

Last of the great Duesenbergs is the solitary and singular honor belonging to this specimen which now is in the Far East.

"a DUESENBERG for the maharaja"

BY GRIFF BORGESON

JIM TALMADGE, whose immediate family tree is a sort of concentrated edition of "Who's Who In Hollywood," likes Duesenbergs. He was restoring his ninth when he saw a photo of an absolutely unique supercharged Dues roadster in an automotive magazine in 1949. With the determination of the true collector he ran it down.

The license plate in the photo was English, so he wrote the Royal Automobile Club to ask for the name and address of the car's owner. The records, he learned, had been lost in the war. Finally Talmadge traced the photo to his own back yard—the Auto Club of Southern California. The Club still had some caption data on the shots. It said that the 142-inch, short-wheelbase Dues had been bought in '35 from the factory in Indianapolis and shipped to England, to be fit-

DUESENBERG DATA—Models J and SJ

Number of cars built	About 470
Number of engines built	Exactly 480
Model J introduced	December, 1928
Last car sold by factory	1937
Cylinder number, arrangement	In-line eight
Bore and stroke	3.75 by 4.75 in.
Piston displacement	420 cu. in.
Valve arrangement	Vee-inclined, overhead, four per cyl.
Camshafts	Dual overhead
Camshaft drive	Silent chain
Transmission	Three speed
Rear axle ratios	4.0 or 4.3 to one
Wheelbase	142.5 or 153.5 in.
Chassis price	\$8500 and up
MODEL J	
Power output	265 bhp @ 4200 rpm
Top speed in second gear	88 mph
Top speed in high gear	116 mph
Piston speed at max. bhp	3330 ft. per min.
MODEL SJ	
Power output	320 bhp at 4750 rpm
Top speed in second gear	104 mph
Standing start to 100 mph	17 sec.
Piston speed at max. bhp	3760 ft. per min.

ted with an original custom body by Gurney Nutting. Then it was shipped back to New York and driven across the continent. There were 3,800 miles on the odometer when it was turned over to the Auto Club for shipment to Singapore, consigned to the Maharaja of Johore.

In addition to its unique orange and black roadster body, the Maharaja's SJ Dues boasted a number of unusual features. It was one of the few ever equipped with right-hand-drive steering. Its oval instrument panel was one-of-a-kind. The Lucas P-100 headlamps were handsome hallmarks of its Old World coachwork. It had full-skirt rear fenders, chromed 17-inch wire wheels, and no rear bumper. Finally, it was equipped with "running lights," like those seen on limousines at the opera. Two lights, mounted low in front, were ordinary parking

lights. The other two sets, molded into the top of each front fender, served to identify the driver. The outside lights were red and, when burning, meant that the Maharaja was driving. The blue inside lights were the mark of the Maharani, his wife.

Talmadge obtained the Maharajah's exact address from the local British Commercial Attaché, sent the potentate a complete set of photos and asked how the car might be acquired. Maybe the question was irreligious, maybe it was only beneath acknowledgement. At any rate, that letter and a follow-up brought no response.

But Talmadge was able to do some cross-checking right at home. He called on Marshall Merkes, the man who is successor to the Duesenberg factory in the fullest sense of the word. Merkes owns the factory correspondence, the blueprints, most of the patterns, many of the tools. It's his business to know about every Dues that was ever produced. He knew about this one.

"I first heard about that car back in the late Thirties," he told Talmadge. "It was ordered in October of 1935 by a dealer in England. Its serial number, 2614, is the highest ever assigned to a Duesenberg chassis. It was the last Dues chassis ever assembled although a few previously assembled chassis with lower

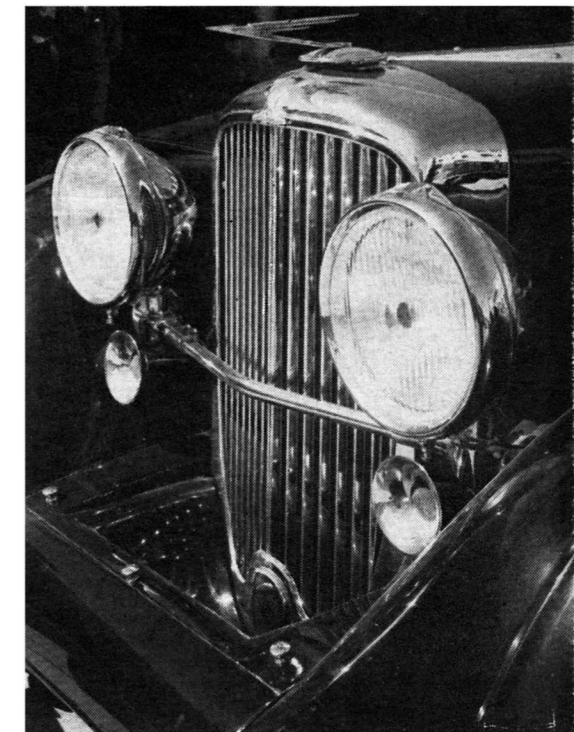
serial numbers were still unsold at the time. Although I'm not entirely positive, there's every reason to believe that 2614 has the last of the 480 Dues engines—engine number 588.

"That was the last I heard about the car until 1950, when I received a letter from a garage in Poona, India. They asked for the price of a set of supercharger gears and for any history I might have on chassis 2614. I gave them the information but they never answered that or a second letter."

As far as anyone knows, the last of the Duesenbergs is still somewhere on the Maharaja's palace grounds or in the Poona garage. And evidently it is not for sale.

So much for the ultimate Duesenberg. Talmadge also learned from Merkes that the supply of parts for the big Duesies is growing larger rather than smaller. And these are not merely a collection of used parts offered for sale. They are either unused parts taken from the old factory bins and shelves or they are newly manufactured, with reference to the original factory engineering drawings. Thus owning a Dues today is one of the most practical expressions there is for the classic car fan's taste. •

EDITOR'S NOTE: Any correspondence addressed to Marshall Merkes will be forwarded to him.



Lighting accessories were both numerous and strange. A set of red lights were turned on when the Maharaja was driving, while blue lights were illuminated if his wife was at the wheel. Headlights here are Lucas P-100 for an Old World touch.

Roadster was one of few Duesenbergs equipped with right-hand steering. Oval panel was another unique idea.

