

# W I L L S S A I N T E C L A I R E

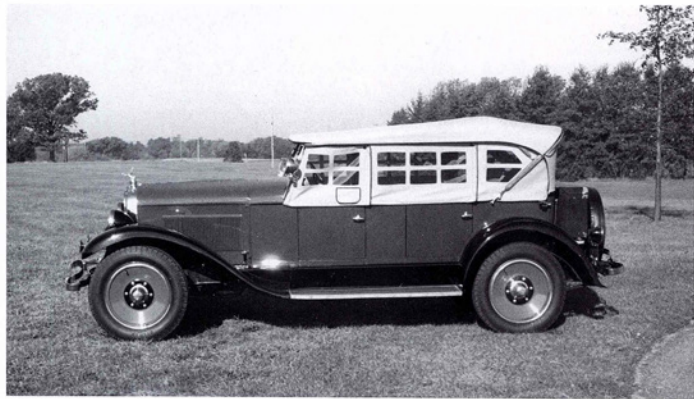
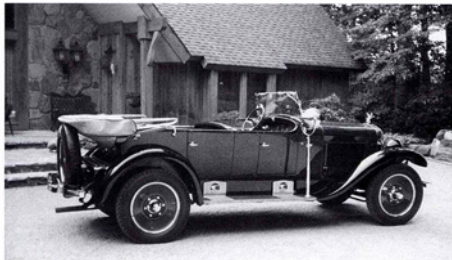
Because his mother was fond of Byron, Childe Harold Wills was his full name, which he hated and never used. Still, there was a sense of the poet in the man. For the radiator of his new car, he chose the Gray Goose, in his words, "the wisest, freest traveler in the skies." For his car's name he joined his own with that of the Saint Clair River along which his new factory in Marysville, Michigan was built-but he added an "e" to both words because it looked more elegant.

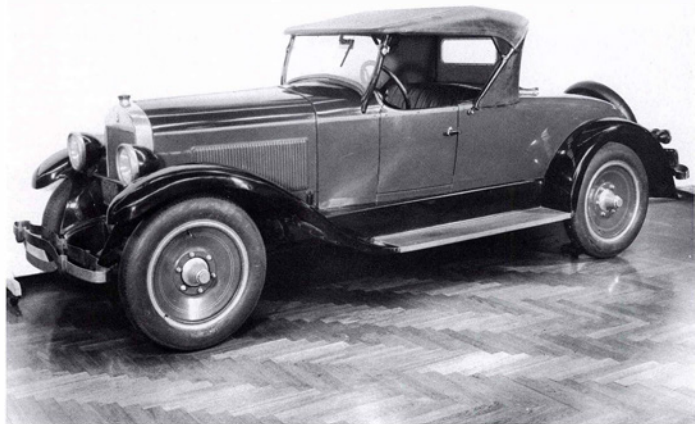
Only 14,000 Wills Sainte Claires were produced, which was partially C.H.'s doing. That the car was produced at all was pretty much Henry Ford's. Because of the verbal agreement made between the two men when Wills joined Ford during his experimental days, C.H. left Ford Motor Company in 1919 with a check for \$1.5 million in his pocket. He had earned it. Much of the engineering thought in the Model T Ford had been his, including its use of vanadium steel. Now Wills had discovered a metal even stronger than vanadium: molybdenum. With the million plus and molybdenum, he could develop an automobile that would set the industry on its ear.

The Wills Sainte Claire was

planned as a car short in wheelbase, light in weight, and abundant in advancements. The longest chassis was 127 inches, the heaviest weight 3,400 pounds, the advancements could fill a book. Wills' overhead cam V-8 engine, alas, was too sophisticated for the average garage mechanic to fathom so he developed a 273-cubic-inch 65 hp straight six (which powers both cars shown here). A single overhead cam shaft-driven by bevel gears, the head and crankshaft were fully machined, 35%

of the latter supported in seven main bearings lubricated by a forced-feed oil system. Wills' ingenuity was also revealed in such details as automatic spark advance, de-clutching fan, back-up light activated by shifting into reverse, single-key ignition/locking system, single-unit starter/generator, and headlights with magnetic mirror reflectors that with a touch of a button give a high and low beam effect. And his fitting of Lockheed hydraulic brakes as early as 1924 was avant-garde. Wills' problem was that



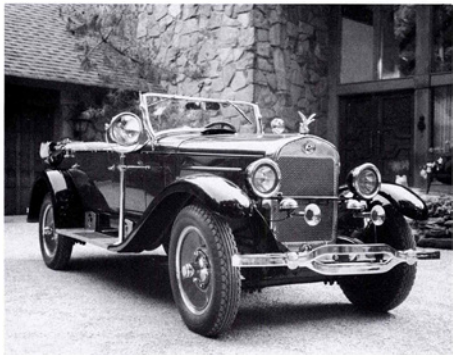


1926 Wills Sainte Claire Model T-6 Gray Goose Traveler Roadster  
Owner: Henry Ford Museum & Greenfield Village, Dearborn, Michigan

whenever he got a new idea for his car, he would stop the assembly line to incorporate it. Such perfectionism, while admirable, was bad business. With his car priced in the \$3,500 range, Wills couldn't afford the luxury of being himself. He chose not to change. The Wills Sainte Claire Motor Company simply ceased to exist in 1927.

Production of 2,085 Wills Sainte Claires in 1926 represented one of the company's better years. The CCCA Museum Phaeton was the donation of William J. Greer, who had purchased the car from original owner August G. Maross in 1982. Only two other T-6 Phaetons like it are known to exist, one of them fittingly displayed in the board room of Amax, the American molybdenum company.

The T-6 Roadster has been in the Ford Museum since 1946. Its original owner was Ray Dahlinger, the friend of Henry Ford's who was the "father" of a boy named John who, evidence suggests, was the illegitimate son of Henry Ford himself. The paternal arrangement had been agreed to by the two men. One wonders if Dahlinger paid for this Wills Sainte Claire.



1926 Wills Sainte Claire Model T-6 Gray Goose Traveler Phaeton  
Owner: Classic Car Club of America Museum, Hickory Corners, Michigan  
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