find a model by a recognised mass-producer that is almost unknown even in its homeland.

Such is the Fiat 2800 of 1938. It did the round of the European Shows—Milan, Paris, London and Brussels: a catalog was issued (though I have yet to locate an English-language edition): but few people are aware that as late as the outbreak of war, Fiat were offering a full-sized seven-passenger formal. What's more, anyone with the right permits could probably have got one in 1944.

To English-speakers, the last big formal Fiat was the 525, a fringe-classic in the 230-cube category offered from 1928 thru 1931. The much larger, and firmly classic 519 with its complex and lethal hydro-mechanical servo brakes had been discontinued during 1927, though stocks lasted in some foreign markets as late as 1929. (This one, by the way, had been listed in the US and two survive there, one in Texas and one in New Jersey). One must discount the lesser sixes (150 c.i. roughly) of the 1928—36 period: the 521, 522, 524 and 527 came in seven-passenger guise as well as on shorter wheelbases, but their American equivalents were things like the 132-inch Plymouth, and they are Special Interest at best, even if the later ones are afflicted with grillework that is more Terraplane than Chrysler. There's a 522 in Ohio, but it's the short chassis type and looks very, very like a 1930 CK De Soto.

Such cars sold for around \$2,600 in England. The 2800, by contrast, was aimed further up market: its American equivalent would be the 148-inch Junior Packard. London price in 1939 was just under \$4,000, or not much less than one would ask for a five-passenger Super Eight Packard or Buick 90. All of which makes it an unlikely offering for Fiat in those days, even allowing for their long-established role as general providers for much of Europe, with assembly plants active in Germany, France, and Poland. (Not that these produced 2800s).

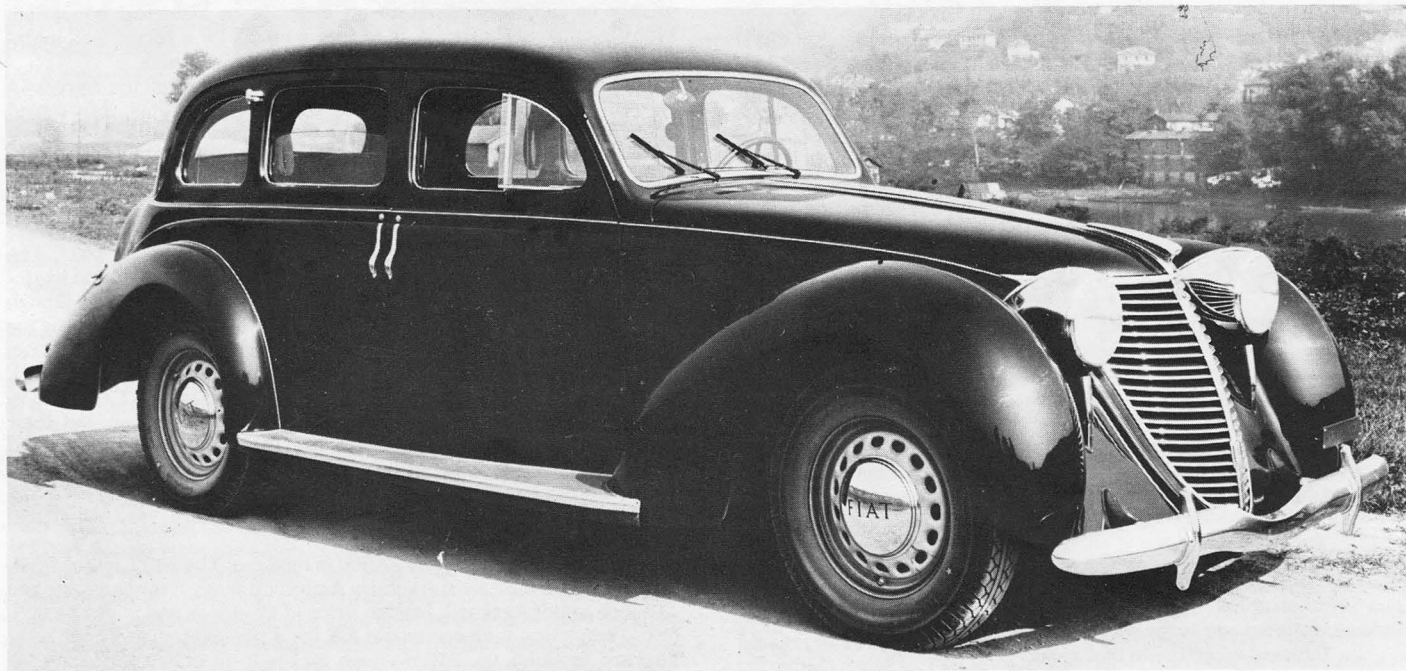
Why? To begin with, the prestige market in Italy was and is very small, and it prefers to drive itself—fast. Second, horsepower tax is savage even by Anglo-American standards: with six cylinders of 3-1/4 in. bore, the big Fiat is a 25 under the NACC/RAC formula, but it's all of 29 horsepower in Italy, which explains why no native product of over 185 c.i.d was available in 1939. Finally, unlike the great Isottas of an earlier era, the 2800 wasn't without local competition. 'Ministerial' clients had the choice of either Lancia's Astura (eight cylinders, one upstairs camshaft) or Alfa Romeo's racebred 6C-2300/2500 (six cylinders, two upstairs camshafts), both available with formal coachwork, and both 'class cars.' Not that the Fiat was much slower: on the stock 4.4:1 axle ratio it's likely that the claimed 80 miles an hour were available on your neighborhood *autostrada*.

The export picture was fairly dim, too. Even in countries where import duty taxed Detroit iron out of business, there was plenty of native machinery for the asking. France had Citroen, Peugeot and Renault: plus a good assortment of seven-passenger Hotchkisses for deeper pockets. (Don't forget, you could squeeze eight people into a long-wheelbase traction!). Among German contenders were Wanderer, Horch's small V8, and even a diesel, the 260D, from Mercedes-Benz. Austin, Humber, Vauxhall and Wolseley, catered for Britons, and among the offbeats were a hefty L-head six by Volvo of Sweden, and a valve-in-head device, the Superb, from Czechoslovakia's Skoda. Thus there was no need to buy Italian: the 2800 must be regarded as an obligation for a general provider. Fiat had no intention of being caught—as Leyland would be thirty years later—with a gap in the market tailor-made for their more enterprising rivals.

Recipe for Executives

By American standards, Fiat's top model wasn't exactly a behemoth. A piston displacement of 2,852 c.c. (174 cu. in.) puts it right down in the Studebaker Champion class, though a wheelbase of 126 inches and a weight of 4,070 pounds don't invite further comparison with South Bend's then-new baby. A tread of 57 inches was, by contrast, wider than one would expect in Detroit.

Mechanically, it followed regular Fiat themes. The cruciform-braced chassis rode on 1100-type independent coils at the front and on semi-elliptics, with a torsion-bar stabilizer, at the back. Steering was by worm and sector, and brakes were pure Chrysler: a hydraulic service system backed by a transmission handbrake which was strictly for parking. The motor was a four-bearing valve-in-head six of 82 x 90 mm. (let's say 3-1/4 x 3-9/16 in.), the nearly square dimensions permitting it to deliver its advertised 85 horsepower at a high 4,000 r.m.p. (Fiat had been narrowing down their stroke/bore ratios since the advent of the little Balilla in 1932). Electric were 12-volt, fuel was fed by Marelli mechanical pump to a downdraft Zenith carburetor, and the cooling system incorporated a thermostat. The clutch was a single dry plate, and there was synchromesh only on the two upper ratios of the four-speed transmission: the lever stayed on the floor



Factory shot of first series 2800 limousine, 1938. Note the recessed door handles. Photo courtesy of Fiat.

throughout the 2800's production life, column shift only reaching Fiats during 1949. Final drive was by spiral bevel. Wheels were steel disc, usually, but not always of perforated type, and tire size was 6.50 x 17.

The only basic variant was the Mil. Col. T (Tipo 2800CMC in factory notation). This, as its name implied, was for army use in the African colonies. It featured a raised ground clearance, a shorter, 118-inch wheelbase, and eighteen-inch wheels; bodywork was an austere five-passenger phaeton somewhat suggestive of a Dodge Command Car with doors, only the car never had four-wheel drive.

Even this one had competition, since Alfa Romeo produced a parallel military edition of their 6C-2500, and persuaded the authorities to take 152 of it. One suspects there were probably more Fiats than this, though so far it hasn't been possible to obtain a model-breakdown of the 620 2800s made. The war notwithstanding, the Mil. Col. had a shorter run—1939 thru 1941 only—than the stock civilian type, which was still listed on paper as late as 1944. I believe, though haven't been able to verify, that some short chassis went to the custom coachbuilders: Touring's *berlina sport* looks, from photographs, to be a 118-incher rather than the full 126. Only the latter, however, was quoted in Britain at a price of \$2,850 fob Wembley. There is no trace that any British client—or custom bodybuilder for that matter—availed himself of such an opportunity.

Production History

The model's first appearance outside Italy was at the Fall Shows—Paris and London, a limousine being displayed on each occasion. Since the Earls Court car was also left-hand drive, I had originally suspected that the same vehicle had merely been shipped across the Channel. Subsequent evidence, however, suggests that there were two similar cars. We know that the London Show car passed into the hands of the Italian Embassy, remaining in its service (with an interlude with the Custodian of Enemy Property) for some twenty years. Recently, however, a similar vehicle with a very low chassis serial has come to light in a private collection in France, and in view of this car's known past history it is tempting to equate it with *la voiture du Salon*.

The model was certainly available in France, Switzerland, Belgium and Holland, and quite possibly elsewhere. It wasn't quoted in the U.S.A., though the diminutive 500 *Topolino* was enjoying a brief and tiny vogue as the nation's top foreign import in 1938—39. (This may explain why Hollywood trotted the odd 500 out in movies with a European background during the 1940s. It wasn't unjustified in Britain, where some 20,000 found buyers in three seasons, forcing Turin to produce a special four-passenger cabriolet, of which they heartily disapproved).

Bodies and Variations

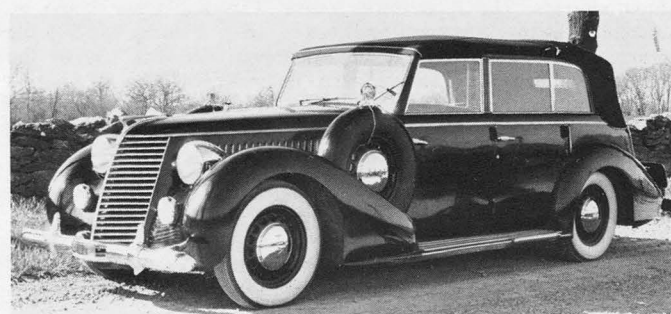
The catalogue listed precisely one style—the seven-passenger

limousine. In its original guise this was a straightforward three-window affair with projecting trunk, not unlike the contemporary long-wheelbase 1100L beloved of Italian taxicab companies. The straight windshield carried dual underslung wipers, a great improvement on the overslung type fitted to the 1100 and 1500, which were apt to wipe the skies when one was driving into a gale. Door handles were fully recessed, as on all Fiats of the period, and the rear quarter windows wound down. The grille was entirely new: gone were the beetling brows of the 500 and 1100, replaced by a rounded vee—still with a pronounced down slope—obviously inspired by recent Pininfarina customs on Fiat and Lancia chassis. The spare wheel lived in the trunk, and the headlamps were exposed, as they would be on most customs. A photograph does however exist of another early limousine supplied to the Royal Court of Italy in 1938: this one had hinged quarter windows, recessed headlamps, and a sharper vee to the grille in anticipation of the style used on 1940 and later versions of the 1100 and 1500 sedans.

This grille would also be found on Second Series 2800s offered from 1939 onwards. The additions of a vee windshield and dual sidemounts produced an odd cross pollination of GM's 1938 and 1939 B-bodies.

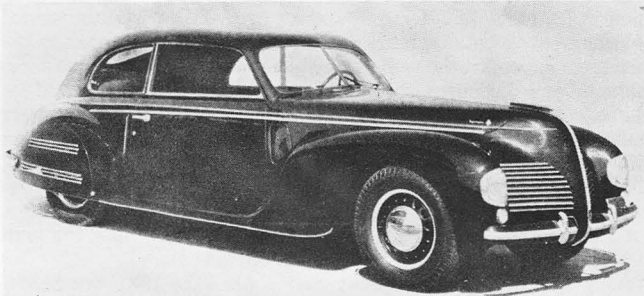
Considering the modest production—and the army's share of what 2800s there were—the custom coachbuilders had themselves a ball. Both Farinas produced Parade Cabriolets of the seven-passenger three-window type, both with more or less stock grilles. These cars were seen with or without sidemounts and projecting trunks. By contrast, Viotti's four-door cabriolet appeared from photographs to be a five-passenger job somewhat reminiscent of the 'Wingham' style produced on a number of British chassis by Martin Walter of Folkestone between 1934 and 1938. I have seen a two-door sport cabriolet—probably on a 118-inch chassis—in Tuscany, but it was a

Freshly restored Pininfarina seven-passenger parade cabriolet taken in the Fall of 1980. The high-set mounts furnish a GM touch, while the coachbuilder's grille is close to the factory's Second Series style. Photo courtesy of White Post Restorations, White Post, VA.



long time ago and the trail is now cold. Very unusual was Pininfarina's *berlina* of four-door, two-window configuration; the narrow pillars and divided windshield suggested Cadillac Sixty Special influences, but the slight curvature of the latter anticipated GM Styling by a decade, and the grille was rather horrible, the exaggerated vee and hood louver treatment being (apparently) inspired by the contemporary eight-in-line Renault, never a pretty car.

Perhaps the finest of the custom 2800s was completed in 1941, as a gift from *Il Duce* to *Generalissimo* Francisco Franco of Spain. *El Caudillo*, for some reason, decided not to accept, so the car duly found its way via Fiat-Espana to the firm's Lisbon branch, and thence into private ownership in Portugal.



The 'Franco' *berlina* by Touring in factory fresh condition, 1941. It looks almost as good today. Photo courtesy of Fiat.

This was almost certainly on the 118-inch chassis, and could be mistaken, except from the front, for a prototype of Alfa Romeo's famed 6C-2500SS *Freccia d'Oro*, a 1946 debutante, and built in series for that firm. It came from the same coachbuilder, Touring of Milan, and featured the same fastback, window and door treatment, even if the rear fender skirts were seldom seen on Alfa versions. Unfortunately, the Fiat's angular stock grillework sort of ill Touring's Compound curves, so—like Pininfarina on his pre-War and wartime Alfas—the Milanese firm had recourse to a variation on Buick's 1939 *fleur-de-lys* theme. It was surprisingly effective.

The 2800 did not survive the war. What little market there had been had vanished. Both Fiat and Lancia opted for a top displacement limit of 91 c.i.: the remaining 'formal' customers bought the long-chassis Alfa—still around as late as 1952—or did without. And while Lancia briefly offered an elongated Aurelia in 1951—52, Fiat stayed right out of this market, if one excepts a few 1400/1900 based customs and the evergreen 1100L taxicab, still around in 1953. Even their later prestige cars, the 2100/2300 Special and the luxurious V6-engined 130 of 1968—were still essentially five-passenger sedans. Unitary construction had taken over, and chopping floor pans is a job for the custom coachbuilder.

The Survivors

For an obscure model of no particular *cachet*, a known roster of eight cars isn't bad going. A sad casualty was the Italian Embassy limousine from London, which came on the market in the very early 60s, with less than 40,000 miles on the odometer, but was cut up before Fiat Register Founder George Liston Young could save it. One must also suspect that the decrepit specimen reported about the same time from Amsterdam has been junked.

Of the remainder, the two *torpedi* in Italy are also certainly *Mil Cols*. There's also a limousine in that country, while a second, very early example survives in reasonable condition in France: I haven't seen any of these cars, or even photographs of them. In fact, to be quite honest, I have seen precisely two 2800s ever, the Embassy car during its heyday, and a seven-passenger cabriolet of which more anon.

What is heartening is the knowledge that four customs survive. Two of these are seven-passenger cabriolets. Chassis 000234 was auctioned off along with the rest of the Leto di Priolo Collection at the Monza Automobile Museum in July, 1972: it was a runner, if in need of full restoration, and has since reputedly departed to Switzerland. Chassis 000307, a Pininfarina-bodied machine, turned up in Rome a few years ago, and is currently in the U.S.A., having been meticulously restored to its former glory by White Post Restorations of Virginia. (One of the problems was replacing the turn signals, of semaphore type recessed into slots in the rear quarters of the body). The Viotti cabriolet has recently come on the market in France, as a '*voiture de chef d'etat*,' though whether this means Mussolini or the House of Savoy is not clear at the time of writing.

Best of all, the Touring *berlina-sport* has come to light, still in first

class order, and in Britain. It isn't for sale, and if it were, it would (justly) be very expensive indeed.

Michael Sedgwick

Letters

From: Frederick J. Hooven, Elm Street, Norwich, Vermont 05055. Your mystery car with the California top (Newsletter, 70:7) is in my opinion a Cole 8, ca 1924. This was built in Indianapolis, Ind., and was quite well-represented in Dayton, where I lived at that time.

It was regarded as a good car by those who owned it. I think they made a six, but I'm not certain about that—it may have been a smaller model 8 that I'm thinking of. This was a 90 deg. V-8 flat-head engine of about 3-1/2 x 5 bore and stroke.

Notice the "balloon" tires, which were very uncommon before 1924, and the Westinghouse air shocks. The latter greatly reduced the front-end spring rate, and therefore reduced the nasty pitching motion that characterized cars of the day, and which made the rear seat uncomfortable to ride in, but they also robbed the car of what roll stiffness it might otherwise have had, so that it was necessary to go around corners very carefully.

A 1921 Mitchell that belonged to my father had been re-equipped with specially-made 32 x 6 tires made by the Dayton Rubber Company, and 20" wire wheels made by the Dayton Wire Wheel Company. These were the first balloon tires I know anything about.

In 1920 the Dayton Rubber Company, of which my father was one of the founders, began to make cord tires. Prior to that time it had made only the old cross-weave fabric tires, which had to be pumped up to 90 lbs. pressure to keep them from blowing out. I asked Dad what was so good about cord tires and he replied that they were much more flexible, and that the sidewalls could flex without heating up the tire. The wheels went around in my head and I let the tires on our Oldsmobile down to 35 pounds from their usual 90. And said nothing to Dad about it. About two weeks later Dad asked me, "Did you oil the springs on that car? It rides so much better." "No," I answered, "I just let the tires down to 35" "Oh, gosh," he said, "You shouldn't do that, they'll blow out."

"Well," I replied, "They haven't blown out yet, and you told me that was the good thing about cord tires, so why don't we see how they go?"

That car rode so much better with its 34 x 4-1/2 tires at 35 lbs. that we went back to the Dayton Rubber, where Dad was no longer active but was still much interested. A.L. Friedlander was the General Manager at that time, and he was always ready to listen to a new idea, so it ended up by the Company making a new tire model for a 32 x 6, or what we would now call a 20 x 6.00. At the same time, Al Wilcox, who ran the Dayton Wire Wheel Company (who made wire wheels for all the race cars of that day) made us a set of special 20" wheels for a 1921 Mitchell that had replaced the Olds.

From: Michael Worthington-Williams, Glaspant Manor, Capel Ifan, Newcastle Emlyn, Dyfed. SA38 9LS, Wales. The mystery car photos in Newsletter No. 70 are certainly obscure, but for what they're worth these are my solutions.

The small two seater speedster cyclecar is a circa 1921/2 Peters built by the Peters Autocar Co of Trenton, New Jersey, powered by a 1144cc air-cooled twin. The absence of a filler cap and the louvred "radiator," plus the vent on the hood, all indicate air-cooling, and a feature of the Peters was its wire wheels. Other models offered were a roadster and a light station wagon, and all were priced at \$344.

The other one had me foxed for a while, but those balloon tyres, rear wheel brakes only and Westinghouse air springs could only spell Cole. The California top suits their image; they were always a stylish outfit.

I have also received very helpful letters from Frank Robinson concerning the Seabrook and Heavy Aviation trucks. Apparently Colonel Duncan Crow's *Encyclopedia of Armoured Cars* (1976) lists the Seabrooke (with an e) as dating from 1915, being of US manufacture, with 5 ton chassis, high box hull, w/partial dropsides, 3-pdr Naval gun with or without shield, 4 maxim guns, and used by the Royal Naval Air Service. Frank suggested Nick Georgano as a source of information on the Seabrook, but this is, in fact, one make of truck which is omitted from Nick's recent *Encyclopedia of Commercial Vehicles*.

As a result of some further investigation of my own, it now appears clear that the Heavy Aviation was similar to the Liberty designed by the Quartermaster Corps, but was designed by the Air and Signal Corps for the use of the American Air Forces. I have located an operator in this country who had two in Lewes in Sussex after the First World War, both of them apparently giving good service. Spares were also readily available from the Slough War Disposals Board, but the wheels were definitely different to the Liberty and not inter-

changeable. The same operator also ran a British Berna, a Riker and a Locomobile. According to Bart Vanderveen's *Observer's Army Vehicle Directory to 1940* the Heavy Aviation and 1-1/2 ton Aviation Light were conceived as tenders and transport vehicles for the Signal Corps/Air Service, and among other truck firms involved, Federal had orders for a thousand, and of these some 600 were shipped to France. Rolland Jerry, writing in *Old Cars Weekly* in November, reports having seen an Aviation Light in the late '30s eking out its days as a yard hack for a sawmill operator in upper New York State. This particular vehicle was offered to Rolland's father as a trade-in for a Cletrac crawler tractor, and was circa 1918, still on solid tyres and valued for scrap at \$15. Its distinguishing feature was apparently handsome disc wheels. Do any Lights or Heavys survive, I wonder?

From: G.H. Brooks, 493 Magill Road, Tranmere, South Australia, 5073. After all this talk about the Victory car advertised by Keep Bros. and Wood in Australia during 1916, I find that the answer to the problem of its origins has been lying in an early issue of the S.A.H. Newsletter all the time.

To help pass the time on a recent very hot day I was looking through my collection of back numbers of the Newsletter when I was brought up short at page three of Number 15, for there, in an advertisement by the Pontiac Chassis Company, of Pontiac, Michigan, is an illustration of what is obviously the same chassis as the one used for the Keep Bros. and Wood advertisement, but seen from the other side.

Georgano's *Encyclopedia* gives 1915 as the only year of manufacture for the Pontiac chassis, and says that the engine was by Perkins, but from the caption to the Newsletter illustration it appears that the company was still advertising in 1916. Can someone enlarge on the history of the Pontiac Chassis Company for us?

The question also arises, following my investigations into the similarity of the Victory to the King car (Newsletter No. 70) as to whether the Pontiac Chassis Company provided the running gear for the King.

I thank Mr. Elliot Kahn for his interest in the problem. In my original letter on the subject (Newsletter No. 63) the existence of a Victory car in the U.S.A. in 1920—21 was mentioned. Our Australian Victory was being advertised here in 1916, two years before the Gray firm's engine.

From: Hayden Shepley, Toughkenamin, PA: Here are two obscure facts that may be worth mentioning. From the "Journal" of the American Aviation Historical Society, which I belong to, I read that Inglis M. Upperco, president of the Upperco Cadillac Corp. of New York City had custom bodies built for Cadillacs in the Keyport, N.J. plant of the Aeromarine Plane & Motor Co. which he founded in 1914 and owned until 1924. No other information known.

During 1924, nine duPont Model C sedans built by Springfield were then trimmed by the Niagra Falls Motorboat Co., have no further information than this.

While in Philadelphia recently I discovered a valuable research tool which I think should be mentioned in the Newsletter to make other SAH members aware of it—The "Union list of Serials" published by the H.W. Wilson Co. has an alphabetical list of all serial publication in libraries of the USA and Canada. These include *Horseless Age*, *Motor Age*, *Autocar*, etc.

From: Walter O. MacIlvain, 17 Bonner Road, Manchester, Conn. 06040. The car pictured in the upper photo on page 7 of the latest Newsletter is either a Spacke or a Brook. The Spacke was the only two-cylinder car at the 1920 N.Y. Show. It was made by the Spacke Machine & Tool Company, Indianapolis, Ind., who had made air cooled engines for many years, earlier as the F W. Spacke Machine & Tool Co. In 1920 the name of the product, which was little more than a cyclecar, was changed to Brook, still by Spacke Machine & Tool Company.

The car in the lower picture is a Cole Aero Eight, built from 1918 to 1924 in Indianapolis. The body style was called the "Californian," but the balloon tires must have been a later addition. The headlamps are the style of 1918—'21, but balloon tires did not appear until 1924. Cole was one of the first to have balloons, but it used drum type lamps when the balloons came out. I hope he changed his steering ratio when he changed his wheels. Cole was also one of the first with Duco lacquer finish. The year 1925 was Cole's last. The Westinghouse air/oil shock absorbers were not standard equipment.

From: Keith Marvin, Apt A-13, The Village One Apartments, 587 Broadway, Menands, New York 12204. I was very much interested in Elliott Kahn's letter in the December Newsletter concerning the "Victory" model engine built by the Gray Company. Mr Kahn states

that "pretty much the same engine eventually powered the GRAY cars and trucks of the 1922—26 period."

Actually, there was one significant difference in the "Victory" model and that which came later. The "Victory" was an overhead valve type and the one used by the Gray itself was an L-head. The later engines of the ohv variety are frequently encountered in the trade journals as "Gray-Beall" (sometimes misspelled 'Gray-Bell'), for F.F. Beall, metallurgist-engineer with Gray who improved the initial "Victory" design.

The earlier Gray ohv engine (before Beall), was indeed used on some Birch cars. This was before 1920 as thereafter Birch opted for LeRoi, Lycoming, Beaver and Herschell-Spillman. However, this is scarcely surprising as in 1919 Crow-Elkhart was using the Gray engine in its four-cylinder line and as Crow-Elkhart (with several other firms) was building cars for Birch, there was no change between them excepting the radiator emblems and hubcap designations. (Incidentally, I am currently making a study of both Birch and its Chicago compatriot, Bush, and although to date I can't definitely connect Birch and Piedmont, I shouldn't be surprised if they were kissin' cousins—other firms which crop up here include Norwalk, Pullman, Sphinx, Elcar, Huffman and Lord knows how many more. Among cars spawned were Birch, Bush, Piedmont, Alsace, Stork-Kar, Lone Star, Norwalk, Marshall, Crow-Elkhart, Elcar, Sphinx, Pullman and probably several others—but this is another story.)

Among cars opting for the Gray engine were the 1922 Ace Model "F," the 1922 Saxon-Duplex "125 G" and the Kelsey friction drive Model "B" cars for 1922 and 1923, in addition to the Birch and Crow-Elkhart of 1919. The Napoleon truck also employed the Gray and, according to Ralph S. Findley and Charles F. MacLeod in their excellent article, "Gray Automobile" (*Antique Automobile*, Jan.-Feb. 1970), they also list Kohler, Pan Hard (sic) and Traffic trucks. There were probably several others, too.

As nearly as I can make out, the Gray L-head engine remained exclusively with Gray cars and trucks.

Badge engineering is a moot point, I think. And it is very prevalent with such cars as aforementioned here where several firms manufacture for others on special order. Birch and Bush are excellent examples of this but although they might not own an iota of originality save their emblem and hub logo, I feel strongly that regardless of their parentage, with this insigne, they should have every right to take their place in the lineup of names which collectively constitutes the panorama of American automobiles. They may be stepchildren and they may be frowned upon, but having been given a name, they should have the right to wear it and take no second place to what might otherwise and mistakenly be considered automotive aristocracy.

From: Fred W. Crismon, 321 Godfrey Ave, Louisville, KY 40206. I don't want to seem argumentative, but reference Michael Sedgwick's identification of the post-war mystery car in the July-Aug 80 issue:

1) He has a fairly good argument in that the Fiat door shapes appear to be identical. However, there are some curious differences which I doubt would appear on the pilot model of a car, and then be altered in the production version:

a) the windshield has rounded bottom corners on the Fiat models, and the metal cowl curves up to meet the bottom of the glass.

b) the door handles on the Fiat models are mounted about two inches higher on the narrow contoured area below the windows.

c) the drip rail between the windshield and the front door comes down all the way to the edge of the front fender on the Fiats.

d) the rocker panel pressing on the Fiat cars is an insert below the doors only i.e. the bottom rear edge of the front fenders curve all the way under and form part of the rocker panel itself. On the mystery car the rocker panel is separate, running all the way from fender opening to fender opening.

2) Although there are other variances such as the size of the rear wheel opening (much larger and rounder on the Fiats), the four aspects I have mentioned above would require too much re-engineering from the pilot model to achieve no useful purpose. The general contours of the lower half of the body sides, the hood and grille, and the front bumpers and guards are very close to the production Hudson Jet except for the front of the rocker panels.

And I still feel that the background is North American. No European community, especially an Italian one, would have wasted that much space between buildings in the early 1950s. And most still wouldn't. Furthermore, the types of buildings shown: a frame house with a gabled front, a two story brick building with gabled ends, a ranch-style house, simply do not even remotely resemble Italian architecture.

And you wouldn't find many poured concrete curbs in Italy in 1950. In fact you still won't find many, and none at all on streets in undeveloped areas such as the one where the photo seems to have been taken.

The photograph, in my opinion, was definitely made in the USA, or at least in North America, and I think the car was a prototype for the Hudson Jet. Maybe they used a Fiat 1400 as a starting point, and modified it to suit?

Keep 'em coming.

From: Fred Roe, 837 Winter Street, Holliston, MA 01746. I have a couple of comments on items in #70:

#1. George Risley's identification of the truck labeled "Farnum Motor Car Co." as a Grabowsky leads me to the conclusion that Farnum was probably a dealer somewhere, perhaps for Grabowsky trucks but not necessarily so. Could have been a car dealer whose line did not include trucks, or one who handled Grabowskys in addition to a car line. Lack of an address on the truck suggests that the location was a smaller city where everyone knew where every business was located.

#2. I can offer the information to Mike Worthington-Williams that the "Heavy Aviation" truck was a World War I equivalent for the Air Force of the "US Standard" or "Liberty" truck used by the Army. I do not believe it was to the same specification, but was another design especially for Air Force use, made in smaller numbers than the Liberty and with much less publicity. The State Highway Dept. in New Hampshire owned about half a dozen of these in 1920, with horsepower rating given as 35 and in some cases 28. Some of the 28 hp versions were listed as "Light Aviation." I believe that John Montville informed me of the origin of these trucks after I had located these New Hampshire entries, and since then I think I recall finding a reference to them in a contemporary publication.

I expect Major Crismon or somebody will come up with more information of the Heavy Aviation trucks which will be more complete than mine, so don't bother with my paragraph if this happens. I have also dropped a note to Mike W-W (I owed him a letter anyhow) giving him this little bit of dope.

If anybody follows up on my notes on the Med-Bow—Medcraft bit, I would appreciate a xerox if there is positive information. I had forgotten all about sending that to you. Actually a later reading of the 1909 registration list has revealed 5 more cars, 2 called Med-Bow, 2 called Medcroft, and 1 called H. C Medcraft, with only one of them located in Springfield, the rest in Brookline and other Boston suburbs. Total 14 vehicles, certainly more than enough to qualify as production.

From: D.J. Kava, 1755 Bandera Drive, Beaumont, Texas 77706. Michael Sedgwick's comments in Number 70 about John Conde's Fiat mystery car in the previous issue confirms my suspicion that the car is in reality a prototype Hudson Jet. Standing in front of the car is Hudson's Chief Engineer Millard Toncray. The give away is the wheel openings and fender flares which are quite identical to my production Jets and of course the roof mounted radio antenna. Richard Langworth's Postwar Hudson book mentions these Fiat based prototypes. The Lombardian plains in this case could also be the outskirts of Ypsilanti. An important photo since few of the pre-production photos seemed to have survived.

Incidentally I met a fellow who claimed to have taken a Checker front fender and put it on his Hudson Jet without modification. Can anyone confirm and supply the correct years and model? Comparing the Checker introduction date with the January, 1953 initial Jet production ought to be interesting.

From: George Risley, 4863 Second Ave, Detroit, MI 48201. Congratulations on the Newsletter format. It has a really professional look now. I hope it will inspire more contributions.

As to Jim Bradley's passing I can say that anyone privileged to have known him will doubly appreciate Walter Haessner's comments about this dedicated member of SAH. As Jim's one-time assistant in the National Automotive History Collection, I found him to be a most thorough and accurate historian and a superior archivist. It was inspiring to work with him and it will not be easy for a successor to fill his place.

Fred Roe's letter re Med-Bow, etc. is of interest. I have at hand a few items that might clarify the matter a bit. It seems H.C. Medcraft got the Med-Bow Automobile Company under way at Springfield, Mass. early in 1907. The "Med" stood for Medcraft and the "Bow" for G.G. Bowersox, who is listed as superintendent (manager?) Medcraft was secretary-treasurer according to my source.

Some of the directors were from Springfield, Mass. and others from

the Illinois city of that name. The company was moved to Springfield, Illinois sometime in late 1908 or early 1909 and re-named the Springfield Motor Car Company, Mr. Medcraft remaining as one of the incorporators. Apparently Mr. Bowersox was out of the picture by this time. In 1910 Medcraft withdrew and the Bayfield Motor Car Company took over the business such as it was. Possibly, by the way, "Bayfield" is a missprint and should read "Rayfield" though I have no proof for this surmise.

I don't find anything to indicate that Medcraft's vehicle had any other name than Springfield which appears in ads and descriptive accounts of the car. Med-Bow was the company name and Medcraft was apparently the promoter. Pictures of the 1907 car exist and I have a drawing of the Illinois-based design.

I hope all this does not compound the confusion. Mechanical details and illustrations can be supplied if Mr. Roe wants them. My sources are automotive periodicals of the time.

The unidentified cars in this issue are, I think, (1) a Spacke runabout made by the Spacke Machine & Tool Company of Indianapolis ca 1919-20. The firm earlier made cyclecar engines and parts. (2) The car with the California top is a Cole of about 1921, if I'm not mistaken. Probably the balloon tires were fitted to cut down wheels in a later modernizing effort.

From: Ralph Dunwoodie, 5935 Calico Drive, Sun Valley, Nevada 89431: The spindly wire wheeled speedster type car in the Mystery B photo of SAHN #70 on page 7 could be either a 1920 Spacke or a 1920 Brook. Enclosed are copies from both Brook and Spacke folders and you can see they are almost identical in appearance! All of my 1921 Brook photos show it with running boards and with more of a roadster body. Although the Spacke was announced as early as May 1919, it wasn't offered to the public until November as a 1920 model. The name was changed to Brook for the 1921 season and the body became a roadster (Incorrectly called a "Brooke" and Brooke-Spake in many recent publications). The California—topped touring car is a Cole of 1920 or 1921.

Research Column

Wanted: photos of Hudson cars in Japan. The first three or four cars arrived along with the first Packard on a ship docking at Yokahama about April, 1912. One of the first cars belonged to Dr. G.M. Lanning of Oskaka. Sale & Frazer of Tokyo were probably the first dealer/distributor. Would like marketing information, details on special bodies, government usage, etc. The cars were shipped completely knocked down to Tokyo during the 1930s. Any stories about the six six-wheeled 1932 Hudsons built for the government for the Manchurian War? D.J. Kava, 1755 Bandera, Beaumont, Texas 77706.

Want any information on a hot air engine manufactured by Ryder-Ericsson Engine Co. of New York, Chicago, Philadelphia and Boston. John Newman, Collinsville Scottville & District Historical Society, 22 Scartwater Street, Collinsville, Q 4804, Australia.

On Ford screw-on hub caps there is a small letter on the cap below the inscription. I understand from correspondence with Bruce Ledingham that the following letters: E, C, L, B, W, H, R and a small star are used. Also the caps on the Canadian-made T model have "Made in Canada." These also vary in design with the words "Made in Canada" in a straight line; also a circular line inside the bottom rim of the cap. Does anyone know what the letters indicate? Do they indicate various suppliers, car models or years manufactured? Gerald Kisiel, 1801 Brentwood Drive, Troy, Michigan 48098.

Want to add to my collection of photos of original Crane-Simplex cars and particularly individual body styles. Will buy prints of cars I do not already have outright or will swap for photos of this or other makes you may want. Fred Roe, 837 Winter Street, Holliston, MA 01746.

Wanted: literature, factory photos or anything dealing with the 1934 Plymouth to add to my collection. Also anything on the John T. Robinson Co. of Hyde Park, Mass., builder of the Robinson auto around 1900. Ed Peterson, 16 Perkins Ave, Hyde Park, Mass. 02136.

Wanted: all factory photos, drawings, plans and technical papers or articles on the 1956/57 Continental Mark II. Any printed material or sources for such material for this automobile would be appreciated. Will purchase, trade or even use and return. Mike Schultz, 11923 Brian Forest, Houston, Texas 77077.

Classifieds

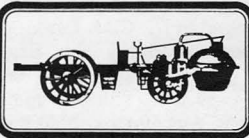
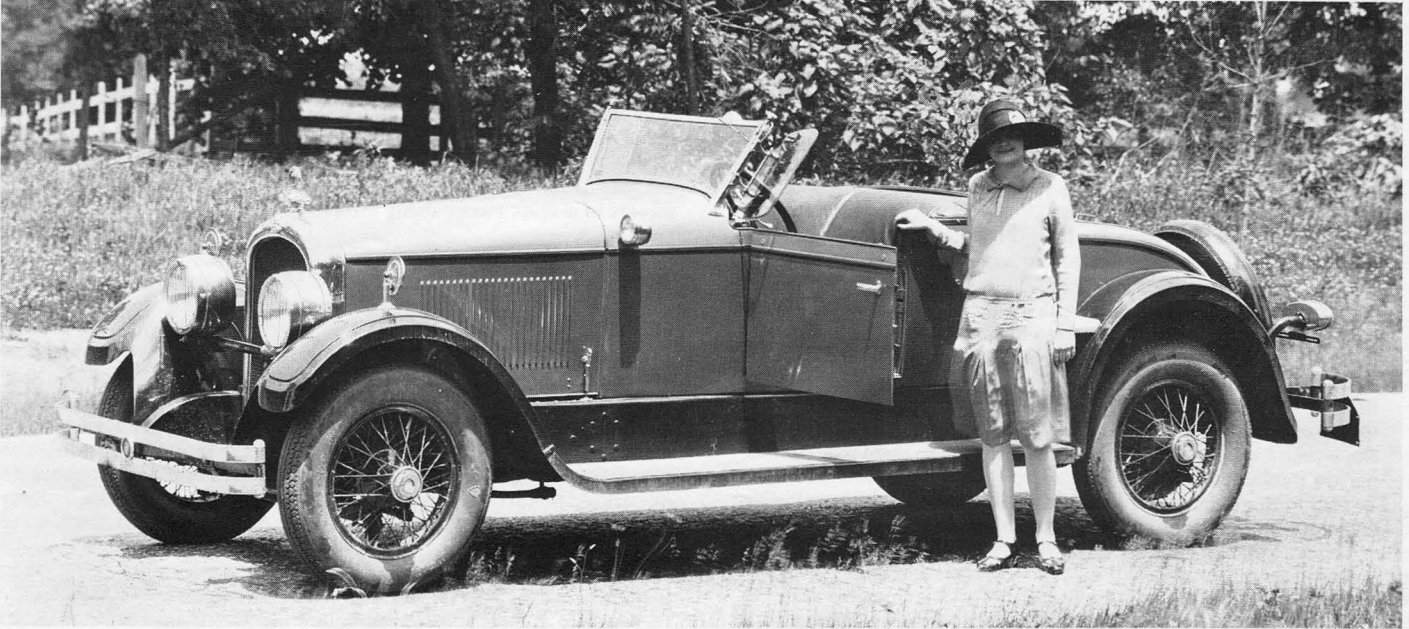
For Sale: 200-page, illustrated, prizewinning Chinese translation of *The Public Image of Henry Ford*. \$9.95 postpaid. David L. Lewis, 312 Business Administration, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI 48109.

Wanted: For 1941 Chrysler Crown Imperial & spiral bound sales catalog showing the long wheelbase models. Gilbert Wasserzieher, 1800 Otter, Anchorage, Alaska 99504.

Wanted: "AMPS—the Milburn Light Electric" published by the Milburn Wagon Co., Toledo, Ohio. Herb Zieman, 906 Eton Road, Toledo, Ohio 43615.

Factory Photo

A 1926 Marmon two-passenger speedster is this month's factory photo and comes from the collection of the editor.



NEWSLETTER

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