

THE DUESENBERG MODEL J: Men were men but their luxury cars were ponderous until the Model J—particularly the roadster—set a new style in elegance and performance

The only sound in the room is the fire snapping in the massive fireplace. The prosperous man in a dinner jacket is perhaps fifty. Sitting in a deep leather chair, he stares contentedly off into the distance where, perhaps fifty feet away, his gigantic, 100-pipe Hammond organ occupies a loft that rises far above the drawing room's parquet floor. Just the fire, flickering over intricate panels of fluted oak and the frozen faces of unlikely ancestors staring out of frames. Useless tables, superfluous lamps and plants—all the cliché trappings of wealth surround our happy gentleman. Beneath this picture of ostentation flows a single inscription in a bold, successful hand—"He drives a Duesenberg."

It's 1931, and ads like this appear in *Vanity Fair* and other prestige magazines. There's no doubt in anybody's mind that the reposing gentleman in the picture has it made. Nor can there be any doubt about the Duesenberg. It's made it too. Because anybody who is anybody has one.

Clark Gable, Gary Cooper, Ben Blue, Marion Davies, Jimmy Walker, William Randolph Hearst, King Alfonso of Spain, Prince Nicholas of Rumania, and scores of The Four Hundred, all boast or will boast various Duesenberg models during this, the heyday of the

famous Model J. In a few years, a supercharged version of the J, the SJ, will be introduced for the sportier members of the automotive elite, but in 1937, five years after the death of Fred S. Duesenberg, the Duesenberg factory in Indianapolis, Indiana, will cease production, never to resume. Duesenbergs will change hands, will be abused, will be scattered to the far corners of Europe and the United States, but they'll be found, cherished and protected by zealous devotees of the marque. It's that kind of car. A beautiful, exotic legend in its own time and an institution today. People must have sensed the car's future back in 1931, because its success was phenomenal. One fellow could have predicted it: Fred Duesenberg.

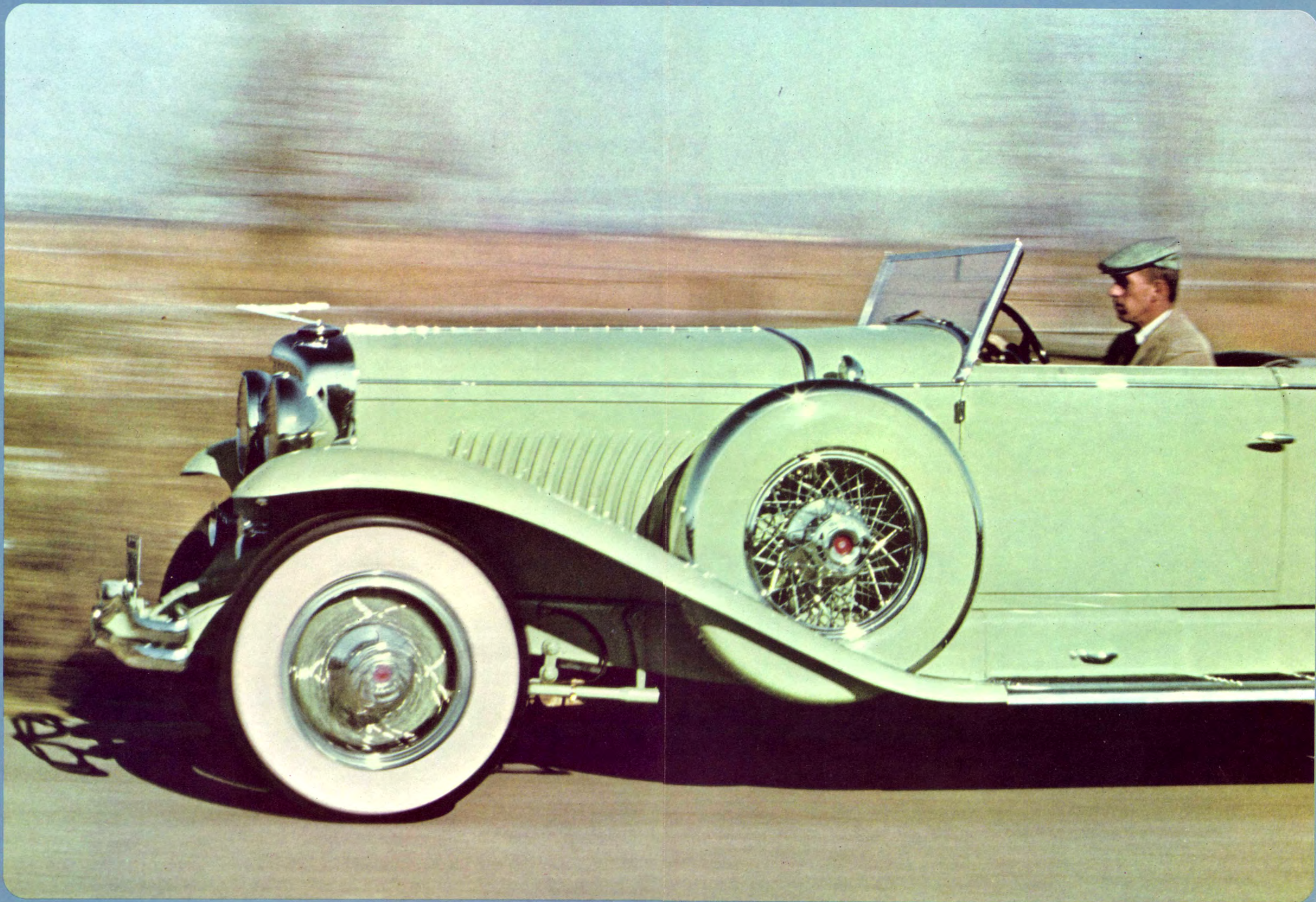
Fred and his younger brother August (Augie) found themselves in the automobile business as early as 1904, but it wasn't until 1921, when their war obligations for marine, tractor, aviation and automobile engines were fulfilled, that they were able to concentrate on passenger and racing cars. A 16-cylinder Duesenberg had taken the land speed record at Daytona Beach in 1920. The next year, Jimmy Murphy drove a Duesenberg to first place at Le Mans—America's first Grand Prix victory. Duesenbergs won the Indi-

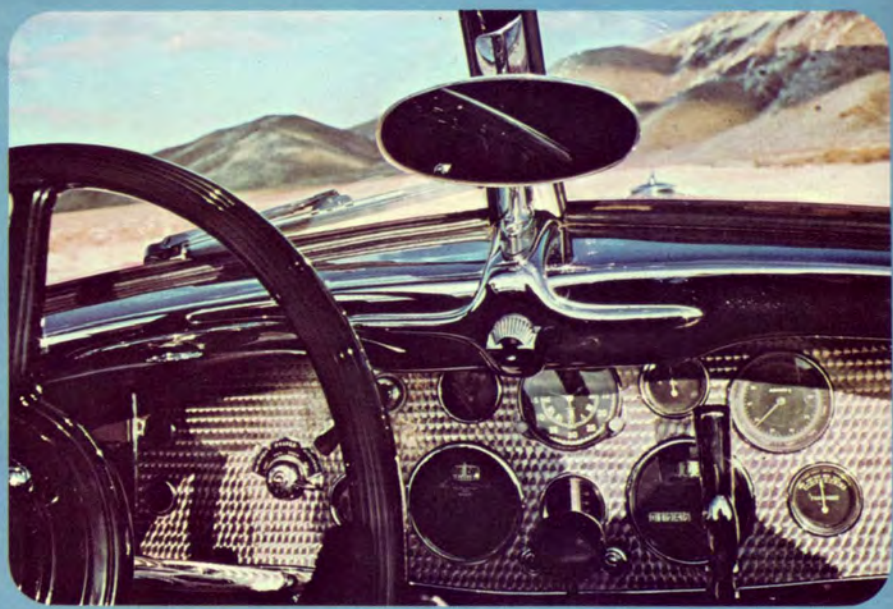
anapolis 500 in 1924, 1925 and 1927. And meanwhile, the first Duesenberg passenger car, the Model A, had made its debut. The A was sensational—a sporty, powerful passenger car with handling and performance only to be found in a racing car. It was the hot set-up. And the Duesenberg name was once and for all established.

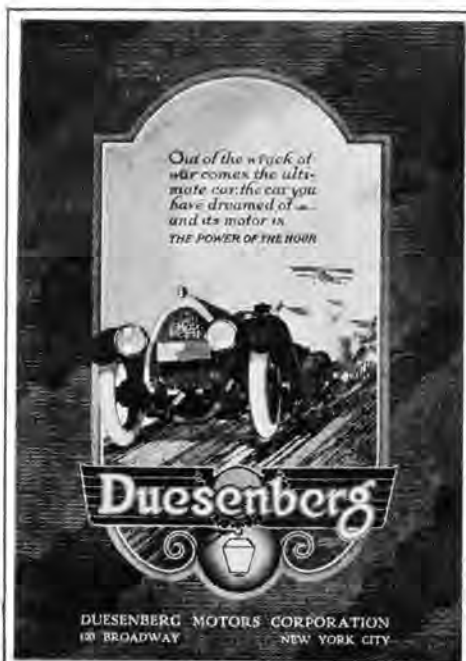
When E.L. Cord bought Duesenberg in 1926, he had one aim: to produce the ultimate in luxury passenger cars—a car with perfect balance, sophisticated design and elaborate coachwork; a car with performance like no other; a car that would be synonymous with prestige. Pity the wealthy American who had to go all the way to Europe to find a true luxury car. Cord would see that America produced something to rival anything sold in Europe. He knew exactly what he was doing. He was turning Fred Duesenberg loose to design a chassis and an engine that were ten years ahead of their time.

Bodies tailored to the whims and needs of an elite clientele would be designed and assembled by America's great coachbuilders—Rollston, Brunn, Murphy, Le Baron, La Grande, Derham, Willoughby, Judkins, Bohman and Schwartz, Hibbard, Weymann and others. No two would be exactly alike.

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Reprinted from J. L. Elbert's Duesenberg: The Mightiest American Motor Car, courtesy Dan E. Post Publications, Arcadia, California



He drives a Duesenberg

They would be personal cars, reflecting the characters of their owners on a grand scale.

It was a bold, exciting concept to which Fred Duesenberg, with the able assistance of Augie, turned his fertile engineer's mind. Nobody could have been better qualified. Two years later, in 1928, the Model J was introduced in the nation's newspapers and exclusive automotive Salons with all appropriate fanfare. As Cord had specified, it was the biggest, fastest, most expensive car in America.

The basic Duesenberg package—chassis and engine—cost \$8,500. For your eight and a half grand you got the largest and most balanced set-up available anywhere. In an era when 116 horsepower was news, the Duesenberg straight eight produced 265 gigantic horses. Bore and stroke for this behemoth were 3.75 x 4.75 inches, for a total displacement of 420 cubic inches. Compression was a low 5.2 to one, which proved ideal for supercharging.

Hundreds of unusual and ingenious features distinguished the Duesenberg eight—four valves per cylinder, excellent free-breathing propensities, a highly efficient cooling system, and the use of weight-saving aluminum (heat-treated for superior strength) wherever possible. There were double overhead camshafts, a self-lubricating device, 15-inch hydraulic, Duesenberg-designed brakes, vibration damping of the highest order, a single, rigid casting for both the cylinder block and the upper half of the crankcase, a precision-balanced crankshaft, the world's finest (and heaviest) connecting rods, a rugged, rigid, deep A-frame chassis with seven crossmembers, and many, many more.

An entire Model J—body, chassis and all, could weigh from 5000 to 8000 pounds, but performance was de-

signed with the weight factor in mind. Consequently, the Model J could do 89 mph in second and 116 in top gear. It performed effortlessly, with more punch at 80 than most of its contemporaries could muster at 40. The motoring press found steering, braking, comfort and ride beyond reproach.

The Duesenberg came in two wheelbase sizes—142½ and 153½ inches—and on your chassis you could specify virtually any body style that you could imagine, with interiors and appointments of exquisite taste (and price). Some favorite styles were the phaetons, the convertible sedans, the town cars and limousines of all kinds, sport sedans, speedsters and victorias. By far the most popular Duesenberg, however, was the Murphy-bodied convertible roadster. Of an estimated total Duesenberg production of 470 cars, 55

were roadsters, and most of these were Murphy creations. Most were built on the short wheelbase, but one in particular, belonging to the Harrah Collection in Nevada (opposite page), was constructed on the long base, and elegantly suited its chassis. This '31 Duesenberg features the disappearing convertible roof which enjoyed great acceptance in the early '30s. Like all Duesenbergs, its instrument panel had a host of automatically actuated warning lights, a split-second stop clock, a tachometer, an altimeter barometer, and a 150-mph speedometer.

The Murphy body was conspicuous in its lack of trim—an unusually modern and elegant treatment. The curve of the side-mounted spare wheel was reflected in the graceful arcs of the hood louvers—a Duesenberg trademark. The huge, gently sloping fenders and steeply raked windshield gave the eye an impression of speed and capability. Total cost—\$14,500.

The apple-green Duesenberg pictured was found in Burlingame, California, by H. Julien Allen of Palo Alto, California. It had been traded in on a new Cadillac, and Mr. Allen rescued it and later sold it to Harrah's Collection. Little restoration was needed to get it back in shape, and today, even at Nevada's high altitude, this Model J performs at well over 100 mph. What's it like to drive? Incredible, say Duesenberg fans—smooth, the mile-long hood stretching out before you, the massive body lunging forward beneath you. It's one of life's most exhilarating experiences.

Because that's the way Fred Duesenberg designed it almost 40 years ago. It's still impressing the daylight out of people, and that's the way he designed it too. Twenty years from now, the Model J will still be one of the fastest, biggest, most desirable vehicles ever built. **C/D**