

TRAVEL IN INDIANA LONG AGO – PART III

THE FIRST AUTOMOBILE

The first automobile in the United States was invented and tried out in Indiana. It was built by Elwood Haynes in Kokomo in 1894. The same year, Charles Black made an automobile in Indianapolis. The first automobiles, with a small gasoline engine under the seat and a steering handle, looked like carriages. Since they did not need a horse to pull them, they were called "horseless carriages."

The invention of the automobile made it possible for almost every family to have its own means of transportation. Many miles of paved roads were built in Indiana so that automobiles, trucks, and buses could be driven safely and smoothly. Today Indiana has over 76,000 miles of roads of all kinds. The first concrete road in Indiana is in Jackson County known as the "slab road" which is located west of Ewing.

From that time forward the progress of the automobile industry has grown beyond everyone's imagination. One epic story of this global institution began simply, with a boy who loved to take watches apart and put them back together again. Henry Ford was born on a farm in Springwells Township (now Dearborn), Michigan, on July 30, 1863. Abraham Lincoln was president, Charles Dickens began work on his last completed novel, Karl Marx considered his theories on socialism, and Giuseppe Verdi polished *La Forza del Destino*, his grand opera on the force of destiny.

The forces that would shape the Industrial Age were gathering the year Henry Ford was born. The open-hearth process of manufacturing steel, the vast network of pipelines transporting oil, and the crisscrossing railroads uniting a nation lay ahead. One American in five lived in a city; the United States was still a rural nation defined by agriculture and the farmers who worked the land. But soon the world was to change. Henry Ford entered the automobile business.

He would lead two small automaking enterprises before putting in motion plans for Ford Motor Company, as we know it today. On June 16, 1903, Henry and eleven associates dispatched incorporation papers to Michigan's state capitol in Lansing for the formation of Ford Motor Company. They had only \$28,000 in cash, some tools, and a few blueprints, but they had a profusion of faith. Henry was thirty-nine years old.

Henry and his stockholders had in mind a machine that could be made quickly and cheaply from contracted parts, removing the need for a large manufacturing complex. The company leased a small, converted wagon factory at 696 Mack Avenue. In an area illuminated by six light bulbs, ten employees worked twelve-hour days, seven days a week, assembling the first Ford commercial automobiles, beginning with the Model A.

Henry and his engineers feverishly went through nineteen letters of the alphabet— from Model A to Model S—selling 20,000 cars between 1903 and 1908. While other auto makers put their shoulders behind building automobiles for the rich, Henry sought to create a utilitarian car, "large enough for the family but small enough to run and care for," he said. "It will be so low in price that no man making a good salary will be unable to own one."

In early 1907, he set up a special workroom at the company's new plant on Piquette Avenue to work on his "universal car" as he called it. On October 1, 1908, the Model T—Henry's motorcar for the great multitude—was ready for full production.

The Model T was as Henry predicted: the automobile that would put America on wheels. First year production reached 10,600, breaking industry records. As the car dropped in price from an initial \$825 to a low of \$259, millions of Americans families bought their first automobile. (Average price today of a medium size car is about \$18,000 to \$25,000.) Wow what a difference!!!!

The Model T made Ford Motor Company the most dazzling enterprise in American business. Since the Model T, the world has never been the same.

The dream world of all young men can probably be traced back to the Model T. From fathers to sons, the automobile has been the natural enigma of young men. All have had their dreams of that one perfect automobile, whether it is Ford or Chevrolet or Dodge or whatever make. Today, we will never know the romance of the Model T but we still have our own feelings about our car of choice. Perhaps a 1940 Ford Coupe, a 1957 Chevrolet convertible, a 1950 Mercury, a 1967 Chevelle, or a 1950 Ford convertible or some other dream car. (Personally I would take either one of these).

The question for all of you reading this is "what was/is your dream car"??

Richard Rumph

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