

HARRAH'S AUTO COLLECTION

HARRY STUTZ depended on big-time racing, such as the Indianapolis 500, and the movies to build the reputation for his Bearcats, and to keep the demand high. They did. Pearl White raced to imminent destruction (or was saved) in countless reels in her racy roadster, and even Barney Oldfield drove them in the movies.

BRING ON THE BEARCATS

Stutz chose the first Indy 500 to introduce his car, and off it went. Youth of America's 'Teens adopted the Bearcat as its own, and cared little that it was open, uncomfortable and rough. It was also fast.

BY MICHAEL LAMM

THE STORY of Harry Stutz and his Bearcats flashes past like a flickery silent movie in double-time. His cars whipped through every important competitive event held between 1912 and 1916. Stutz himself was likewise forever racing from one goal to another, one job to another, never lighting for long.

Both the man and his cars had fantastic amounts of restless energy. Stutz insisted on squeezing use from every second of time. He couldn't abide sitting still—and never did.

Not only did Stutz Bearcats throb in cadence with Harry's high blood pressure, they captured a roomful of trophies and came to symbolize a whole era. Today, the name Bearcat conjures up the decade of volatile, bubbling '20s, although by 1920 most Bearcats had become used cars. The raccoon-coated, hip-flashed college boys of that day were still bounding around in Bearcats built 10 years earlier. Even so, Stutz Bearcats remained the headiest, sportiest, jazziest automobiles available then; and, in many ways—because it's almost impossible to buy a restored Bearcat today for less than \$50,000—they're still that way.

Harry Clayton Stutz was born on a small farm near Ansonia, Ohio, in 1876. Farm living didn't quite suit him, so in his early teens he took a part-time job with the Davis Sewing Machine Co., repairing farm machinery on the side for his neighbors. A few years later, Harry went to work for the National Cash Register Co., the firm that was soon to hone the mechanical genius of Charles F. Kettering.

In 1897, aged 21, of medium build, dark-haired and good-looking, Harry Stutz put together his first car. He assembled it in his father's back yard, using an abandoned buggy as its base, a water-cooled one-lung engine, and a gearbox pirated from parts of a wheat binder. While not tremendously sophisticated, it ran with absolute reliability for many years. More important, it started Harry on a short but happy career of building some of the world's fastest and finest motorcars.

In 1903, the family moved to Indianapolis, where Stutz married Clara Dietz, daughter of the automotive lamp manufacturer. At the same time, he took a job with the Lindsay Russell Axle Co., a stint that lasted only long enough for Stutz to pick up and memorize the intricacies of that company's transaxle unit. After leaving Lindsay Russell, he began a series of job-hopping that just had to be calculated to give him the broadest possible education in automaking. Stutz had never

finished high school, and his later formal training consisted of night classes and correspondence courses later in life.

Harry Stutz's next stop was the J&G Tire Co., where he learned to make tires, then on to the Schebler Carburetor Co. to master fuel systems. He took and quit both jobs in the same year, 1904.

He spent most of 1905 designing a radically different sort of car that would one year later become the famous American Underslung. The



Marion Motor Car Co. in Indianapolis not only bought his plans for the Underslung, they made him their chief engineer and factory manager at the same time. Stutz stayed with Marion from 1906 through 1909. The Underslung, a road hugging car with huge wheels on axles suspended above the frame, proved very popular with the sporty crowd and remained in production until 1914.

But a steady, salaried job wasn't Stutz's idea of excitement, so in early 1910 he quit Marion to devote that entire year to designing and building the one single race car he planned to enter in the 1911 Indianapolis 500.

By this time he had become acquainted with Fred Duesenberg, a

friendship that would last a lifetime. Over the years, Stutz and Duesenberg would exchange views and experiences on automobile design, sometimes copying from one another. They discussed plans and blueprints openly and so they both profited from each other's thinking.

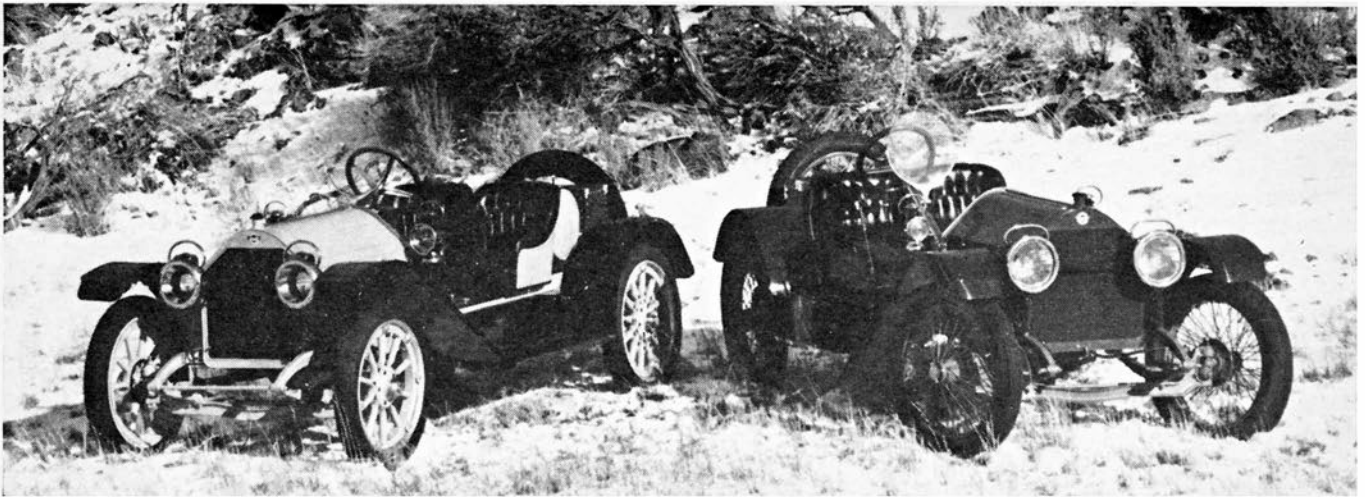
Stutz's plan for his first Indy race car was simple enough. He wanted to launch a new make bearing his name as soon as possible after the 1911 race. Being relatively unknown, he reasoned that if his car didn't win or place, he wouldn't have lost much except time and a few thousand dollars. If he did make a good showing, though, he knew the publicity would help launch his new venture. Which is exactly what it did.

Harry Stutz, with Henry Campbell as his partner, formed the nominal holding company of Stutz Motor Car Parts Co. Stutz got Gil Anderson to drive his one-off entry. While no one realized it at the time, this car would become the prototype for the 1912 Bearcat, identical in nearly every respect. Meanwhile, not to waste time, the Stutz Parts Company began manufacturing transaxle units and supplying them to various automakers.

Anderson drove the prototype Bearcat to 11th place at 68 mph in the first race held on the brand-new Indianapolis Brickyard. The event was won by Ray Harroun in a Marmon Wasp at 74.6 mph. The race itself captured the American fancy like no other, and even a car finishing 11th got rave notices in the press, especially this one-off built by an unknown who'd done such a good job that the car ran the entire 500 miles without a single mechanical adjustment.

So Stutz was off and running in every way, an overnight success. Always handy with a slogan, Harry immediately coined the phrase, "The Car that Made Good in a Day," and so it was. From then on, it was smooth running for as long as Stutz cared to stay aboard. Unfortunately, Harry was too restless to ride very long, and when he impulsively sold his interest in the Stutz Motor Car Co. in 1919 (the word "Parts" had been dropped from the corporate name), he left the best ride he would ever get.

To dispel some of the confusion surrounding both the early and later Stutzes, it might be appropriate here to mention that there wasn't just one Bearcat—there were many different models and body styles. Then, too, Stutz, during his tenure with the firm and afterward, built any number of other models—touring cars, coupes,



HARRAH'S AUTO Collection, Reno, Nev., graciously rolled out a pair of pristine Bearcats between acts of a Nevada snowstorm for **Writer/Photographer Michael Lamm**. On left is a yellow 1912 Bearcat, meticulously restored and sporting a 390-cid T-head four developing 60 bhp at 1500 rpm. Right is a red 1913 with McCue center-lock wire wheels and more complete instrumentation.

BEARCATS

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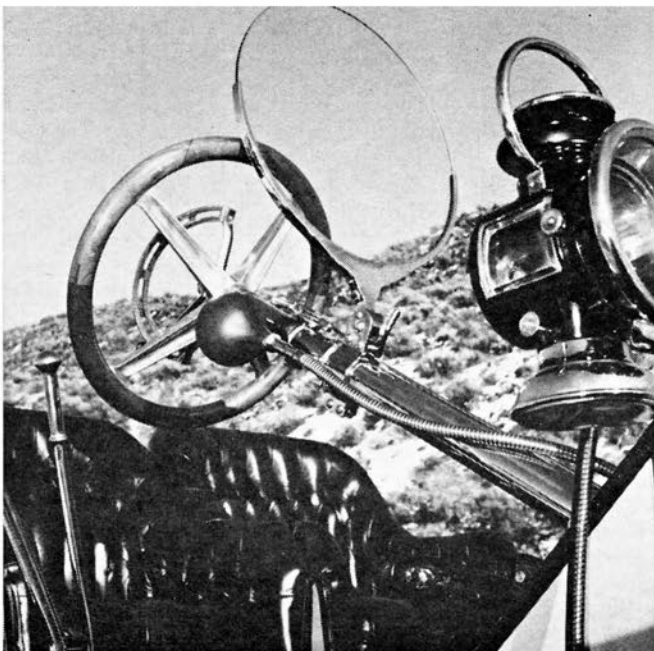
speedsters, and roadsters that didn't carry the Bearcat name.

Today we usually think of the Bearcat as a buckboard chassis with a dog-house hood, monocle windshield, and exposed gas tank behind twin bucket seats. True enough, this was the first Bear-cat, hyphenated in those days and introduced in 1912 (not 1914 as many historians claim). It proved immensely popular from the very start, production almost always falling far behind demand.

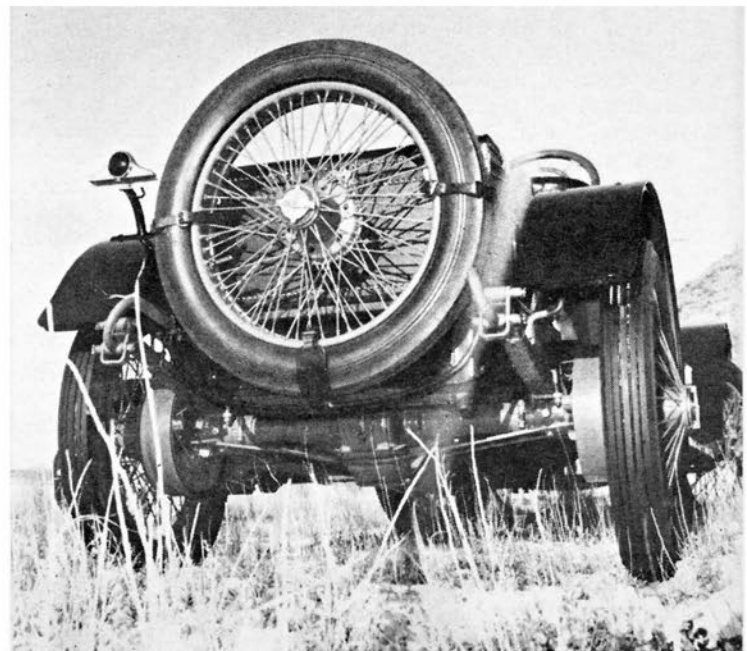
The Bearcat started out in 1912 with only the barest essentials—no doors, no windshield, no top, not even a body to speak of. It was a rough-riding, rough-sounding automobile. Gradually, though, toward 1917, it started taking on refinements, came with cut-down body sides, a turtle deck carrying sunken spare tires, finally even doors plus many of the other add-ons so many sports cars picked up on their way to becoming more livable and thus more mundane. But basically, the Bearcat continued in a stright-line series from 1912 through 1923. By the latter date, though, it had a door on the passenger's side, a fairly conventional

roadster body, and even a folding top.

After Stutz left the company in 1919 to start the HCS Motor Co., a much less successful venture, Stutzes slowly turned from the old "sturdy and fast" philosophy to the more stodgy "safety Stutz" epithet. Under its new but equally able management after 1919, Stutzes were still winning races and going great guns on the engineering side, but they'd lost that certain spark of the very early Bearcats. In a last-ditch effort to regain some of the old Bearcat's flavor, the new management launched the bobtailed Super Bearcat of 1931, a quick and delightful car that lasted through 1933, but it was all too



MONOCLE windshield epitomizes simplicity of Bearcats. Sports cars, surely, they were almost duplicates of Stutz which finished 11th in the 1911 Indianapolis 500.



STUTZ learned in race that wooden wheels weren't for performance cars and wire wheels became optional on 1913. Note hefty internal-expanding drum brakes.

late. Stutz Motors went into receivership in 1935, five years after Harry Stutz had died of complications following acute appendicitis. He never regained anything near the success of his original company after he plunged into HCS and other post-Bearcat adventures.

Getting back to those great early Bearcats of the teens: The first (1912) Series A carried a 4-cyl. Wisconsin engine, same as the 11th-place Indy finisher. This powerplant had its block cast in pairs, with non-detachable T heads and two spark plugs per cylinder. These were fired by a Splitdorf magneto and fed by a Schebler carburetor. Displacement was 389.9 cid with bore and stroke of 4.75 x 5.50. The engine delivered 60 bhp at 1500 rpm, a healthy figure for those days, especially from such a comparatively small displacement (600- and 800-cid racing engines weren't at all uncommon then).

The huge crankshaft rode in three generous main bearings, all pressure-lubricated through internal galleries. A massive flywheel spun exposed at the bottom, mating to a multiple-disc dry clutch. The idea was to combine reliability and simplicity on the grandest possible scale, an achievement Stutz carried through without peer.

Those first Bearcats, as well as all subsequent ones through 1921, used a combined transmission/rear-axle unit mounted in the rear. Stutz designed, patented, and built it himself, obviously borrowing from his Lindsay Russell days. This transaxle had a very high

rear-end ratio in the Bearcat, 3:1, which made good use of that low-speed torque.

The 1912 Bearcat's wheelbase stood at 120 in., and the car sold for \$2000, not cheap but not really expensive.

Next year, 1913, customers could order the Series B Bearcat with either the previous season's T-head four or a new T-head six. This latter had smaller dimensions so it would fit into the same space as the four—4.50 x 5.00-in. bore and stroke—and again cast in pairs. Both engines had dual ignition, this time sparked by Eisemann magnetos with dual distributors. It must be remembered that all cars of that day plainly burned oil, so twin ignition was common to ward off plug fouling. Center-lock McCue wire wheels became optional in 1913, replacing the standard (and very lovely) wooden-spoke ones.

The Series E Bearcat followed in 1914, but now Stutz was building his own engines. The four stayed pretty much as before, but a new six again made the scene, this time scaled down to a 4.0 x 5.0 bore and stroke and cast in triplets instead of pairs.

Electric starting and headlights became standard in 1914. So did a cone clutch, much less effective than the earlier multi-disc unit it replaced. Bearcats continued with right-hand steering, even though most U.S. cars had switched to the left by then. Left-hand steering was made an option by Stutz and remained so through 1921. Thus while the Bearcat did lead its rivals

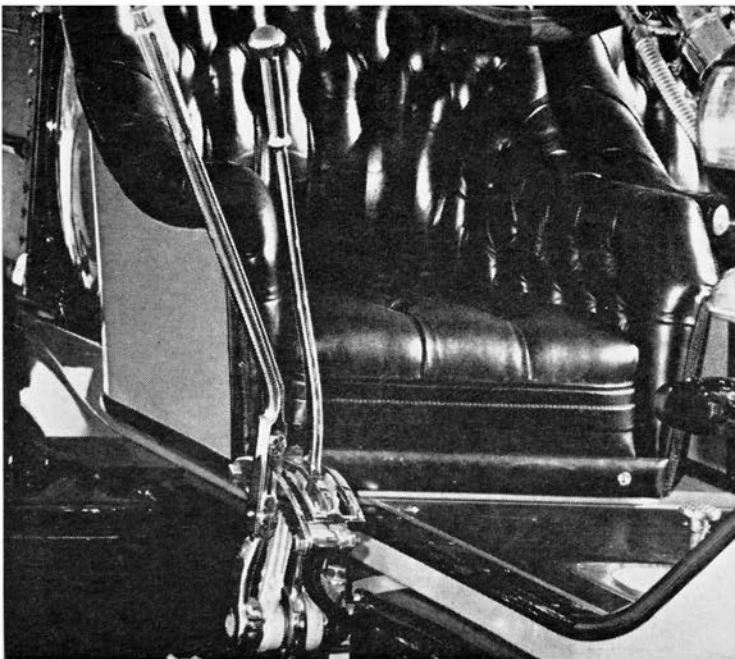
(notably Mercer) by a slim margin in the early years, a hardening of the arteries had already set in.

Bearcat Series F and C for 1915 and 1916 respectively showed very little change, either mechanically or in styling. Then came 1917 and a short leap forward. The Series R of 1917 was the first to use an enclosed body with cut-down sides and a real windshield. But more important, it got another completely new engine.

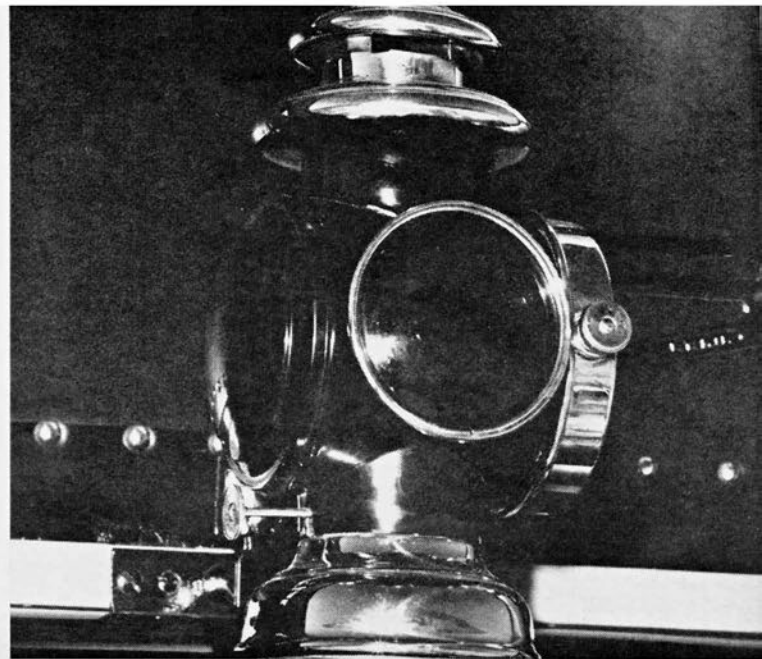
This was again a four, but this round it boasted 16 valves—four per cylinder—the first such design ever available as a U.S. production item. The block and (again) non-detachable heads comprised a single casting, and as before it used the T-head configuration. Bore and stroke were 4.375 x 6.0 inches for 360 cid and approximately 65 bhp.

From 1917 to the Bearcat's first discontinuance in 1923, it was a downhill run, not so much in sales or production, but from an engineering standpoint. The 1918-23 models more or less plodded along with the 1917's engine and running gear, although in 1921 the Bearcat did go back to the previous disc clutch. Bodywork was steadily being "improved," which meant made more like other cars with less sporting blood.

This isn't to say the Bearcat hadn't done very well all its life in racing circles. The Stutz record book reads like *Who's Who* of competition. Then, too, the Bearcat was a natural ham for the silent cinema. Pearl White, in *The Perils of Pauline*, dangled from more



BOTH gearshift and brake levers stood outside Bearcats, and continued this way through 1923, even though by then they had complete bodies. Buckets would be sporting today.



LIGHTING on the 1912 or 1913 Bearcats wouldn't pass today's state laws; but Harrah's doesn't change its near-perfect display cars for driving on highways.



DASH on this '13 was fancier than that on '12. Stutz fought left-hand drive for years, gave in with option.

BEARCATS

continued

than one biplane and landed on the hood of more than one Bearcat during her cliffhangers. Barney Oldfield, when he turned to movie starring as well as driving in races, often chose Stutzes to beat the Express to the grade crossing.

In the racing world itself, Harry Stutz realized from the beginning that winning meant more in terms of publicity and sales than millions spent on advertising. He did advertise extensively, though, often publicizing his victories, and he usually wrote the ads himself, showing as much flair for copy as for cars.

His 11th-place showing at Indy on May 30, 1911, convinced him of the theory that speed brings sales, and from that race until the U.S. entered WW I, he never backed off.

Between 1911 and 1930, Stutzes entered no fewer than nine Indy 500s. In all, 15 cars made the race, seven finishing in the money and a total of 11 still running at the end.

In 1912, Stutz entered three cars at Indianapolis. Big guns in that race included the two Mercedes of dePalma and Wishart, the Fiat of Charlie Tetzlaff, and Hughie Hughes' Mercer. As it happened, a National won the race, with Fiat taking second and the Hughes Mercer third. Merz's Stutz managed fourth at 76 mph, dueling with the Mercer for the entire 500 miles. The Mercer's advantage came from a newly developed knock-off wire wheel that had Stutz's demountable rims beat in every way. Lou Zengel's Stutz came in sixth, with Gil Anderson's car out after 197 miles, having averaged 77.18 mph to that point. Anderson's Stutz flipped because of a blowout.

During 1912, too, Stutzes campaigned all over the country, as they did through 1915. Jack Bayse handily won the Bakersfield Road Race of 1912, a crazy event that jogged through 212 miles of California oil fields. Bayse came in one hour and 20 minutes ahead of the second-place Mitchell driven by Phil Klipstein.

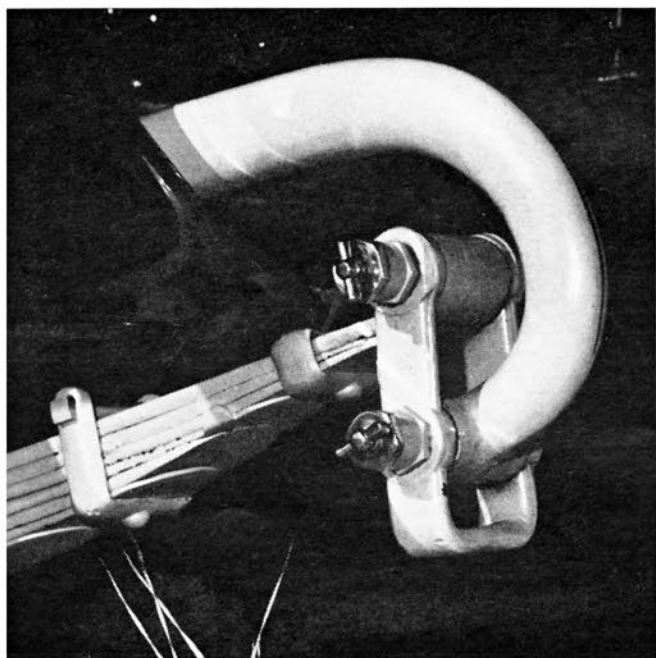
On board tracks, in hillclimbs, and

over paved and dirt courses all across the nation, Stutz was the car to beat that year. No fewer than 36 Stutzes competed in sundry events in 1912, and no fewer than 24 came in first.

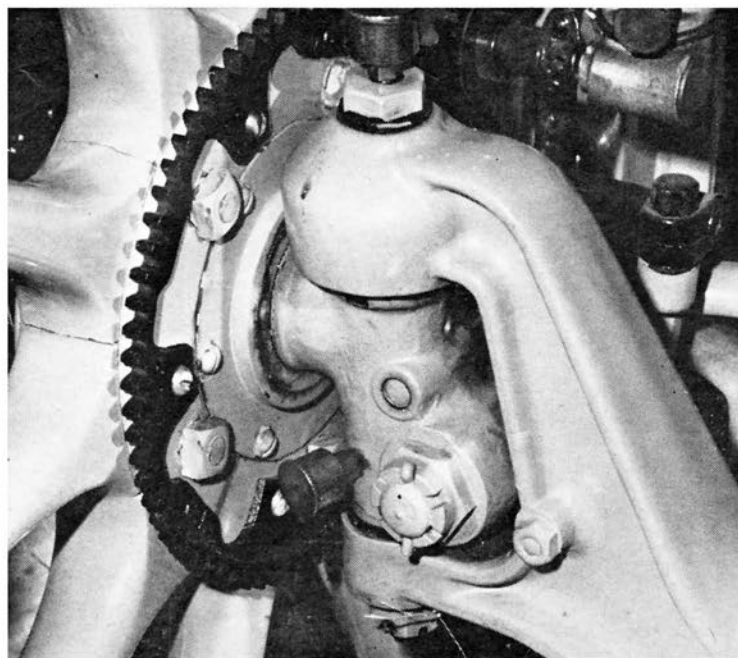
The next year, 1913, Stutz won the title "Official Road Race Champion" by taking eight of the 10 most important races in the country, seven of them consecutively. At Indy, Merz drove his Stutz to third, crossing the finish line for an average of 73.38 mph with flames spouting from his car. In addition, Gil Anderson took the Elgin (Ill.) National Trophy at 71.5 mph.

In 1914, Stutz placed fifth at Indy in the hands of Barney Oldfield. His was the first American car to finish the race that year, all the rest being foreign-made (Delage, Peugeot, Delage came in 1-2-3). Barney averaged 78.15 mph and made only three pitstops, these to take on tires.

Nineteen-fifteen marked the high point of Stutz's early racing career. This was the year of the White Squadron, a limited edition of pure racing cars that Stutz had especially built because of the new 300-cid limit imposed on Championship racing vehicles. Engines of that displacement had been designed by Harry Stutz and were built by Wisconsin. They used a monobloc configuration with a single overhead cam, quite likely inspired by conversations with Fred Duesenberg. Four valves were used per cylinder, and the engine had three hefty ball-bearing mains.



FRONT spring hanger shows artistry which Harry Stutz's crew put into even the most mundane of details. Harrah restoration lets early workmanship shine through, too.



GEAR on front wheel of 1912 Stutz Bearcat is drive for speedometer. Beefy members help explain how Stutzes went from race to race without failure.

White Squadron cars were painted white, and all drivers wore white helmets and coveralls, with STUTZ emblazoned across their chests.

At the 1915 Indy 500, the albino Stutzes came in third, fourth, and seventh, Gil Anderson, Earl Cooper, and Howard Wilcox piloting respectively. Anderson averaged 87.60 mph, just 2.25 mph slower than Ralph dePalma's winning Mercedes. This was to be Stutz' best Indy.

It was in 1915, too, that Harry Stutz received a letter from an irate owner who claimed he was being passed everywhere in his Bearcat by the hated Mercer Raceabouts. Stutz asked that the car be brought back to the factory for inspection. Finding nothing wrong, Stutz decided to give this "lemon" Bearcat a real test by asking Cannon Ball Baker to beat his current coast-to-coast record in it. The transcontinental record at that time was held by a motorcycle, driven the year before by Baker.

Baker took off the fenders, taped the rear springs, but left the Bearcat stock in all other respects. He made the dash from San Diego to New York in 11 days, seven hours, and 15 minutes, driving single-handedly for a distance of 3728 miles over roads considered substandard even then. The "lemon" set a new record, needing no mechanical work at all and only one set of rear tires.

Stutz often stressed the fact that

racers were won more by stamina than speed. His cars not only stayed together, they usually never needed so much as water added to the radiator. In 1915, Stutzes entered 16 major events, failing to finish in the money in only one—that single straggler being wrecked rather than hampered with mechanical ills.

Honors for racing victories poured into the Stutz offices in Indianapolis. The marque was voted "Champion of 1915," it was made "Official Lincoln Highway Car," and the *New York Evening Journal* even printed a spontaneous cartoon of Uncle Sam with one White Squadron Stutz tucked under each arm, the legend reading, "They are Good Enough For Me." Stutz had the cartoon blown up and one of them hung in every office he ever occupied.

Due to World War I, the Indianapolis classic was suspended during 1916 and 1917. Stutz used this time to enlarge his manufacturing facilities. The White Squadron cars were sold to private owners, some racing them under the Chevrolet banner. This marked the end of the great Stutz racing years under Harry's enthusiastic coaching. The redesigned Bearcats of 1917 were fine, fast road cars, but they never made the big-time racing circuits. When Harry left the Stutz Motor Car Co. so abruptly in 1919, it marked the passing of an era.

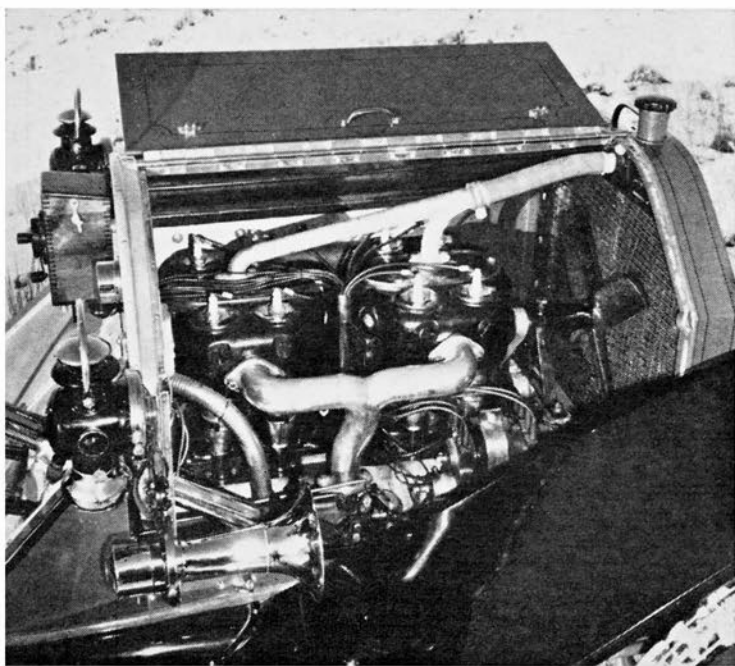
By rights, the story should end here,

but it doesn't quite. The Stutz firm, under its new leadership, still built great cars, and fast ones. Some highlights of the Stutz post-Harry period included taking the National Class D high-speed record for cars with less than 183 cid. In a blown 181.6-cid Stutz special delivering 566 bhp at 8300 rpm, Frank Lockhart set a new record of 198.929 at Daytona Beach on April 25, 1926, a trip that ended in a crash that was to cost Lockhart his life.

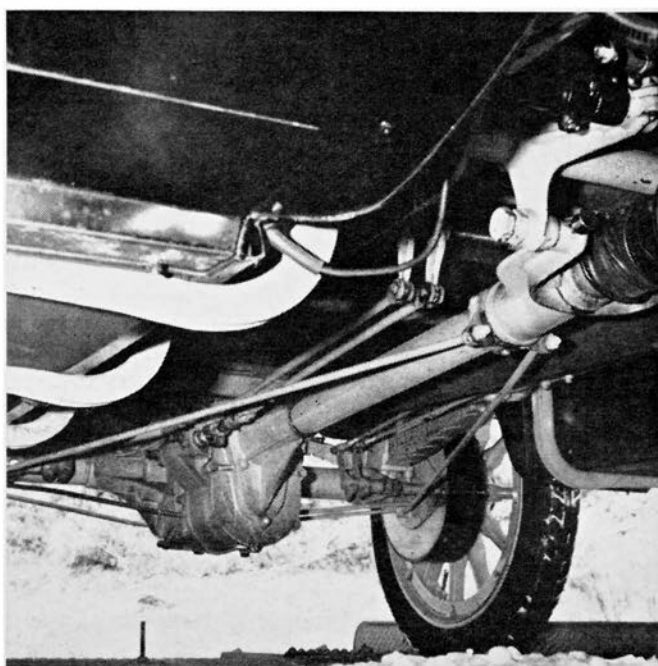
During 1927 and 1928, Stutzes established new records in the annual Pikes Peak Hillclimb. And, of course, in 1928 a supercharged Black Hawk Speedster took second at Le Mans with Bloch and Brisson driving—the first time an American car even placed on the Sarthe circuit. The following year, 1929, Stutzes finished fourth and fifth at Le Mans.

The SV-16 and DV-32 Stutz production eights of the early 1930s had overhead cams, the DV-32 (for dual-valve 32) with four valves per cylinder. These engines were the brainchildren of a long-time Stutz engineer who'd worked with Harry while he was borrowing ideas from Duesenberg.

So it wasn't that Stutz Motors suddenly collapsed after Harry's leaving. Yet things were never the same as under his tutelage, especially never like those glorious years when Bearcats were equally at home on the track or in front of the fraternity house. ■



ENGINE of 1913 Bearcat is T-head four (a small six was available) with dual ignition sparked by Eisemann magnetos with dual distributors.



TRANSAXLE—Stutz's own design—was used until 1923. Multiple-disc dry clutch mounted to exposed flywheel behind block with shaft to 3-speeds-forward transaxle.