

V O I S I N

Fewer than 20,000 Voisins were produced. Only about 90 survive. Their high aluminum content made them attractive as scrap, and confiscation of the cars by the Germans during the Occupation was widespread. For nearly two decades before, the singular character of the Voisin itself had made the car attractive to owners for whom the usual was not quite enough. "One man's meat is another man's poison," the ditty went, "My favorite car is an Avions Voisin."

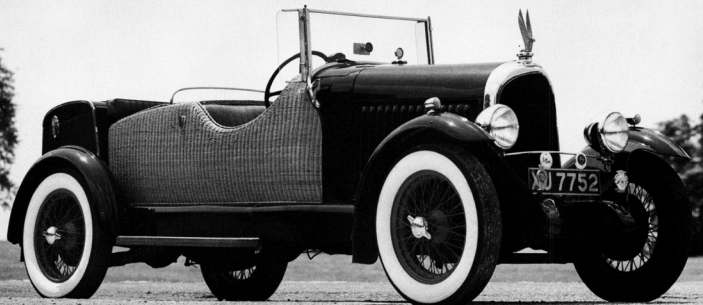
Gabriel Voisin was, as the French say, "*un type*," a character, a one-of-a-kind. He went to his deathbed—at age ninety-three, a longevity he proudly claimed had nothing to do with clean living—still insisting that the Wright brothers had been given credit for an achievement he had realized earlier. His factory for building aircraft at Issy-les-Moulineaux was the world's first. Converting to automobile production following the First World War, Voisin went his own way from the beginning. What made his cars unusual was not their component parts—other manufacturers used the Knight sleeve-valve engine, were as devoted as he to finding the answer to easy gear-changing and regarded scientific light weight as gospel.

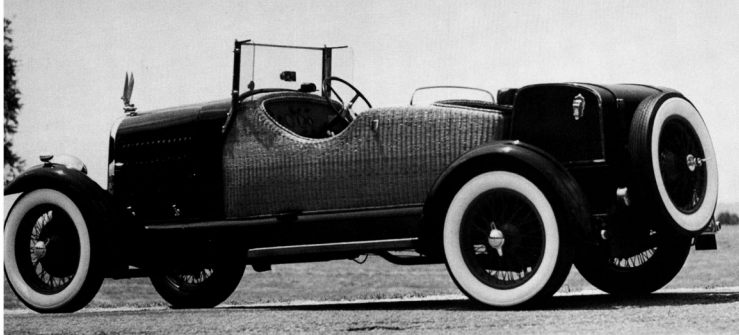
Voisin was simply more passionate on these subjects, forever railing about the "technological imbecility" rampant in the industry. He broke rules whenever he could. Luxury cars were supposed to be big, he made some of his small. Luxury cars were not for racing, he raced some of his. He chose "*La Cocotte*" ("chick") for his car's emblem, but the word could also mean a woman of easy virtue, a floozy, a tart. Most luxury car manufacturers would have thought twice about that. Most luxury car manufacturers sought the services of coachbuilders too but, with rare exception, Gabriel Voisin preferred his car to be his alone and provided the coachwork himself. A few of his styling ideas are seen on these pages.

The Browns have owned their 2.3-liter C-14 Wicker Roadster since 1984. Dick tells the story: "Some skeptics have questioned the authenticity of the body because they have never seen another one just like it. Well, that's the way it is with one-of-a-kinds. My fiancée and I purchased this car on Labor Day, were married three weeks later and drove the car on the Glidden Tour which started the same day. On the second day of our honeymoon, we suffered a minor breakdown—of the car, not the marriage. The moral is: Never start a

honeymoon with an untried car and an untried bride. Something always seems to go wrong. Everything's been right since. On the Michigan CARavan, ours was the smallest car but just 'took a licking and kept on ticking.' It is my understanding that the Avions-Voisin has now been declared a 'national treasure' in France and can no longer be exported. I hate that. This delectable little French bon-bon is delightful to look at and a true joy to drive. Also the smoke from the sleeve-valve engine helps keep the mosquito population under control. The Cotal electro-magnetic gearbox giving six speeds forward and Dewandre vacuum-power brakes make the C-14 Voisin very advanced for 1929. Gabriel Voisin built many different models and not one of them was mundane or normal. Nobody really owns a Classic but instead merely takes care of it and worships it until the next generation takes over. We are the temporary caretakers of 'Wee Willie Wicker,' basket case extraordinaire."

The Blackhawk Classic Auto Collection C-20 Simoun Demi-Berline has twice the cylinders (twelve, 4860 cc) as the other Voisins in this portfolio. Fewer than sixty were sold. Typically, Gabriel Voisin said the reason was that the cars were "too scientific," but the \$7,800 price tag in a Depression year probably contributed. The Blackhawk car is a Cubist fantasy, and startling, even for a Voisin.





1929 Voisin C-14 Wicker Roadster

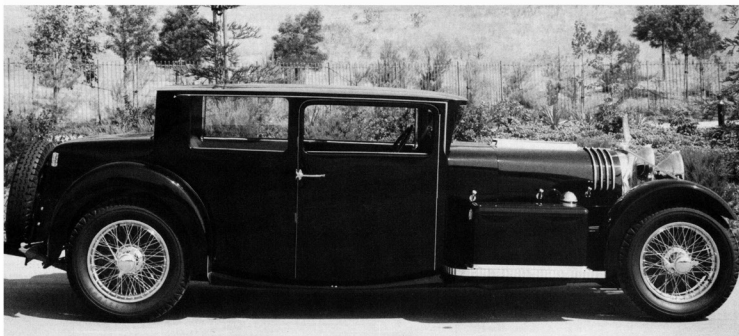
Owner: Richard & Monia Brown of Corydon, Indiana

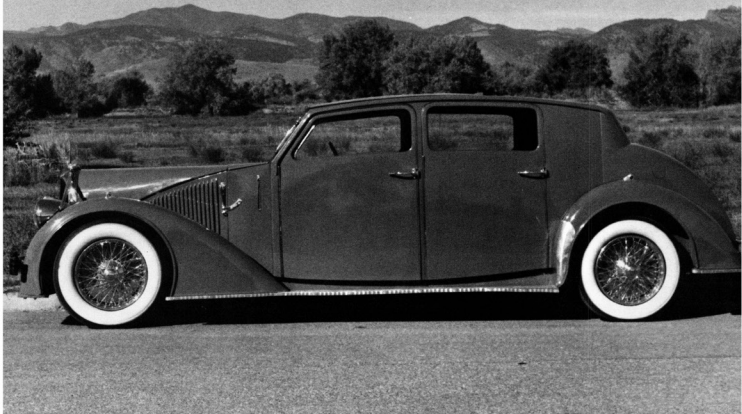


1931 Voisin C-20 Simoun Demi-Berline



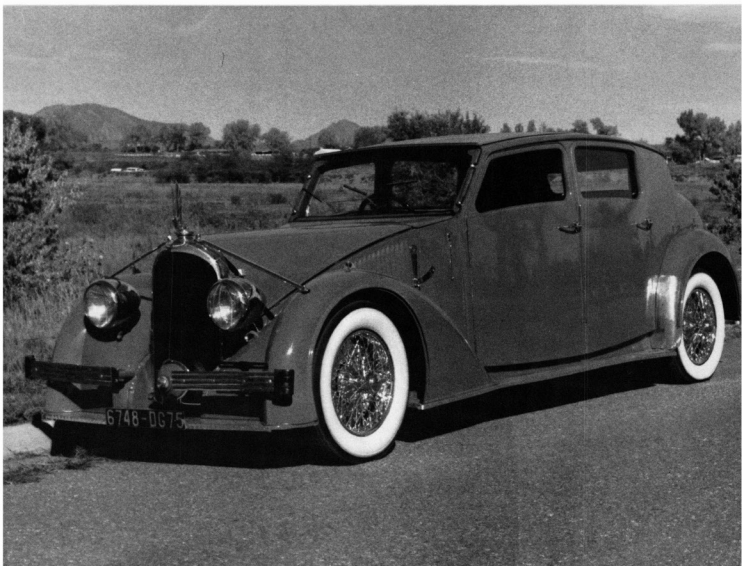
Owner: Blackhawk Classic Auto Collection, Danville, California





1936 Voisin C-28 Ambassador Berline

Owner: Clive Cussler of Golden, Colorado





1935 Voisin C-25 Cimier Demi-Berline

Owner: Roger P. Smith of Thousand Palms, California

"The most unusual car in my collection," comments Clive Cussler about his 3318 cc C-28 Ambassade Berline. Clive's entire collection comprises unusual cars.

Roger Smith has owned his C-25 Cimier Demi-Berline since 1987: "A hardtop coupe de ville, its open driver's compartment and windshield unsupported across the top give a sense of openness. The car is a structural tour de force, light in weight, carefully machined and bristling with innovation. Its styling breathes integrity and panache and imparts a rare mixture of substance and flair that speaks eloquently of the genius of its creator. Add to that a low center of gravity, nearly fifty-fifty weight distribution, electric gearbox, electric sunroof, bucket seats, pull-to-open door handles, raked windscreen, two carburetors, eight to one compression, variable shock absorption front and rear—all in 1935! Voisin owners included Rudolph Valentino (who had four), Josephine Baker, H. G. Wells, Maurice Chevalier, Anatole France, Le Corbusier, the President of France and others with independence of spirit and ample pocketbooks. Gabriel Voisin met with customers to match their needs to his own fierce convictions about what the very best possible automobile could be. Each car was essentially custom-made.

Siding, for example, was seen in wicker, wood, stretched and lacquered canvas, varnished leather and clan tartan. Each Voisin automobile was an original, produced in a factory that was more an atelier in

the mode of Peter Paul Rubens than a rationalized, bureaucratized industry—which perhaps explains the high rank of the Voisin in the field of automotive sculpture. It's a pity it all had to end."

