

THE CAR BECOMES PART OF AMERICAN LIFE

Although the automobile could trace its ancestry to China, France, England, and Germany, it was American producers like Ransom Olds, William Durant, and Henry Ford who made it the commonplace product that transformed 20th century life. At first, it was seen as a nuisance and a rich man's toy; but when the car came into the price range of the average person, he and she wanted one. A woman in the 1920s was asked why she owned a car, but did not have a bathtub. She answered: "You can't go to town in a bathtub." The U.S. was a nation on the go, and it wanted to get there in its own car.



Henry Ford

Early efforts centered on steam and electric cars, but the steamer was too slow and complicated, and the electric was too limited in distance. The Stanley Steamer did have some success, but it was too expensive for most people. The internal combustion engine created power more quickly and had a longer range than steam and electric cars. The first American car company was owned by the Duryea brothers, and their automobile won the car race from Chicago to Evanston, Illinois, in 1895.

An important step in car building came with interchangeable parts. This began in 1901 when a fire occurred at the factory of Ransom Olds, who produced little runabouts. To continue production, he ordered parts from other companies and specified the sizes and shapes he needed. This idea expanded when Henry Leland's Cadillac Company developed standardized parts for all its cars. Other changes made cars more functional. Electric headlights replaced earlier gaslights, the self-starter saved arm injuries, and enclosed cars made traveling more comfortable in cold weather.

Henry Ford made the car more affordable. He organized Ford Motor Company in 1903, and five years later, came out with his first Model T. The price of \$850 was too high for the average person, so he found ways to cut costs. One method was the assembly line, where parts came by conveyor belts to the point where they were added to the frame. Other ways he reduced costs were to paint all cars black and to make his own parts. By 1925, a new Model T sold for only \$260.

But Ford was losing out against General Motors. Formed in 1908 by William C. Durant, GM bought up Buick and Olds in 1908, Oakland and Cadillac in 1909, and Chevrolet in 1911. GM boasted that it had a car "within the price range of all."

Other small companies were also in business, and some like Packard, Nash, and Hudson survived for many years. Walter Chrysler, who had been president of Buick, started Chrysler Corporation in 1925 and with his Chryslers, Dodges, and Plymouths, became the third of the Big Three.

Name: _____

Class: _____

CHALLENGES

1. Why was the internal combustion engine more satisfactory to motorists than steam or electric cars? _____

2. Who owned the first American car company? _____

3. What was the first car to use interchangeable parts? What car was first to have all of its parts interchangeable? _____

4. What improvements made the car more satisfactory to consumers? _____

5. When did the first Model T come out? How much did it cost then? _____

6. As a car buyer in 1923, what color did you expect to get when you ordered your Model T? _____

7. What was the basic system used by Ford to speed up production? _____

8. What were the first two car lines offered by GM? _____

9. What car did GM put out to compete with the Model T? _____

10. How many cars were on American roads in 1924? NOT Answered on front

15.4 million Registered Cars