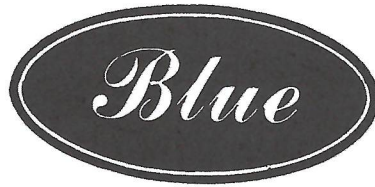


On The



Oval



HENRY'S 'BETTER IDEA'

by Robert Wm. Smith

To honor the anniversary of Henry Ford's birthday, July 30, 1863, we have included the following article by Robert Wm. Smith, recapturing the history of Henry's first Ford.

Even though members of the Early Ford V-8 Club of America primarily are interested in models produced between 1932 and 1940, we are a little intrigued by the mystique of the Ford trademark and the traditions of the Company which has made that trademark one of the most familiar in the modern world.

Let's look into the history of events which have produced a Company known for its "better ideas". Ford Motor Company's "Better Ideas" really began 75 years ago.

In the early morning hours of June 4, 1896, Henry Ford made his first trial run in a small, four-wheeled vehicle he called a "Quadricycle". That run was a dramatic occasion in itself, but the following decades saw its creator become a part of American history and the Company he established produce more than one hundred million automotive vehicles.

The Quadricycle, described by the late historian Allan Nevins as "strikingly small and light—the lightest vehicle of its type yet produced," in reality was one of America's first subcompact cars.

About half the size of the new Ford Pinto, the Quadricycle had a 49-inch wheelbase and was 79 inches long overall. It was 45 inches wide and 43 inches high. By contrast, the Pinto had a 94-inch

wheelbase, a 163-inch overall length, and is 69.4 inches wide and 50 inches high.

Ford Motor Company was incorporated in 1903 but the birth of the worldwide organization could appropriately be traced to completion of the Quadricycle 75 years ago in June.

For the 32-year old inventor, the Quadricycle's successful first outing was the result of inventiveness, determination and hard work that earned him the title of "genius of the automotive industry."

In just 75 years, the ideas of Henry Ford and other automotive innovators have revolutionized the pattern of life in America and most of the world — affecting jobs, homes, education and recreation.

At the turn of the century, only a handful of Americans owned motor vehicles. Today, four out of five American families own them. One in three families now has two or more cars.

Today, Americans travel more than a trillion miles a year by car, truck or bus. More than 89 percent of all intercity trips are made in motor vehicles.

The American road measured only 2,151 miles when Henry Ford's Quadricycle came along, and it usually ended in a mud puddle outside the town limits. Now 3,684,000 miles of roads, highways

and freeways bind the nation together.

One of every seven jobs in the United States is connected with the highway transport industry. More than 830,000 men and women are directly employed in the manufacture of motor vehicles and parts, while another 2.7 million sell and service automotive vehicles. Industries allied with highway transportation provide jobs for another nearly 10 million men and women.

Three giants – steel, oil and railroads – set the stage for Henry Ford and the beginnings of motor transportation.

In 1864, a year after Mr. Ford's birth, the open-hearth process was developed and the modern age of steel began. The following year, the oil industry laid the first stretch of pipelines in the Allegheny River Valley. In 1869, the American continent was spanned with iron rails.

From his boyhood days, Henry Ford was a master of mechanical logic. From a glance at a machine he could understand the interdependence of its parts and trace the interaction of gears, ratchets, spurs, cams and levers. According to his father, William Ford, neighbors referred to Henry as a "young man with wheels in his head".

After leaving home – a small farm just outside Detroit – at age 16, he hired on as an apprentice in a Detroit machine shop that made steam engines. Within a few years, he had become chief engineer of the Edison Illuminating Company. His co-workers described him as "highly proficient as a mechanic and as an operational engineer . . . He had a good job, he was ambitious".

But it was not enough. In the early 1890's, Henry Ford began tinkering with a tiny vehicle in a small workshop at the rear of his home at 58 Bagley Avenue in Detroit, just a few blocks from the Edison plant.

At that time, any man experimenting with "horseless carriages" was considered something of an oddity. An elderly Detroitier said Henry Ford – no exception – was regarded with some suspicion around the neighborhood.

The young inventor was supported by his encouraging wife, Clara, whom he had married in 1888, and by the help of friends and co-workers from the Edison Company – David Bell, Jim Bishop, George Cato, and "Spider" Huff.

Henry Ford's first motor sputtered its way into history on Christmas Eve in 1893 – the same year his only son, Edsel Bryant Ford, was born. For the next few years, he experimented with engine designs, but he did not begin work on the eventual, larger motor for his Quadricycle until January, 1896. A little later he began building the chassis and body of the carriage.

In the months before the Quadricycle was finished, he worked night after night until 11 p.m. or midnight, and all day and night Saturdays.

According to Allan Nevins, Ford did not mind the long hours. "I cannot say that it was hard work," he observed years later. "No work with interest is ever hard." He was confident of the results – "they always come if you work hard enough".

Apart from the motor, wheels, axles and steering rod, the vehicle was constructed of wood, and weighed only 500 pounds without fuel. It had a buggy-like seat and ran on bicycle-size wheels with pneumatic tires.

Ford's "horseless carriage" had two speeds, one 10 and the other 20 miles per hour. It had a neutral gear but no reverse. Gear changes were made by a clutch lever mounted on the floor to the right of the driver.

During the two days before his invention was finished, Ford hardly slept at all. Finally, between 2 and 4 a.m. on June 4, the vehicle was ready. With his wife and helper Jim Bishop anxiously watching, Ford put the clutch in neutral and spun the flywheel. The motor came to life!

Ford drove the Quadricycle slowly along nearby Detroit streets, with Bishop on a bicycle ahead of him and a few curious passers-by staring incredulously. A spring actuating one of the "ignitors" failed during the short run, but it was quickly repaired and the two men returned triumphantly to the Ford home, got a few hours of rest and then reported for work at Edison.

Although the outing was successful, Ford was not satisfied, and practically rebuilt the Quadricycle in the following months. He and his helpers replaced many wooden parts with metal, installed a cooling system in the engine, and added a front seat and sturdier wheels.

Henry Ford subsequently built other cars and on June 16, 1903 – a little more than seven years after his successful invention – he launched Ford Motor Company in a small, converted wagon factory in Detroit.

Today, Ford Motor Company is a multi-national industrial complex with diversified interests, including the production of cars, trucks, tractors, consumer appliances, electronic equipment and communications systems, and financing and real estate subsidiaries.

In 1970, Ford and its subsidiaries produced nearly 4.9 million cars, trucks and tractors. The Company employs more than 430,000 men and women in almost 200 countries and territories.

Where is Ford's first "Better Idea" – the Quadricycle – now?

The original vehicle is on permanent display at the Henry Ford Museum in Dearborn, Michigan, along with one of two exact reproductions hand-built to Ford specifications. The other U.S. reproduction is owned by Ford Motor Company and was displayed at the 1963 World's Fair in New York.



FIRST "BETTER IDEA" – Automotive pioneer Henry Ford was photographed in Detroit in his Quadricycle shortly after the initial pioneer run of his vehicle on June 4th, 1896. Although Ford Motor Company was founded in 1903, the birth of the multi-national corporation can be traced to completion of the Quadricycle 75 years ago. Mr. Ford's horseless carriage, powered by a two-cylinder, four-cycle engine, had a trolley-like electric bell to warn pedestrians.