



BIDDLE

The Biddle never achieved any great fame. It won no races. Nor has it in our day become an object of worship like, say, the Mercer Raceabout. It was just a nice sporting car, the kind of machine a Philadelphia Main Line gentleman might have in the same way that he had a hunter or two, a Purdey shotgun, and his Savile Row suits. Still, it was an elegant, if unpretentious, machine both in the manner of its going and especially in its look. For in its day, from 1915 until its demise in 1922, a period when most American cars had sunk to a nadir of repulsive appearance, it managed to look handsome with more than a little of the best European practice in the design of its coachwork. Pre-Kaiser War practice, I hasten to add, for the Biddle's lifespan paralleled the years of the Kaiser's War and its aftermath.

The Biddle never had a chance to succeed as a real sports car. For in its day it was possible to buy, for about the same price, such cars as the Mercer Raceabout and the Stutz Bearcat, either of which could run rings around it. A Biddle Raceabout cost \$2,100 in 1917.

The Biddle was an assembled car. Except for its bodywork and its pointed radiator (*its* headlights echoed the same Mercedes-like shape), its vital parts were bought ready-made from outside suppliers. In 1918, for example, the Biddle used a Buda four-cylinder (3¾ in. x 5½ in.) L-head engine. As was fashionable at the time, its inlet manifold was cast integrally in the head. Although rated at 22 hp, it was said to develop an actual 48 hp. The crankshaft had but three main bearings. Cooling was "thermo-syphon," which meant that the engine had no water pump and depended for circulation on the fact that heated water rises.

When the Biddle was first announced in 1915, a supersports raceabout was promised with a modified four-cylinder, 70-hp, horizontal-valve racing Duesenberg engine. But this hot little job, the

Model K, didn't appear until 1918 when the company was already in dire straits. Had a Biddle with this engine (Duesenberg called it their Model G-3) been offered earlier, it might have changed the whole image of the Biddle. It might actually have challenged Stutz and Mercer as a truly potent sports car. A few years later, after Duesenberg sold the rights to the Model G-3 engine to the Rochester Motor Mfg. Company (which marketed it as the Rochester-Duesenberg engine), a Roamer (that American car with a Rolls-Royce-shaped radiator shell), equipped with such a power plant, set the land speed record for passenger cars at 105 mph. In 1921 this was fantastic, especially on four cylinders.

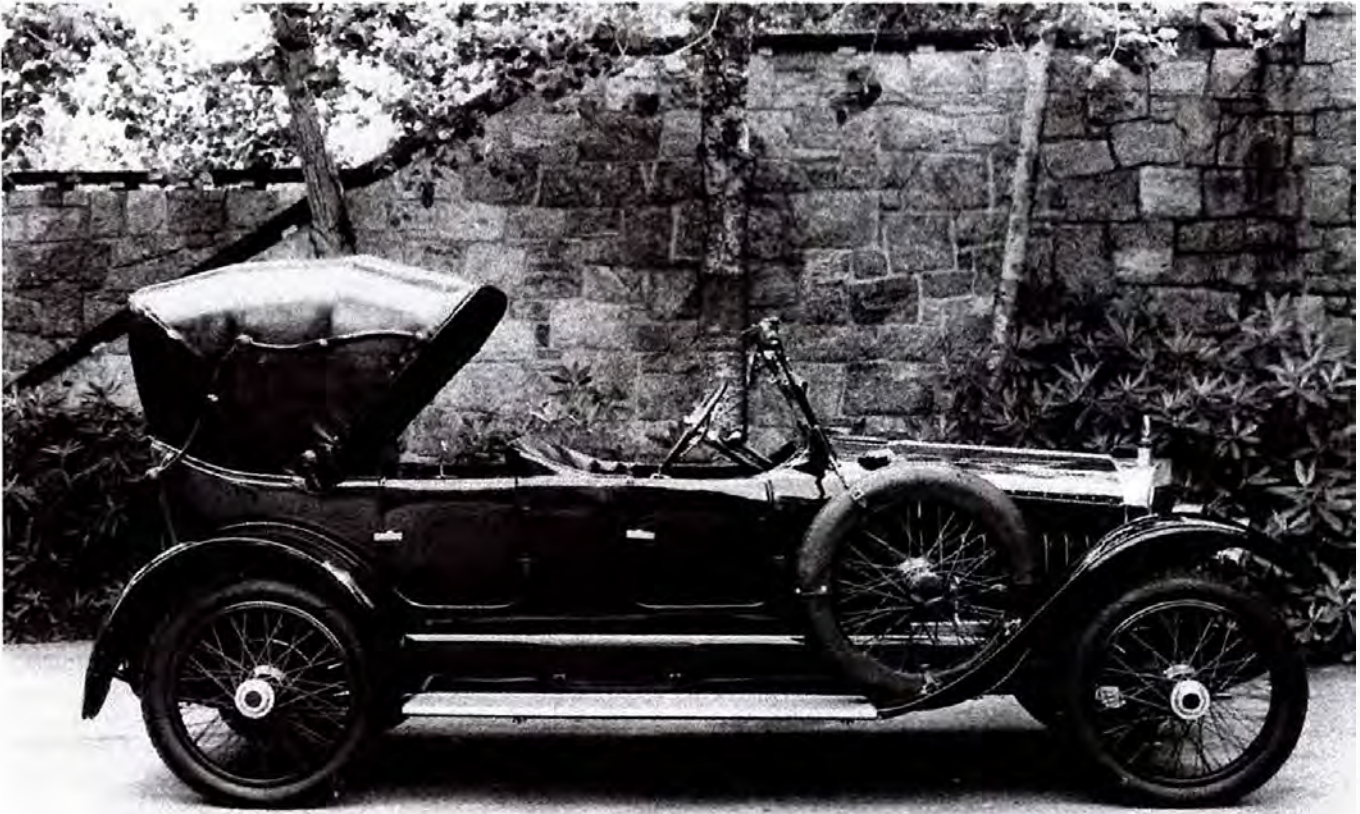
The Biddle had an aluminum-cased, four-speed transmission, a multiple-disc clutch, and an open drive shaft. The chassis frame was quite conventional with leaf springs at all four corners. The rear ones were unusually long and flat. Six Rudge-Whitworth wire wheels were standard.

An unusual number of body styles were offered, including a "chauffeur-in-the-rain" limousine and an odd looking carriage-like equipage called a Park Phaeton with *two* folding tops, canework sides, and patent-leather fenders. The catalogue pointed out that this was "custom built."

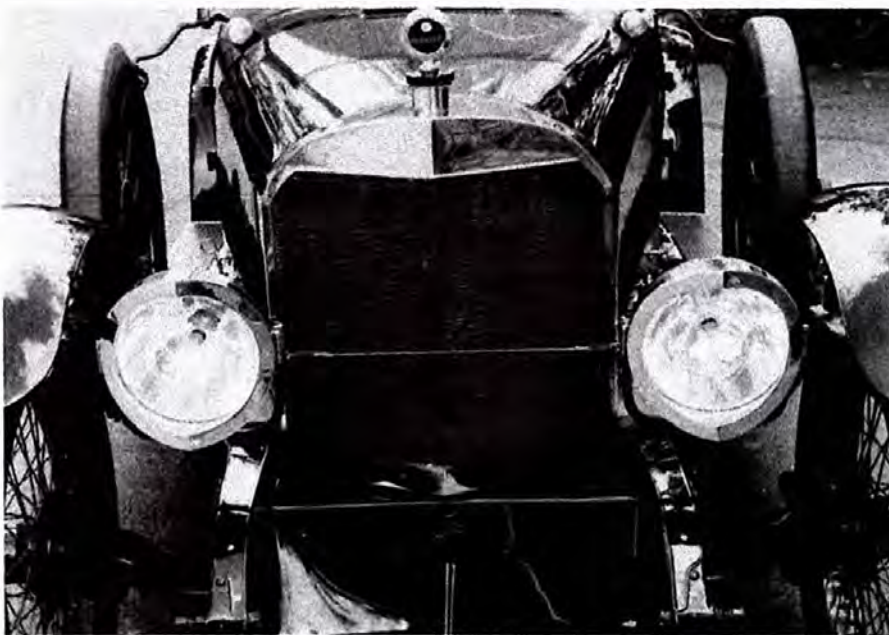
Standard models had what the catalogue *calls* a "Rostand Rain-Vision Windshield," which I assume means that the upper section could be binged out of the driver's sightline. It was, I suppose, better to get rain in your face than not to see at all in those pre-windshield-wiper days.

The Biddle was made in Philadelphia until 1919, then on West 42nd Street (of all places!) in New York City. In 1920 the company went broke and the creditors carried it on for a time. In 1921 the car was built to order only, with bodies by Rauch and Lang, the electric-car people. Few were sold and the Biddle ended its short career in 1922.

*Preceding pages:
1915 Biddle is early example of
marque which existed until
1922. Built also as a two-seater, it
was an "assembled" car, cost about \$2,000.*



I



1. Victoria-topped Biddle Sports Tourer was usually had some car for 1915. Various makes of engine were installed during seven years of its existence. In 1918 it was available with either four-cylinder, L-head, 22-hp Buda, or four-cylinder, 70-hp Duesenberg engine.
2 Front view of Biddle sports "Motometer"-topped, Mercedes-style radiator. Headlights have similar pointed fronts.