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Of Automobiles, Books, and a Genius in 'Hollow Rolling Sculpture'

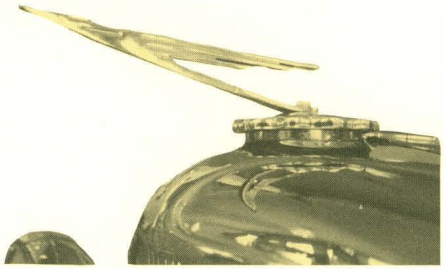
No thing is without meaning. A poem, a building, a bridge, an automobile — every created object without exception is an extension beyond itself of human thought, hopes, potential, limitations. The study of an object, then, reveals something of humankind, its history, and the culture of a given time and place. It provides, as well, interesting comparisons and contrasts between times and people.

Those things that capture resonances of idea, shape, color, expectation — some unique element of "truth" — that transcends generational boundaries, come to be valued beyond initial appraisals. Some come to be treasured for the rarity of human fulfillment represented by the creation. This principle is true of automobiles as well as other cultural and art forms.

The delineation between the rare and the common is an important act of learning and in the establishment of taste. And in so delineating, we discover those important persons in our history who have given us a glimpse of what might be understood as the "eternal" in human conception and achievement.

In this context, we celebrate and commemorate Gordon Miller Buehrig, artist, whose medium was metal and whose vision and achievement gave us some of the most enduring monuments in the art of the automobile.

Gordon Buehrig was born in Mason City, IL, on June 18, 1904. Upon graduation from high school he entered Bradley Polytechnic in Peoria, where he studied liberal arts and took art courses. In his autobiography, *Rolling Sculpture,* he wrote, "One day I was expelled from chemistry class because, according to my instructor, my notebook was not well done, and there were sketches of automobiles on all the pages." The instructor "was incensed at the thought I wasted my time drawing automobiles."[1]



Duesenberg Model J mascot introduced in 1929. Hood ornament designed by Gordon Buehrig. (Courtesy the Auburn-Cord-Duesenberg Museum.)

By 1924 Buehrig was a working artist in the automobile industry, as an apprentice under the chief body engineer of the Gotfredson Body Company, Wayne, MI. Buehrig never left the industry, and later he wrote, "My life in the automobile industry became more exciting with every move."[2]

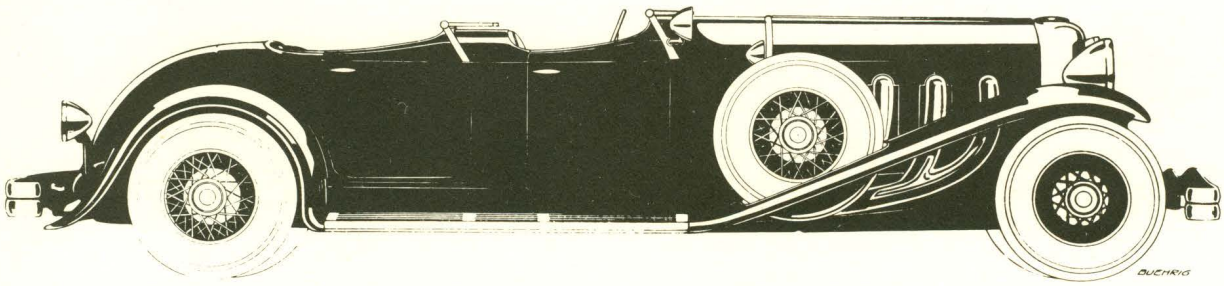
In 1926 he joined Ray Dietrich, who was building bodies for Pierce-Arrow, Franklin, Packard, and Lincoln. By 1927 he was a designer with the Packard Company — and here he was introduced to a book by the French architect, LeCorbusier, called *Toward a New Architecture.* "This great book," Buehrig wrote, "helped me formulate much of the philosophy of design, which I used later in designing automobiles."[3]

LeCorbusier enunciated the artistic revolution of a new era: "Contour and profile are a pure creation of the mind; they call for the plastic artist. A great epoch has begun. There exists a new spirit."[4] Buehrig was a conscious force of that "new spirit, "providing creative genius in American automobile design as no other single artist has done.

In 1928 he went to Stutz, where he worked on what became known as the "Super Bearcat." In 1929, when only 25 years old, he was hired as chief body designer for Duesenberg, the most prestigious automaker in America. Here his reputation was established in classic automobile artistry. Buehrig designed about half (the "best half," he told me with a smile in 1986) of the 400 Duesenbergs built between 1929 and 1933. Some of these are, like works of art, named: the Shreve Archer Judkins Coupe, the Beverly Berline, the Derham Tourster, the Rollston Convertible Victoria, and — perhaps the greatest of all — the Twenty-Grand Duesenberg, designed for and exhibited at the 1933 Chicago World's Fair and now on permanent display at the Nethercut Museum of Beauty, San Sylmar, CA.

One of the most unusual Duesenbergs created by Buehrig is the Brunn Torpedo Phaeton. Only five of this model were built, and only one was built by Brunn.

(See BUEHRIG Page Four)



Design rendering by Gordon Buehrig of the 1932 Duesenberg SJ Brunn Torpedo Phaeton. (Courtesy the Auburn-Cord-Duesenberg Museum.)

Caxtonian

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Musings...

I first met the late renowned auto designer, Gordon Buehrig, in Arizona in 1985. I was there on research, and lecturing on the "Artforms of the Auburn, Cord, and Duesenberg." Gordon, who had designed these magnificent motorcars, was to be in the audience. I was uneasy, to say the least, lecturing to the creator. To put me at ease before the lecture, Gordon said, "Let me tell you a story, Bob": There once was a man who had survived the Johnstown Flood. At every opportunity, he told of the flood and his survival. When he finally arrived at the Pearly Gates, he reminded St. Peter that he had survived the Johnstown Flood and asked, "Do you think I could tell about it at one of your meetings?" Obliging, St. Peter replied, "I think that's possible — maybe at a Wednesday evening gathering. But there's something I must warn you about." "What's that?" the man asked. "Noah's going to be there."

Gordon liked the lecture, and we formed an immediate kinship — he, the artist in metal, and I, the academic who appreciated his art. In fact, in June 1986 Gordon, his wife, and daughter were in Aurora, IL, where he was to receive an honorary Doctor of Arts degree from Aurora University. A vice president there at the time, I had arranged the conferral with the Board of Trustees. To celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Cord 810, I also arranged an exhibition of classic autos, including Gordon's personal 810, on the front lawn of Eckhart Hall, "Old Main," named for Charles Eckhart, founder of the Auburn Automobile Company and an early benefactor of the college.

This was the only degree Gordon would ever receive, and he was very proud of it. *The New York Times* cited it as one of his achievements in his obituary in 1990. His daughter once asked me why no other institution had ever recognized her father in this way. The answer is, of course, that the study of the automobile does not fit into academe's neat "fields of study," and we ignore the intellectual and aesthetic dimensions of this important socio-cultural development in America.

But I had become a "pyramid-dweller," to borrow a term from scholar Frederick Turner's important essay, "Design for a New Academy," published in *Harper's Magazine* (September 1986). Turner wrote: "...the laws of the world form a gigantic pyramid — with mathematics as the bottom layer, physics the next, and so on, and with the arts and theology on top. To understand any layer profoundly, it is necessary to plunge into the discipline beneath it." The task in Turner's "New Academy" — and in life, it seems to me — is to become sufficiently sure-minded that we can negotiate the steep and slippery slopes of the pyramid with comfort and grace, as we move from level to level, unbounded by fields of study.

I have not yet done the documentary, "The Automobile as Art," that Gordon wanted, but Caxtonian and art historian Richard Love provided a preliminary forum for it. In the fall of 1994, I was his guest on the national PBS program, "American Art Forum with Richard Love." For 30 minutes I had the pleasure of discussing the artistry of Gordon and illustrating it with some of the superb automobiles he had designed. This was, Richard reports, his most popular program in nine years of production. Gordon would have been delighted to know this, but he would not have been surprised. Gordon, you see, was also at home in the pyramid — as are many Caxton colleagues, a major factor in making our fellowship so richly rewarding day by day and over the years.

Robert Cotner
Editor

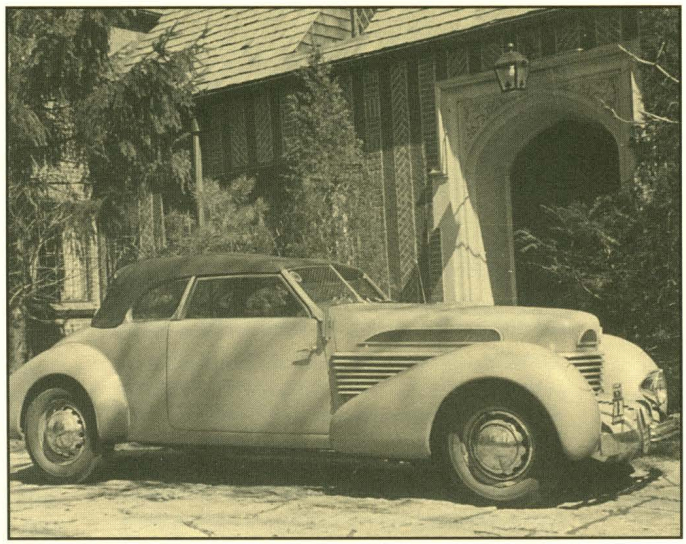
Book Collecting Drives Caxtonian to Automobile Collecting and Racing

I was not as a child forbidden to watch television, but, there being no such device in our house, I didn't anyhow. I did have ready access to books, and by the age of seven or eight could happily amuse myself with books, of which there were a plenty.

The family library was fairly catholic in scope, but with great depth in certain areas. I did not find solace then in the history of the *Book of Common Prayer* or the literary and parliamentary exploits of Benjamin Disraeli, but there were lots of things about ships and such subjects, and before very long I could name the dreadnoughts in order. Eventually it dawned on me that even if there had been any battlecruisers left, one could not take one home. My earliest memory of a book about cars is of David Scott Moncrieffe's *The Three-Pointed Star* (1956), my interest being drawn by the fact that our family car was a huge Mercedes-Benz sedan. This was followed by Ken Purdy's *Kings of the Road (1952).* This wonderful book infected me, as it did many, with the "Bug," which is to say that it introduced my innocent young mind to the love and legend of the Bugatti automobile. My father, sensible man, had no interest in Bugattis, so I had to start my own collection. By the time I got to the university, my name was on all of the wrong mailing lists, and so it remains to this day, although catalogs which once ran to 25 pages now run to hundreds.

In the beginning there were "coffee table/ Christmas" books, light of text, but with plently of photographs. There followed biographies (Rudolf Caracciola, Stirling Moss) and "marque" books, each devoted to the lore and legends of a single car make. The pre-electronic publishing world created the odd and happily remembered remainders: Borgeson's *The Golden Age of the American Racing Car* (1966) for a few dollars at Stuart Brent's late lamented store, and both of Peter Helek's wonderful books on early racing from a store in Harvard Square, Cambridge.

As time went on I became acquainted with some of the people (and cars) that appeared in my books, and my interests began to focus on a few makes of older automobiles. The care, use, and ownership of cars, and involvement with people with similar interests led to a life, of sorts, and, for my sins, I now preside over a group that holds sporting events for aging sports cars (and drivers). The amount of paper offered to those with my affliction has grown exponentially, and if the average bookstore can't supply the desired item, a phone call or short drive can remedy the problem.



The 1937 Cord 812 convertible Phaeton belonging to Gordon Adamson in front of a house on South Egandale Road in Highland Park, IL, designed by Robert Seyfarth, father of Caxtonian Hugh Seyfarth, who nominated Gordon to the club.. (From the collection of Henry Adamson.)

There are a fair number of book sources in the automotive area, but the "local" is Classic Motorbooks in Osceola, WI. I have drooled over their catalogs for 20 years. Their stock runs from Abarth to Willys, with subsections for models, posters, trucks, tractors, and almost any topic of automotive relevance. A more hands-on approach may be had with a visit to Paul Zimmerman at the Motorsport Collector, off Belmont in Downers Grove, IL. The stock here is organized around original "automobilia" but unusual books featured prominently. Walter Miller is a major source for original publicity and manuals, doing business out of Syracuse, NY. T.E. Warth, founded Classic Motorbooks, but now does business in Minnesota in used and out-of-print items and also operates a finding service. In addition he publishes an intriguing guide to book values. At the top of the list is Eoin Young in England, whose splendid stock is such that nothing is unavailable.

Outside of those legitimate sources are book and library sales, which offer the chance of real bargains. The famous annual Brandeis book sale is usually rather barren, and the Newberry sale is always cleverly scheduled to conflict with a racing weekend. But, as this is written, I am standing in line at a sale where I have always found good things. I won't say which sale.

The electronic age has made the volume of available titles grow ever larger, with several interesting results. A book need no longer cover a single make of car, but can concentrate on a particular model, or even, in special cases, a individual one. The book is set up electronically, a small run printed, and a few more printed as and when needed. Alas, for the remainder table of yore! The small run mandates high prices, but we are also spared the curious phenomenon of a small-run book of the pre-

(See BOOKS TO RACING Page 6)

At Home in the Pyramid

For those at home in the pyramid, nothing human is alien; indeed, nothing is alien. To say this is to predict the end of a whole cast of academic thought, that Brahmin prejudice which once wrote off other cultures as savage, and which now writes off our technological shopping mall culture as barbarian or worse. The true pyramid dweller does not deplore pop culture. He or she sees it as the raw material of great art. Technology is one of the performing arts by which new realities come into being. And it needs scriptwriters, composers, choreographers.

Frederick Turner

From "Design for a New Academy," Harper's Magazine, *September 1986, p. 51. (Used with permission of the author.)*

Buehrig

(Continued from Page One)

This magnificent work of art was designed by Buehrig from an idea suggested by Mark Lawrence of Washington, DC, for whom the car was to be built. The automobile chassis was built by Duesenberg, with the custom body work created according to Buehrig's design, by the Brunn Body Company, Buffalo, NY. The cost of the car was $19,000.

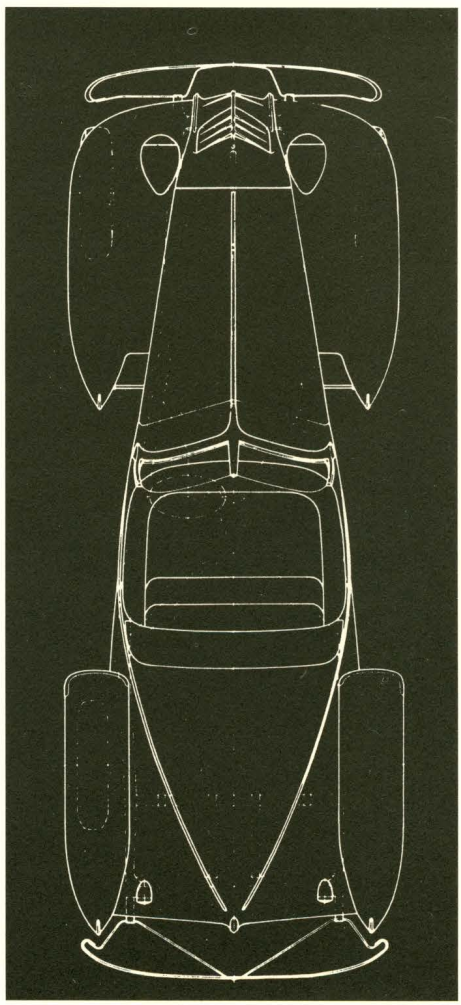
Buehrig describes Lawrence's reaction to the delivery of the car: "The day Mark took delivery he was probably the most excited customer who ever drove a new car from the plant....He had a fist full of five dollar bills. He walked through the plant, shook hands with every workman, handed him a five dollar bill, and thanked him for helping to build his Duesenberg."[5]

In 1934 Buehrig joined Harold Ames as chief body engineer for the Auburn Automobile Company. This company, under the presidency of E.L. Cord, had the reputation for producing cars of speed, grace, and awesome power. Duesenberg had been acquired by Auburn in 1927. Buehrig's first assignment with the company was to restyle the 1934 Auburn.

Ames and Buehrig isolated themselves during the weekend of July 4, 1934, at Lake Wawasee, IN, and developed plans for a new Auburn. Buehrig remembered the occasion: "My instructions from Ames were that he wanted the car to have a big hood so the car would look powerful."[6]

The result was a powerful, sleek automobile — the 851 Auburn of 1935 — whose classic lines established it as one of the finest production cars in American automobile history. Buehrig's face-lift included a restyled grill, a powerful-looking hood assembly, and louvered side panels. To save money — he had a budget of only $50,000 — the fenders, doors, and body assembly were "lifted" from the 1934 model. The car sold for $1,695. The addition of superchargers and a boat-tail design on some models in 1936 enhanced the advertising boast that the Auburn 852 could, with ease, exceed 100 mph; a small plate on the dash of every 852 model made this claim for prospective owners.

Above: The 851 Auburn is considered an automobile of great distinction. It is an adaptation of Al Leamy's 1934 Auburn. The photo above is of an 851 owned by Paul TerHorst, Mundelein, IL, and named Best of its Class at the 1997 ACD Show, Auburn, IN. Below: Blueprint rendering, top view, of the 1936 Auburn 852 Boattail Speedster by Gordon Buehrig. (Courtesy Auburn-Cord-Duesenberg Museum.)



Gerald Silk, Professor of Art at the University of Pennsylvania, said in his study of the automobile, "The very best was yet to come." That was, as Silk described it: "Gordon Buehrig's masterpiece and E.L. Cord's ultimate engineering breakthrough, the magnificent front-wheel drive 1936 Cord 810."[7]

Originally conceived as a "baby Duesenberg," the Cord 810 was the final hope of a company desperately struggling in the lengthening depression years. In nearly every way, the Cord 810 was the culmination, for both Buehrig and Auburn, of their years together. By 1937 Cord's company was in bankruptcy, and Buehrig was out of work.

But in his final car for Cord, Buehrig himself was motivated in a profound sense by the language and ideas of LeCorbusier, and the automobile as an art form was more consciously and completely developed in this automobile than in any other American car. Inspired by aeronautical design and his own creative genius, Buehrig shaped the Cord 810 around "contour and profile" never before imagined or seen in an automobile.

He concealed the cooling system within the coffin-nosed hood. He hid the headlights within the fenders; the model, he said, came from the lights he had seen on the wings of airplanes. The pontoon fenders bespeak power and speed in their very shape and placement alongside the unbroken lines of the hood and the low-slung body, which had no runningboards.

Having utilized, from the Cord L-29, the front-wheel-drive technology, Buehrig was able to keep the profile of the Cord 810 low as well as sleek. Using the research of LeCorbusier, he designed in his uniquely new automobile as fine an adaptation of the ovoid — or teardrop — body as had ever been designed.

Buehrig removed extraneous flat surfaces from the exterior of the car and rendered all design elements in a horizontal flow. He used the sphere and the hemisphere with great ingenuity and shaped the entire car as an ovoid to give new meaning to style in the automobile that is, even in 1997, yet remarkable. There were 27 items of design on this car that had never appeared on an American car before.

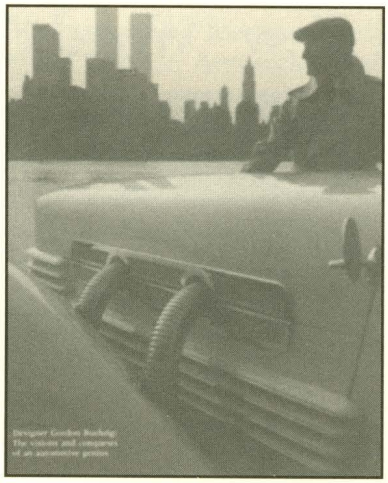
In 1935 Buehrig brought a new spirit into auto design with the startling introduction of the Cord 810 at the New York Auto Show. The initial reaction was unanimous: "The results, from an artistic standpoint, are breathtaking," one commentator stated.[8] In the 61 years since the introduction of the Cord 810, praise for Buehrig's work has grown and magnified. As a designer of this one motor car, Buehrig fixed himself as an artist of the highest order, working in a medium enunciated by the New York Museum of Modern Art as "Hollow Rolling Sculpture."

In 1949 Buehrig joined Ford Motor Company and began his longest association with any manufacturer. He retired from Ford in 1965. There he designed the 1951 Crown Victoria coupe, which many think his most successful commerical automobile. He also designed the 1952 Ford and Mercury all-metal station wagons. In these vehicles, he refused to cover the metal with imitation wood decals to make the cars look like the earlier versions of station wagons actually made of wood. "To do so would be a violation of my design ethic," he said.[9]

In early 1952 the Ford Executive Committee decided to build a prestige car that would rival — even replace, they hoped — the Cadillac as the finest American prestige motor car. Buehrig was assigned the role as body engineer for the car that would become the Continental Mark II. This automobile was offered — for $10,000 — in 1956 and 1957. Unfortunately for Ford, the car was a commercial failure, in spite of the emphasis on engineering, design, and attention to aesthetic elegance, which influenced, as Buehrig noted, later versions of the Mark series.[10]

When introduced in 1955, the Mark II was the heaviest and most expensive motor car in America since the Duesenberg. Its shipping weight was 4,800 pounds. It had a 386-cubic inch, 300-horsepower Continental engine with a top speed of 118 mph, though some were clocked at 130 mph.

An old friend of mine, the late Gene Wise, wrote, an "idea is not an is; it is a does."[11] He went on to say that we should therefore "look for ideas not at rest but in labor."[12] I suggest we see the splendid representation of ideas in labor through the progressive, creative genius of Gordon Buehrig — from the ancient vertical lines



Gordon Buehrig and the Cord 810 he designed near the scene of their triumph, the New York Auto Show of 1935, where the car's bold and beautiful shape was the talk of the town. (Photo used through special arrangments with the Franklin Mint.)

of the Duesenberg, to the powerful grill and hood of the 1935 Auburn, to the yet-enchanting sculpture of the 1936 Cord, to the sleek, modern elegance of the 1956 Mark II.

The work of Gordon Buehrig is analogous to our finest literary artists, in that the "aesthetic effect" — as Lionel Trilling has said — of great art is born in dynamism of idea.[13] One senses that Buehrig's achievement as an artist exceeded his success as a designer of production automobiles for the mass market. A marvelous irony emerges from Buerhig's life and work brought on by the marketplace reality of the post-depression years.

Whenever serious consideration is given to the automobile and its design, Buehrig's name is heard. *Road and Track* (1966) called him the "last of the great individual era designers."[14] *Automobile Quarterly* (1972) stated: "Gordon Buehrig — genius in his own time — had fostered a masterpiece with that Cord, and he did so, surprisingly, as both the actual creator of the car and as chief of styling — something unheard of in the U.S. industry."[15] And Gerald Silk commented, "Gordon Buehrig's masterpiece is...the magnificent front-wheel-drive 1936 Cord Model 810. Not just another pretty face, the car reflected a philosophy in concept from every point of view."[16]

In one of my last telephone conversations with Buehrig, we discussed in detail a documentary film for which he was developing a script. He also told me of a new vehicle he had already designed and for which he had created a model. Later he sent me his hand-written script and snapshots of his new, two-engine, van-type vehicle. He was still "sketching cars" at 85. He died in 1990 before either the documentary or the new vehicle could be produced.

What we have in Gordon Miller Buehrig is irrepressible genius extending itself into vital and life-long creativity. Buehrig's response to his genius, which he knew to be a gift, was to accept, refine, and fulfill it — to his own great pleasure and to ours.

In so doing, he represents, it seems to me, the very best of human aspirations. His place in American art is unique: he was a master in metal, conceiving and accomplishing rare forms in automobile design that are, decades later, considered not only collectible artifacts but wise investments — true treasures worthy of international recognition.

Robert Cotner

Endnotes

1 Gordon M. Buehrig with William S. Jackson. *Rolling Sculpture*, Newfoundland, NJ, 1975, p. 13.
2 *Rolling Sculpture*, p. 15.
3 *Rolling Sculpture*, p. 15.
4 LeCorbusier, *Toward a New Architecture*, trans. Frederick Etchell, New York: Praeger Publishers, 1927, p.13.
5 *Rolling Sculpture*, p. 41.
6 Gordon Buehrig, "Auburn in the Twilight Zone," *Auburn 1980*, Auburn: ACD Festival, Inc., 1990, p.3S.
7 Gerald Silk, *Automobile and Culture*, New York: Harry Abrahms, 1984, p. 231.
8 George A. Brewster, "Body Design at the New York Show," December 1935; cited in *Rolling Sculpture*, p. 95.
9 *Rolling Sculpture*, p. 132.
10 *Rolling Sculpture*, p. 143.
11 Gene Wise, *American Historical Explanations* Homewood, IL: The Dorsey Press, 1973, p. 7.
12 Wise, p. 146.
13 Lionel Trilling, *The Liberal Imagination*, New York, Anchor Books, 1954, p. 282.
14 Warren Fitzgerald, "Gordon Miller Buehrig - Designer of American Classics," *Road and Track*, XVII, Feb. 1966, p. 42.
15 Howard Darrin, "My American Safari," *Automobile Quarterly*, X, First Quarter, 1972, p. 36.
16 Silk, p. 231.

Editor's Note: This article is adapted from a lecture given for the Newberry Library, August 6, 1992, and published in The Accelerator, *the quarterly publication of the Auburn-Cord-Duesenberg Museum, Auburn, IN, Autumn 1992, pp. 6-9.*

Books to Racing

(Continued from Page Three)

electronic 80s, whose out-of-print price was over $1,000 before it was five years old (one example being the late Mark Dees's *The Miller Dynasty* first edition, 1983).

To those who find the culture of the automobile uninteresting, the recent plethora of car books can be of interest as historiography. The late Griffith Borgeson published *The Classic Twin-Cam Engine* (1981), based on 30 years of research concerning events of the years 1912-1924. The personalities involved were well-known, and the events well-documented, but research quickly showed that what was "common knowledge" was, in fact, lore.

The resultant technical work is more interesting than most novels, and a classic in its own right. (I should point out that at least one Caxtonian other than my father and I, has pursued a sideline interest in automotive books, this being David Dangler. David's interest stems from his collecting and use of vintage automobiles of the largest and mostly British variety.

Henry Adamson

Editor's note: Henry Adamson is a second-generation Caxtonian. His father, the late Gordon Adamson, was a member until his death in 1986, and his mother Emily is still a member.

Gordon Adamson, c. 1950, in his Auburn (Lycoming) powered, 225-c.i. hydroplane "Delta." Note the Cord instruments. (From the colletion of Henry Adamson.)

A Few 'Words' from the Road . . .

Signs of the Times

If you remember the following signs along the nation's highways, then you are as old as the *Caxtonian* editor:

He had the ring
He had the flat
But she felt his chin
And that
Was that.
Burma Shave (1934)

Within this vale
Of toil
And sin
Your head grows bald
But not your chin.
Burma Shave (1948)

Around
The curve
Lickety-split
It's a beautiful car
Wasn't it.
Burma Shave (1953)

Drinking drivers—
Nothing worse
They put
The quart
Before the hearse.
Burma Shave (1959)

From Frank Rowsome, Jr., The Verse by the Side of the Road *(1965).*

Selected Auto Bookshops From Along the Road ...

*Classic Motorbooks. 800/826-6600. FAX: 715/294-4448. www.motorbooks.com mbibks@win.bright.net.

*The Motorsport Collector, 5120 Belmont Rd, Ste L, Downers Grove, IL, 60515.

*Walter Miller, 6710 Brooklawn Pkwy, Syracuse, NY 13211. 315/432-8282. FAX: 315/432-8256.

*T.E. Warth, Esq. Automotive Books, Lumberyard Shops, Marine on St. Croix, MN 55047. 612/433-5;744. FAX: 612/;433-5012. t.e.warth 1@aol.com.

It's a Doozy!

Language reflects culture in interesting ways. The Duesenberg automobile, for example, has provided the word "Doozy" — or "Duesie" — to the English language, according to the late poet, John Ciardi. *A Browser's Dictionary* offers the following documentation:

> doozy An outstanding thing. Usu. in the formula *It's a Doozy*! It's a oner! It's a humdinger! [Corruption < *duesie, Duesie*, short for *Duesenberg*, Am. auto produced 1921-37 by Fred and [Augie] Duesenberg; the fastest, finest, most advanced and most expensive U.S. production model of its time and now one of the great classics sought by antique-auto buffs....]

From John Ciardi, A Browser's Dictionary *(New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1980, p. 112.*

Front profile of a 1934 Duesenberg owned by the Cunny family, Sycamore, IL. (Photo from the collection of Robert Cotner.)

Gordon M. Buehrig

The Great Figure

Among the rain
and lights
I saw the figure 5
in gold
on a red
firetruck
moving
tense
unheeded
to gong clangs
siren howls
and wheels rumbling
through the dark city.

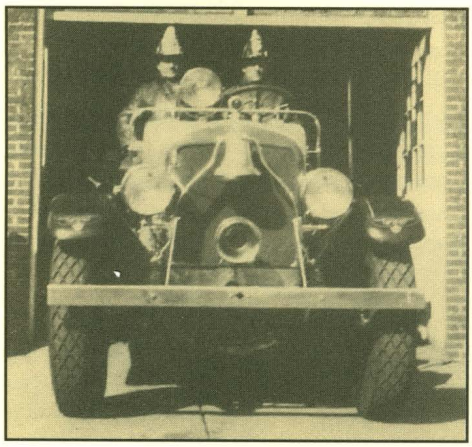
William Carlos Williams

Poet and medical doctor, William Carlos Williams, wrote "The Great Figure" in 1921. It is one of the fine poems in American literature about motor vehicles. The poem catches the tense movement of one of the important developments of the motorcar industry, the modern fire truck, on a run through the city at night.

In a note written in 1955, Williams adds meaning to his intent in the poem, saying: "the irony of the word *great*, the contemptuous feeling I had at that time for all 'great' figures in public life compared with that figure 5 riding in state with full panoply down the streets of the city ignored by everyone but the artist."

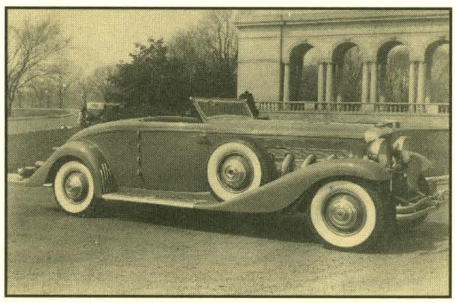
RC

Poem from The Collected Earlier Poems of William Carlos Williams, *New York: A New Directions Book, 1951, p. 230. Quote by Williams from* Times *[of London]* Literary Supplement, *February 19-25, 1988, p. 179.*



A 1921 Stutz fire truck from Station #5, Aurora, IL. Lt. Edwin Johnston and driver Edward Baum sit in the open cockpit in this 1932 photograph provided through the courtesy of the Aurora Regional Fire Museum.

Classic American Motion Picture Features Classic American Car



Buehrig-designed 1935 Duesenberg Model SJN convertible coupe by Rollston similar to the car used in the 1949 film of The Great Gatsby, *starring Alan Ladd.*

From *The Great Gatsby*

At nine o'clock, one morning late in July, Gatsby's gorgeous car lurched up the rocky drive to my door and gave out a burst of melody from its three-noted horn. It was the first time he had called on me, though I had gone to two of his parties, mounted in his hydroplane, and, at his urgent invitation, made frequent use of his beach.

"Good morning, old sport. You're having lunch with me today and I thought we'd ride up together."

He was balancing himself on the running board of his car with that resourcefulness of movement that is so peculiarly American — that comes, I suppose, with the absence of lifting work or rigid sitting in youth and, even more, with the formless grace of our nervous, sporadic games. This quality was continually breaking through his punctilious manner in the shape of restlessness. He was never quite still; there was always a tapping foot somewhere or the impatient opening and closing of a hand.

He saw me looking with admiration at his car.

"It's pretty, isn't it, old sport?" He jumped off to give me a better view. "Haven't you ever seen it before?"

I'd seen it. Everybody had seen it. It was a rich cream color, bright with nickel, swollen here and there in its monstrous length with triumphant hat-boxes and supper-boxes and tool-boxes, and terraced with a labyrinth of wind-shields that mirrored a dozen suns. Sitting down behind many layers of glass in a sort of green leather conservatory, we started to town.

F. Scott Fitzgerald, excerpted from The Great Gatsby. *Copyright 1925 by Charles Scribner's Sons; copyright renewed 1953 Frances Scott Fitzgerald Lanahan. (Reprinted with permission of Charles Scribner's Sons.)*

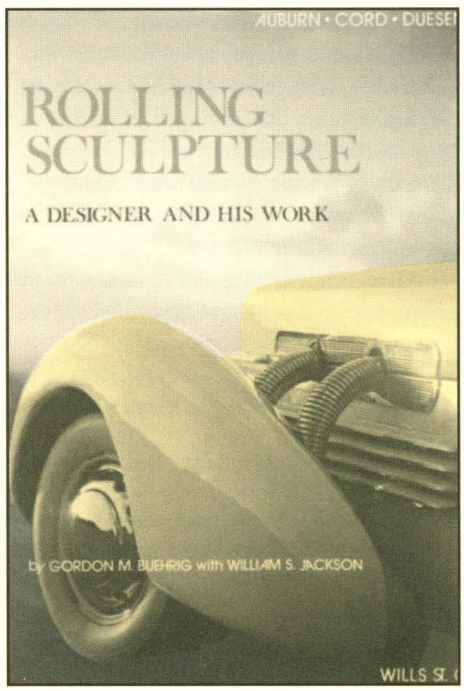
Indiana-Produced Cars Ranked as "Best Built," "Most Beautiful" Ever

A special issue of *American Heritage* (November 1996) devoted to 100 years of American cars ranked Gordon Buehrig's Cord 810/812 "The Single Most Beautiful American Car."

Peter Morance, art director of the magazine, wrote, "Look at this car in the context of when it was built. It was revolutionary. There's no other word. It broke all the rules. Everything was simple, everything was integrated — the hood with the grill, the headlights that retracted into the fenders — and the proportions are perfect .... The Cord is clearly and object of the 1930s, but it also looks absolutely modern. It is truly timeless."

Dan Jedlicka, auto reporter with the *Chicago Sun-Times*, reported (April 28, 1997) that the Duesenberg (1930-37) "is arguably the best U.S. car ever built."

It is remarkable that this small Indiana auto company, the Auburn Automobile Co., founded by Charles Eckhart as a carriage works, produced the "Most Beautiful" and the "Best Built" autos in America.



The dust jacket of Gordon M. Buehrig's autobiography, Rolling Sculpture, *published in 1975 and now out of print. From the Rare Book Room, Aurora University. Used with permission.*

Book Marks

Luncheon Programs

Your Special Luncheon Invitation. . .

Pop-Up Books II Subject of October Luncheon

At the Caxton luncheon, October 10, Caxtonian John Railing will give Caxton club members a preview of his forthcoming exhibition, "Pop-up and Movable Books," at Columbia College. The lecture. "Pop-Up Books, II," will feature the captivating history of the pop-up book, those engaging interactive creations that delight us all. He will showcase for members and guests samples from different publishers, artists, authors, and paper engineers, beginning with the earliest pop-ups from the mid- 1880s to the present. The intimate luncheon setting of the Mid-Day Club will give guests the chance to hold, to examine, and to "play with" these very special forms of publications.

In addition to the pop-up collection, Railing also collects modern first editions and French photography books. One of the country's best close-up magicians, Railing has appeared twice on the "Today" show and has, as well, been featured in Playboy magazine.

Railing, an attorney, a futures trader with the Chicago Board of Options Exchange, and a corporate executive, is one of the foremost authorities on three-dimensional publishing and has one of the largest private collections, with more than 4,000 items. Many will remember that Railing gave the Holiday Revels talk, "Pop-ups for the Holiday Season," this past December. The luncheon talk will be an extension of that talk, using a wider variety of examples from his collection.

In the continuing long series of excellent noon programs, this is one that Caxtonians will not want to miss.

Leonard Freedman
Edward Quattrocchi

Important Note: Members planning to attend luncheons or dinners must make advance reservations by phoning the Caxton number, 312/255-3710. Luncheon for members and guests, $20. Dinner, for members and guests $35.

Internet users may communicate with The Caxton Club at the following address:

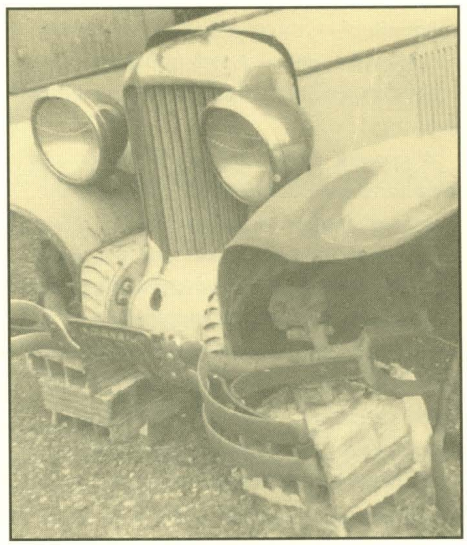
http://www.caxtonclub.org

How Evolution Came to Indiana

In Indianapolis they drive
five hundred miles and end up
where they started: survival
of the fittest. In the swamps
of Auburn and Elkhart,
the jungles of South Bend,
one-cylinder chain-driven runabouts fall
to air-cooled V-4's, 2-speed gearboxes,
16-horse flat-twin midships engines --
carcasses left behind
by monoblock motors, electric starters,
3-speed gears, six cylinders, 2-chain drive,
overhead cams, supercharged
to 88 miles an hour in second gear, the age
of Leviathan . . .
There is grandeur in this view of life,
as endless forms
most beautiful and wonderful
are being evolved.
And then
the drying up, the panic,
the monsters dying: Elcar, Cord,
Auburn, Duesenberg, Stutz — somewhere
out there, the chassis of Studebakers,
Marmons, Lafayettes, Bendixes, all
rusting in high-octane smog,
ashes to ashes, they
end up where they started.

Philip Appleman

From Darwin's Ark (1984). (Used with permission of the author.)



A 1928 Cord L-29 in an Indiana junkyard. (Courtesy Auburn-Cord-Duesenberg Museum.)

Dinner Programs

Your Special Dinner Invitation . . .

Humphries and Pound to be Profiled at Dinner Meeting

Caxtonians and guests will have the pleasure of hearing "An Heroic Poet: Rolfe Humphries and Ezra Pound" at the October dinner meeting, scheduled for the Mid-Day Club, October 15.

The speaker, Paul T. Ruxin, is a long-time member of the Rowfant Club of Cleveland and has just moved to Chicago and joined The Caxton Club. His lecture will look at the relationship between Humphries and Pound as it developed through the publication of Pound's *Complete Poems* in 1947.

Three important strands will be unraveled in the lecture: The matter of intellectual integrity, the considerations that surround the personages, famous and infamous, and the kind of person that Humphries was, as poet, scholar, and friend.

Ruxin, originally from Cleveland, has degrees from Amherst College and the University of Virginia. He is an attorney with the Jones Day firm in Chicago, and chairs the firm's Energy Practice and is also the firm's Professional Personnel Partner.

A lifelong bibliophile, he has collections of Samuel Johnson, James Boswell, and their circle, and of the Amherst poets — Dickinson, Frost, Humphries, Merrill, Wilbur, and others.

The October dinner meeting will provide members an opportunity to welcome a new Caxtonian and to hear a wide-ranging presentation that will touch on the ethics as well as aesthetics, the law as well as the arts.

C. Frederick Kittle

All luncheon and dinner meetings, unless otherwise noted, are held in the Mid-Day Club, 56th floor of the First National Bank of Chicago, Madison & Clark, Chicago. Luncheon and discussion, 12:30 p.m. Dinner meetings begin with spirits, 5 p.m., dinner 6 p.m., lecture, 7 p.m.

The First National Bank of Chicago's parking garage, 40 S. Clark Street, offers a special parking rate after 5 p.m. to guests of the Mid-Day Club. When you leave, please tell the parking attendant you were at the Mid-Day Club, and your parking fee will be $5.25