



HISPANO-SUIZAS

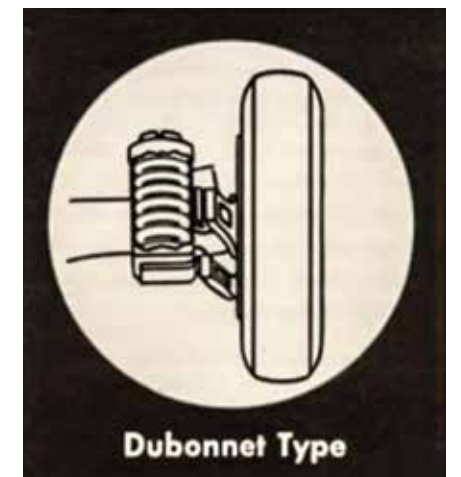
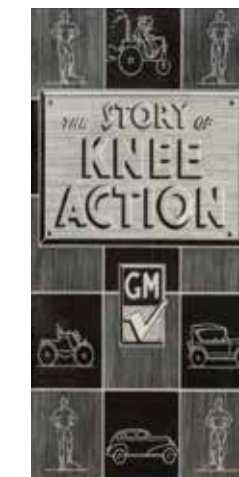
A PAIR OF ANDRÉ DUBONNET

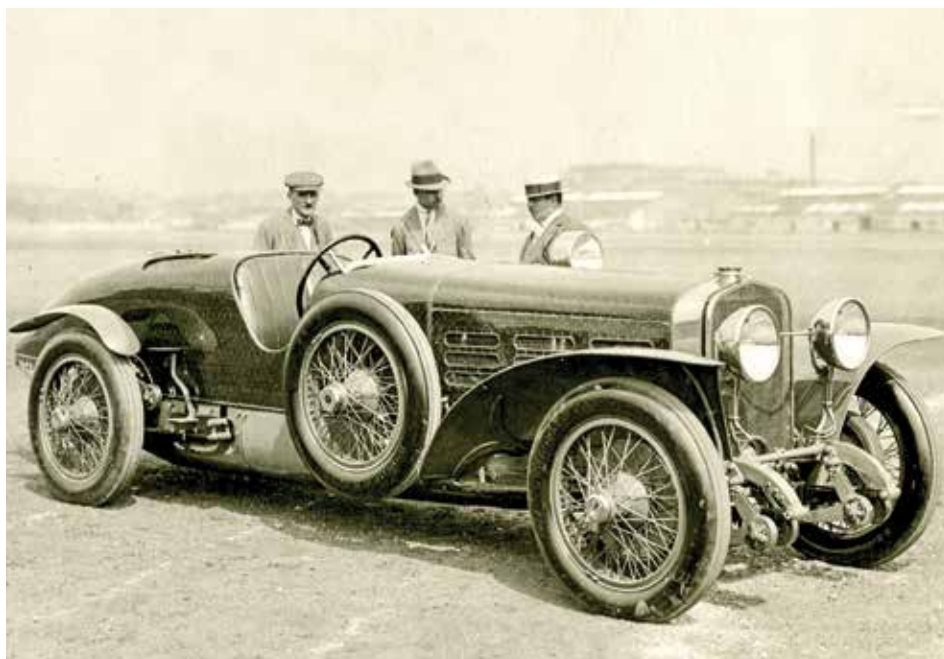
BY RON VERSCHOOR

A André Dubonnet (June 28, 1897-January 20, 1980), had a broad range of interests and as an heir to the Dubonnet aperitif fortune, he indulged them with great success. He served in the French Air Force during World War I, he was part of the French bobsled team at the 1928 Winter Olympic in St. Moritz, Switzerland and he developed a trailing arm independent front suspension known as the Dubonnet suspension in the early 1930s. (General Motors employed this system on Chevrolet and Pontiac models in the mid-1930s and its benefits are mentioned in an obscure 1935 GM publication entitled “The Story of Knee Action.”)

André Dubonnet also had a strong interest in automobile racing. He won the Georges Boillot Cup at Boulogne with a Hispano-Suiza H6 on July 2, 1921 and later that month placed 4th at the French Grand Prix at LeMans piloting a Duesenberg race car. He resumed his relationship with Hispano-Suiza in 1922, winning the Autumn Grand Prix at Monza. In 1926, he co-piloted a Delage 15S8 to third place at the British Grand Prix at Brooklands and the following year went on to complete 36 laps at the Spanish Grand Prix at Lasarte in a Bugatti Type 39A. >

André Dubonnet and his Hispano-Suiza H6, victorious at Boulogne in 1921. Photo: Wikimedia Commons
PHOTOS RIGHT: 1935 GM publication *The Story of Knee Action* and Dubonnet suspension illustration.





PHOTOS CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: The Tulipwood Hispano-Suiza during restoration; 1924 Hispano-Suiza H6C Tulipwood Torpedo by Nieuport; 1986 Pebble Beach Concours, the Alec Ulmann Trophy.

▲ **THE H6C TULIPWOOD TORPEDO**

One Hispano-Suiza closely aligned with the Dubonnet name was André's entry in the 1924 Targa Florio and Coppa Florio in Sicily, placing 6th and 5th in these events, respectively. (The Targa competition is four laps of the 67.1 miles road race course; the Coppa includes one additional lap.) This H6C Torpedo has a unique body made of tulipwood that was produced by Nieuport, an aircraft manufacturer located in the suburbs of Paris. It is believed to be the only automobile body produced by the French firm. Originally equipped with minimalist blade fenders, the larger torpedo-shaped fenders were a later addition.

Restored in the mid-1980s at Mike Fennel's restoration shop in Saugus (in the photos shown in issue 3-2020 by Southern California member Andy Spilkomen) it was entered in the 1986 Pebble Beach Concours d'Elegance by Don Williams and the Blackhawk Collection and was awarded the Alec Ulmann Trophy as "the most exciting Hispano-Suiza present." A September 5, 1986 *Los Angeles Times* article stated the car "had not been shown in the United States for 25 years" and that restoration addressed "the wood body, which had begun to rot, and plating, which had tarnished." Displayed for many years at the Blackhawk Collection, it is believed to be in an East Asian collection today.

▶ **THE H6B "XENIA"**

A second Dubonnet Hispano-Suiza now with a Southern California connection originated with a 1932 H6B engine. This powerplant served as the basis for another one of Andre's commissions, this one designed by Jean Andreau and built by Jacques Saoutchik. The car was named after Andre's second wife Xenia Howard-Johnson who passed away in 1932. It features an aircraft-inspired aerodynamic body unlike anything on the road at that time.

The headlights and front fenders integrate smoothly into the body and a panoramic, one-piece windshield provides an unobstructive view of the road ahead. A removable roof panel provides an open driving experience➤



DUBONNET: THE DRINK AND THE SOURCE OF THE FAMILY'S WEALTH

Who drinks Dubonnet? A July 15, 2006 *Wall Street Journal* article revealed that the Queen Mother had quite a fondness for this fortified wine (as does her daughter). She preferred it as a Dubonnet Cocktail prepared with equal parts of gin and Dubonnet (recommended in 1-1/2-ounce

portions) and served "on the rocks" instead of the more traditional presentation: shaken with ice and strained into a cocktail glass and garnished with lemon.

Might there be another Dubonnet/Hispano-Suiza connection in the world of libations? King Alfonso

XIII of Spain was an ardent Hispano-Suiza enthusiasts and isn't it interesting that the Alfonso cocktail is made with Dubonnet? (Coat one sugar cube with two dashes of aromatic bitters. Pour half an ounce of Dubonnet over the sugar and fill the chilled glass with champagne. Cheers!)



DUBONNET FAMILY GENEALOGY

Some references state that André was the son of the founder of the Dubonnet aperitif, but I believe he was the founder's grandson. The confusion is probably brought on by the fact that both his father and grandfather were named Joseph. André's father Joseph Marius Dubonnet was born in 1855 but the Dubonnet corporate website states the Dubonnet cordial was developed in 1846, so Joseph Jr. could not have invented the drink. Joseph's father, sometimes referred to as Sir Joseph Dubonnet, was born in 1818, making him 28 when he invented the drink. He is described as a wine merchant and chemist.



STUDIO PHOTOGRAPHY BY MICHAEL FURMAN, THE MULLIN AUTOMOTIVE MUSEUM DISPLAY
PHOTOGRAPHY BY DREW PHILLIPS • ADDITIONAL IMAGES BY NELSON THORPE



Its doors incorporate curved glass and the entire door assembly slides backward, employing a patented design by James Young known as “parallel action.” Wheel discs complement the body which is free of ornamentation and tapers to a point at the rear when viewed in profile. The passenger compartment seats four and mechanically, its chassis incorporates Dubonnet’s independent suspension. It is a large automobile, measuring 223 inches in length.

Xenia was hidden during World War II and emerged unscathed in 1946, used in a parade to commemorate the opening of de Tunnel Saint-Cloud near Paris for civilian use. During the 1960s, it was owned and restored by Alain Balleret, the president of the Hispano-Suiza Club of France. Charles Morse purchased the car in 1999 before acquisition by Peter Mullin in 2003.

Eighty-plus years after its creation, it still looks futuristic today and has been featured in a number of museum exhibitions recognizing automotive artistry, including:

- > “Curves of Steel: Streamlined Automobile Design,” The Phoenix Art Museum, Phoenix, Arizona, Spring 2007.
- > “The Allure of the Automobile: Driving in Style, 1930-1965,” The Portland Art Museum, Summer 2011.
- > “Sensuous Steel: Art Deco Automobiles,” The Frist Center for the Visual Arts, Nashville, Tennessee, Summer 2013.
- > “Precious Metal,” The Petersen Automotive Museum, Los Angeles, California, 2015-16
- > “The Art and Times of the French Coachbuilders,” The Mullin Automotive Museum, Oxnard, California, Spring 2018. ●

A partial list of Xenia’s awards:

- > 2000 Pebble Beach Concours d’Elegance, Most Elegant Closed Car
- > 2001 Amelia Island Concours d’Elegance, Best of Show
- > 2001 Greenwich Concours d’Elegance, Best of Show
- > 2001 Meadow Brook Concours d’Elegance, Engineering Excellence Award
- > 2005 Art Center College of Design Car Classic, Student’s Choice Award
- > 2009 Goodwood Festival of Speed, Best of Show
- > 2016 Windsor Castle Concours d’Elegance, Pullman Trophy
- > 2021 Amelia Island Concours d’Elegance, Hispano-Suiza Award



IMITATION IS THE SINCEREST FORM OF FLATTERY

Both the Tulipwood and Xenia Hispano-Suizas have been replicated in scale models and longtime CCCA member Joe Malaney shared these images from his vast collection. The 1924 Tulipwood Torpedo is a 1:24 scale model by the Franklin Mint and the 1938 Xenia is a 1:18 scale model by Minichamps. On a considerably larger scale, CCCA member and Greater Illinois Region Director Russ Rodriquez shared photos of this remarkable full-size Tulipwood Torpedo creation in his collection.

