THE ‘GREAT MISTAKE’ – THE CITROEN 2CV

In the last newsletter, we dealt with an automotive symbol of utilitarianism in the form of the Volkswagen Beetle – the ‘people’s car’ that served (and continues to serve) people worldwide who needed a ‘no-frills’ approach automobile. Although its origins were in fact Germanic (and socialist), the VW Beetle’s popularity and success could be ironically measured most accurately here in the United States - but what about Europe? Was there an auto designer that longed to supply the survivors of war-torn European countries with an affordable vehicle that could re-ignite local commerce? As it turned out, there was. And not unlike the father of the Beetle, he ran into just as many, if not more, roadblocks and pitfalls along the way and, even after its completion, faced critics who met it with incredulous laughter and finger-pointing. Most European motor journalists dubbed it ‘the great mistake,’ and in Holland, where it would become as iconic as the VW here in America, it was initially christened ‘the ugly duckling’ by a Dutch journalist channeling Hans Christian Anderson. The developers name was Pierre Boulanger, and the vehicle was the Citroen 2CV – and both would have the last laugh in the end.

Enter Andre Citroen, a Dutch auto designer (who’s surname in many languages ironically translates to ‘lemon,’ a stereotypical tag still used to describe unreliable and downtrodden cars) living in post-depression and pre-WWII France who longed to bring into existence a vehicle that not only would resist further economic downfalls, but also defiantly contrasted the might of the American auto industry and its lumbering, petrol-guzzling giants. His vision and his company, however, were torpedoed by his strength of will even before he began, as he refused to suffer the direction given to him by financial directors who ‘knew nothing of cars.’ As a result, he died without seeing his vision become a reality.

His namesake would continue under the auspices of the most unlikely of manufacturers: The Michelin Tire Company, who took over Citroen in 1935. The two directors that were put in charge of Citroen were Pierre Michelin and Pierre Boulanger, who is now known as the ‘father of the ugly duckling.’ Boulanger was, for all intents and purposes, a renaissance man – he had already assembled an impressive list of accom-

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Up Coming Events

April 10 & 11, 2015: Bakersfield Swap Meet, Bakersfield, CA
April 12, 2015 La Jolla Concours d’Elegance, La Jolla, CA
plishments before he became an au
to designer, including serving in the
military twice and achieving the
rank of Capitan as an aerial photog-
rapher with the French Air Force
during WWI; then moving to the
U.S. working as a ranch hand and a
drafter, then starting his own build-
ing company in Canada.

It was during his stint in the
French Air Force that he befriended
one of the sons of Michelin, where
he eventually gained employment
building residences for the Michelin
employees. His career experiences
would prove invaluable in the de-
velopment of the Citroen 2CV, and
so would the vision he shared with
Andre Citroen, although his was
more detailed. His mantra: “Don’t
cram people into a car, but build the
car around people.”

Once getting Citroen’s books
back to rights, he settled into the
design office, and commissioned a
vehicle that would be a concept de-
erived from his observation of farm-
ers in the villages surrounding his
firm in Clermont-Ferrand. He was
convinced that the agricultural ap-
plications for this car would alone
merit its acceptance, but its specifi-
cations and affordability
(particularly the sparseness of its
design and frugality of its building
materials) would ensure it. This car
should be easy for farmer’s wives to
drive, and should accommodate
multiple passengers comfortably –
particularly on the rough backroads
of rural France. The details that so-
lidified the idea that Boulanger had

President’s Corner...

Since this is a new year, and this is the first HCFI newsletter of 2015, I wanted to start
off with a new column and an introduction. I am the new President of the HCFI Board of
Directors.

I have been on the board of the HCFI for many years, and in the past have served as di-
rector, secretary, and vice-president. I am also president of the Motor Transport Museum
in Campo, California, and recently retired from the Automobile Club of Southern Cali-
ifornia (AAA).

As you will notice in the column listing the Board of Directors, there have been some
recent changes made. Former President Don Sable, former Treasurer Tom Kettenburg,
and former Public Relations Director Reid Carroll have all resigned due to personal time
restraints. I would like to thank these gentleman for devoting their time and efforts in the
past to the HCFI, and wish them good luck in their future endeavors.

Further, their departures have left three openings on the Board of Directors that we wish to fill with interested and quali-
fied people. If you are interested in serving on the HCFI’s Board of Directors, please contact executive director “Mae” Mac-
Pherson or myself at the library.

In conclusion, I’d like to thank you for reading this column; I hope you all look forward to future editions of it. Finally,
thank you to all the members of the Automotive Research Library of the HCFI, for supporting the automotive hobby, and
helping to preserve the literature by supporting the Automotive Research Library.

Greg Long
President / HCFI Board of Directors

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Pierre Boulanger circa 1939
lost his mind in the eyes of his design staff, however, were this vehicle should be only a third of the price of the wildly popular and successful Citroen II Traction Avant, and the kicker – it did not matter whatsoever what the car looked like.

Andre Lefebvre, the designer behind the aforementioned Traction Avant, was tapped to tackle this project, which he deemed 'ridiculous.' Its code name under development was the ‘TPV’ which stood for ‘Toute petit voiturette’ or ‘very small car.’ The Citroën TPV’s staff was among the first on record to engage in what is now common practice in business worldwide prior to its appearance on the drawing board: market research. For five months, over 10,000 people in and around France’s agricultural circles were asked what they would require from a vehicle, and the results astonished the design staff – proving without a doubt that Boulanger was indeed on to something, as even non-farmers were interested in the concept.

Thus, Lefebvre got to work. Taking a cue from Boulanger’s time in the Air Force and his time as a former aircraft designer, the initial bodywork was to include bracing wires as opposed to a standard chassis, not unlike what was found in aviation designs of the time. The goal was to keep the car lightweight (under 660lbs), so aluminum was to be the primary material. Aluminum was perceived to be a material that would
soon be much cheaper, but this was one of many mis-calculations that would plague the development of the 2CV. Aluminum was very expensive, and would eventually become more so during WWII; despite this fact, it was still a staple of the car for many years – particularly the corrugated sheeting used in the car’s body that was similar to the design of the German Junkers aircraft.

The prototype introduced in 1937 presented a plethora of problems that time and trial and error would eventually iron out, but the ‘no frills’ concept had been thoroughly adhered to. The car had a crank start, no reverse in the gearbox, magnesium suspension arms and torsion springs under the rear seat serving as the suspension.

In fact, the front seats were nothing more than fabric hung from the roof, and the roof was fabric stretched over the aluminum frame. The steering wheel was actually handlebars, and the motor was that of a 300cc BMW motorcycle. This first prototype was scrapped after only fifty yards of driving. Many others followed, including the one that suffered a short-circuit, igniting the fuel tank, and eventually the magnesium suspension arms, resulting in an inferno that left nothing left of the car but the carburetor (the only thing not made of aluminum.)

The prototype that eventually was ready for production after ‘ironing out the wrinkles’ appeared during the German occupation of France in 1939, but was disman-
Eight years away from the TPV project during the war allowed Boulanger to logically rethink his goals for the car and the possibilities of making them a reality. The once stubborn and adamant designer realized that even in pre-war France, the TPV was an impossibility in its current form, let alone in post-war France. One by one, the details that he held firm on in the beginning were slowly being replaced by the practical, the modern, and the more functional. The weight of the car was now above 880lbs. The motor was now an air-cooled 375cc engine that had been suggested to him by Walter Becchia, who defected from Talbot Motor Company with carburetor specialist Lucien Girard (arguably Europe’s greatest experts in auto engineering) due to difficulties with German authorities at Talbot. The air-cooled engine solved the anti-freeze problem, but initially Boulanger was incensed to find a fourth gear on the gearbox, which was explained off by Becchia as not an extra gear but ‘an overdrive.’ On the early models, the gear plate lists this as the letter ‘S’ after 1-2-3 (for surmultiplee’, or ‘overdrive’).

The aluminum and magnesium had been replaced by steel (mostly due to the inability for workers to weld aluminum during wartime without the equipment that had been confiscated by the SS); the suspension had been replaced by shock absorbers, which were once forbidden by Boulanger as they reminded him of the bloated cars of the rich. The cellulose acetate (or Perspex) windows were replaced by glass, and the crank start mechanism was replaced by a self-starter, which after many experiments (one of which was a rubber band concept not unlike that of winding the propeller of a toy airplane was considered to save weight) forced Boulanger to relent yet again. Unbeknownst to him, his staff – who knew that the self-starter was inevitable – had already produced one sometime earlier.

One of the more practical additions was that of an additional headlight, which came to be after one of the test drivers was nearly killed by a truck driver on an evening drive who thought the single headlamp was that of a motorcycle that he had misjudged. A rear-view mirror was also added – something that had not even crossed the minds of the designers up to that point because of the clearance issues with the roof, which was heightened to Boulanger’s specifications after a test drive that did not allow him to wear his hat. The car now had a frame that was curved plate steel reinforced by steel tubing. The final stage was the outer design, which was first taken on by renowned body designer Bertoni, but was rejected outright by Boulanger and replaced by the design brought to the table by designers Steck and Caneau in February of 1948 – the year of its debut at the Paris Salon. Many features of the 1939 prototype were maintained, particularly the ‘Bauhaus’ style circular doors.

Most of the staff thought the car too ugly to sell due to its focus on the practical rather than the aesthetic, but it debuted at the Paris Salon anyway, much to the amazement of the automotive press, who doubted that the car even existed because of the secrecy under which it was developed (although one reporter had managed to sneak a photo of what the press had been calling the ‘3CV’ during a test drive in an enclosed park by mounting a ladder to the roof of his own car). Now called the 2CV, the reaction to it was amazement – at the fact that Citroen had developed a complete four-door car with a 375cc engine for the price of a Messerschmitt - and laughter - at its sheer ugliness.

Production started in 1949, and demand was so great that waiting lists had to be created. Boulanger had given strict instructions to these lists because he would not waiver from his original principles. Priority was given to “those who have to travel by car because of their work and for whom ordinary cars are too dear to buy, maintain, and use.” Inspectors visited potential buyers to verify the social

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criteria, and each buyer was contracted to promise to report in writing their experiences with the 2CV. The ‘great mistake’ became immensely popular, particularly in the Netherlands, but was a commercial failure in Britain and the U.S. until the energy crisis of the 1970’s, where it became a staple in the streets of the U.K. – Kevin J. Parker

Bibliography & Photo Credits:

Let us know you're out there, and what you think!

Thanks to all of you for your continued support, as we could not function without it! Many thanks to Bob and his crew, and Alan as well for a job well done!

The world is a dangerous place to live; not because of the people who are evil, but because of the people who don't do anything about it.

Albert Einstein

Donations to the HCFI

In these difficult economic times, raising funds for the ongoing projects at the HCFI Library is even more difficult than usual. The HCFI Library is still investigating new premises, as we have seriously outgrown the current leased location. Many suitable properties are currently on the market at below normal prices but those prices are not expected to hold for long. The HCFI Board is working diligently to find a suitable property and you can help….

We need your help, both now and in the longer term. While none of us looks forward to our passing, most of us make plans for our estate. Please don't forget the HCFI during these planning stages. While monetary gifts are most welcome, we can offer excellent tax breaks for items donated to the HCFI Library. Just think: without your timely intervention, all those books and periodicals you have accumulated over the years could end up in the local landfill, lost to future auto enthusiasts forever.

As part of the ongoing Scanning Project, the HCFI Board has decided to add additional periodicals from 1935 to 1960 to the on-line library. To complete this and go beyond 1960 will cost about $17,000 over the next year. Grant monies have become more and more difficult to acquire. Again, monetary donations for this extension of the on-line library are most welcome.

Next Board Meeting
The next Board Meeting will be on May 20th, 2015 at 9:00 AM at the Library Office: 8186 Center Street, Suite F La Mesa, CA 91942.
**Gifts In Memory Of:**
Sandy Grover
Clinton (Sam) & Anne Gurnee
Virginia Shaw
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**COMPLETE SETS OF HCCA’S GAZETTE & FORD MODEL T CLUB’S VINTAGE FORD FOR SALE.**
The HCFI has available for sale complete sets of the above magazines. We also have many duplicates so if you need to fill in your collection give us a call.

- Duplicates run 1939-1949 $15.00
- 1950-1959 $10.00
- 1960-1969 $ 5.00
- 1970-1979 $ 3.00
- 1980 up $ 1.00

The full set of Gazettes through 2010 would be $1200. and the Vintage Ford through 2008 would be $900.

Please contact “Mac” 619-464-0301 or research@hcfi.org.

**OVER 1,800,000 PAGES SCANNED SO FAR**

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**Books For Sale**
The Library has books for sale, they are duplicates of books in our archive. As the Library continues to receive donations of books and periodicals we occasionally get duplicates, we always keep the best and most valuable books in the archives. The other books need to be sold to provide space for the additional books. An updated list of available books can be requested at any time by calling or emailing a request of the latest listing of about 1,900 books. Call: 619-464-0301 or email: research@hcfi.org.

**Car For Sale**
The Library has received a 1926 Model T Ford Turing Car. We would like to sell it for $11,500 to help fund the Library. Appears to be a complete, need some TLC. This picture was from a year ago.

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*From Motor August 1964*
Chronicles of the Automotive Industry in America, For 1925

Production for the year: 3,735,171 passenger cars, 530,659 trucks and buses.

General Motors acquired control of Yellow Truck & Coach Manufacturing Co.

Oldsmobile introduces chromium plating.

A.C.F. acquired Fageol Motors Company of Ohio and moved operations to Detroit

General Motors Truck Company introduced a one-ton truck, the first truck to have
four-wheel brakes.

Elwood G. Haynes, Joseph J. Cole and Edward and Harry Lozier died.

Paul G. Hoffman became vice president of Studebaker, in charge of sales.

Maxwell-Chalmers was reorganized as Chrysler Corporation.

A Duesenberg Special, driven by Peter DePaolo and Norman Batten, set a new rec-
ord (101.13 m.p.h.) in winning the Indianapolis Speedway Sweepstakes.

Ford production exceeded 9,000 a day.

Fisher Body acquired Fleetwood, a custom body-building company.

More than 150 electric railway systems were now operating motor buses.

The 25-millionth U.S. motor vehicle was made.

A national chain of drive-yourself stations was established.

Ralph Munford drove a Chandler 1,000 mile in 689 minutes, a record.

Bumpers, front and rear, were now standard equipment.

New make this year: Acorn, Ajax, Astor, Backhus, Bauer, Barver, Buck,
Diana, Eastern Dairies, Harrie, Julian, LaFrance-Republic, Majestic, Mayfair,
Morrissey, O.K., Wright.