

The Horch was a celebrated German Classic with a very checkered career. Its saga is confusing, mainly because so much quarreling was going on. Founder August Horch had worked with Carl Benz in Mannheim before a disagreement sent him to Cologne to begin his own company in 1899. But by 1909, following an earlier move of his firm to Zwickau, Horch had argued with his board of directors there and departed to start yet another automobile company elsewhere in town. Denied use of his own name, he chose the Latin translation of *horch* (imperative of the German verb "to listen") and thus his new car was the Audi, which began to routinely beat the Horch in competition. After a falling out with his new backers in 1920, August Horch went to work for the Ministry of Economics in Berlin.

Meanwhile, Paul Daimler was feuding with his directors at Daimler-Motoren-Gesellschaft in Stuttgart, principally because of their reluctance to build the straight-eight Mercedes he had designed, so he left the company his father had founded and joined Horch in 1923. Ferdinand Porsche took his place, and a few years later Daimler merged with Benz.

Under Paul Daimler's tutelage, August Horch's old company moved into prestige ranks. The new straight-eight put the marque squarely in the German luxury class then dominated by Mercedes and Maybach (the latter car built by the son of Gottlieb Daimler's oldest collaborator who had left Mercedes in a huff years before). But by 1930 Paul Daimler tiffed with Horch, which brought in Dr. Fritz Fiedler. Fiedler would later desert to BMW, but not before he developed the V-12 (plans for which Paul Daimler had begun) which was introduced at the 1931 Paris Automobile Salon. A super car priced attractively less than the Mercedes or Maybach, the new Horch was powered by a 5990 cc 120 hp engine capable of moving these big (135- or 147-inch wheelbase, weight approaching three tons) automobiles about 90 mph.

Noel Thompson's 1932 V-12 Sport Cabriolet by Gläser of Dresden stretches nearly eighteen feet from bumper to bumper and was custom-built, at a price of \$10,045, for Joachim von Ribbentrop, the German ambassador to England. The car

remained his until commandeered by the British following the outbreak of the war. Gläser touches include the dual rear-mounted spares, individual luggage compartments fitted into the back of the front seat, and a convertible top padded with horse-hair. Apparently, Ambassador von Ribbentrop liked to travel in comfort because the front seats recline. Just 73 V-12 Horchs were produced in little more than two years, when the model was discontinued. The Thompson car is one of just three known to survive.

In 1932 the raging depression forced a merger among four German automobile companies: DKW, Wanderer, Horch and Audi. The combine was called Auto Union. That summer August Horch returned to his old factory for the first time in twenty-three years. He was officially reinstated as the head of the

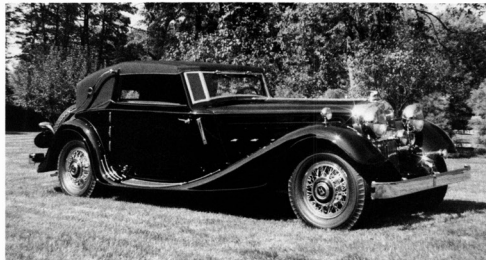
Horchwerke the following year.

With the V-12 discontinued, A. Horch & Company proceeded to the end of the decade producing V-8 and straight-eight cars. The Riddells' 830 Cabriolet is one of the former, as explained by Dick: "This was the first German V-8 and not without its problems, carburetor and fuel pump mainly. After a six-month run, the 830B followed. Our car is one of only two Type 830's with Gläser bodies to have the spare wheels in the fenders; all the others have them at the rear. This was my first Classic, purchased in 1967 in pieces for \$350. The car is still not fully restored but close."

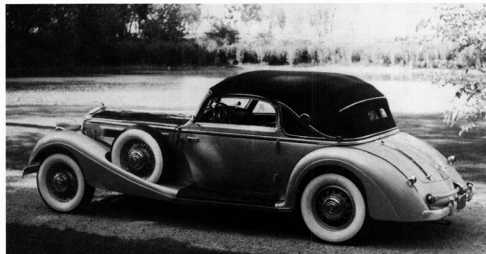
The flurry of Horch models during these years was perplexing but the marque remained high on the German prestige ladder, the cars second in favor only to Mercedes among high-ranking Third Reich staff officers. And the famous Auto Union race cars were built in the Horch factory.

Nineteen thirty-nine was the last year of Horch production. At the top of the marque's straight-eight line

1932 Horch Type 670 V-12 Sport Cabriolet, Gläser
Owner: Noel Thompson of New Vernon, New Jersey



1939 Horch Type 853A Straight-Eight Sport Cabriolet
Owner: Barbara D. Hughes of Essexville, Michigan





1933 Horch Type 830
V-8 Cabriolet, Gläser

Owners: Bobbie & Dick Riddell
of San Clemente, California

was the 4944 cc 120 hp Type 853A. Very few Sport Cabriolets were built like the car Barbara Hughes has owned since 1965: "What do I like about this car? First, its beauty of design and body style. Then engineering; the car's behavior on the road is fabulous, especially after it is up to speed. Lastly (which could justifiably be exchanged with the first mentioned) is the Horch's dependability and integrity. Cars, you know, can be compared to people. Every warm clear day from June through October's bright blue weather, time and other critical appointments permitting, the Horch will be seen on some of the kinder, gentler highways and byways of beautiful Michigan."

In Germany fate did not deal gently with the Horch. The Third Reich had other plans for the company by the fall of 1939. V-E Day found the plant in disarray—and in East Germany. The factory was nationalized later in 1945.

