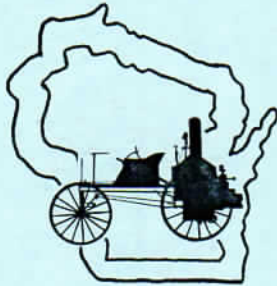


spark

no.8



A LETTER FROM THE EDITOR: THE WINTER MEETING

Instead of talking about the Spark, I thought this time I would talk about our Second Annual WSAH Winter Meeting. The main thing I want to say is "DON'T MISS IT!" A lot of you still haven't returned your postcards to Phil Hall--and the meeting date draws ever nearer. In case you didn't notice, this is going to be a very important event. It is important enough, in fact, that notice of the meeting in Old Cars Weekly has brought us several new members in addition to inquiries from one end of the country to the other. So, get those cards to Phil right away. He needs to have some idea of how many members will be attending the tours and various meals (that includes members and their guests). Let Phil know your plans right away. If you've lost your card, or for some reason never got one, drop Phil a line. (Phil Hall, 754 N. 113th St., Wauwatosa, WI 53226), or give him a call at Midwest Racing News (414-774-4748).

Phil and his partner in crime, Ray Scroggins, have put a lot of work into putting our Milwaukee meeting together. I hope I can help give them a big turnout. A complete (nearly) schedule for both days is included with this issue of the Spark. I've also included a detailed map of the area.

One thing that isn't detailed on the enclosed schedule is what will be happening at the membership meeting before we wrap up on Saturday afternoon. Of course, the meeting will be fairly open, but among the "must discuss" items are the SAH dues increase (see Matt's Director's Message") and the Wisconsin Automotive History Project. When it comes to the Project, most of the talking is over. What we have to do now is start writing. What we will be doing at the membership meeting is making specific assignments. A few such assignments have already been made. Take another look at our Wisconsin auto industry roster and consider which of

the many histories you would like to write.

That's enough for now. See you February 27 and 28 in Milwaukee. You can't afford to miss it!

* * * *

The man on our cover is, of course, Brooks Stevens. The artist is Randy Clausen. Randy works in the production/art department at Krause Publications.

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DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE: BROOKS STEVENS, OUR FIRST HONORARY MEMBER

As we meet in Milwaukee this year for our second annual mid-winter meeting, your Board of Directors has directed me to perform the exceedingly pleasant task of conferring our first Honorary Membership on member Brooks Stevens. In preparation for doing this I spent some time acquainting myself with some of Mr. Stevens' automotive and industrial design activities during the last half century. I found this task akin to climbing an enormous mountain. You tend to take it for granted when it is far off in the distance, and it isn't clear exactly where it commences to be a mountain, but mostly you are awed by the enormity of its dimensions and its dominance over the other terrain as you go along.

As I reviewed the diverse activities of Brooks Stevens and his associates, I was constantly reminded that the successes that they have enjoyed in their industrial and automotive design endeavors since the mid-1930's have required far more than the straight lines and standard curves of the draftsman or the sharp pencils of the cost accountant. In an

age that has often ignored the importance of design and settled for the mundane and undistinguished, Stevens' designs have invariably been intensely original and fiercely pioneering. Some have been controversial, and many have had revolutionary impact on the material environment that we all inhabit.

As one examines the multi-faceted design career of Brooks Stevens, one is at once impressed by its breadth, by the variety of its undertakings, by the scope of its successes, and by the consistency with which Stevens and his associates are on the cutting edge of progress in so many areas of design.

Unfortunately, Mr. Stevens has been so very busy with design projects for the last half century that he has not articulated his philosophy to the public with the persistence of some of the other individuals in the field--men like Buckminster Fuller and Raymond Loewy. He has chosen to remain active in design rather than to become a senior statesman for it. But while we have benefitted from the changes wrought on our material environment by Stevens' efforts, some of his colleagues and students have benefitted from his articulation of his philosophy of design. One of them was kind enough to share some of it with me.

Put most simply, Stevens' endeavors emanate from a guiding and consistent concept of what design ought to be. For Stevens, design is a totally involving process that takes in every aspect of the subject of design. So from the beginning Stevens designed two things: a concept of design and things. The two, the concept and the things, grew and adapted to each other over the years. The result that we see is designs that combine originality, ingenuity and vitality with absolute integrity. And thus, they stand out against the ill-conceived and shabby of our age in brilliance.

Brooks Stevens' formal training was at the Cornell School of Architecture in the early 1930's-- a place that was a veritable hotbed of genius, producing such giants as Philip Johnson in the field of architecture. Stevens, however, returned to Milwaukee after Cornell and worked for a time as a freelance designer in packaging and graphics. Success came quickly and easily to him, and in 1934 he founded Brooks Stevens Design Associates. That same year Stevens became a Charter Fellow of the prestigious ISDA (Industrial Designers of America).

From this point on the growth and impact of Stevens' influence was inexorable. The designs that he and his associates conceived were often intriguing, sometimes revolutionary, usually successful and always original. So the designs grew in influence and the concept of design grew with them. As one would expect, the client list of this new design group grew from a few Milwaukee corporations to an international clientele numbering over 300. This client list represents every kind of enterprise and product line imaginable, and in each case the design work includes a total treatment of the product. Just as often, entire product lines and even the structure of the client company itself become the objects of this total design treatment. For this is Stevens' philosophy of design--the broadest possible involvement in every aspect of a design product. In some cases this includes design of the product, of the plant in which it is built, and of the marketing and promotion for the company which makes it. For Stevens there are no artificial limits to his involvement in the projects that he and his associates undertake.

From the beginning Stevens and his associates attacked the broadest possible range of design challenges. They did this with a vitality and originality that staggers the imagination. In the process they produced an incredible list of firsts and bests in numerous fields. In some cases they introduced the very concept of design to areas that had not known it.

Brooks Stevens' active involvement in automotive design began in 1940. As with other activities, the scope of this involvement is awesome as it involves such facets as design, racing, collecting and actual production. Recent and present automotive clients of the Stevens organization include Delorean Motor Company, American Motors and Road America. Rather than try to detail Brooks Stevens' activities in the automotive field, we will have the significant opportunity to listen to him do this at our mid-winter meeting. We will also see the Brooks Stevens Automotive Museum and the Excalibur production facility. This represents the rare opportunity to see both the artifacts of an important part of automotive history and to interact with the person responsible for them.

WSAH members Ray Scroggins and Phil Hall did a great deal of work in arranging our mid-winter meeting. They were both unqualified in their appreciation of Mr. Stevens and his organization for their generosity in working with us to make our meeting a success. We appreciate this, as we appreciate the fact that one of our members, Brooks Stevens, has achieved the prominence that he has in several automotive fields. We appreciate the superb automotive contributions that led to this prominence.

Mr. Stevens is a member of numerous professional organizations and societies (including the SAE and ASME) and has been duly honored by all of them. We know that conferring our first Honorary Membership in the Wisconsin SAE cannot rank in prestige with the other honors that he has received, but we also know that he has received no other honor that conveys more genuine enthusiasm and respect than ours.

* * * * *

On a less pleasant topic--

I have received several communications from our members regarding the increase in national SAH dues to \$20. I, and others, had heard the announcement of the dues increase at the Hershey Banquet, but it was unclear whether this pertained to this year's dues or future dues. There is a general feeling in our group that the dues increase is unreasonable. I have drafted a letter to Dave Brownell expressing this feeling, along with other concerns that members of our chapter have. This letter has been sent to WSAH Board Members for their review and will have been sent to Dave by the time that you read this.

I have decided to pay the \$20 for this year. Each of you have to decide this issue for yourself. If you wish to do this, and you have already sent the \$10 national dues to our treasurer with your WSAH renewal, you will shortly get a note from him stating that you need to send an additional \$10. Of course, if you elect not to do this, Vince will return the first \$10.

Basically, if any of our members should decide not to renew their national membership, we will be called on by national to enforce our by-laws and throw them out of the WSAH. At that point we would have to make some very hard decisions about the future of our affiliation with the SAH. I would suggest that before you decide not to renew national membership, you wait until after the February meeting in Milwaukee. I have invited Dave Brownell or any other representative of the National Board to that meeting to explain the situation from their point of view. I hope that they choose to be represented and can resolve some of these issues. If you have any other thoughts on this, please let me know.

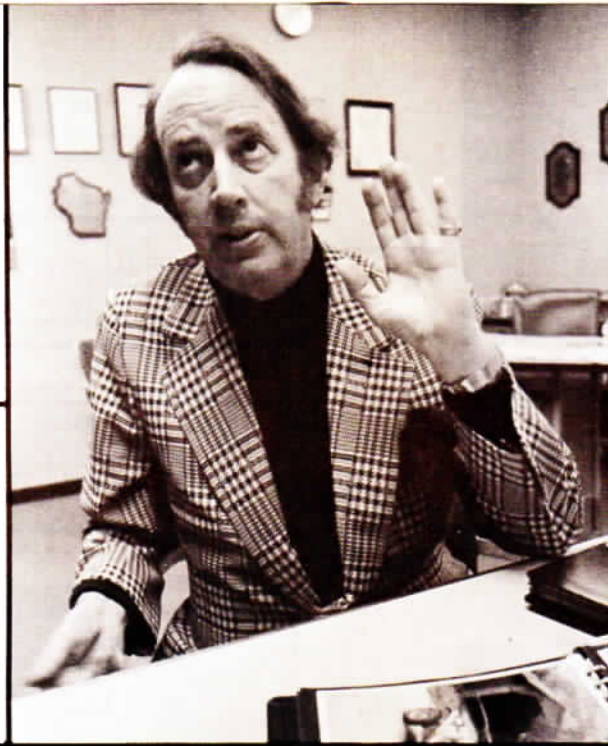
Matt Joseph

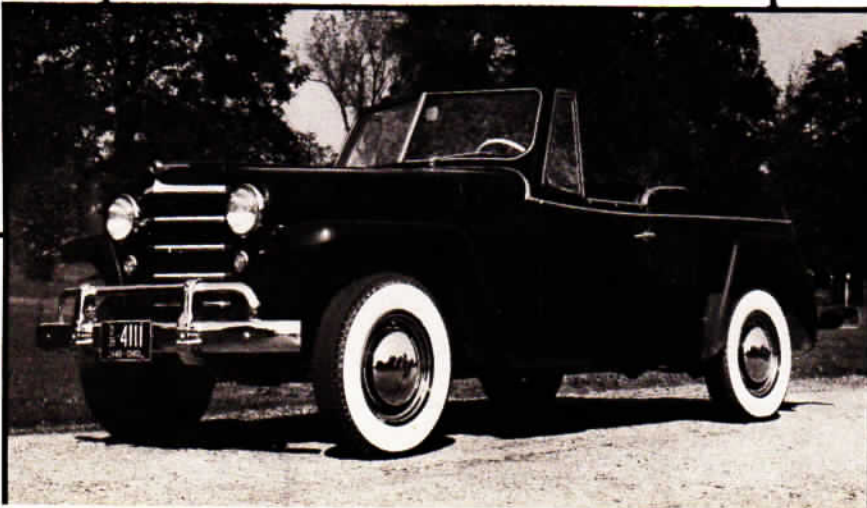
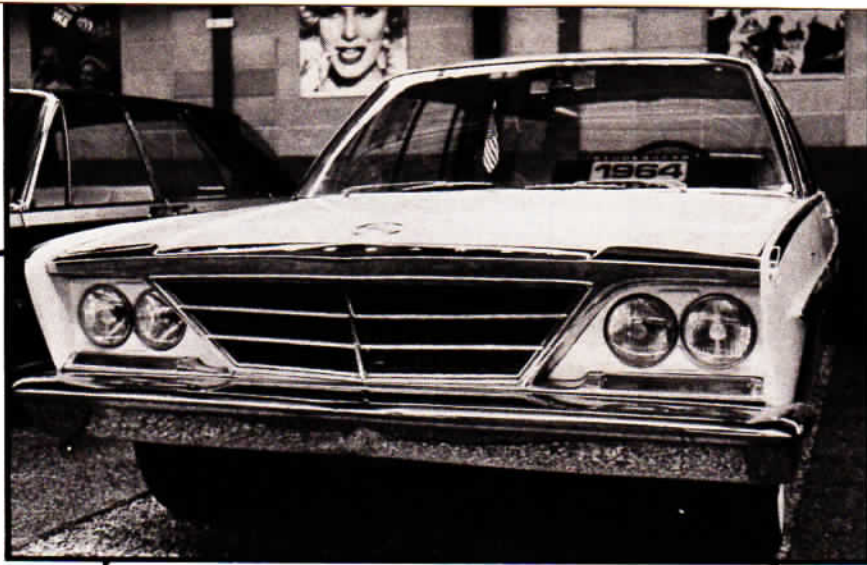
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A Brooks Stevens

Design Portfolio







EXCALIBUR: 1964 to Date

*Excalibur Automobile Corp.
West Allis*

Studebaker had ordered up a show stopper for the 1964 New York Automobile show. They asked Brooks Stevens to give it to them. Stevens was a consultant to Studebaker at the time and the company knew that he was the man to go to for an exciting design.

At the time, Studebaker was importing Mercedes cars so the project show car was very appropriately done. Design was based on the 1927 Mercedes Benz. Chassis was Studebaker Daytona and most of the components were Studebaker Avanti.

It took Stevens eight weeks to build the prototype, with the help of his two sons, David B. (now Excalibur president) and William C. (Steve, executive vice president). Unfortunately, when the three Stevens arrived at the New York Coliseum for the big auto show, they found that Studebaker had just announced plans to phase out automobile production in the United States. Too much blood, sweat and Stevens pride had gone into the Studebaker prototype to simply put it back on the trailer and head back to Wisconsin. Instead, Stevens and sons decided to show the car anyway.

A space was rented and the Excalibur name was revived from the Brooks Stevens designed, built and raced cars of the Fifties. The display caused enough excitement to produce a list of potential buyers, including New York City's largest Chevrolet dealer. His only request was that his Excalibur be powered by a Chevrolet engine, starting a tradition that has lasted to this day.

After the New York show an ad was placed in the Wall Street Journal, to "test the water." Some 400 people replied to the ad. Of them, 25

paid \$1,000 deposit toward the purchase of the \$6,000 sports cars. Another \$15,000 was borrowed. With the \$40,000 total, David and Steve Stevens founded the Excalibur Automobile Corporation.

Since its inception in 1964, the company has produced roughly 2,000 cars in its 80,000 square foot facility in the Milwaukee suburb of West Allis. The first 100 were built by the brothers themselves. Today, 100 employees turn out almost 300 cars a year.

Design evolution has loosely followed that of Mercedes Benz fifty years ago. The Series I Excalibur was inspired by the 1927 Mercedes Benz SSK. The Series II, which came out in 1970, in order to meet federal standards, followed the lines of early Thirties Mercedes Benz cars. In 1975 Excalibur arrived in Series III form, looking much like Mercedes sports cars, circa 1934-36. The Series IV is stylistically reminiscent of the Mercedes Benz 540K.

The Excalibur is a unique piece of machinery, well known for more than 15 years for its engineering and workmanship. Its place in Wisconsin's proud automotive history is secure.

Chris Halla

-30-

CHAPTER/MEMBER NEWS

In March, Matt Joseph will take his knowledge out of the garage and into the classroom as the "Mechanical and Physical Restoration of Old Cars" is offered over the Wisconsin Educational Telephone Network (ETN) for the first time.

When first offered in 1975, the Extension course, "Collecting Old Cars," was the nation's first university level class in auto restoration. Now dozens of colleges and thousands of hobbyists

participate in auto restoration courses. The new ETN course will begin March 4 and will include nine sessions covering auto restoration from bumper to bumper and road to roof. Matt and guest experts will examine buying classic autos, restoring engines, bodies and upholstery and research for the restorer.

ETN, an arm of UW-Extension, works like a gigantic conference call. Via ETN, almost 200 classrooms scattered through every county in Wisconsin are hooked together in two-way telephone communications. Students can participate in lectures given hundreds of miles away by hearing the lecture, following along in guidebooks and asking questions via the telephone hook-up. Matt's telephone conference class will originate from a workshop in front of a live audience at La Crosse, Wis.

For further information on the course "Mechanical and Physical Restoration of Old Cars," call Matt at (608) 262-3731 or (608) 262-1694.

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RESEARCH COLUMN

Gary Busha, 3123 S. Kennedy Dr., Sturtevant 53177 is seeking all kinds of automotive fiction. He will gladly pay the cost of xeroxing and postage and will return all originals.

Chris Halla, 509 W. Fulton, Waupaca 54981 would like to hear from anyone who owns an old Harley-Davidson motorcycle suitable for photos.

W.T. Cameron, 7495 Clearwater Rd., Minocque 54548 continues his search for any and all information on the Cameron car, the Cameron brothers and the corporation they headed.

Tim Tilton, c/o Krause Publications, 700 E. State St., Iola 54990 is interested in information and photos pertaining to the Porsche 914.

Wally Wray, Chicory Hills, Rt. 2, Argyle 53504 is looking for free, non-returnable steam car photos, especially of the in-progress restoration type--plus any information and tips on steam car restoration. Wally also seeks information pertaining to the history of Kissel.

-30-

Director:	Matt Joseph
Associate Director:	Wally Wray
Secretary:	Chris Halla
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Directors-at-large:	Bill Cameron Tim Tilton Phil Hall
Winter Meeting Co-Chairmen:	Ray Scroggins Phill Hall
Newsletter Editor:	Chris Halla
Associate Editor:	Gary Busha

How to get to the winter meet

