

Packard, A Distinctive American Automobile

Packard cars set the standards for quality, luxury, engineering and performance. They were America's longest lasting independent automobile company dedicated to the manufacture of the finest possible cars. They continued to create automobiles of world-wide prestige long after companies like Stutz, Pierce-Arrow, Cord, Auburn, and Duesenberg ceased production.

Packards were the choice of politicians, actors, sporting figures, heads of corporations and VIPs. For over five decades, Packard contributed to helping build the American automobile industry into the undisputed leader of the world. There was a small group of marques that built cars of the highest quality and Packard was the king of these creators of timeless classics.



Packard Model A

A little bit like Ferruccio Lamborghini building his own cars after being dissatisfied with a Ferrari he bought, James Packard, a mechanical engineer, believed he could build a better horseless carriage than the Winton cars owned by George Weiss, his partner in their electrical equipment company. (A side note, it has been reported that Ferrari built his first V-12 engine out of admiration for Packard's V-12).

In fourteen months, James Packard, his brother William, and two people hired from Winton, built the first Packard. It was built in Warren, Ohio and first ran on its streets on November 6, 1899. It was named the Model A and had a high tiller steering and a single-cylinder engine. Their reputation for technical innovation started with their very first car, with the Model A's automatic spark advance. Packard pioneered many firsts including the modern steering wheel, the first production 12-cylinder car engine and passenger car air conditioning.

By 1902 Packard was building four-cylinder automobiles, by 1913 six cylinders, and by 1915, a V-12. By the mid 1920's, Packard was considered America's premier car of prestige. Packard produced cars over a span of half a century and also produced marine and aircraft engines in both World Wars including the famous Liberty V-12 of World War II. With its emphasis on creating the finest possible cars and its production of aircraft engines, Packard was the only American company whose work could be compared with England's Rolls-Royce.



1933 Packard with Steam Locomotive

Packard Firsts

- First automatic ignition spark advance - 1899
- First to use a steering wheel instead of a tiller handle - 1901
 - First spiral bevel differential gears - 1913
 - First American twelve-cylinder engine - 1915
 - First aluminum pistons in an auto engine – 1915
- First volume manufacturer to produce 4-wheel brakes – 1923
 - First to use balloon tires as standard - 1923
- First Neon signs in America – LA Packard dealer – 1923
- First mass-produced straight-eight auto engine - 1924
 - First hypoid differential – 1925
 - First hydraulic shock absorbers – 1926
 - First back-up lights – 1927
- First pressurized cooling system – 1933
 - First full-flow oil filter – 1934
 - First power hydraulic brakes – 1936
- First automobile air conditioning – 1939
 - First sealed beam headlights – 1939
 - First padded dash - 1939
 - First automatic windows – 1940
- First all steel station wagon - 1948
- First electronically controlled overdrive
- First application of torsion bar suspension
 - First glove box
 - First to use a lateral stabilizer
- First to obtain a patent on the modern radiator
 - First electric load leveler
 - First sun visors
- First “ride control” to manage shock absorbers
 - First constant action windshield wipers
 - First to use limited slip differentials