

# A U B U R N



*The Auburn-Cord-Duesenberg Museum's 1935 Auburn 851 Speedster in front of the Museum*

At the turn of the century, carriage and wagon makers by the hundreds tried their hand at producing automobiles. Frank and Morris Eckhart of Auburn, Indiana were typical. Modest capitalization of \$2,500 for their Auburn Automobile Company was followed by modest production. Most firms similarly begun in small towns throughout America were overwhelmed as the automobile business turned into a big-time industry. But the Auburn motored on. During World War I the Eckharts boasted that their secret of success was the fact that there had been "no change in ownership or officers" in their company since its inception, but the truth was they were not very successful. That secret was out in 1919 when the brothers sold controlling interest in Auburn to a Chicago consortium including officers of the Harris Trust and First National banks and William Wrigley of chewing gum fame, all of whom were quickly chagrined to find that what they bought wasn't making money. The new Beauty-Six, that designation a thinly-veiled comment on the plain-jane Auburns the Eckharts had produced, didn't boost sales much. Finally in 1924 Ralph Austin Bard, who had put together the disgruntled consortium, approached the hotshot Moon salesman of the Quinlan Motor Company in Chicago. Go to Auburn, Errett Lobban Cord was told, find out what's wrong. At the factory Cord discovered a dismal production of six units a day, a parking lot full of unsold cars—and a dazzling opportunity. The nest egg of \$100,000 Cord had saved from his commissions and investment in the Quinlan dealership was burning a hole in his pocket. Back in Chicago he wheeled a deal. For a modest salary, he would become Auburn's general manager provided he was given the option of buying control if he could save the company. To this, all parties readily agreed. Very quickly, the Auburn became a very different car. . . .

A little chic nickel plating and some flashy repainting and those formerly black and green Auburns in the factory parking lot began to sell, a carload of 100 of them to a single dealer in Brooklyn bringing in some needed cash to move on. The automobile was a "style vehicle," Errett Cord said about this time, which was really more in the nature of a prediction because almost everyone else in the industry talked about engineering a vehicle not styling it. Even before General Motors recognized the wisdom of creating a design department, E. L. Cord was his own Art and Colour Section. He knew what sold cars—and who bought them. His comment that it was the woman "who passes final judgement" on a family car purchase was rather avant-garde as well because it had been only a half-decade since she had been given the right to vote.

E. L. Cord and designer Alan Leamy spent many a late evening together in Cord's kitchen in Auburn sketching ideas. At that kitchen table was begun the conscious policy of body-design changes every few years as a major sales tool.

Equally aware was Cord of the sales potential of performance. With improving roads, America had become interested in speed. A marque that did well on the track drew a lot of showroom attention, so Cord set out to capitalize on this growing fetish for bigger and faster cars. Eight cylinders in a Lycoming engine promised pizzazz—and delivered. In 1929 two Auburn 8-88 Roadsters averaged better than 60 mph for 15,000 miles on the board track at Atlantic City, breaking all records for fully equipped stock cars from 5 to 5,000 miles. On Independence Day at the Rockingham Speedway in Salem, New Hampshire, factory driver Wade Morton took the checkered flag at an impressive 89.9 mph average. Admittedly, Stutz was not on hand. In the other races entered during '27, Auburn trailed the Black Hawk Speedster across the finish line. The difference in power—Stutz's 125 and Auburn's 90—was considerable. But in the marketplace, the difference between the two cars was even more pronounced—in price.

What Errett Cord provided in the Auburn was more car than anyone had a reasonable right to expect. And he continually was offering more. The two 8-88's on display in the Auburn-Cord-Duesenberg Museum (which is housed in the company's former administration building, now



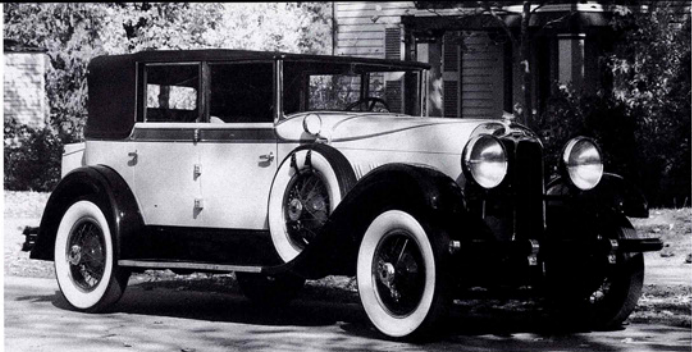
1926 Auburn Model 8-88 Roadster  
Owner: Auburn-Cord-Duesenberg Museum, Auburn, Indiana



1928 Auburn Model 8-88 Sport Sedan  
Owner: Auburn-Cord-Duesenberg Museum, Auburn, Indiana

on the National Register of Historic Places) are a perfect example. The 1926 model offered 298.6 cubic inches, a stiff "twist-proof" pressed steel frame and a three-speed "racing crash box." For the second series 8-88 introduced in 1928, hydraulic four-wheel brakes replaced the former mechanicals and Bijur lubrication was added. All this for a car selling in the \$2,000 range. The 8-115 followed in 1928—promoted in full-page advertisements depicting 115 white horses stampeding off the page. This left no room for a photograph of the car, but perhaps it would have been superfluous anyway.





1930 Auburn Model 8-95 Phaeton Sedan

Owner: Henry Ford Museum & Greenfield Village, Dearborn, Michigan

The over 22,000 Auburns sold in 1929 represented a 1000% increase over sales figures of scant five years previous. And by now Errett Cord's empire included two more automobiles: the Model J Duesenberg and a front-wheel-drive car bearing his own name. The man's rise in the automobile industry had been meteoric. The stock market crash was a nuisance that saw Auburn sales

decrease to 13,700 cars in 1930. Errett Cord was sure he could handle it.

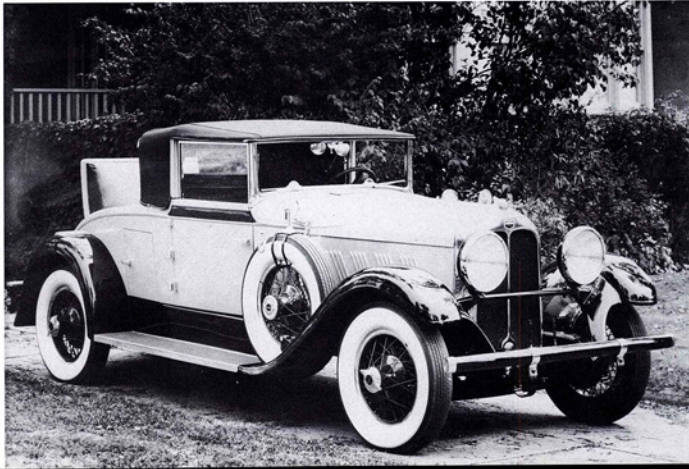
The smaller straight-eight Auburn for 1930 was the 8-95: 246.7 cubic inches, 100 hp, a 125-inch-wheelbase chassis. "Low price, high style," says Randy Mason of the Ford Museum's 8-95. "This is a marvelous early example of the convertible sedan body style with low, very narrow pillars, thin-top profile and a

superb two-tone paint combination."

Styling also attracted Tom Lester to his 8-95 Cabriolet: "At \$1,495 new, this was not an expensive car although its roadability would suggest otherwise. The Lycoming engine and hydraulic brakes are great. The car had 11,000 original miles when I bought it about thirty years ago. The odometer is closing in on 20,000 miles now."

1930 Auburn Model 8-95 Cabriolet

Owner: Thomas J. Lester of Deerfield Beach, Florida



The Model 125 of 1930 was the final rendering of Auburn's largest-ever straight eight. The only concessions to the prevailing economy were the elimination of a couple of previously low-selling body styles and the overall lowering of the price range by several hundred dollars. This paid off. Automobile showrooms were often lonely places in America in 1930. Comparatively, Auburn sales remained brisk.

The Speedster owned by Al Copsetta is an example of Auburn's retaliation to Stutz's Black Hawk. A record-breaking 84.7 mph for twenty-four hours at Atlantic City in '28 and a Penrose Trophy-winning assault on Pikes Peak later that year were the Auburn Speedster's finest performances. The Black Hawk remained a slightly faster car, but an Auburn Speedster could be driven out of a showroom for several thousand dollars less.

And the Auburns with less racy coachwork than the boattail Speedster were plenty quick too. Just ask Bob Daryman about his 125 Cabriolet: "This is one of the few muscle cars of that era. With 125 hp, it can get to 105 mph. Just looking at it, you can tell the car can go. When Errett Cord took control at Duesenberg, one of his first moves was to have his Auburn stylists redesign the Auburn radiator to look like a Duesenberg and add those large headlamps and classy round-type bumpers. I bought this 125 Cabriolet four years ago from a junkyard owner who had stored it since 1953 and who seemed to have no interest in it. I sure do. Adding the accessories to this car has been fun. We have it dressed up like a dapper young man of the time might have done it."

1930 Auburn Model 125 Cabriolet

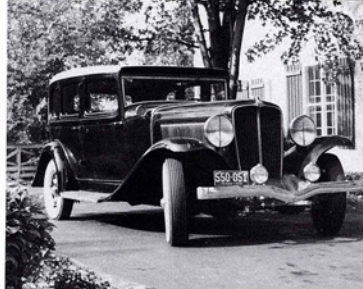


1930 Auburn Model 125 Speedster  
Owner: Al Copsetta of Lindentwood, New Jersey



Owner: Robert S. Daryman of York, Pennsylvania





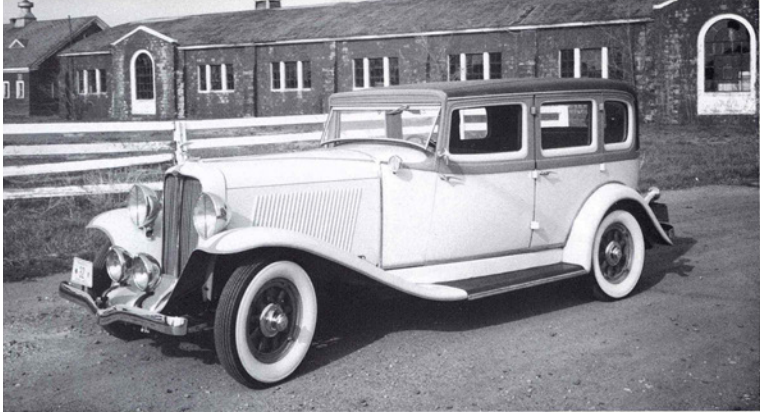
than the Model 125, but the new body design made the car appear just as big or bigger. *Fortune* magazine used the superlative in proclaiming the 8-98 "the biggest package in the world for the price." And the price: an incredible \$945-\$1,195 in the standard line, \$1,195-\$1,395 in the custom line which included the perk of an L. G. S. Free Wheeling unit. Auburn enjoyed a record year: 29,536 cars sold and a \$3.5 million profit. Meanwhile most automakers were wondering how they could hold on to their shirts.

Nineteen thirty-two brought another new twist: "Dual Ratio," produced by the Cord-owned Columbia Axle Company. By turning a lever on the dash, a driver could preselect the desired axle ratio (4.55:1 or 3.04:1) for best performance under prevailing load, speed and road conditions. This was an effective selling point, and in a year which saw sales of most manufacturers plunge into a veritable abyss, Auburns sold numbered 11,646 which was a big decrease but not as drastic as most.

Jim & Carol Beauchamp have owned their Model 8-100A for six years: "This was our first Classic. The all-original state of the car is rare and educational and its less-than-show-quality condition makes it easy to enjoy and hard to worry about. In Auburn tradition, this is definitely a performance-oriented automobile with exhaust cutout, two-speed differential and free wheeling. And the body design was an outstanding achievement of Auburn's Al Leamy. The absence of sidemounts on our sedan accentuates the sweeping lines of the belt moulding and graceful fenders. In tough times, this car sold well. The '32 Auburn was a very affordable Classic, advertised as such then, and it remains so today."



1932 Auburn Model 8-100A Four-Door Sedan  
Owners: Jim & Carol Beauchamp of Austin, Texas



Ray & Carol Kroll echo the Beauchamps' sentiments: "The overall design of the 1932 Auburn resulted from the talent of Auburn's Al Leamy. Continued was the gathering of the paint trim at the center of the hood which had been a distinctive feature of Auburns since E. L. Cord's early years with the company. We particularly appreciate the opportunity to drive this Classic sedan and view the narrowed long hood crowned by the winged Mercury ornament and flanked by the two freestanding headlamps. In addition to the unique headlamp design and matching cowl lights with their split-appearance design tastefully achieved with chromium mouldings, the front appearance of the car with its radiator grille unobstructed by a headlight bar set the Auburn apart from its contemporaries of the early thirties. The two-speed Columbia rear axle was a plus; a debit was the fitting of mechanical rather than hydraulic brakes. The historical mystery that surrounds our 1932 Custom Touring Sedan is the fact that it was first titled on August 9th, 1939 by the Auburn-Cord-Duesenberg Company (as Dallas Winslow renamed the firm following his acquisition). The original title shows a delivered purchase price of \$175.00 and an Ohio sales or use tax paid of \$5.25. This Certificate of Title No. 630007580 was issued in the county of Paulding in Ohio. This is a mystery we would like to solve."

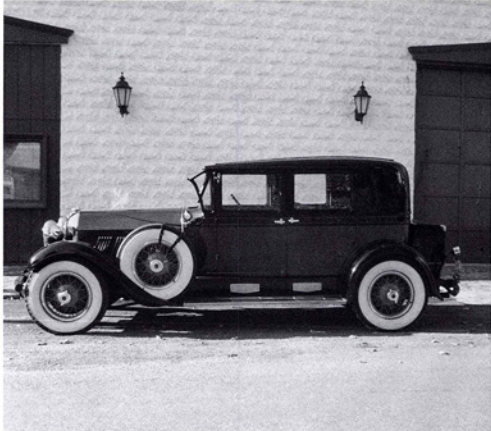


1932 Auburn Model 8-100A Custom Touring Sedan  
 Owners: Raymond F. & Carol T. Kroll of Brooklyn Center, Minnesota

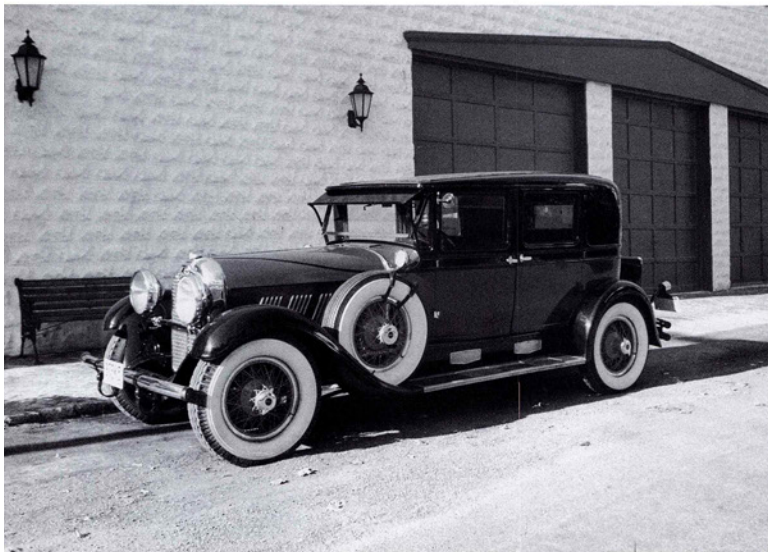


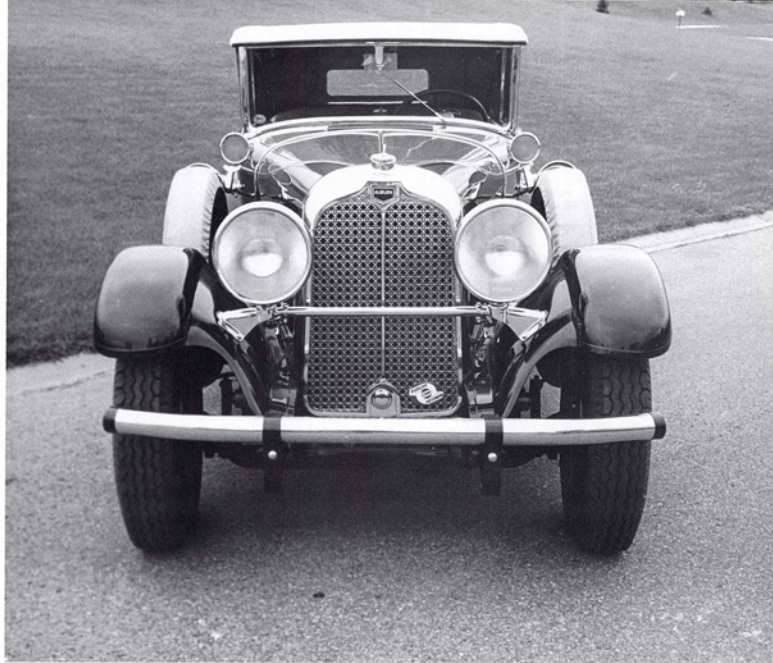
In two years Jim Cox has driven his 125 Sport Sedan over 5,000 miles: "The car is very comfortable for touring. When it's cool, there's ample heat; when it's hot, there's ample cooling with the windshield cranked out. I love the close-coupled look of this Auburn, particularly in side profile with the Brewster windshield and trunk. Sitting behind the wheel, I also enjoy the view over the stout hood toward those huge Indiana headlamps. The fact that this car was a finale intrigues me. This was the last year the Brewster-style windshield appeared on any production automobile, and also the last year for the tubular Balcrank bumpers. And most important historically, 1930 was the last year for the big eight engine which had set so many speed records and made the name Auburn famous far beyond the small town in Indiana that was the headquarters of the company."

For 1931 Auburn dropped its 125 and 8-95 as well as its non-Classic six-cylinder models to focus production on a single new eight: a 268-cubic-inch unit delivering 98 hp at 3400 rpm. At 127 inches, the wheelbase was three inches shorter



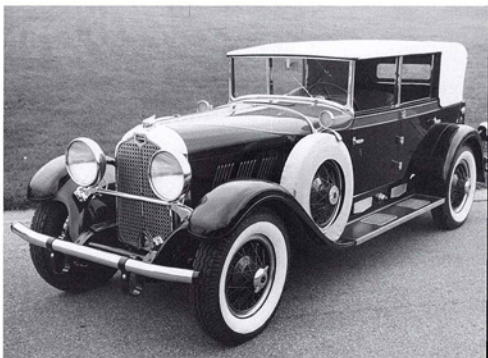
1930 Auburn Model 125 Sport Sedan  
Owner: James H. Cox of Matamoras, Pennsylvania



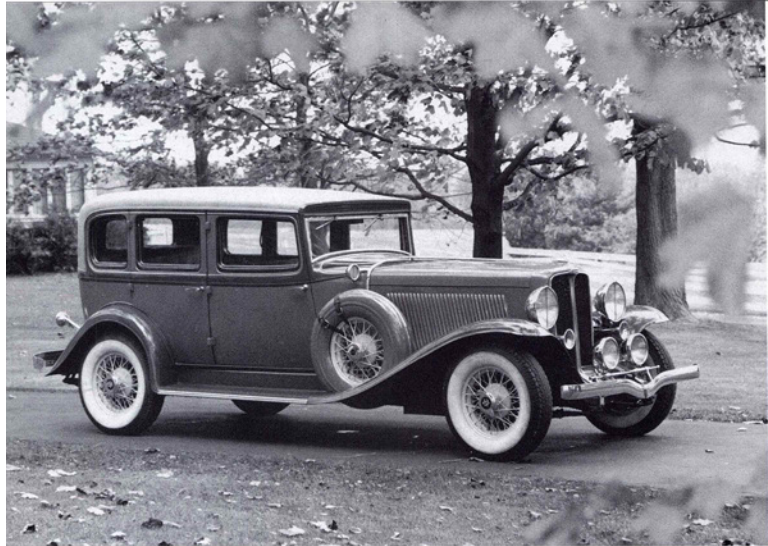


1930 Auburn Model 125 Phaeton Sedan  
Owner: Ken Kenewell  
of Fenton, Michigan Photos: Torque

Interesting to Ken Kenewell is the first owner of his 125 Convertible Sedan: "Peter Nessor was a bootlegger who operated a speakeasy in Racine, Wisconsin. Auburn history shows the 125 was made one year only and was the company's most powerful straight eight ever. I'm sure the original owner appreciated the pep of the engine. I've owned the car for over two decades. This particular body style has it all: roll-up windows, nice low-profile top when up and also stored nice and low when down. The back window section is removable for partial open touring."







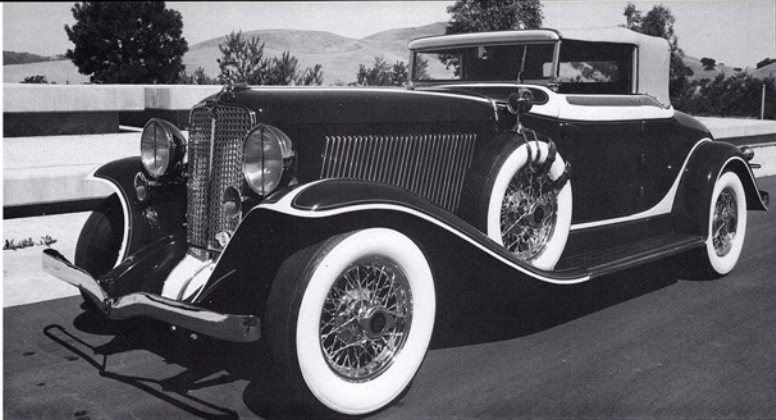
1932 Auburn Model 12-160A Four-Door Sedan

Owner: Auburn-Cord-Duesenberg Museum, Auburn, Indiana

The '32 V-12 Sedan in the Auburn-Cord-Duesenberg Museum is a remarkable car for yet another reason. In the past half-century-plus it has travelled a total of 8,800 miles and is completely original even to its double-white Firestone tires. Museum curator Skip Marketti says it will stay that way.

During the first quarter of 1932, the Auburn Automobile Company made a net profit of \$7,959—or less than one-fortieth that of the previous year. That summer in an attempt to improve this situation, a fully-equipped V-12 Auburn Speedster was taken to Muroc Dry Lake where in a series of speed tests it covered a standing mile at 67.03 mph, a flying mile at 100.77, completed a one-hour run at 92.2 mph average and 500 miles at 88.95. All figures—many of which would stand until after World War II—were extravagantly publicized but to no avail. On November 30th, Auburn reported a net loss of \$974,751 for the fiscal year. Red ink was everywhere in the automobile industry, of course, and Auburn's





1932 Auburn Model 12-160A Cabriolet

Owner: Behring Museum, Danville, California

The mystery in 1932 was how Auburn could do it: a V-12 for \$975-\$1,275, the most economical twelve-cylinder car ever placed on the market anywhere. The bargain-basement price for multi-cylinder luxury was partially possible by using the same bodies as the eights and making components of like, if not interchangeable, design. The brakes on the twelve were hydraulic. The

wheelbase, at 133 inches, was a half-foot longer. Since the late twenties Lycoming had been part of the Cord Corporation empire and produced the 391-cubic-inch 160 hp V-12 to Auburn specification.

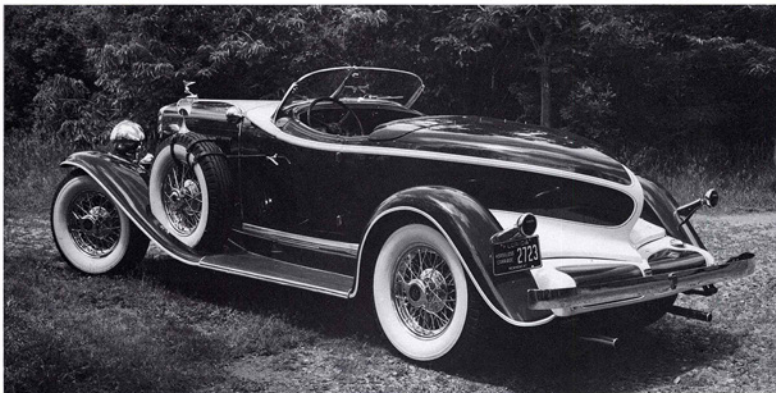
"A fabulous V-12 engine with twin carbs and a fast 90-95 mph performance," enthuses Dick Gold regarding his Speedster. "The only luggage space is behind the seat, so

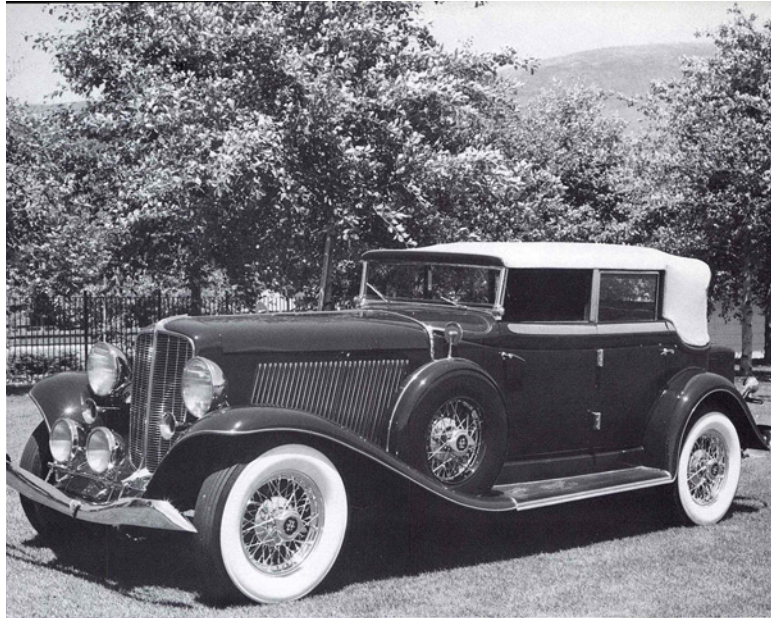
there's not much room, but who cares?"

For fifty dollars less than the Speedster, or \$1,225, one could have purchased a Cabriolet in '32 like the car in the Behring Museum. Auburn prices always strained credulity during the Classic Era; the literary willing suspension of disbelief is necessary to conjure the Auburn V-12.

1932 Auburn Model 12-160A Speedster

Owner: Richard G. Gold of Deerhaven, Minnesota

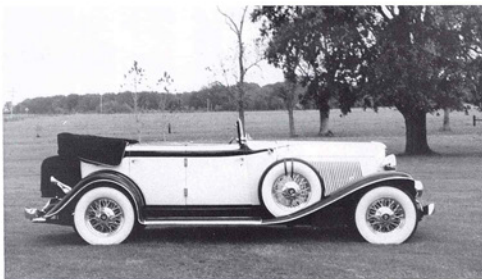




1934 Auburn Model 1250 Salon Phaeton  
 Owner: Blackhawk Classic Auto Collection, Danville, California

As Auburn sales continued on a downward spiral, the decision was made early in 1934 to complete the V-12 chassis remaining on hand and then discontinue the line. In introducing the twelve, Auburn had dropped its smaller and lower priced six—a miscalculation, it was now believed. Two lines of Auburn sixes were reinstated for '34 to generate volume sales. When the figures were totalled, approximately 2,500 V-12's had been produced in three years, about 250 of them in '34, approximately 27 of those Salon Phaetons like Knox Kershaw's and the car in the Blackhawk Classic Auto Collection.

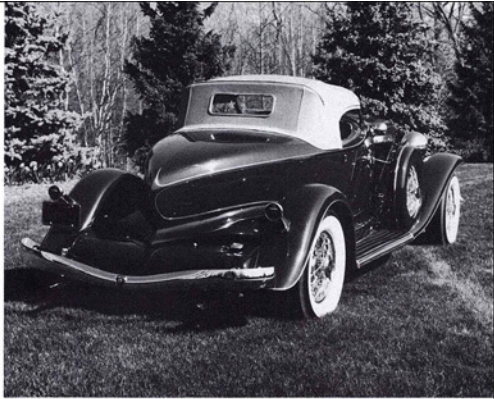
David Engel's 850Y Convertible Sedan exemplifies Auburn's efforts to create a moneymaker out of its straight eight in '34: "The styling was changed. The front fenders had teardrop panels, the side panels had sweeping horizontal vents, the radiator cap was moved under the



1934 Auburn Model 1250 Salon Phaeton  
 Owner: Knox Kershaw of Montgomery, Alabama

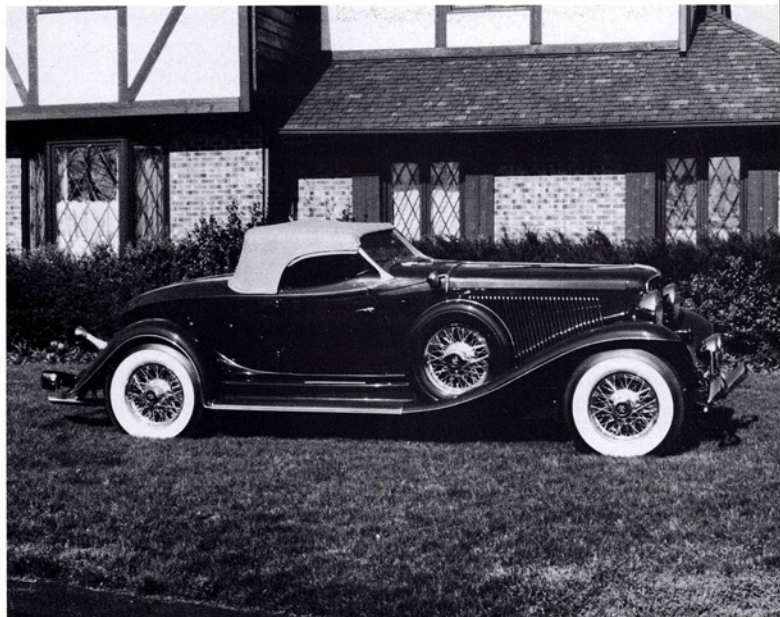
money-losing year was not as dismal as that suffered by most manufacturers. In 1933 the company tried with a larger model line-up, including the V-12 Salon series higher priced in the \$1,800 range. But overall sales fell—to 5,040 units. The good news remained the cars themselves.

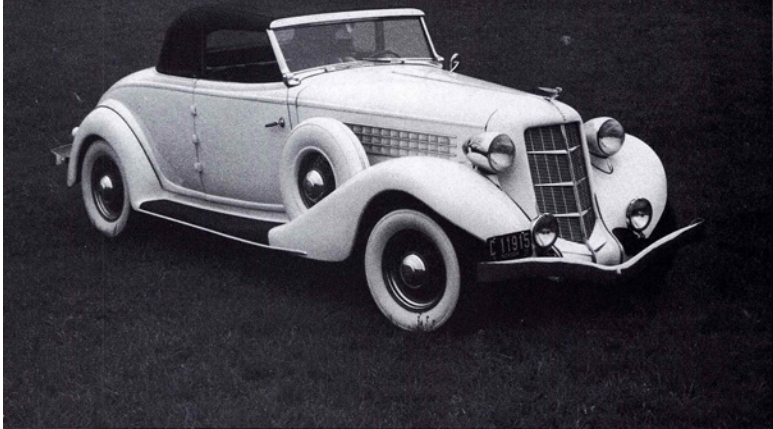
"The body style is gorgeous and exciting. The V-12 performance is smooth and powerful," comments Bill DiCiurcio about his '33 Salon Speedster. "The two-speed Columbia rear enables this car to cruise at highway speeds all day. With an Auburn of this era there is no need for the hobbyist who likes to drive his car to worry about having high-speed gears fabricated, which is the case with other Classics. And the braking system of the Auburn, which accommodates various weather and road conditions, works and is basically a rudimentary A. B. S. system—this in 1933."



1933 Auburn Model 12-165 Salon Speedster

Owner: William T. DiCiurcio of Mt. Laurel, New Jersey





1935 Auburn Model 851 Coupe

Owners: Bud & Judie Hicks of Marshall, Michigan

A half-million dollars had been spent to design the 1934 line; \$50,000 was budgeted for revisions for '35 to make the car more acceptable to the public. Duesenberg president Harold Ames, among those in the Cord empire who had been critical of the earlier design, was dispatched to Auburn to oversee the operation. He took Gordon Buehrig and Augie Duesenberg with him. They got to work immediately.

"With a \$50,000 budget, we couldn't do much," Gordon said later. "The decision was made to do nothing to the chassis or body and to concentrate on the front end sheet metal and fenders." The latter were more deeply skirted, the side panels received new louvers, the Auburn signature "streamer stripe" was eliminated, the radiator grille was made bolder. The cars were introduced in June of '34 as 1935 models.

Bud and Judie Hicks have owned their '35 851 Coupe for fifteen years

during which time it has been gently driven.

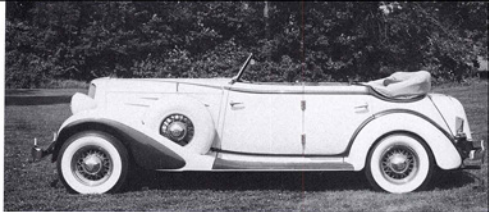
The Osbornes' 851 Convertible Sedan was anything but initially. Bruce explains why: "As a purveyor of cars for movies and television, I've owned literally hundreds of old cars. This was my first Classic, bought expressly to be the lead car in the movie *Shanghai Express*, given partial mechanical restoration, a quick paint job (as the villain's car, it had to be black), and shipped to Hong Kong. This Auburn was a revelation. Over fifty years old when I got it and disused much of that time, the body was still firm and sturdy; the doors didn't need rehangng but shut easily and smoothly with a quiet click and no effort. And the performance was remarkable. The car has such unexpectedly powerful acceleration. During the filming of the movie the Auburn was chased by two motorcycles with sidecars, and the director had to keep reminding its driver not to take off so fast since he

was unable to keep both the car and cycles in the same shot. After returning from Hong Kong, we gave the Auburn a proper restoration. It is beautiful with a graceful top and possibly the best-proportioned side windows of any four-door convertible I've ever seen."

The mid-'34 introduction of the 1935 Auburns had been a boon for the company but for automobile show time, when the rest of the industry would be introducing its new 1935's, Auburn needed what Gordon Buehrig called a "bomb"—a sensational car that would guarantee headlines amidst the welter of other new cars competing for same.

Augie Duesenberg worked with Lycoming and Switzer-Cummins on a supercharger that would boost the Auburn straight eight's 115 hp to 150. Gordon Buehrig was sent back to the drawing board to come up with the car's design. Aware that Union City Body—another Cord Corporation subsidiary—had about a

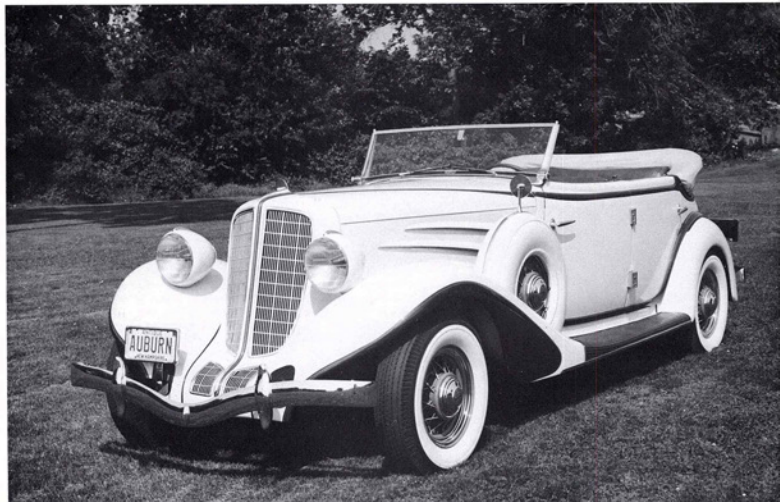
hood. The cars are now generally considered among the best styles of mid-thirties Auburns, but back in '34 they were not popular, possibly too advanced for public taste. They were made for only six months. The return of hydraulic brakes to Auburn's eight was a definite plus. I've owned my 850Y Convertible Sedan since 1969; in 1972 it joined my wife and me on our honeymoon on the Empire State Region CARavan."

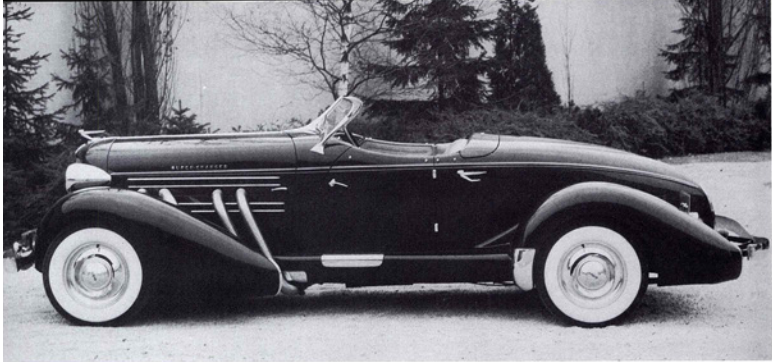


1934 Auburn Model 850Y Convertible Sedan



Owner: David C. Engel of Greenland, New Hampshire





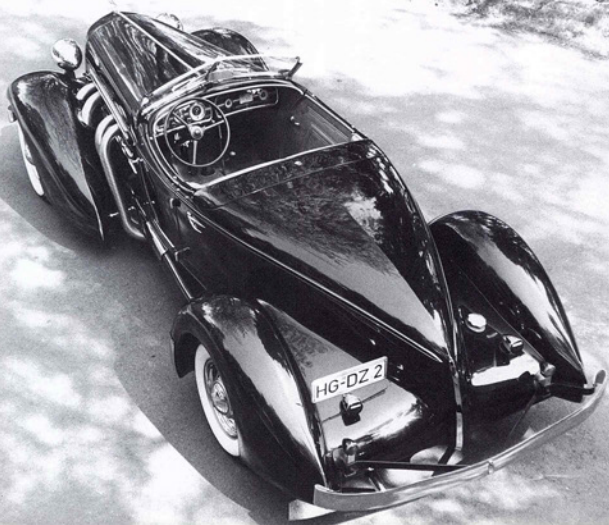
hundred former Auburn Speedster bodies remaining in stock, Harold Ames suggested a boattail speedster might be perfect for the attention-getting show model Auburn needed. Given an assignment markedly less

than carte blanche, Buehrig turned sorcerer. The result is seen here. "The most flamboyant U. S. car design," says Dave Holls. "My 851 Speedster was originally owned by Mr. D'Iteren of the Belgian custom

body building house. I bought it about two decades ago and drove it in Europe from 1970-1974 while working there for General Motors. Needless to say, the car came back home with me."

1935 Auburn Model 851 Speedster

Owner: David Holls of Bloomfield Hills, Michigan

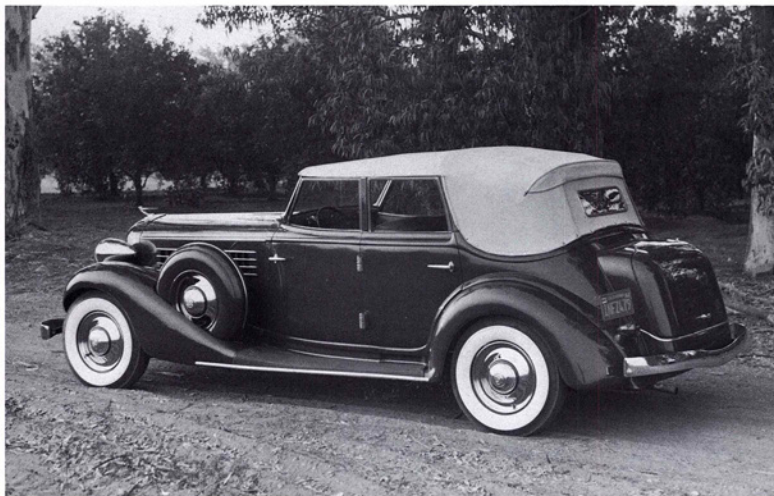




1935 Auburn Model 851 Convertible Sedan.

Owners: Bruce & Norma Osborne of Bloomington, California

Photos: Rick Lenz

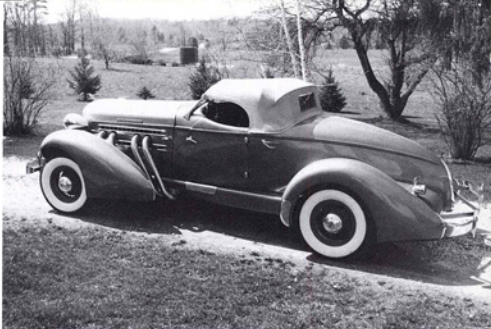




Auburns for 1936 were designated 852. "That was our total facelift for the new model year," Gordon Buehrig said.

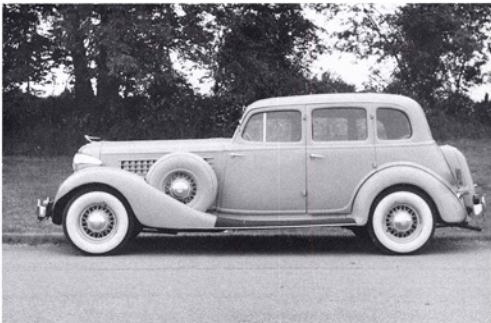
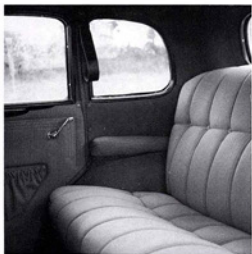
"Beautiful styling, a lovely interior," comments Bob Pierson about his 852 Sedan. "Just a great and beautiful car," says Al Ferrara of his Speedster, "which I would say even if it hadn't been designed by my good friend Gordon Buehrig."

Auburn sales rose 20% in 1936—not enough for a profit, however. But Auburn's troubles extended beyond the factory to the turmoil within Cord Corporation. With Ab Jenkins driving, the 851 and 852 Speedsters set up more than seventy new speed marks. For awhile all U. S. stock car records up to twenty-four hours and 15,000 miles belonged to Auburn. The Speedster was the first fully-equipped American production car to exceed 100 mph for a twelve-hour period. All this produced headlines in 1935 and 1936. The sad headline from Auburn shortly thereafter announced the company's obituary.



1936 Auburn Model 852 Speedster

Owner: Alfred Ferrara of Gates Mills, Ohio



1936 Auburn Model 852 Four-Door Sedan  
Owner: Bob Pierson of Bloomington, Indiana

