

# SAH Journal



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SEPTEMBER / OCTOBER 2013

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## Editor's Notes

You are receiving three issues of the *SAH Journal* arriving together: #264 (Sept/Oct), #265 (Nov/Dec) and #266 (Jan/Feb).

Following the last issue containing the draft membership directory and its call for each of you to update your membership profile, the next issue #264 was clearly on track not to be in your hands until 2014. This disconnect needed to be addressed but the costs to produce and mail three full issues was logistically and financially unrealistic. Another alternative was to simply name the next issue #264 and break the *SAH Journal's* continuity. The alternative that seemed best and thus is the one chosen is what you now hold. Issues #264 and #265 are "modest" issues of four pages each with #266 a regular issue. This solution to produce a trio of issues does not interrupt or detract from members' rightful expectation for a bimonthly publication.

The next issue (#267, Mar/Apr 2014) is in production and will be in your hands two months hence, bringing the dating of the issues into line with the calendar. Additionally, in the last issue, it was stated that coverage of Hershey will occur in this issue—that coverage appears in #266.

Faced with executing three issues, the opportunity to embrace a connecting theme was irresistible. To start, the covers of these three issues are intended to connect while also emphasizing the selected theme: 60 years of the Corvette, in the beginning. A review of one time Corvette designer Peter Brock's new book is in #265. The full cover photo will be revealed on page 15 of #266 along with a provocative article by *Helen V Hutchings*, and she kicks things off with this first look at the Corvette's birth in 1953—distilled from e-mail with the editor:

The Corvette's intro to the motoring press was held September 29, 1953 at GM's Milford Proving Ground with 50 media type in attendance and eight of the "better" Corvettes assembled up to that time. And they would have had to be carefully selected as those first 300 were of "uneven" quality (understatement). Yet, as just about every history of Corvette has noted, there can only be one "first 300." Thus today, 60 years after they were produced, is it any surprise that (usual caveat/depending upon condition and provenance) one of those "first 300" can and do command prices in the realm of half a million dollars? The 300-car number cited for 1953 production was what was authorized with most all of the cars earmarked/allocated to go to high-visibility folks such as Hollywood stars (John Wayne was one) and sports figures, execs of other major companies, and, of course, some stayed in hands of GM top brass. During calendar 1953 only 183 Corvettes were sold—total calendar and model 1953 production was the number authorized: 300. All were identical—polo white w/red vinyl interior and wheels/black manually-operated canvas-top convertibles w/retail price of \$3,498. All had two-speed automatic transmissions and six cylinder 150 hp engines and 6-volt electrical systems but no roll-up windows (side curtains were provided), no exterior door handles, nor any outside rear-view mirror. Only two options were available: a heater (\$91.40) and an AM signal-seeking radio (\$145.15). The antenna, a wire mesh embedded into the inside of the fiberglass truck lid, was standard equipment on all 1953 Corvettes. Sixty years on of those original 300, approximately two-thirds are accounted for.

**NOTICE:** the Nominating Committee is seeking nominees for the 2014 slate for three-year terms ending in 2017 of the SAH Board of Directors. The requirement for consideration for election of being a member of the Society addresses the importance of an interest in automotive history and commitment to the purpose and mission of the Society. In addition, the board is currently particularly interested in nominees showing skill and background in investment and in website and social media areas. Please address suggestions to *Susan Davis*, chair of the nominating committee, at [susandavis228@gmail.com](mailto:susandavis228@gmail.com).

**April 10-14, 2014:** the Tenth Biennial Automotive History Conference at the Vail Automotive Innovation Facility, Palo Alto, California. For additional information visit the SAH website ([autohistory.org](http://autohistory.org)) or call Arthur Jones, Conference Chair, at +1.215.985.4714 or email: [nomecos@verizon.net](mailto:nomecos@verizon.net).

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SOCIETY OF AUTOMOTIVE HISTORIANS

ISSUE 264

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# A VISIT TO CAAPY

## Poissy, France



 I-r: 1959 Talbot Lago America, 1948 T26 Lago Grand Sport, 1939 Talbot Lago Special T150C, 1923 Talbot 4 cyl.

An hour outside central Paris, at the western end of the RER A5 regional rail line, is the “*Collection de l’Aventure Automobile à Poissy*,” aka “CAAPY.” This museum, managed and maintained by an association of volunteers, documents automobile and truck production in Poissy and nearby Nanterre from the 1930s to the present. A mile and a half fair-weather walk from the RER station, over the Seine, brings you to the western edge of the PSA Peugeot Citroen Poissy plant grounds and the modern industrial building which has housed the museum since 2002. The obscure location and limited hours of operation (three hours each on Monday afternoons, Saturday mornings and Saturday afternoons) should not dissuade anyone from making a visit to see this fine collection.

The original pre-war plant was commissioned in the 1930s by Ford SAF, *Ford Société Anonyme Française*, under the leadership of Maurice Dollfus, in response to the disintegrating Mathis - Ford SAF joint venture which was producing the Matford line of vehicles in Strasbourg. After the Second World War, Ford concentrated on operations in England and Germany and sold the Poissy plant and products to Simca in 1954, at which time Ford bought a 15% share of Simca. Chrysler purchased Ford’s 15% share of Simca in 1958. The Chrysler share of Simca quickly increased, reaching 63% by 1963. Simca became a Chrysler brand with the Chrysler pentastar appearing on Simca vehicles, corporate signage, letterheads, etc. The corporate name became Chrysler France in 1970, the Chrysler share reaching 99% at that time. In 1978 Peugeot SA acquired Chrysler’s European subsidiaries, operating them under the SNC Talbot & Co. (France), Talbot UK and Talbot Spain names until 1985. PSA Peugeot Citroen now operates the modern Poissy plant complex, which currently produces the Peugeot 208 and Citroen DS3. This rich automotive manufacturing heritage has been conserved and presented by the CAAPY association since it was founded in 1984 by employees of the plant and technical center. At this writing association membership stands at 138, half of whom are employees or former employees.

The modest admission fee to the museum includes a one-hour tour in French by one of the association volunteers. The volunteers are a personable lot, whether you speak their language or not.

Approximately 70 vehicles are on the floor, along with countless examples of components, cutaways, production tooling, graphics and automobilia, mostly covering the post war era. Vehicles dating from the Chrysler France and SNC Talbot era will look familiar to North American visitors. It is difficult to absorb all of the content in one visit. (Tip: call ahead before traveling. –Ed.)

The overall presentation is a testament to the axiom that no museum building can be too large. Station wagons, for example, are displayed with tailgates open to provide additional space for memorabilia. A few vehicles are positioned almost door handle to door handle. Photography is permitted, but requires careful framing due to the layout of the displays. One senses, however, that the intensity of the displays is not due to a lack of planning or a runaway acquisitions policy, but is, rather, the result of an enthusiastic and ongoing effort to make as thorough a presentation as possible of the vehicles produced in the region. The pride and care with which this collection has been assembled and organized over the years is evident.

An important part of the CAAPY mission is the management of the museum archive, which documents vehicles built at Poissy since 1938 and at Nanterre between 1935 and 1961. Vehicle literature, manuals, technical and commercial documents, period photographs and 16mm and 35mm commercial films are preserved in the archives. The volunteer staff includes archival specialists, and non-association researchers do have access to the archives by request. A current staff project is the compilation of a chart to show the production history of Poissy.

This remarkable museum is a must-see for the automotive history scholar/enthusiast visiting the Île de France. To plan your visit, start with the association website at [www.caapy.net](http://www.caapy.net). Specific questions can be addressed in English to [caapy@peugeot.com](mailto:caapy@peugeot.com). Association member Jean Le Meaux, who spent part of his automotive career in Detroit working on the Chrysler Omni/Horizon project, handles communications for CAAPY and was very helpful in assisting with information for this article, including the Poissy ownership lineage summarized above.

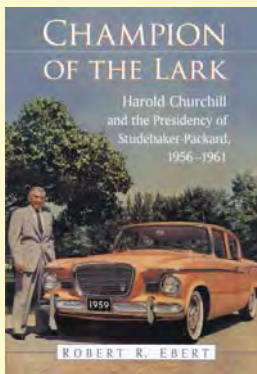
–Robert Barr

# Book Reviews

## Champion of the Lark: Harold Churchill and the Presidency of Studebaker-Packard, 1956-1961

by Robert R. Ebert

McFarland & Company, Inc. (2013)  
www.mcfarlandpub.com (800-253-2187)  
196 pages, 10" x 7" softcover, 97 b/w illustrations, index, bibliography, chapter notes and appendices  
Price: \$39.95  
ISBN-10: 0786474203  
ISBN-13: 978-0786474202



Judging this book by its cover is a disservice to its content for something must have happened along the way to turn the period marketing brochure photo into a rather murky-looking cover. The contents of the book are anything but. The writing is clear and although scholarly, it never becomes pedantic in spite of the author being an academician.

Author *Robert R. Ebert*, a professor emeritus of economics, a longtime SAH member, and (full disclosure) has and continues to serve the organization as its secretary for the past half a dozen or so years. Vehicles are important to him too. He's owned a dozen or more collectible cars over the years and openly admits to being a hopelessly-addicted hobbyist.

This book is the fourth transportation-oriented title he's had published. And if you are planning to attend the Automotive History Conference on the campus of Stanford University in April 2014, you'll be afforded the opportunity to hear him present the results of his most recent research.

Marque histories usually relate their story from the perspective of the product or the consumer, describing how a given year/model was designed, engineered and then how the car that resulted was received by the buyer. For this book, Ebert's approach is different. Studebaker-Packard history 1956-61 is considered from the perspective of one of its executives, Harold Churchill. Relating how executives arrived at their business decisions is revealing.

Top executives—regardless the industry or the company—seem to be considered heroic one moment, then vilified the next. Thus it is virtually impossible not to view Harold Churchill as one very special individual. For Churchill managed to do the improbable. When asked to step aside so that Sherwood

## POWER: How J.D. Power III Became the Auto Industry's Adviser, Confessor, and Eyewitness to History

by Sarah Morgans and Bill Thorness

Fenwick Publishing Group (2013)  
www.davepowerbook.com  
400 pages, 9" x 6" soft- or hardcover, indexed and with chapter notes  
Price: \$19.95 (soft) \$50 (hard)  
ISBN-10: 0981833675  
ISBN-13: 978-0981833675



Have you purchased a vehicle—any vehicle—manufactured after 1970? Or 1992 on, have you spent a night in a hotel or motel? Or, since 1995 have you engaged the services of a long-distance telephone provider? If so, James David Power III has effected your transaction, influencing the betterment of the service or product for the consumer.

In case you've not already connected the proverbial dots, Dave Power is the founder of J.D. Power and Associates; the marketing research company which surveys customers' satisfaction with a wide variety of services and products, then echoes that voice, the opinions of the customer, back to the producer of the item or service.

Dave's company started modestly. He, his

Egbert could assume the presidency of S-P, Churchill did so. At the same time he was retained as a director of the corporate Board. Moreover, he would subsequently prove a key "player" facilitating Studebaker's smooth transfer of production from the US to Canada.

Ebert and his research associates spent hours combing the corporate papers, and period publications as well as contemporary ones, as the bibliography and chapter notes make clear. So even if you are already familiar with the history you now will gain additional insights reading of the thinking and decision making processes that preceded the various public announcements.

—Helen V Hutchings

late wife Julie, and their growing brood of four children prepared the mailings to consumers at the kitchen table. Then, as the surveys were returned, it was at that same kitchen table that the tabulating was accomplished. Today J.D. Power and Associates has just shy of 1,000 people working for it worldwide and is part of the even-larger McGraw-Hill Companies.

*Power* is the recently released book that is part biography, telling of Dave's personal life including much regarding his philosophy and ethics, and partly a business book as it conveys how the company was conceived, its business model and how it generates income conducting surveys that, for the most part, have not previously been contracted for or underwritten by any outside entity.

This reviewer can't help but note that although Dave Power didn't write his story personally, the book's co-authors Sarah Morgans and Bill Thorness convey everything in a readable, friendly way that in so many ways reflects Dave Power's own personality. For Dave Power is one of the least stuffy and most personable "suits" you're apt to encounter in any industry.

The realm of the automobile is where Dave made his earliest mark. It has also been the industry which he and his company subsequently have influenced to make the greatest changes, and this includes the industry's dealerships which, starting in 1987, had their own Power-formed International Automotive and SuperDealer Roundtables with its enthusiastic participants the most innovative and progressive dealer principles nationwide.

Be you a consumer—of anything—you'll find the book of interest. For automotive-oriented historians it is a must-have book that once read will be shelved for future reference.

—Helen V Hutchings