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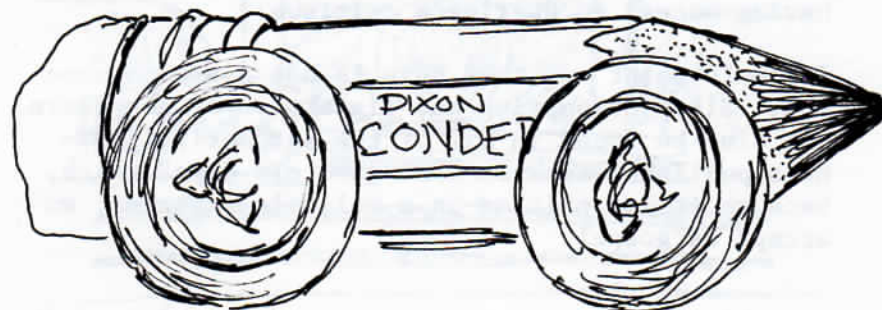
Editorial Notes

In SPARK 24 we talked about the basics of preparing a manuscript for submission to a periodical or book publisher. In this issue we'll take a more detailed look at writing for the auto hobby press.

As active amateur historians most of us have had our work published from time to time. A few of us depend on writing for all or part of our income and have had a great deal published. And, of course, there are those among us who are as yet unpublished. From my own point of view, the SPARK's purpose is not only to present automotive commentary and history, and WSAH news, but also to assist our members in the production and publication of their writings, whether the author be neophyte or old hand.

The article herein on auto hobby writing was originally published in slightly different form in the February 1981 issue of Writer's Digest. It has been changed only where information needed updating.

Chris Halla





## Director's Message

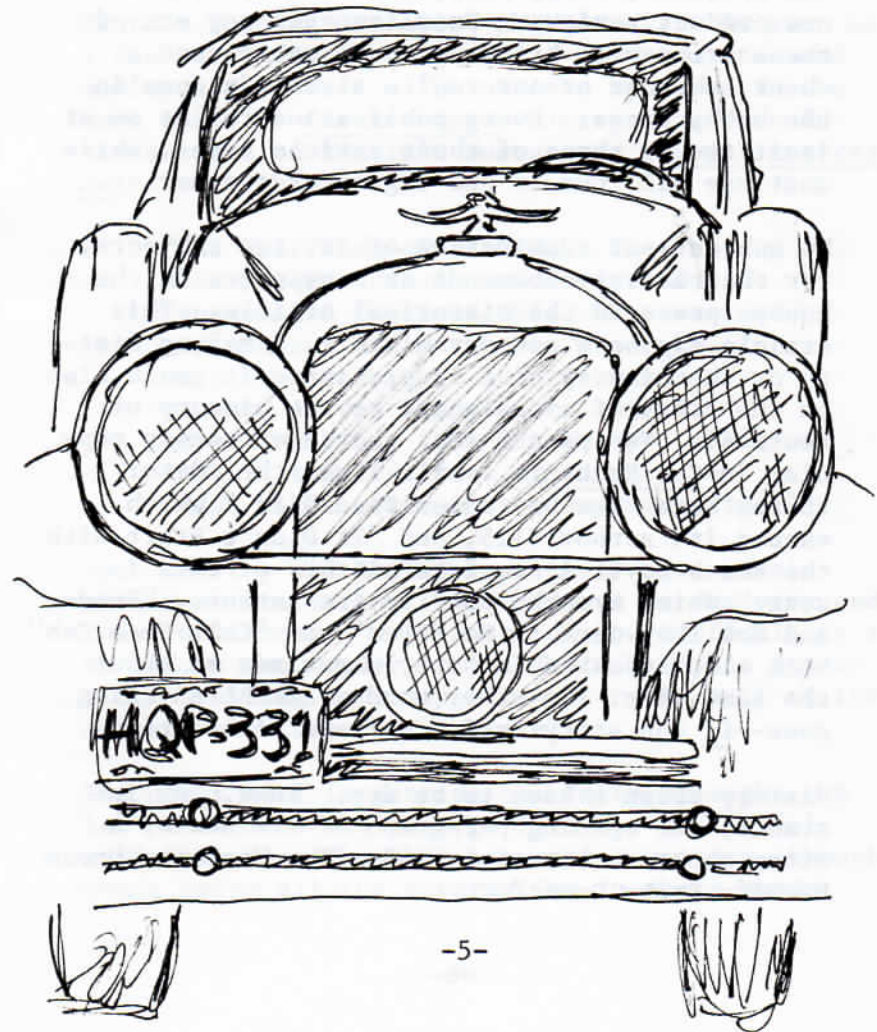
I suppose it's inevitable, but no matter how hard an author tries--no matter how thorough his research, how careful his editing--some errors seem bound to creep into every article, report or book. Equally inevitable is the speed at which we readers jump in with "letters to the editor," some of which get published while others--perhaps fortunately--never see the light of day. Often the reported errors are trivial, but some are gross mistakes that never should have been made and once made, can hardly ever be corrected. Trouble is, the "correct" facts as brought out by some more knowledgeable person are usually lost as time goes on, and future historians, having access only to the original, may never get to see the corrections and thus perpetuate the errors.

For instance, George Husting, the Kissel authority, found no less than 22 mistakes in the lead article in the November 1983 issue of Cars and Parts entitled "1929 Kissel White Eagle Speedster." The sub-head reads "Milwaukee Brews Up a Real Classic." There is every reason to believe that some future article on the White Eagle will overlook the fact that the car was built in Hartford, Wisconsin and perpetuate the other mistakes, not having access to Husting's critique.

I should point out that this is not a new phenomenon. Sloppy reporting and distortion of the facts can also be found in all of the automotive journals published back in "the good old days" which, because it was printed in a reliable magazine, we accept as gospel.

The moral in all this? Be as thorough and painstaking as possible in your research and reporting and then submit your manuscript to as many people as you can find who have knowledge of your subject for review now instead of suffering the embarrassment of having it pointed out in some future "letter to the editor."

Bill Cameron





## WRITING FOR THE AUTO HOBBY PRESS

By Chris Halla

As every WSAH member is aware, several distinct types of articles are used in auto hobby periodicals: history pieces, how-to and other technical articles, hobby news, and book reviews and new product reviews. Excellence in any one of these areas will bring you publication and a check, whether or not you're already a name in the hobby press. Every publication relies on at least two or three of these article types, while most use all four to one degree or another.

No subject--or combination of any two subjects, for that matter--commends as many pages in the hobby press as the historical article. This article may be a company history, a marque history or the history of a single car. It could also be the story of a designer, or the history of Route 66. Two pieces that proved extremely popular in Car Exchange, while I was the editor there, were "The Day James Dean Died," which earned its author \$125, and "It Didn't Start With the Beach Boys: A complete history of cars in song," which brought \$340 to its author. "Roads and How They Came to Be Paved" and "Call Me a Cab" both also appeared in hobby magazines at about the same time. In other words, almost anything goes--if the story is factual and interesting.

History doesn't have to be dry. Take, for instance, the opening paragraph of Tim Howley's story about the cars of 1958, "The Year the Dream Machine Broke Down:"

Somewhere back in the star-spangled days of WWII, in a foxhole in Germany or on an atoll in the South Pacific, G.I. Joe had a dream. He dreamed of an enormous postwar automobile, one with wings and fins and jet pods so it could fly, with more controls than a B-29. . . .

There's nothing dry about that at all! As soon as I read that first paragraph, I was ready to send Howley a \$90 check. The article appeared in the next issue of Car Exchange. Jerry Heasley sold his article on the 1970 Mustang to Special Interest Autos with this:

"The last rose of summer." That's what Jacques Passino of Ford racing fame called the Boss 302. "The engine and the car did more than we could have expected it to do. It was a winner, it was a good car, a good street machine. But I guess you could call it the last rose of summer, because right after that everything died."

Both Heasley and Howley kept their historical articles interesting from word one to the very end. These writers are well aware of how difficult it is to inform the reader if you don't have his attention. Telling an interesting story is half of the successful historical article.

The other half is getting the facts straight. A lot of information must go into the historical article. Even the best automotive writers, though, don't carry all the information in their heads.



They get it from many sources: books, period magazines, corporate PR departments and archives, and interviews. Two excellent sources of names and addresses of contacts in the industry are The Motoring Press Guide (Kroll Verlag, Box 1160, D-8031 Seefeld/Obb., West Germany) and The International Motor Press Association Roster (230 Valley Rd., Montclair, New Jersey 07042). Car clubs are another excellent source of information. They are made up of enthusiasts who like nothing better than to see their favorite cars in print. The most complete listing of car clubs can be found in the Vintage Auto Almanac (Hemmings Motor News, Box 945, Bennington, Vermont 05201).

When writing automotive history, present all the facts while injecting some human element into the story. If you know the subject bumper to bumper and road to roof, don't be afraid to throw in a little personal opinion. (Nothing keeps them reading like controversy.) Otherwise, stick to the facts. All periodical editors want history that lives. They are tired of words that lay lifeless on the page.

### Tech Check

Now let's look at technical writing. It's a difficult field, where good information can make a project, and inaccuracy can break it. If you happen to be a crack tech writer already, you have a head start. If not, you can still do the job. I have worked for two different companies as a tech writer (the pay, by the way, is pretty good), and I still don't completely trust myself. What I do--what I advise others to do--is find a mechanic in a restoration shop or a speed shop, or a knowledgeable shade-tree mechanic working on a

project I want to tell my readers about. Then I stick with the mechanic from the beginning of the project to the end. I have him explain (while I take pictures and notes) every step. I ask plenty of questions. Remember, the reader wants to put his trust in your information. You may also use other published sources in writing your technical piece. Checking yourself against published sources in the technical area you're covering is always a good idea. Don't plagiarize, but do check and double-check.

### Old News

The easiest way to break into the auto hobby press is with a news story in one of the tabloids such as Old Cars. To write hobby news, you must know what's going on. Most periodicals carry a "what's happening" column. The most complete one is published in Old Cars. Once you find an event you would like to cover, give the editor a call, or write him, and ask for an assignment. A phone call is best. If someone else hasn't already been assigned the article, chances are that you will get the job, even though the editor may not know you. Being able to shoot good photographs is helpful with this kind of article; it's almost a necessity, in fact. Many news stories are published without photos, but that is a decision best left to the editor, not the author. Keep in mind, too, that if your story is published with your photos, your paycheck will be larger.

The event you cover may be a car show, swap meet, concourse d'elegance or reunion. Or it could be a display of old cars at the local jazz festival. Don't bother with mall shows or a few vintage buggies in the local Lions parade. Hobbyists



participate in the latter two events, but such events aren't usually outstanding enough to warrant hobby press coverage.

Certain key elements at every car show and swap meet will make up the foundation of your story. When you get to the event (or, better yet, beforehand), get in touch with the organizers. Let them know that you will be attending as a representative of the hobby press. They may be able to give you some information right away, such as how many people are registered to show cars or sell their wares. They can also give you background on the event. If there are any special events within events, these people will direct you to them. When I cover a show or swap, I like to meet as many of the organizers as possible. This not only assures me of getting all the information above, but also helps in getting photos and being introduced to any celebrities who might be attending. More than once, a show has produced an interview with a celebrity collector.

If you're covering a show, talk to a dozen or so vehicle owners. Get their feelings about that particular show and shows in general. These little chats can be the magic that turns your story to gold. Swap meet vendors can be asked the same questions, but also make sure to ask them how sales are going. Many of your readers are vendors, and they want to stay right on top of things.

Some other events that are likely grist for the hobby press mill include museum openings and closings, art shows that employ automobiles or automobilia, happenings in the lives of automotive pioneers and notables, and, of course, more sensational events like fires, floods and volcanoes

as they affect the life of the car enthusiast. Many universities have programs in auto restoration that are worth writing about. Hobbyists want to be kept aware. Both reader and editor depend on the freelancer to see that all the news sees print. Covering hobby news may not seem very exciting, but it's the surest way I know to become known in the hobby and get a check in your mailbox.

And, sometimes it is exciting. Take the case of the Schlumph brothers. The Schlumphs, as you will recall, were a couple of wealthy French factory owners who collected Bugattis. Everything was fine until their Socialist Workers Party employees found out where the lion's share of factory profits were going: into the Bugatti collection. Then all hell broke loose. Old Cars where I was then working, immediately dispatched one of our English correspondents to the scene. When no other reporters were being allowed into the factory or the brothers' Bugatti museum, our reporter posed as a member of the Socialist Workers Party brotherhood, moved about at will, and filed a complete story with photos. Now that's exciting! Payment: \$500.

If doing the news just doesn't interest you, don't despair. There are other ways of breaking into the hobby press with news of another kind. As an automotive editor, I bought some 50-75 book reviews in a year at an average of \$10-\$15 apiece. Book reviews are easy to do: read the book, explain what it's about and let your reader know why he should buy it or avoid it. As long as you're honest, almost anything is suitable. It's a good idea to take a photo of the book's cover or send the dust jacket in with the review. The



main place freelancers fail in writing book reviews is right at the start. That is, in the first paragraph giving all the pertinent data on the book at hand. Here's the form I use: NAME OF THE BOOK (all in caps), By Author, Publisher and Address, number of pages, illustrated (or not), price and if paper or hardbound.

New products for the auto enthusiast also make good brief copy. Provide a review of the product, its price and a picture of it in use. I used to buy a dozen or so of these a year. The best new product reviews involve a thorough test of the product with an honest report of the results.

### Features and Photos

One thing that adds life to any article is art-- that is, photos or illustrations. Indeed, you would be hard-pressed selling a feature story without it. Occasionally a piece of original art will do, but usually nothing beats the tried and true photograph with its attendant caption or outline.

When illustrating a story, you must either go to the original source or someone who deals in factory press photos, or find existing examples of your subject. All news stories and many features are at least partially illustrated with the latter. Automobile Quarterly and Collectible Automobile do an outstanding job of using this kind of photo, always in full color. Most features also use some factory photos for illustration. If the company that produced the cars you're writing about is still in business, you can usually get photos from the corporate PR department or archives, either free or for a nominal charge. Automotive litera-

ture dealers, who sell at swap meets and through hobby press periodicals, are a good source of factory photos. (A note of caution though, some literature dealers will not sell photos for reproduction. My advice is don't do business with this sort of folk.)

When shooting your own photos at an auto show or swap meet, you will find that there are no rules. All you can do is be patient and hope for the best. Believe me, that's not easy when you are trying to photograph a car that hundreds of people want to get a close look at. Then, too, there are the picture wreckers. My recent favorite is the guy who stepped in front of me to pick his ear just as I snapped the shutter on an immaculate 1951 Talbot Lago coupe and later reappeared in my zoom lens where a '56 Chev Nomad had been. Don't let the wreckers frustrate you, though; patience will pay off. When shooting a vehicle with just a couple of people around it, don't be afraid to politely ask them to step aside for a moment.

Shoot from a low angle or a few feet above your subject. A small stepladder should be a part of every car photographer's bag of tricks. Photos should be shot in both a vertical and horizontal format. When you shoot a car, get it from every possible angle. Full front, full rear, full side (both sides), three-quarter front and three-quarter rear are the bare minimum in getting a set of pictures that both you and the editor can be happy with. Most magazines also use a number of interior and engine shots.

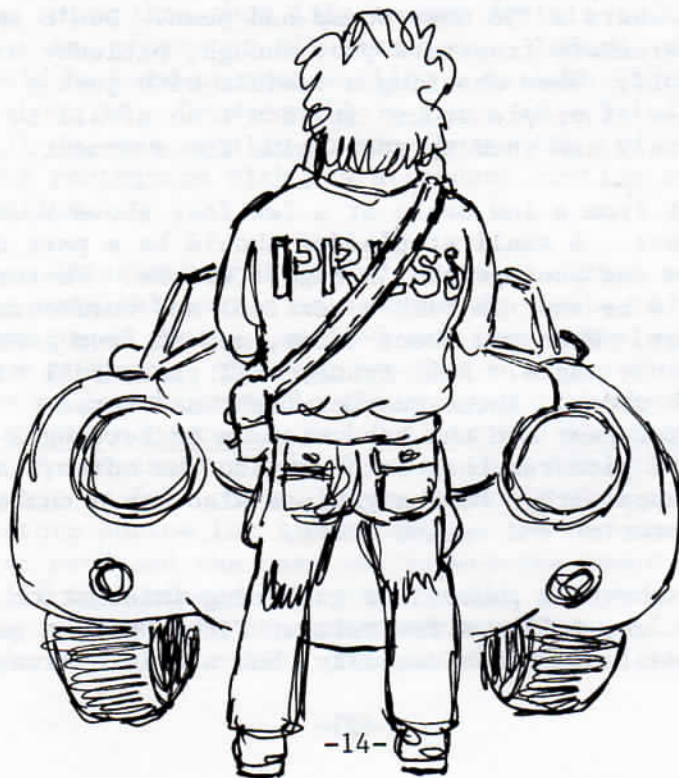
When shooting photos and gathering information for articles, follow a few rules: First, make a good impression. Dress casually, but neatly. Always



carry an extra pad and pens, plus plenty of b&w and color film.

Never cross barriers at a car show without an OK. Try to get an ID of some sort from the editor you're working for, the organizers, or both. Never touch or get into a car without the owner's permission. Once you have explained to the owner who you are and what you're doing, you will usually get all the cooperation you could possibly want.

With that kind of cooperation--and with accurate reporting and good photographs--you will be able to get behind the freelance driver's wheel, and shift your auto hobby writing into high gear.



## KISSEL SCRAPBOOK TREASURES

By Ken Nimocks

Inside the front cover is this simple, handwritten directive, "Feb. 10, 1955. This scrap book is to go to my son Robert E. Kissel, Green Bay, Wis." But to the old car enthusiast, this mere "scrap book" is more of a treasure chest, filled with photographs, newspaper articles, advertisements, letters, and the handwritten commentary on the history of the Kissel Motor Car Company by one of its founders, William L. Kissel.

The foresight shown by Mr. Kissel in gathering this information has proven to be a rare and valuable source for data on these majestic automobiles and the firsthand annotations easily prove or dispel most of the discrepancies that often follow a fallen marque. No doubt, Mr. Kissel was aware that a lot of history is lost due to the historymakers themselves being gone before the facts are documented, so at the age of 76 he assembled this scrapbook and thus made certain that the history of the Kissel would be accurately passed on. As it was, he had plenty of time to complete the project, for he was very active until his death in 1972 at the age of 93.

Now, of course, this treasure is in the possession of Robert E. Kissel, Sr., an affable gentleman now retired after 42 years in the paper industry and a man who is "not directly" interested in old cars, but is still very much involved with them through his interest in his fascinating family heritage. That heritage is the subject here. Because the



machines themselves have already been tested, photographed, and otherwise deservedly glamorized by writers in various publications, many readers may be quite familiar with the technical aspects of the Kissel, but the observations and anecdotes from some of the men who were there seem to make even the most common facts more interesting.

The Kissel Motor Car Company was founded in 1906 in Hartford, Wisconsin by Louis P. Kissel and his four sons, George A., William L., Otto and Adolph. According to notes in the scrapbook, the car came about because of the need for a stationary engine to be produced by Louis P. Kissel's company, The Hartford Plow Works. A patternmaker employed by the company made a drawing of a four-cylinder gas engine and offered the pattern if the company would make the castings. (The patternmaker's name appears to be "Sam Fouls," but it is not legible in the notes. It would be nice to give proper credit if any reader can help.) The engine proved successful, and William L. wrote, "We then decided to build up a car and bought the necessary parts such as a frame, axles, transmission, steering gear, wheels, radiator and a roadster body which we finished in 1905." That first car, called a Badger, was a copy of the Stoddard-Dayton, according to Robert, and was later given to Sam Fouls. Production of the Kissel Kar began in 1906 with quality cars in the medium and higher priced field. A Milwaukee Sentinel article dated May 13, 1906, told families to come to Hartford for jobs, "available to all who want them," and 40 to 50 new houses available for purchase by Kissel employees. Robert notes that a building supply firm was also owned by the Kissels.

On August 20, 1908, at the age of 70, Louis P.

Kissel was shot to death by a laid-off employee. Robert gave details that the man was one of those employees that had purchased a new home from the company and was out to get someone involved with the financing when he encountered Louis P. first. George, at age 27, became president of the company and head of finances and sales, while William, at age 29, headed up production, which included engineering and design. William's formal education was not mechanically oriented--he was a graduate of Spencerian Business College in Milwaukee--but with his years in his father's implement business and his interest in things mechanical, his capabilities, as well as those of his brothers, were soon proven. By 1912 the company had expanded into a million dollar corporation with over 900 employees and building about 3,500 cars and trucks a year. There were sales branches in 10 major cities and three foreign countries.

It should be noted that the vehicles were called "Kissel Kars" until 1919, after which they were called just "Kissel," because the company thought the former name sounded "too German."

The cars were all custom built, with no mass production or moving assembly lines through the entire duration of the company. Body panels were beat out by hand or by trip hammer or roller. They produced their own excellent four and six-cylinder engines and although they used Lycoming blocks for their eight cylinder, much of the rest of that engine was manufactured by Kissel. There has been some controversy in the past about whether the eight should be considered more Lycoming or Kissel, but William Kissel's handwriting on the margin of a 1959 Road & Track article notes some of the changes: "... using a larger bore 3 5/16" and longer stroke



4½." Also built our own aluminum rods--pistons, oil pump & alum. oil basin & alum. head." Some experts feel that the precision hand assembly and balancing of the engine made it much better than the original Lycoming. Robert Kissel worked summers in the plant during high school and college and recalls machining rods for the eight cylinder, a tedious job because the process was repeated over and over on each individual rod to meet precision specifications.

The most noticeable Kissel model, by far, has been the Gold Bug Speedster. Called the Two-Passenger Speedster by the company after its introduction at the 1918 New York Auto Show (where it reportedly "Stole the show") it was dubbed the Gold Bug by the late W.W. "Brownie" Rowland, auto editor of the Milwaukee Journal in 1919. The idea for the Gold Bug has been attributed to Conover T. Silver, the leading New York dealer for Kissel and Apperson automobiles. Kissel's scrapbook contains numerous pieces of correspondence on Silver's letterhead. There are also notes and letters from several Gold Bug owners, including one from artist James Montgomery Flagg, stating that he had purchased his sixth one. Among famous owners were Jack Dempsey, Amelia Earhart, Al Jolson, Greta Garbo, Rudy Valee, and even racer Ralph DePalma. Robert recalls that there were often famous visitors to the plant. The car body was designed by John Frederick "Fritz" Werner and Robert has many memories and anecdotes about him. Robert described him as "crusty" but a "real craftsman" who made gifts for him such as a wooden sword and shield and a beautiful hand inlaid wooden box which Robert still keeps on his mantel. Werner had built the bodies for the first automobiles owned by Kaiser Wilhelm II and Czar Nicholas of Russia

and his father had built royal coaches for the kings of Bavaria. Robert says "I remember my father saying he had to watch him because he wanted to put curly-Qs on the car like he did on coaches." Werner used a wall drawing board to sketch full-scale cars.

Robert also remembers Herman Palmer, the man responsible for the highly refined Kissel six cylinder engine. He says that Palmer was a benchhand working for \$1.25 a day when it was discovered that he was a graduate engineer from Germany. "They got him a drawing board and he became Chief Engineer."

Robert Kissel's first car at age 19 was a rare White Eagle Speedster. He said that there was always a car to drive, but this one was his from the beginning. "It had a special carburetor and was advertised to go 100 mph. It had two spare tires and a four-speed transmission. I roadtested the car before it had the body on it, the way they roadtested back then." The scrapbook has a newspaper article on George and William taking delivery of George's first car, a White Steamer, and a newspaper picture captioned "1st Car He Ever Bought" showing William with a 1937 Lincoln Zephyr coupe, with the explanation that he had previously owned only cars of his own manufacture.

Kissel kept up with or led the industry with their body styling and mechanicals, such as hydraulic brakes, and are also credited with a number of firsts including balanced engine parts, special colors, drawer-type slideout rear seats, lighted instruments, glove compartments, arm rests, and inside visors, some of the ideas coming from customers' custom built cars. Probably the most sig-



nificant first was the patented (several patent notices are in the scrapbook) "All Year Car" with a removable hardtop as well as a folding convertible top. Robert recalls a practical joker, a friend of his father's, coming into the office wearing a hat with a straw brim and felt top. When questioned he said it was his "All Year Hat!"

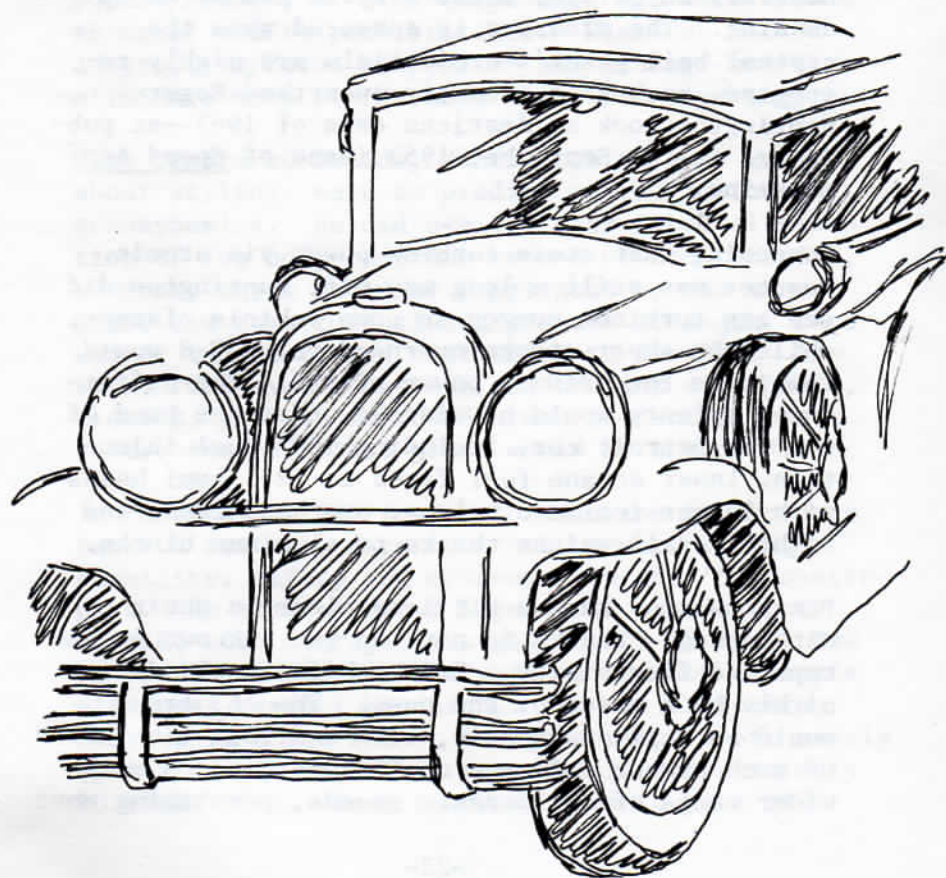
By the late Twenties Kissel, like many other auto manufacturers, was failing and had drastically reduced their production. They contracted with New Era to build 1,500 Ruxtons, but only produced about 35 of them. (Robert mentioned that he drove a Ruxton for his first trip to Green Bay.) They produced some trucks and taxis, but car production ended in 1931 with only 93 units. The factory was later used for production of West Bend outboard motors.

More facts and little details are assembled in the scrapbook than can even be touched upon in a short article like this; days could be spent in just reading through the material, let alone recording and putting into order all the data.

Again, Kissel enthusiasts and the Kissel family are fortunate that this material was put together when it was. Unfortunately, few of the vehicles remain, and no one in the Kissel family owns one now. When the factory closed, Robert had two, his brother one, and his father three, but they were traded in the thirties. Although Robert put what he thought was a high bid on one several years ago, it sold for more than twice his bid and he hasn't tried to find one since. He admits that he isn't a car buff. He says it isn't cars themselves but the history of the Kissel car, with his family involvement, that interests him.

But the tone of his voice tends to belie this when he repeats what he has said many times before, "There just aren't any left. I wish I had never sold mine."

(Editor's Note: This article originally appeared in Old Cars Weekly. CH.)





## LOOKING BACK AT THE FUTURE

By Wally Wray

Of the many interesting challenges faced by automotive historians, one of the most problematic is dealing with personal opinions expressed by authors. In the case of the rarely encountered look toward a future that to us is long passed, however, an earlier authors words can be quite amusing. The pleasure is enhanced when the crystal ball gazer's credentials are highly respected, such as a recently unearthed Roger Huntington look at American cars of 1963--as published in the September 1953 issue of Speed Age magazine.

Conceding that steam turbine power via atomic reactor was still a long way off, Huntington did see gas turbines common in some vehicle classes, while the short stroke overhead valve V-8 would remain as the primary power source. But differences aplenty would be visible under the hood of the '63 Detroit car, including 100% fuel injection, lower octane fuel fired in 12:1 hemi heads with larger inclined valves, overhead cams, and light overall weight thanks to aluminum blocks.

Transmissions were a bit less clear in their methodology, thanks in part to yet unknown engine type and flexibility. Stick shifts would definitely be a thing of the past. The '63 trans would be fully automatic, with a strong likelihood of much higher reliance on fluidics, and a much wider range of engine/axle speeds, permitting most

efficient operation under all road and load conditions.

Suspensions, one of the toughest design areas since horse and buggy days, also offered some challenges. The car of '63 would use an up-dated front lateral-link and independent rear set-up with rear brakes mounted inboard, and discs all around. Real expectations for advancement were to be looked for in springing methods, with a high mounted coil deemed most likely. Torsion bars, bonded rubber, or even compressed air were viewed as other viable possibilities. Whatever method adopted, improved suspension and linkage would eliminate much of the need for power steering.

With regard to bodies, Huntington made no guess about styling, save to predict vastly improved aerodynamics. He did see the near total elimination of the body-on-frame method of construction, however, which would be supplanted by the mono-built box structure giving greater strength, less weight and cost, and resistance to flexing. Inside, full system heating and cooling air conditioning, greatly improved crash protection, seat belts, and polarized glass would be standard.

In conclusion, Huntington foresaw the '63 Ford or Packard having greater comfort, power, speed, stability, safety and economy than its '53 counterpart. He also expected legal road speeds up to 90 mph, with average cars getting 25-35 mpg. How accurate his predictions were we can now evaluate with near perfect hindsight. He was obviously correct in a few areas, though perhaps a bit overly optimistic in expecting some developments in only 10 years time. Some features seem to have dis-



appeared into limbo, perhaps to be resurrected and achieved at some time yet in years to come.

One thing is certain, the flawless crystal ball vision is nonexistent.

