

P E E R L E S S

Prior to the First World War, Peerless was one of the celebrated "Three P's" (with Packard and Pierce-Arrow), marques the very mention of whose names connoted unabashed luxury. "All that the name implies" was the Peerless slogan. By the dawn of the Classic Era, however, the Cleveland, Ohio company's star had begun to dim. Entry into the popular-priced field diluted the marque's prestige image, and managerial changes were so frequent that the company might have been well advised to install a revolving door to the executive suite. Matters took a turn for the better

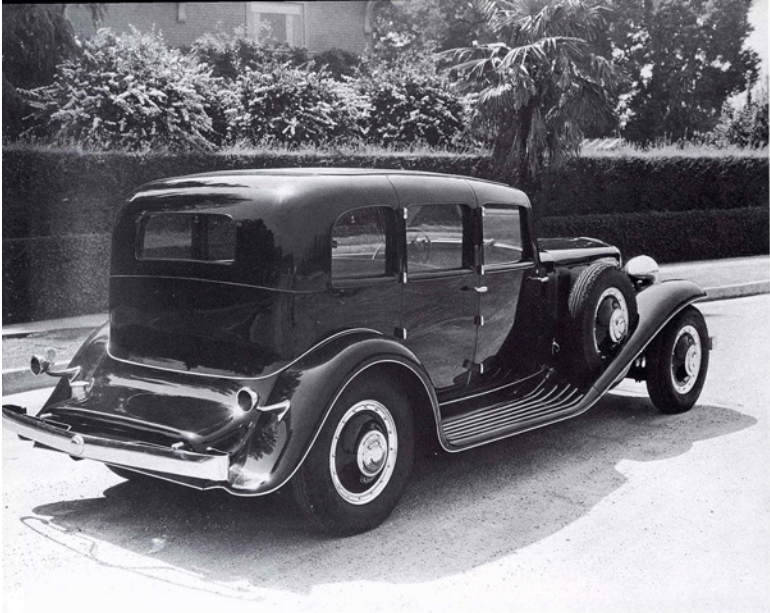
when Alexis de Sakhnoffsky (the Russian-born designer later responsible for Packard styling innovations among others) was hired to design the 1930 line. But the new Peerless was introduced as Wall Street crashed. The company that had not been able to capitalize during the boom years was ill-equipped to cope in an economy gone bust.

To the everlasting credit of the marque, Peerless exited with bravura. Project XD had begun in 1927, when rumors spread of multi-cylinder development by Cadillac and Marmon. Anxious not to be left behind, Peerless began experimenting

with a V-16; the Aluminum Company of America (Alcoa), which earlier had collaborated on all-aluminum coachwork development, asked to join the effort. Early in 1929 former Marmon vice president James A. Bohannon became the new Peerless president. Work on Project XD accelerated. The 464.6-cubic-inch V-16 engine was bench tested at 170+ hp. Aluminum was also used extensively in the 145-inch chassis. Enlisted to design the coachwork was Franklin Q. Hershey, the twenty-two-year-old designer of the Walter M. Murphy Company of Pasadena, California. The magnificent car on these pages was the result.

Taken to Muroc Dry Lake, the Peerless V-16 tested at over 100 mph. At little more than 4,000 pounds, the new car promised to be a svelte challenger to the new sixteen-cylinder models from Marmon (5,360 pounds) and Cadillac (nearly three tons). But in Cleveland a cold look at reality had been taken. Peerless sales were less than a quarter of pre-crash

1932 Peerless Touring Sedan Prototype, Murphy
 Owner: Cranford Auto-Aviation Museum of the Western Reserve
 Historical Society, Cleveland, Ohio Photo: Strother MacMinn



The Peerless V-16 engine; Peerless prototype photo by Strother MacMinn

levels. Going on seemed futile. Most of the company office furniture was sold, and the assembly line was shut down. Following the repeal of Prohibition in 1933, Peerless bought out Carlings of Canada and went into the beer business. "From motors to malt and from hubcaps to hops," James Bohannon would say.

In 1946 James Bohannon donated the 1932 Peerless V-16 Prototype to the then Thompson Products Museum, forerunner of the Crawford Auto-Aviation Museum. Its mileage at the time was 4,775; at this writing it registers a bit less than 5,000 miles. This unique and original Classic deserves a velvet glove. In addition to its inherent place in history, the V-16 Peerless was the last passenger car produced in Cleveland. It is, the Crawford people proudly state, the "flagship" of their collection.

