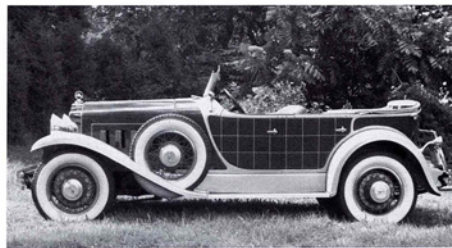
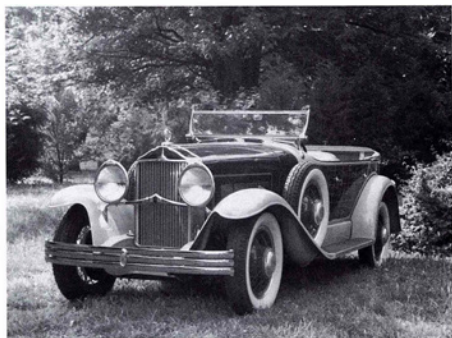
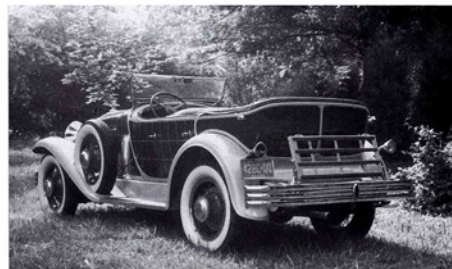


W I L L y S
K N I G H T



1921 Willys-Knight Great Six Series 66B Phaeton
Owner: Al Copsetta of Lindenwood, New Jersey

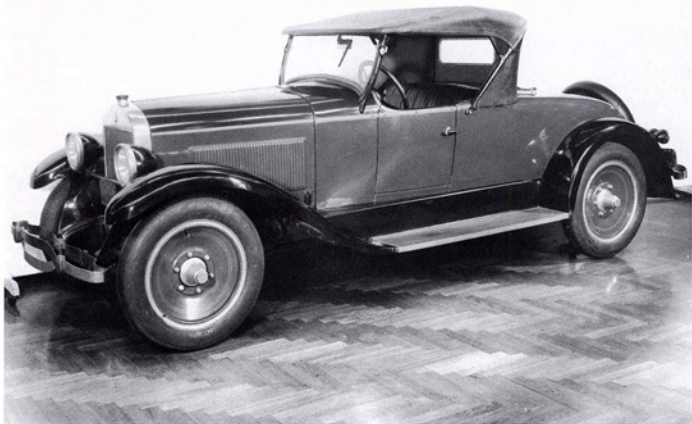


Granted, John North Willys had overextended himself badly and retrenchment was certainly in order, but he was mortified nonetheless in 1920 when Chase National Bank called in Walter Percy Chrysler to set matters right in his Toledo, Ohio company. Chrysler's first action-cutting Willys' annual salary in half, to \$75,000—was clearly a power play since Chrysler himself was being paid a cool million dollars for his annual efforts by Chase. But John North Willys kept his cool as Chrysler called the shots in Toledo until the bankers offered Walter P. another salvage operation with Maxwell in Detroit that seemed more promising. Certainly Chrysler had helped Willys-Overland but whether he regarded his job there or the Toledo company itself as finished is moot. Willys-Overland was undead, so to speak, but still mighty sick.

John North Willys was delighted to see Chrysler depart and relieved that the only Willys car he was interested in was an experimental poppet-valve six engineered by the Zeder-Skelton-Breer triumvirate (it would ultimately see production as the first Chrysler). Walter Chrysler was as uninterested in Knight sleeve-valve engines as Willys was enthusiastic. With Chrysler gone, John North got to work. From 50,000 cars sold in 1921, Willys worked sales up to over 200,000 by 1925. From an indebtedness of over \$20 million, he worked profit to a profit almost equaling that figure during the same period. In 1925, too, Willys bought out Stearns-Knight of Cleveland. With the subsequent introduction of the Falcon-Knight, Willys had sleeve-valve models in all price ranges from high (Stearns) to low (Falcon). "The Day of the Knight" is here, company advertisements burred.

Although the Willys light was middle-market range, John North couldn't resist giving his namesake car an upscale edition. Introduced at the 1929 New York Automobile Show, the 87 hp Great Six Series 66B Plaidside Roadster was styled by the talented Amos Northup, with Griswold of Detroit building the coachwork. Short and sassy (120-inch wheelbase), the Plaidside was a perfect accompaniment to the Jazz Age. Flappers with bobbed hair and rolled stockings, raccoon-coated gents with hip-pocket flasks went wild at the New York show. The Willys-Knight Plaidside Roadster was the most talked-about new car there.

Al Copsetta enjoys talking about these Willys-Knights today: "A great combination, in my view, sleeve-



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

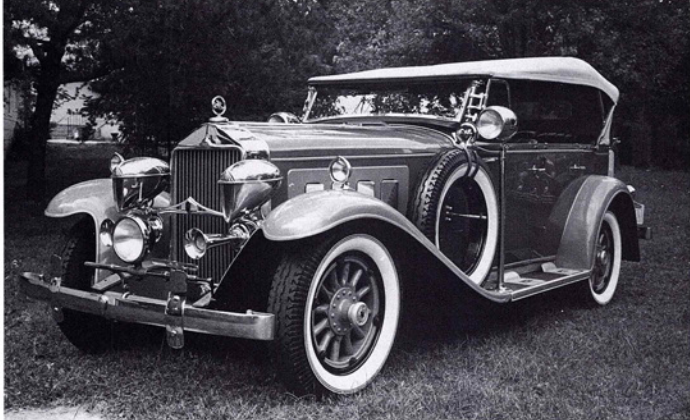
whenever he got a new idea for his car, he would stop the assembly line to incorporate it. Such perfectionism, while admirable, was bad business. With his car priced in the \$3,500 range, Wills couldn't afford the luxury of being himself. He chose not to change. The Wills Sainte Claire Motor Company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

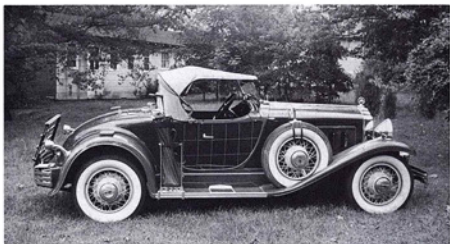


1931 Willys-Knight Great Six Series 66B Phaeton, Baker-Raulang
Owner: Al Copsetta of Lindenwood, New Jersey

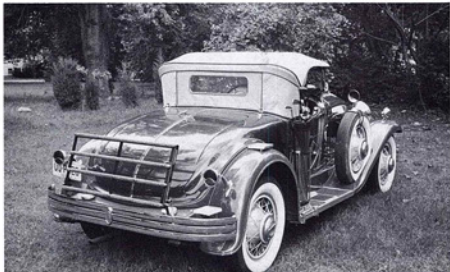
valve engine and Amos Northup design. It appears the Plaid sides were displayed at the automobile shows for three years as my Phaeton was shown in '31. Only the Roadsters were catalogued by Willys. The Plaid side Phaetons were never advertised and apparently were built only for the automobile shows in the U.S. or for export. I know that three were produced for the 1931 shows, one for Chicago, one for San Francisco, and my car which was purchased by a Michael Collins from the Willys exhibit at the New York Automobile Show.

"The Baker-Raulang Phaeton body was purchased by Cliff Cornell, president of the Cleveland Flux Company, to replace the coupe body on his recently-purchased 66-B Willys-Knight. Baker-Raulang was the coachbuilding arm of the former Baker and Rauch & Lang electric-producing companies. Only three bodies like my phaeton were made; the other two went on Ruxton chassis."

Plaid side Willys-Knights are seldom seen today. They weren't produced long. In March 1930, with his factory humming and believing (as most did) that the Wall Street crash would have only short-term effect, John North Willys became America's first ambassador to Poland. Two years later, at the request of President Hoover, he returned to manage his now-troubled company. The Jazz Age was over. So was the jazzy Willys-Knight Plaid side.



1930 Willys-Knight Great Six Series 66B Roadster
Owner: Al Copsetta of Lindenwood, New Jersey





Above—Al Copsetta's 1931 Willys-Knight 66B Phaeton by Baker-Raulang and his Plaidside Roadster; below—the Roadster

