

THE 1928-1930 CHRYSLER IMPERIAL L-80 ROADSTER

“AND BEHIND DOOR NUMBER THREE...”



BY RON VERSCHOOR

P Perhaps a more appropriate title might be, “Who is behind door number three?” Presented here are three advertisements featuring the Chrysler Imperial L-80 Roadster for 1928, early 1929 and late 1929. All three illustrations show the right side of the car for an important reason. Notice the small door directly in front of the rear wheel. This is an unusual feature facilitating easy access to the rumble seat compartment. It is found only on the right side of the car and all three of these bodies were designed by Locke & Company of New York. >



Photo opposite page: 1928 Chrysler Imperial L80 Roadster brochure illustration. Photos this page from top: A 1928 Chrysler Imperial L80 Roadster with the rumble seat door closed and with the rumble seat door open.



A 1929 Roadster with hinged cowl open ...

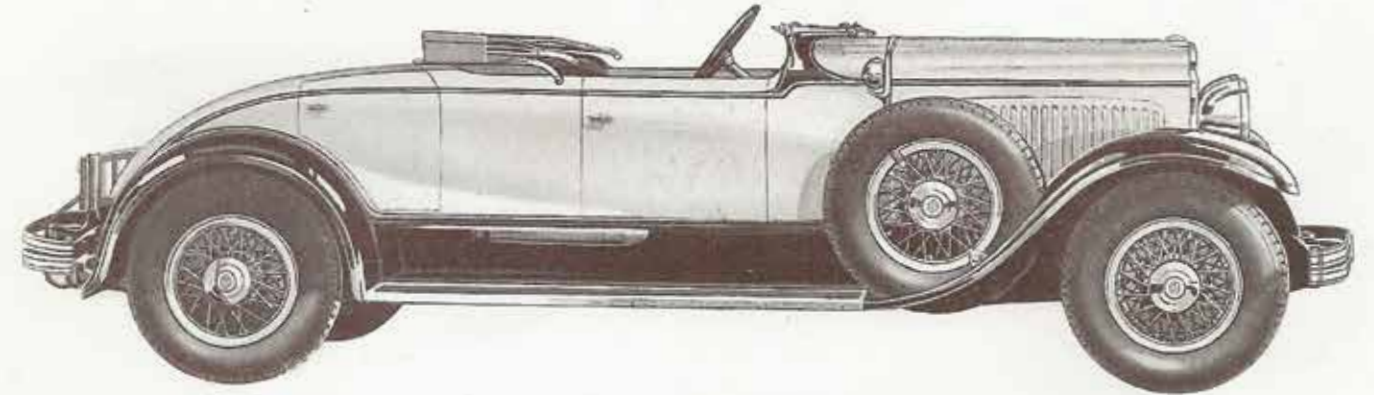


and closed.

“The question remains, who developed the third-door access to the rumble seat?”



Springfield Rolls-Royce Phantom I York Roadster by Brewster with rumble seat door



THE Imperial Roadster combines beauty, style, and the utmost utility. It is what might be called a personalized car, with an individuality and distinctiveness which reflect the owner's appreciation of the finest in motor cars, as in all other personal possessions.

The custom-designed body is mounted on the Imperial chassis and powered by the Chrysler Imperial engine, which assures the car's complete and undisputed mastery of the road.

The upholstery is black, pin-grain, hand-buffed leather and the top is Burbank fashioned over natural wood bows. Entrance to the rumble seat is made through a door which opens on the right side, permitting the greatest freedom in getting in and out of the compartment in the rear.

The windshield folds out over the cowl and the top of Burbank over natural wood bows folds back, conforming to the symmetry of the body as a whole.

The foregoing are only a few of the noteworthy features and details of the Imperial Roadster.

IMPERIAL ROADSTER

WHEELS—Four Wood wheels with spare rim. UPHOLSTERY—Black, pin grain, hand-buffed leather in front compartment and in rumble seat. ENGINE—Silver Dome standard, with Red-Head optional at no extra cost. EQUIPMENT—Bumpers, front and rear; non-shatterable glass windshield; and top boot standard equipment. Demountable Wood, Wire or Disc wheels furnished at extra cost. Fender wells for Wood or Wire wheels; trunk; trunk rack; and spare tires available as extra items.

An early 1929 Chrysler Imperial L80 Roadster advertisement



IMPERIAL ROADSTER (with rumble seat), \$2895 at factory. Wire wheels extra.

ULTRA-FASHIONABLE
A New Imperial Custom Roadster

CONNOISSEURS of motor car beauty have accepted the new Chrysler Imperial as the most beautiful roadster on the road. It is self-evidently today's masterpiece of style and symmetry—a sports car different from all traditional designs. The new custom body is the finest expression of the sophisticated taste and masterly technique of Locke, who designed it. The sloping silhouette and the curve of the bas-relief modeling which sweeps with graceful flourish across the lower section of the body are new notes in roadster appearance—focal points of charm and distinction. The rumble seat compartment has a door on the curb side and a separate windshield, fitted, like the folding windshield in front, with non-shatterable glass. Beside this alluring newness of custom-body treatment, the new Imperial Roadster possesses that smooth, animated, sparkling performance which instantly typifies the masterful genius of Chrysler engineering. Price \$2895 at the factory. Wire wheels extra.

CHRYSLER
 IMPERIAL



Late 1929 Roadster design by Locke



Rolls-Royce Phantom II Henley by Brewster with rumble seat door

The 1928 brochure mentions this noticeable feature stating:

In the 112-horsepower Imperial "80" Roadster, it is not necessary to clamber over the rear fender to take a place in the rumble. Entrance and exit to this comfortable seat is made easy by means of a door built into the side.

In addition to that access door, a hinged panel half the width of the compartment swings up to allow passengers access the rumble seat. The 1928 roadster body style was carried over into the early part of 1929, and was then replaced with a different Locke roadster design featuring a more tapered rear end that remained in production into the 1930 model year. The later body incorporated a slight variation to the rumble seat compartment with the addition of a front-hinged cowl panel facilitating access to the rumble seat. Chrysler advertising described it this way:

The rear-deck seating compartment has a door on the curb side and a separate windshield. Both front and rear windshields are equipped with non-shatterable safety glass.

In referencing George H. Dammann's "70 Years of Chrysler," the 1928 Roadster is described as "a Chrysler production body, not a semi-custom salon model" and the early 1929 model as "the Chrysler bodied Imperial roadster." Dammann only recognizes the late Roadster as a custom Locke design but this contradicts the advertising copy used in Chrysler promotional literature, as follows:

- > 1928: "Locke, one of the foremost of custom coach-builders, is the builder of this model, constructed in accordance with the last demands of custom style."
- > Early 1929: "The Roadster: Custom built by Locke" and "the custom-designed body is mounted on the Imperial chassis."
- > Late 1929: "Locke, with consummate artistry, has designed a custom roadster body." (Dammann does recognize these Roadsters as Locke designs.)

CCCA member Frank Wright of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania is credited for pointing out the Locke-Chrysler partnership across all L-80 years and he went to great

lengths to research these models and locate an early 1929 Imperial brochure, a very rare piece of automotive literature.

The question remains, who developed the third-door access to the rumble seat? It is found on several Brewster-bodied Rolls-Royce models including the Phantom I York roadster and Regent convertible coupe models, as well as the Phantom II Henley convertible coupe. Springfield Rolls-Royce advertising describes the Regent as "A two-passenger Coupé, with collapsible top and roomy rumble seat, which incidentally is easily entered from the running board—another evidence of advanced Brewster design." In John deCampi's "Rolls-Royce in America" a British-built 1924 Silver Ghost (chassis 3AU) with Locke Roadster coachwork is shown featuring the third door design, but it is unclear if this is the original body placed on this chassis.

Have you seen other Classics with this feature? Please share your findings so we can determine who is behind door number three. ●