



1925 McFarlan Twin Valve Six Model 154 Knickerbocker Berlina Limousine  
Owner: Craig Karr of Santa Monica, California Photo: Rick Lenz

Prior to the First World War, the McFarlan Carriage Company of Connersville, Indiana evolved into the McFarlan Motor Car Company. Probably few paid much attention; the McFarlan of that period was a good if prosaic automobile. By the twenties, however, it was impossible not to notice the McFarlan. Consider the specification of Craig Karr's

Knickerbocker Limousine: six cylinders, triple ignition, 24 valves, 18 spark plugs, 572.5 cubic inches, 120 hp. The Twin Valve Six McFarlan was the most powerful production automobile in America at the dawn of the Classic Era. With its 140-inch wheelbase ("will turn easy in average street," the catalogue insisted) and two-plus tons with closed coachwork,

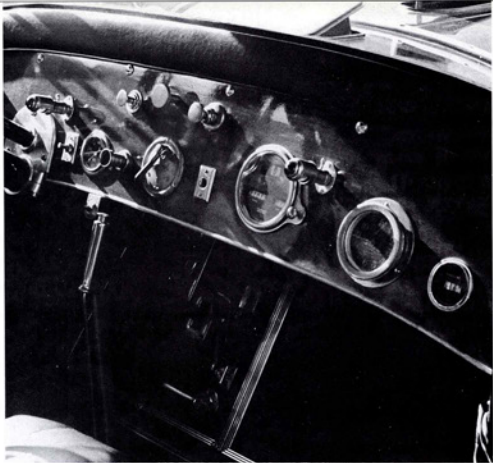
it was one of the biggest. And, with prices for production models ranging up to \$9,000, among the most expensive.

Hollywood flocked to Connersville. Movie star purchasers included Wallace Reid and Fatty Arbuckle. Boxing champ Jack Dempsey was an owner; band leader Paul Whiteman owned two. Craig Karr's McFarlan was ordered in Connersville by a member of the Romanoff family who had fled Russia following the Bolshevik revolution with enough gold bullion to pay for two: a touring and this limousine, one of a pair built, individually styled and reputedly the most expensive vehicles ever produced by the company. Romanoffs always traveled in style and insisted on having their caviar in comfort so this McFarlan was ordered with some special picnic equipment, as Craig explains: "A silver-trimmed trunk was originally fitted on the teakwood platform at the rear, into which was placed not only small suitcases but collapsible brass poles with eagles on top. Once assembled, the poles permitted a tent to be hooked to the rear leading edge of the leather top and positioned so the Romanoffs might enjoy a sunshaded lunch seated on two canvas pillows which fastened to the teakwood platform once the trunk was removed."

At some point during its checkered career, the trunk was removed permanently from the McFarlan (and remains to be re-created). Craig has owned the car since 1977 and has researched the history. Just twenty-one McFarlans remain extant of the 2,087 produced during the company's eighteen years of life. Of these, just eight are Classic Era cars. Following the death of Harry McFarlan in 1928, the company itself became history, a young empire builder named Errett Lobban Cord purchasing the McFarlan real estate for the production of his own cars. The Romanoffs remained in the United States until wiped out in the crash of '29, whereupon Mr. R (his first name is known, but discretion dictates it not be revealed) dropped the two McFarlans off in a California junkyard and took off himself for Switzerland where he still had some money stashed. The limousine was salvaged from the junkyard by an Oldsmobile dealer to use as an attention-getter on his car lot. The McFarlan caught the attention of a Palos Verdes resident who purchased the car in 1932 and kept it until the mid-seventies when Craig, pleading that the car deserved to be restored, convinced him to sell.



"The sheer size of this vehicle and its massive powerplant attracted me to it," says Craig. "Weighing in excess of 7,000 pounds, it handles like a Mack truck. Due to its rear end ratio, it's not a fast car but can climb hills effortlessly. With its heavy insulated roof, the passenger compartment remains cool on the hottest of days, windows open, of course. With its construction and appointments, the McFarlan is more like a royal carriage than an automobile. In fact, it is the most ostentatious vehicle in my collection and, being a collector of giant autos, that says a lot."



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