



The ROCKET FUEL Newsletter

Greetings from the President

Hi and Happy New Year! Well, here it is, 2008. Hope you're all rested from the holidays and ready for the year ahead. As you know, we have an Oldsmobile National Meet to host that will take an enormous amount of work. We need support from all MCR members. Current MCR club activities will continue but this meet is top priority.



If you've never been to a National Meet, this is your chance as it's being held right in your own back yard. There will never be another Nationals this close to our area again. I hope everyone of you will attend if your schedule so allows. A Nationals is a sight to behold with hundreds of beautiful Oldsmobiles gathered in their respective classes. You should have received your January JWO by now. Notice that it contains the registration form and a write-up of the events offered. I encourage you to be a part of this memorable event. Please register to be a part of history and since you'll be there anyway, volunteer to help.

To find out ways you can help, plan on attending our next meeting. It will be held at the **Dearborn Hyatt Hotel on Saturday, Jan. 19th at 9:00am.**

Steve Apking

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MCR SERVICE TEAM



Editor's Notes

As there was no formal meeting last month because of the Christmas party, there are no minutes to report. And as always, if anyone has any articles for the newsletter, please submit them. Though our newsletter is meant to be a reporting of our club's events and activities, it could be so much more interesting and fun to read if we have stories about our members and their cars. Kudos to MCR member Jim O'Connell for having his '71 Cutlass Supreme featured in December's Cruis'news. Check it out. (p.16)

Sue Apking & Kelly Ferry

JAN 2008						
SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
30	31	1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10 Katy Bejma	11	12
13	14 Ken Kress	15	16	17	18	19 Deb Wheeler MCR/OCA Meeting Hyatt Hotel
20	21	22 Steve Apking	23	24 Gina Carriere	25	26
27	28 Jerry Garfield	29	30 Alan Wilcox	1	2	3

UPCOMING EVENTS: JAN 19-27 NORTH AMERICAN INTERNATIONAL AUTO SHOW

FEB 2 DINNER CRUISE/RESTAURANT TBD

FEB 16 MCR/OCA MEETING AT THE HYATT

MAR 7 - 9 DETROIT AUTORAMA AT COBO HALL

DECEMBER FUN

As Motor City Rockets, we ended 2007 on a festive note. The annual Christmas party, held Dec. 15 was a huge hit. Gina & Greg Carriere again played hosts to 32 of us. In addition to a feast of delicious food items supplied by club members, we held a short meeting. It consisted of a wrap-up of the year's activities and presentation of the spirit award. This year's recipient was Alan Wilcox.

Next came our white elephant gift exchange. For those of you familiar with the process, you know that there are some nice gifts and then there are some questionable ones. But it always seems that each year there is one item that quickly catches the eye of some and gets stolen over and over. This year it was a tire clock. Those white oil filters reared their ugly heads again but maybe for the last time. No matter what the selection of gifts, I think I speak for everyone when I say that the gift exchange has become the highlight of the entire party. Of course no one went home until we took our famous "group shot". We also collected 25 toys for the "Toys for Tots" program. All in all, it was another fun time for the Motor City Rockets. Thanks to all.



On Dec. 30, some 22 members visited the Chrysler Museum. There was a wonderful exhibit called "Cars, Trees and Traditions". It paired authentically decorated trees with vehicles from the early 1900s-1980s and came complete with advertisements, imagery and trimmings of each decade. It was an interesting and fun afternoon with members reminiscing about past holidays and then having a pre New Year's lunch at Rochester Mills Beer Co. Thanks to Dennis & Karon Piskorowski for the idea and to Jeff Pregler for making the arrangements. *Sue Apking*

A Brief History of The First 100 Years of the Automobile Industry in the United States

Chapter 11 - The Golden Age: Tailfins and dreams of glory

by Richard A. Wright

Most of the heroes of World War II were military men and political leaders, but one industrialist who became a hero was Henry J. Kaiser, who turned out Liberty Ships faster than German U-boats could sink them.

After the war, he decided to take on Detroit. His new partner, Joseph Frazer, had worked for General Motors, Chrysler Corp. and Willys-Overland before picking up the failing Graham-Paige just before the United States entered the war. After the war, Frazer leased the giant Willow Run bomber plant that Ford had built and the team hired Howard Darrin (who made a reputation before the war styling very elegant custom Packard bodies) to design a car.

Kaiser and Frazer were not the only men with dreams of glory in that postwar automotive era when anything sold. There was William Stout and his Scarab, Gary Davis and his three-wheel Davis, Earl "Madman" Muntz and his Muntz sports car. They did not make it.

And there was Preston Tucker. His Tucker Torpedo was long and low, with an aluminum, air-cooled engine and a cyclops-like centered headlamp which turned with the front wheels.

Tucker raised about \$25 million through the sale of stock and dealer franchises. It didn't last long. He built about 50 prototypes before his company collapsed, under attack from Drew Pearson on the radio and under investigation by the SEC.

Tucker went down even though Ed Cole, General Motors' premier engineer, said he thought Tucker's car was "well-conceived." But Tucker found that \$25 million was not enough to get in the game.

It didn't matter much what it looked like-anything sold after the war. Studebaker introduced the first post-war design in 1946, a radical, streamlined car with fenders integrated into the body and a distinctive wraparound rear window on its Starlite Coupe. Comedians made fun of it, claiming you could not tell if it was coming or going. But it sold well.



Kaiser-Frazer surprised every one by leading all the independent makers in production in 1947, building 144,500 cars. Henry J. had done the impossible again. He had taken a seat in Detroit's high-stakes game.

Or so it seemed. By 1955, Kaiser-Frazer was gone (after an abortive effort to sell a small car called the Henry J through Kaiser dealers and the Allstate through Sears, Roebuck).

"We were not surprised that we had to toss \$50 million into the automotive pool," Kaiser said later. "We were surprised that it disappeared without a ripple."

Hudson and Nash had merged into American Motors and Studebaker and Packard had joined forces. Soon Hudson and Nash both disappeared, replaced by Rambler, and the once proud name of Packard was affixed to some of the strangest-looking Studebakers ever made. Both Packard and Studebaker were doomed. The strategy conceived by Alfred P. Sloan and perfected by General Motors President Harlow Curtice in the '50s was working.

Sloan introduced the concept of "dynamic obsolescence" and annual model changes in the late '20s and early '30s as a way to increase demand for new cars to higher levels. It also raised the ante in the auto game. Smaller companies found it increasingly difficult to meet the expense of annual model changeovers.

After William Knudsen left his position of president of GM to head the nation's defense buildup in 1940, Charles Wilson was named president. Wilson was only 15 years younger than Sloan, but he was definitely of a different generation.

Wilson and the UAW's Walter P. Reuther had developed a considerable amount of mutual respect, even friendship. Wilson saw that the workers wanted security. He began working out a plan for a guaranteed annual wage.

In the economic structure which Detroit had built, the laws of supply and demand had been modified. Largely because of GM's financial system, devised in the '20s by Sloan and his chief economic lieutenants Donaldson Brown and Albert Bradley, when sales dropped prices did not drop -- the use of labor did. The financial risks inherent in the automotive sales cycle were shifted from stockholder to worker.

On Aug. 16, President Harry Truman lifted the wartime wage freeze, saying increases would be allowed, provided they did not force a price increase. The president had inadvertently given Reuther the issue he needed to battle GM and to win control of the UAW. As head of the GM unit of the UAW, Reuther asked for a 30 percent wage increase and demanded that GM open its books so all could see if the corporation could afford the increase without raising prices.



He knew, of course, that there was no way GM would do this. The UAW struck GM. The strike dragged on for months. In January, Ford and Chrysler settled for 18.5 cents an hour, a wage increase of 17.5 percent. Neither company agreed to hold down the price of its cars.

But Reuther insisted that GM hold down the price of its cars. And he insisted on an extra penny, "the frosting on the cake." Wilson. refused. A month later, the UAW and GM signed a contract which raised wages 18.5 cents per hour. Nothing was said about prices.

Reuther did not get his extra penny, nor did GM open its books. But the workers liked Reuther's style. They elected him president of the UAW.

The '48 Cadillac had small, attractive fin-like curves on its rear fenders to house its tail-lights. GM styling boss Harley Earl said he was inspired by the P-38, a twin-fuselage World War II fighter plane.

Eventually, other makers began putting tailfins on their cars. In one of the most curious styling fads in history -- the fins had no function whatsoever except to sell cars -- the fin became the symbol of the American car of the '50s, reaching bizarre proportions before it ran its course.

The '49 model year was the big one. All remaining prewar designs were swept away. Ford Motor Co. made its move. The '49 Ford, with fenders fully integrated into the body, was a classic statement of modern car design.

That same year, Chrysler took a wrong turn. It went for the old-fashioned virtues of solid construction, lots of headroom, functional styling. In short, the '49 Plymouths, Dodges, DeSotos and Chryslers were excellent, but dull. Ford, which had lost the No. 2 sales position to Chrysler Corp. in the '30s, passed Chrysler in 1950. Chrysler was made permanently a smaller factor in the U.S. market after those comfortable, but stodgy '49 models.

At GM, meanwhile, Charles Kettering had one more major contribution to make. After the copper-cooled engine failure in the early '20s, Kettering took charge of GM's research operations. Over the years, GM Research Laboratories came up with numerous developments, none more important than tetraethyl lead.

Kettering's researchers discovered that adding tetraethyl lead to gasoline was an inexpensive way to increase octane and end engine knock, or pre-ignition. This allowed development of a more efficient higher-compression engine. (GM later spun off its tetraethyl operation to form Ethyl Corp.)

Kettering described such an engine in a paper delivered to the Society of Automotive Engineers in the mid-'40s. It was introduced in the '49 Cadillac and Oldsmobile. Few



remember it in the Cadillac, because it was Oldsmobile that made the engine famous. Olds called it the Rocket 88 and it was an instant hit.

The other makers followed during the '50s with their own high-compression V-8s, but GM built a strong sales lead during those years when it not only had the automatic transmission all alone, but the high-compression V-8 also.

Nash unveiled its new aerodynamic design, which it called "Airflyte." But more than its aerodynamic design, the public noticed its resemblance to an upside-down bathtub and that was what stuck.

Packard built its last truly elegant (if pregnant) design from '48 to '50, then it went modern, then weird, then under.

Studebaker looked to aircraft for inspiration and came up with its famous bullet-nosed models of '50 and '51, very attractive in Starlite coupe form, resolutely odd as four-door sedans. For '53, Studebaker unveiled a classic coupe, generally credited to Raymond Loewy, although others including Virgil Exner, famous for the giant tailfins on late '50s Chrysler products, also claimed credit.

It was one of the most beautiful cars of the postwar era, both in its standard form and as the European-looking Hawk, but Studebaker would not survive the '60s. The expensive model changes were bleeding it, as they did Kaiser-Frazer, Willys and Packard.

With GM in the lead, cars got bigger, more luxurious and more powerful through the '50s. But they also became more reliable, safer and easier to drive. The American car of the '50s was probably the best for the money in the world.

Critics labeled Detroit's products "insolent chariots," but the public loved them. In 1949, new-car sales of more than 4.8 million finally topped the old record set in pre-crash 1929 by almost a million units. In 1955, sales approached 7.2 million.

There were a few clouds, but the future looked bright from Detroit.

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NEW MEMBERS

Welcome to the rank and file of the Motor City Rockets.

We look forward to your participation.

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Ken and Marsha Nicholas

Joe and Cheri Sroka

Domenic and Nancy Bernabei

Ron and Cathy Davis

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