



1930 Bucciali TAV Roadster, Saoutchik

Owner: Blackhawk Classic Auto Collection, Danville, California

B U C C I A L I

Few things can be said about the Bucciali without inviting controversy. That Bucciali Frères, as the company styled itself, had a factory at 8 rue Gambetta in Courbevoie and a showroom on the Champs-Élysées is one of them. That the frères involved were two is another—one was Angelo, the other Paul-Albert, though he preferred Albert-Paul or just Paul or Albert on occasion—and friends (perhaps for that reason) usually referred to him as Buc. Angelo Bucciali was business manager for their automotive venture, Buc was designer and engineer.

An aerial acrobat awhile, the multi-named Bucciali built his own monoplane before he turned two-year-old, flew with the Groupe des Cigognes during World War I and later adopted that squadron's stork mascot for Bucciali automobiles. (Marc Birki did likewise, and earlier, for his Hispano-Suiza.) With brother Angelo, Buc capitalized Bucciali Frères in 1922 at 200,000 francs (less than \$20,000), indicating the Buccialis had no intention of becoming another Henry Ford. Indeed, selling their cars seems to have been almost an afterthought.

Competition absorbed the brothers' time for awhile. Early efforts included race cars powered by a two-stroke

twin and a V-4. Victories were few, but that seems not to have bothered the Buccialis either. Such production cars as were built were conventional—at first. The unorthodox arrived at the Paris Salon in October 1926, but this new Bucciali was tucked under a stairway leading to the buffet and was overlooked by hungry reporters. For the 1927 Salon the brothers were awarded a more strategic location, and journalists had considerably more food for thought. "The most unconventional of all the unusual cars exhibited," wrote one. Front wheel drive, independent steering, independent suspension on all four wheels and a Sensaud de Lavaud infinitely variable automatic transmission were startlingly progressive.

How many TAV (for *Traction Avant*) Buccialis were produced is a mystery. Buc claimed thirty-six, at a cost of \$20,000 each. Some historians

put the figure as low as fourteen. A press release claim that the cars were fitted with "Mercedes 5S supercharged" engines was glorious nonsense. Most were powered by American-built Continental straight eights. Nonsense aside, the TAV Bucciali was glorious.

The only complete Bucciali in existence is the Blackhawk Classic Auto Collection's TAV Roadster by Saoutchik. In the Blackhawk collection as well is the show chassis of the Double Huit, the Bucciali brothers' bombshell for the 1930 Paris Salon—a cubist sculpture with a U-16 engine, except that, upon examination years later, old French newspapers were discovered stuffed in sheet aluminum boxes under the rocker arms. That Bucciali was going nowhere.

Separating fact from fantasy in the Bucciali saga shall probably ever remain dicey. The Bucciali brothers gambled that a sophisticated motoring public would be astounded by what they wrought. On that score, they clearly won.

