



Behind these shade trees, in the original Auburn administration building, is a bonanza in parts for classic car owners.



Batdorf and Cord transmission.

Cover Story:

Cord-Auburn Health Center

Two of the most famous cars America ever produced still live, due to the business acumen of a millionaire philanthropist who has no interest in classic cars as such.

Photos by DICK ADAMS

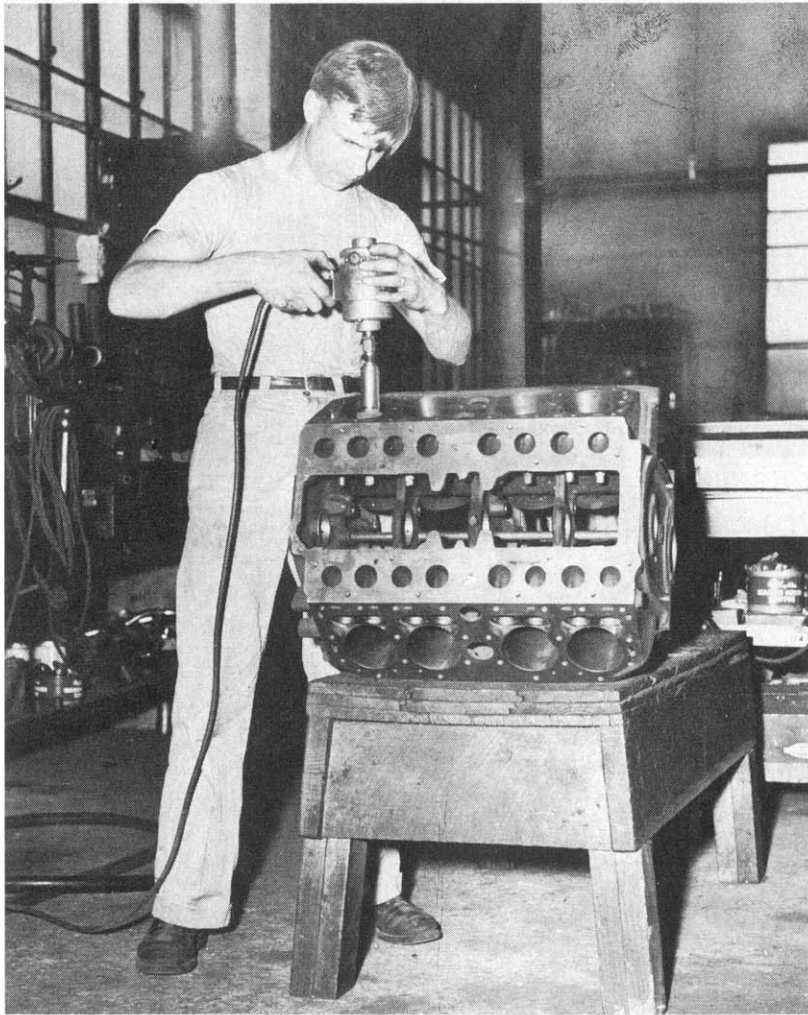
TWO of the greatest cars this country ever produced fell victim to economic strangulation in 1936-37 when the E. L. Cord empire collapsed. The Auburn Speedster and front-wheel drive Cord apparently were destined to disappear from the American scene and become mere memories along with the 2,200 names on the roster of unfortunate automotive enterprise.

Today, although few examples of their greatness survive, the state of their health is assured by a mechanical clinic maintained almost exclusively for them. Here, the broken bones of their steel bodies and the worn out mechanical organs can be repaired or replaced by 'surgeons' who learned their trade on the original models.

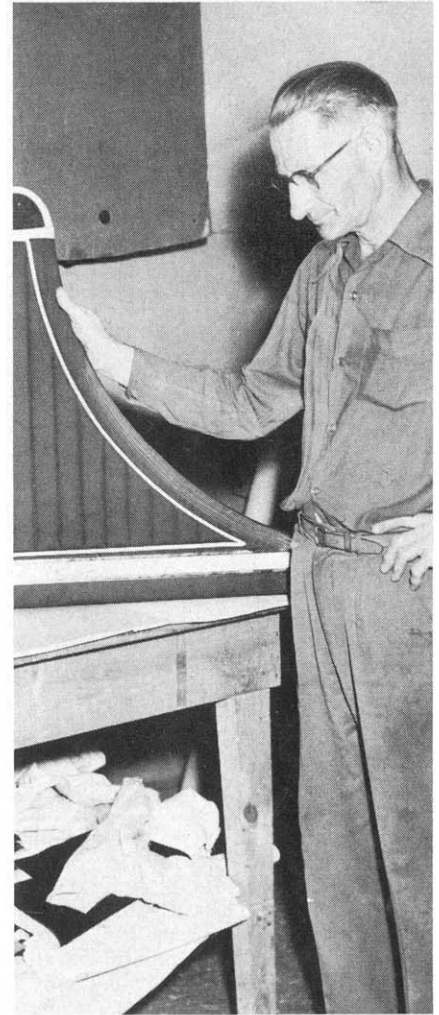
The man behind this project is a veritable Santa Claus, having been born on Christmas Day 60 years ago. He is Dallas Winslow of Grand Blanc, Michigan—millionaire, philanthropist and businessman who has no interest in classic cars as such.

His principal business today is a lawn mower manufacturing firm and the production of Roto-Tiller, a gasoline-powered hand garden tool. The largest Winslow plant is at Springfield, Ohio and nearly 300 names are on his payrolls.

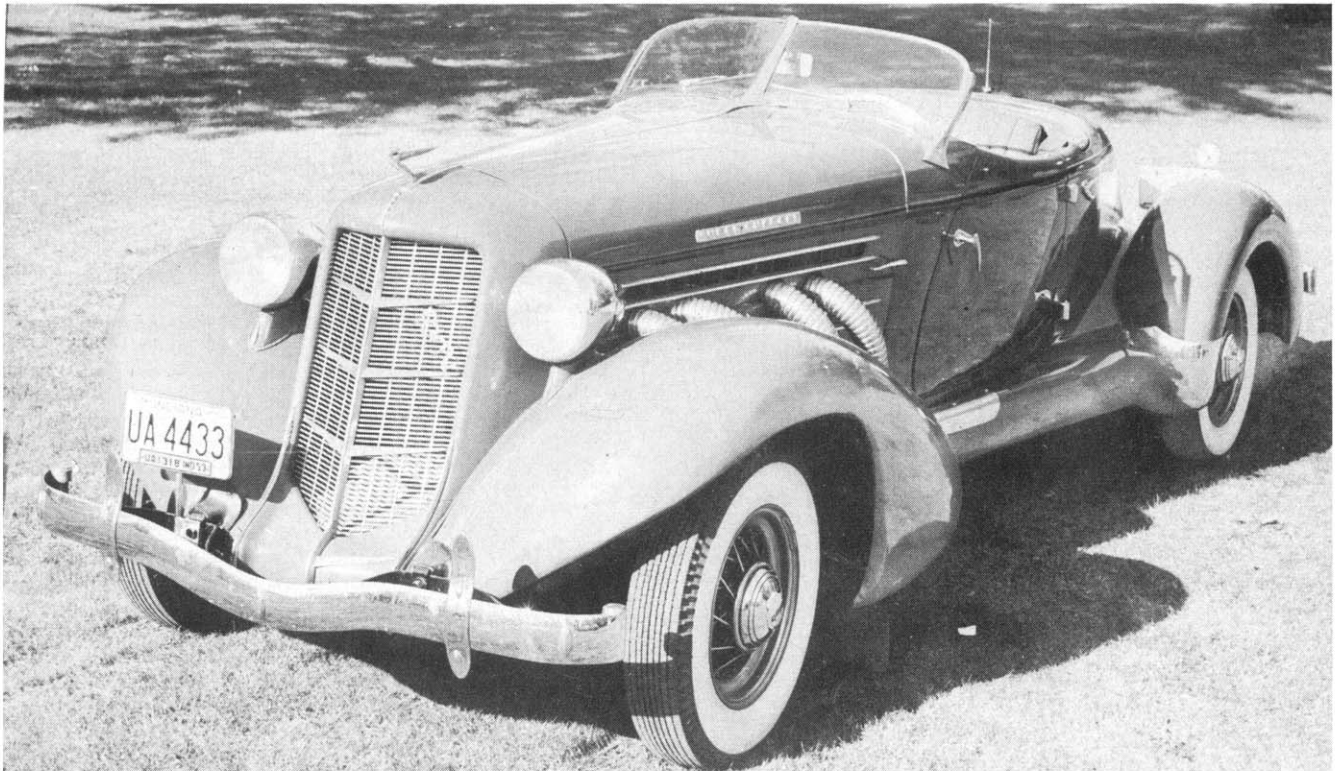
But the beginning was in 1929 when he swung a deal for the parts bins of the Paterson automobile manufactured by the W. A. Paterson Co. of Flint, Mich. The Paterson's 15 year history ended in 1923 but Winslow believed there were enough



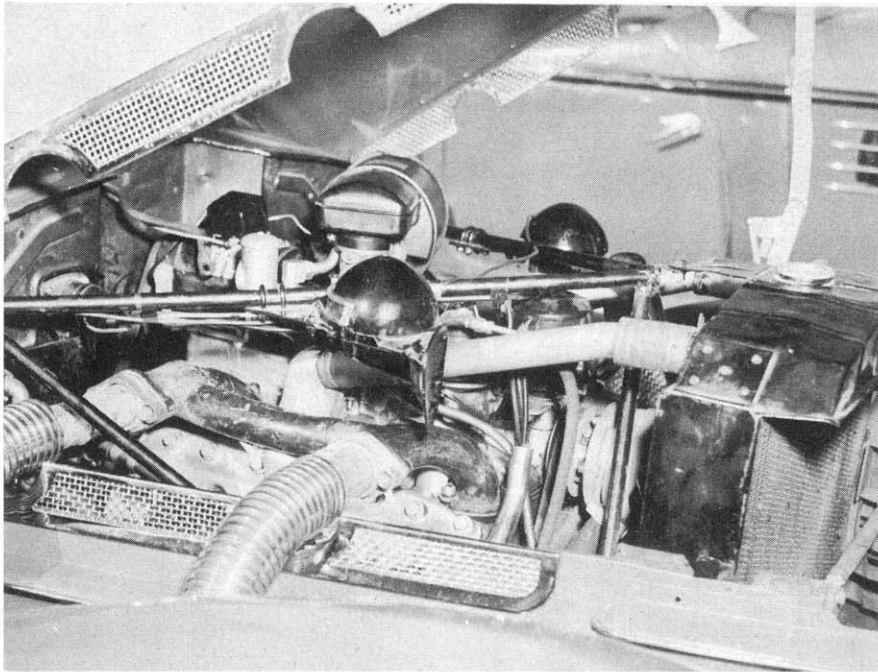
Mechanic John McQuown grinds valve seats in new Cord block.



Butler, the upholstery artist.



Supercharged Auburn Speedster, is owned by Cal Grosscup of Auburn and was rebuilt at A-C-D shop.



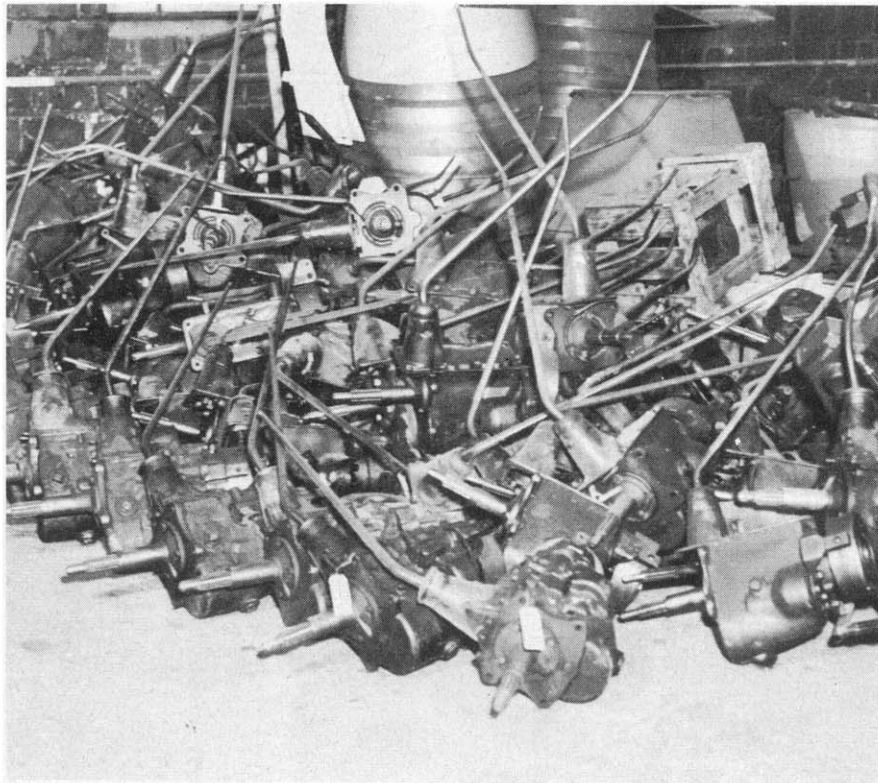
Engine room of unblown Cord is filled by V8 powerplant.

Paterson owners who would want factory replacement parts to make the investment worthwhile.

Stearns-Knight, Durant, Star and Franklin leftovers eventually were bought as they fell victims to bankruptcy or were discontinued. Then in 1938, Winslow bought Auburn's supply when E. L. Cord's empire collapsed. With Auburn, he also acquired Cord and Duesenberg and moved the automotive part of his operations into the 70,000 square foot administration

building of the Auburn Automobile Co. and took the name Auburn-Cord Duesenberg Co. The main manufacturing plant at Auburn was taken over by the Warner gear division and Cord's facilities at Connersville, Ind., is home to a kitchen utensil firm. Graham and Hupmobile parts bins came under Winslow ownership and were transferred to Auburn in 1939 and 1940.

The Auburn plant primarily was considered a service depot for Roto-Tiller but demands for the classics has grown



Transmissions, awaiting rebuilding, in storage area.

so steadily that the business now is about evenly divided.

Having acquired the three 'great' names, Winslow began a careful survey of state records to ascertain ownership of known models. Armed with this vital information, the office force began mailing literature to owners assuring them that parts and service were still available. It was a ready-made market and one that had proved profitable in similar previous operations.

Just how profitable probably exceeded everyone's expectations for the Cord and Auburn refused to die. The few that apparently were destined to end their days on junkpiles were eagerly snapped up by buyers who recognized their intrinsic value as pioneers of design. Thus, they escaped the fate of obscurity that ordinarily follows the discontinuance of manufacturing.

The end came in 1937 when the Securities Exchange Commission closed in on a stock manipulation deal at Auburn. But the handwriting was on the wall even earlier; mass production techniques had pushed the custom, hand-built car to the wall.

What E. L. Cord and Gordon Buehrig, the Cord designer, had wrought however, was a model that startled the world with its smartness and gave a chronic case of indigestion to their competition.

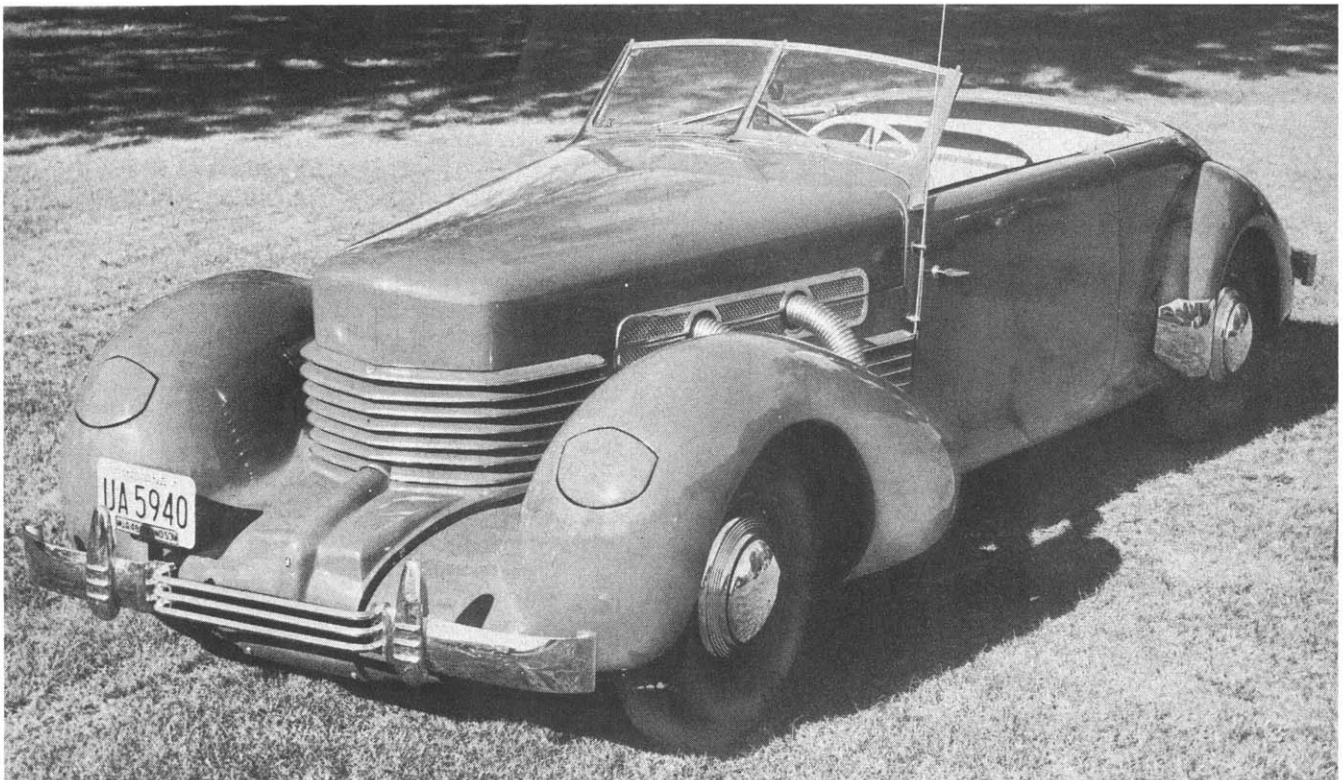
The 1936 Cord 810 model was revolutionary then and is an eyebrow raiser today. The chassis, as such, was missing. Only a half frame existed and that cradled the 125 HP Lycoming V8, carried the front suspension units and the transmission mounted ahead of the engine. This stub frame bolted into the body at the firewall. The body shell was of 'unit construction,' as it is now called.

Stylewise, the blunt coffin-nose, rakish windshield and fast back of the sedan, pontoon fenders, retracting headlights, absence of running boards and step down interior, set patterns the industry has since adopted. In the convertible models, a top that was concealed when lowered and 5-passenger phaeton were the forerunners of the club coupe.

The front drive was not new—there had been other pull-instead-of-push cars manufactured in America and the front-wheeling L-29 Cord had won a few dozen styling prizes abroad when it was introduced in 1929. But, when it was running right, the 810 was good for nearly 100 MPH and turned in a phenomenal 20 MPG in fourth, or overdrive, gear. It had its faults: a weak transmission and sometimes obstinate shift system and the universal joints linking the drive train to the wheels didn't enjoy the finest of reputations.

In 1937, the 812 was introduced and represented little or no styling changes but the 125 HP engine was boosted to 175 by adding a supercharger that made speeds of 110 MPH possible. The price was \$2,900 at a time when a small Cadillac could be bought for \$1,700 and the Lincoln Zephyr for \$1,300. Only 1,146 Cords had been sold when the roof fell in.

The Auburn, for years a powerhouse on the American road, assumed the stature of an elephant in 1932 with a V12 powerplant. This lasted three years, giv-



1937 Cord with non-blown engine also belongs to Grosscup and was reconditioned at A-C-D.

ing way to a straight-8 to which a super-charger was attached in 1935. Thus was the Speedster born, only to be cut off a year later when depression era sales fell off.

Parts of the Duesenberg, America's mightiest motor car, are the only ones Winslow has sold in a block. With very little activity in this field and with few items available, they were sold to Marshall Merkes of Winfield, Ill. Merkes, who owns two or three Duesies, had been the steadiest A-C-D customer for this line. The oldest auto parts now in the plant are for a 1920 Hupp and 1926 Auburn.

Winslow catapulted to national prominence in 1950 when he began giving employes, of one year's service or more, a new Ford. The company retained title to the automobiles but tied no strings to the employe's use of it. Philanthropy, however, began long before; Winslow had been supplying hearing aids, dentures, medical attention, etc, for his workers for years. He's one of the original share-the-wealth advocates—but with a difference, he's sharing his.

Six of the 51 employes at the Auburn plant are regularly assigned to the restoration section and four of their names were on the original Auburn-Cord payroll when Winslow took over.

Dwight Batdorf heads up this crew—perhaps the most skilled specialists in the country on those two automobiles. Batdorf does double duty, being an expert on the sometimes cantankerous vacuum-electric transmissions used on the 1936-37 Cords. Two members of Batdorf's staff have a service total of 82 years—Ralph Butler, a modest man who is an artist with needle and fabric, runs the upholstery shop and has been with Auburn for

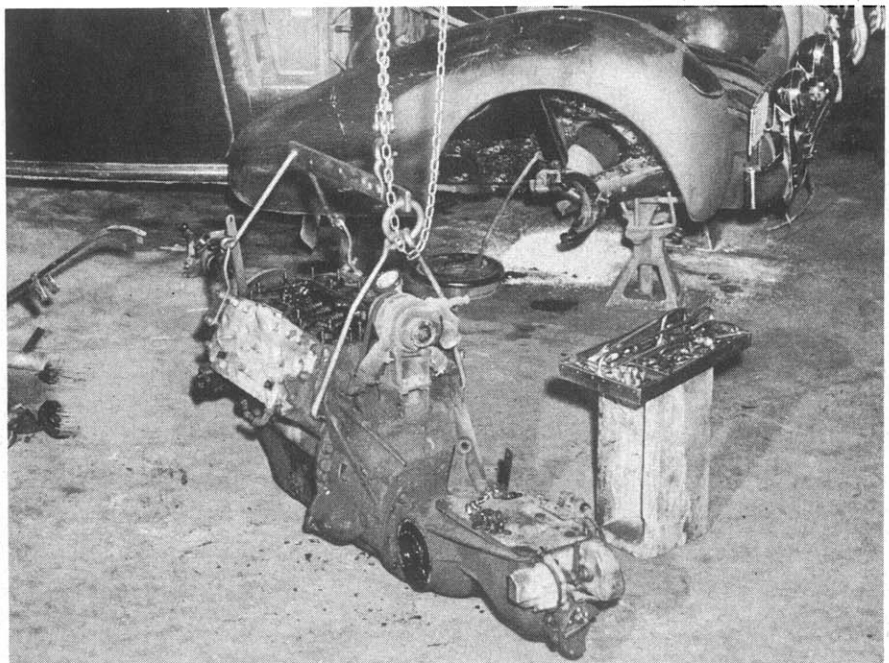
42 years and Russell Silberg, a veteran of 40 years, handles the body work. Ora Shoudel, so familiar with the engines he probably could assemble one blindfolded, is a comparative newcomer, having carried his toolbox into Auburn's plant only 27 years ago.

Current demand for A-C-D services is mostly concerned with the 810 and 812 model Cords. Total production in their two years ending in 1937 was only 2,320 and Plant Operations Manager Veale estimates the 1,800 Cords still in existence include a number of the 4,429 L29 models sold between 1929-32. At that, the

A-C-D people insist they have enough parts to continue servicing the cars for 10 years.

Auburns, too, receive considerable attention, especially the Speedster models—most of which carried a dashboard plaque attesting that Ab Jenkins had driven the car at more than 100 MPH. Veale contends 8,000 Auburns are still active but the majority are of the less desirable body styles than the coveted Speedster.

The connoisseur of these automobiles—and of the Graham, Hupmobile, air-cooled Franklin, Durant and even the latter-day Tucker—is found in all sections



First step in rejuvenation is removal of engine.



Classic crew, left to right: Russell Silberg, Orá Shoudel, Ralph Butler, Howard Carper, John McQuown, Dwight Batdorf.

of the country and often in foreign lands. A-C-D officials in a position to note an ever-increasing interest, attribute it to car clubs, especially those concerned with classic cars, higher per capita incomes which permit the indulgence of such hobbies and periodicals devoted to automotive topics.

Some of A-C-D's best customers are famous, others are well-to-do and many obviously are able to buy only one part at a time as they affect a restoration within the confines of a limited family budget.

The company has overhauled one Cord shipped from Hawaii — perhaps the greatest distance shipment—and factory personnel still recall the sweet-faced young California girl who nursed a very sick and weary-looking Speedster into the garage two years ago and hovered over it like a mother until it was restored to health.

And there was a captain in the British Navy who made a trans-Atlantic phone call to ask immediate delivery of a L-29 part and a similar restoration, on an automobile that sold for no more than \$3,300 new, was worth \$3,600 to a Texan.

There has been the tragic-comedy side also: the Ohio enthusiast who wrecked his Cord 20 miles from the plant after taking delivery on a completely rebuilt sedan; the husband who asked for two receipts; each for half of his total bill, so his wife wouldn't know how much he had spent; the real estate man who was unable to pay the \$3,200 tab and forfeited a near perfect Cord and the magician from Quebec whose magic failed him when it came time to settle accounts with A-C-D. In those cases, since company policy is cash, the A-C-D people sell the car for whatever it will bring and they seldom lose.

The town of Auburn, too, has its few who are loyal to the home product. A number of Auburns are in evidence and

E. C. Bartels, director of sales, knows of three Cords owned locally.

One of the latter is Cal Grosscup's phaeton. That car and his Speedster are featured on this month's cover. Grosscup, who owns a tavern just off the courthouse square, sold a 1952 Cadillac to buy the Cord and acquired the Speedster a short time later. Each was rebuilt at the A-C-D plant and emerged with identical coats of Flame Red lacquer.

Grosscup estimates he has invested \$6,500 in the two cars. When they're parked in the driveway of his residence on Van Buren street, which forms part of the state highway system leading north from town, traffic all but crawls. Grosscup, who also has owned a Duesenberg, shrugs when he mentions the Cadillac—he believes the Cord will outlast the Cad and he points out, quite logically, that Cord and Auburn values increase with age rather than depreciate.

As is evident from the above, there's nothing inexpensive about the restoration operation. Labor goes on the bill at \$4 per hour, probably twice the rate collected by the mechanic down the tree-lined street who puts a wrench to the Detroit product. But that \$4 an hour buys the services of men who, in most cases, grew up with both the Auburn and Cord and know all their idiosyncrasies.

A rebuilt 125 HP V8 flathead Cord engine will set you back \$310 and one of the fabulous 175 HP supercharged powerplants costs \$40 more — without the blower—both on an exchange basis. The 8-cylinder in-line Auburn engine rated at 115 HP without the supercharger and 150 when blown, lists at \$198 exchange and that Cord transmission can be replaced for \$254 plus a deposit of \$100 which is refunded when the worn unit is received.

The exchange system virtually is the life blood of A-C-D for they salvage the usable parts and rebuild those in poor condition until they are serviceable. The

storage bins have an ample supply of bearings, pistons, rings, rods, timing gears and chains and other engine parts although superchargers and their gears are very scarce and are sold only on an exchange basis. Universal joints, connecting the front wheels with the differential ahead of the powerplant, are manufactured by Bendix on standing order and A-C-D retails about 200 of these yearly. The very thin aluminum cylinder heads are cast by an outside contractor and the heavy duty wheels required by the front drive system are turned out by the Gore Wheel Co. of Fort Wayne.

The headaches for A-C-D and a large bill for the customer often can be laid to body work necessary to restoration. Body components are scarce—stripping a Cord and selling the parts separately can swell the bank account more than disposing of many '53 automobiles—and usually are hand-formed when replacement is required.

The factory salvages doors, hoods, and the pontoon fenders although they may be little more than a pile of rust. These partially destroyed sections are rebuilt, with new metal being grafted into place. Needless to say, it's expensive.

Auburn residents are as accustomed to seeing Cords, Auburns, Gramms and Huppmobiles as they were in the days when the plant was operated by E. L. Cord. Many of the cars destined for the full treatment arrive on flatbed trucks or in railroad cars and many of those chugging in on their own power threaten to collapse before reaching the driveway to rejuvenation.

Once inside the plant, Batdorf's men take over. The car is stripped, upholstery ripped out, the engine and transmission disassembled and body paint removed. When the mechanical ailments have been diagnosed and repaired, reassembly begins and finally the car is pushed into the modern paint shop. Meanwhile, upstairs,

Ralph Butler has been busy reupholstering seats, side and door panels and scuff pads in broadcloth or leather. Butler uses the original patterns that were bought with the parts bins. When the springs have been replaced or retied, foam rubber padding goes over them before the finish fabric is fitted. A complete upholstery job—and Butler works alone—usually requires four weeks; its share of the bill is approximately \$350 but it's quality workmanship and can't be distinguished from the original.

Although they handle 10 to 12 complete Cord restorations annually and an additional two or three Speedster jobs, an even busier facet to the A-C-D business is the constant drain on their parts supply by enthusiasts who do their own restoration—either because they can't afford to plunk down from \$500 to \$3,000 in one piece or take enjoyment in the work.

A-C-D's bank is always open to these enthusiasts and the correspondence file is voluminous. Classic car fanciers are a clannish bunch and the word has gotten around that A-C-D is the one place where almost anything needed can be obtained. The first letter places the writer's name on their mailing list and, periodically, the office force reminds the owner or would-be-owner that service and parts are available.

A-C-D, on occasion, also has acted as the middle man in introducing an owner who wishes to sell his treasure and a purchaser. Knowing the location of most of the Auburns and Cords in the country, this isn't difficult—in fact there are three or four times as many potential buyers as cars available. When they act as 'broker', there is no charge for the service.

Curiously enough, with the Cord-Auburn fever rising rapidly, A-C-D does no scouting for parts although they occasionally purchase Cord blowers. During the war, however, they sought out and bought Lycoming V8 blocks and found so many in junkyards and private garages that the plant rebuilt an average of 60 to 70 monthly.

With the boom in Cords and Auburns,

the parts bins of the later model Graham and Hupmobile are visited comparatively seldom. Company officials expect that business to pick up later when the 30,000 Grahams and 23,000 Hupps of all models still rolling begin to slip into extinction. Since the 1939 Hupp Skylark and 1940-41 Graham Hollywood were made from modifications of the Cord body dies although fitted with rear drive, it is likely to assume that they also will enjoy a renaissance. This revival of interest is already being enjoyed by the air-cooled Franklin, which ended 32 years of production in 1934 with demand for parts and service increasing monthly.

Rebuilt Graham engines are already available at \$169 for the 6-cylinder model and \$198 for the straight-8, both on an exchange basis. Prices are the same for the Hupp powerplants. As with Cord and Auburn, the price is for a 'skeleton' engine: only the block, crankcase, crankshaft, piston and rod assemblies. The customer supplies cylinder heads, fuel and water pumps, manifolds, flywheel, carburetor and electrical equipment.

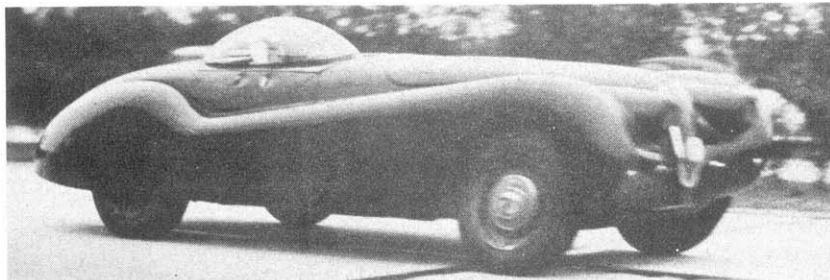
Service for one of the latest victims of automotive bankruptcy—the widely hailed, rear-engined car introduced by Preston Tucker in 1947-48—also is available at A-C-D. Over and above Winslow's penchant for buying up parts with possible future appeal there was another tie-in here. The early model Tuckers used the Cord transmission and Tucker's success in his search for these gearboxes probably contributed to the scarcity of parts that exists today.

Factory personnel don't expect too much of the Tucker service acquisition because too few of the automobiles were made. But the previous purchases of uninteresting-looking bearings, gears, pistons and assorted parts have proved that the financial ills of one firm can be a boon to another. Dallas Winslow, undoubtedly, has made a profit; his foresight has been a bonanza to the Speedster and Cord owner. Both, however, owe it all to two automobiles that refused to die. ☆ ☆

Jaguar Does It Again

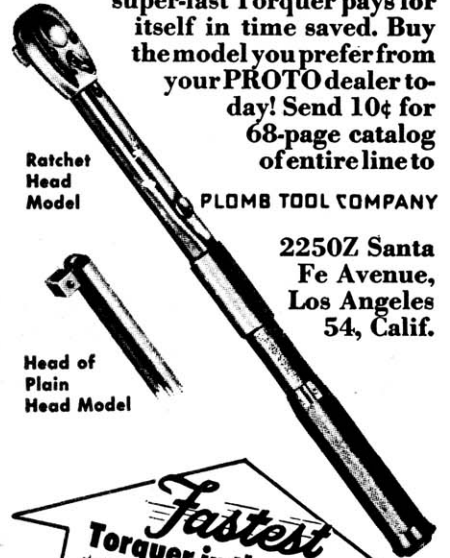
THE world's speed record for stock production cars has been shattered again on the Ostend-Brussels Highway near Jabbeke, Belgium.

On a measured mile course, drivers for Jaguar Cars Ltd., of Coventry, England, set a new world's mark in a stock Jaguar XK-120M by attaining a speed of 172 MPH. The new mark exceeds by nearly 30 MPH the speed set by the Austin Healy '100' running recently on the salt flats at Bonneville, Utah. The Jabbeke tests were observed, controlled and officially timed by the Royal Automobile Club of Belgium. ☆ ☆



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