

CADILLAC WOODIE



Photos opposite page clockwise from top left: Rear seating area; Rear hatch finished in wood; Bill Lockwood with the 1941 Station Wagon.

# 1941 CADILLAC 61 SERIES STATION WAGON

BY JOHN MILLIKEN

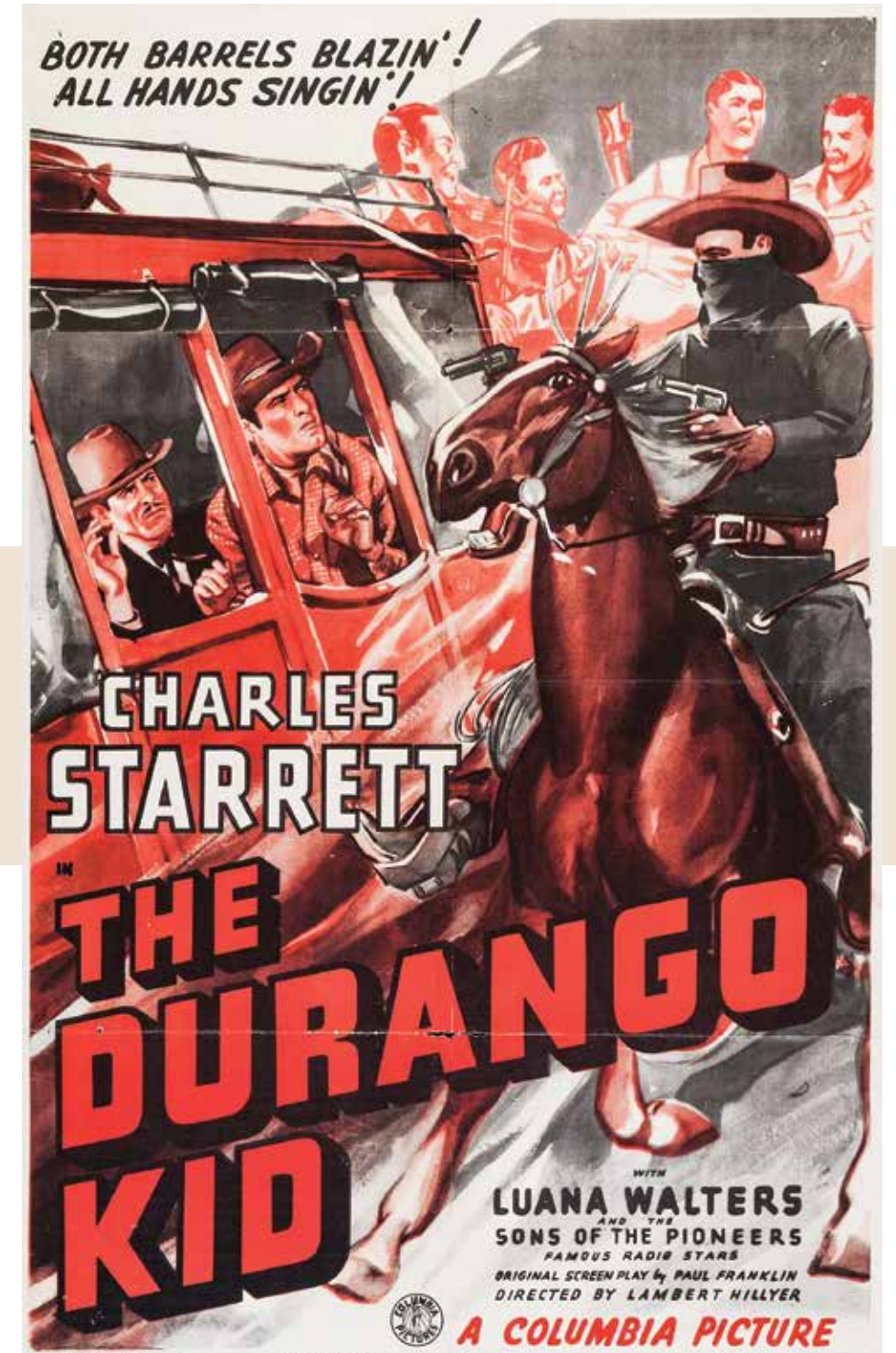


Classic era automobile manufacturers were primarily concentrated in Michigan, Indiana, and northeastern states with few hailing from the west coast. The steam-powered Doble of Emeryville, California holds the distinction of the only California-based Classic marque. Likewise, there were few custom coachbuilders located in California, with Walter M. Murphy Coachbuilders the best known among those. A few Murphy employees established their own coachbuilding enterprises, such as Bohman & Schwartz and the J. Gerald Kirchoff Body Works.

Howard "Dutch" Darrin's short-lived operation in Los Angeles spawned Coachcraft, Ltd. led by Rudy Stoessel who previously worked at Pierce-Arrow, Kirchoff and Darrin. Stoessel's partners were Paul Erdos and Burt Chalmers and the operation was established in 1940 located on Melrose Avenue.

Coachcraft specialized in the customization of existing bodies, rather than creation of ground-up designs. Shown here is one of the firm's more interesting designs, a station wagon based on a 1941 Cadillac 61 Series. The car is pictured in Roy Schneider's "Cadillacs of the Forties" as well as Maurice Hendry's "Cadillac: The Complete History" (and described as an Estate Car) when owned by CCCA member Hollis Weihe.

While most station wagons have four doors, this car is a two-door body style with a large rear hatch hinged at the top. In British car vernacular, it would be considered a Shooting Brake, which conjures up images of wealthy sportsmen venturing out for hunting excursions.



## CADILLAC WOODIE

Stock 1941 Cadillac panels include the hood, grille and front fenders, but from the A-pillar rearward, it is largely custom built, with the exception of the rear fenders. Wood siding is fitted to the doors and continues to the rear of the car. The rear hatch is also skinned with wood, as are all window surrounds, with wood slats applied to the roof which protect the paint when the roof-top luggage rack is put to use. The dark red paintwork is applied to the hood, fenders and curving roof which tapers to the rear bumper. The rear side glass is made of two pieces, extending from the B-pillar backward giving the car a light appearance. As odd as a two-door wagon from this era sounds, it works remarkably well.

Car was originally built for actor Charles Starrett ("The Durango Kid") who was pictured with the car in front of the Coachcraft headquarters. In the early 1970s, Hollis Weihe of Bakersfield who had owned the car for many years, decided to part with it. Bill Lockwood of Peekskill, New York (who sold me a 1938 LaSalle Convertible Coupe years earlier) decided to go in on this deal with me but the car has remained on the east coast for more than 40 years. The car has been repainted and reupholstered but its exterior wood is original and in excellent condition.

In 2015, I submitted this car to the CCCA Classification Committee for Classic status consideration and it was approved as single example. (In 2021, the CCCA recognized all Cadillac 61 Series as Classics.) The quality of the work of this example speaks to the craftsmanship Coachcraft provided and I hope to share it with other enthusiasts in the near future. ●

Editor's note: *The Beaulieu Encyclopedia of the Automobile*, Coachbuilding reports that Coachcraft Ltd. was in business from 1940 until 1966 and that some designs were penned by Phil Wright and Strother MacMinn. An unrelated firm also named Coachcraft operated in London from 1934 to 1950, crafting bodies for Railton, MG and Bristol.

## OTHER COACHCRAFT CLASSICS

A frequent styling cue Coachcraft incorporated in its designs was a front fender line that extended into the door. That feature is visible in these three examples—a 1941 Cadillac, a 1941 Mercury and a 1948 Lincoln Continental.



*The only Mercury Classic  
- a 1941 Sedan  
by Coachcraft*



*A 1941 Cadillac 62 Convertible Coupe by Coachcraft*



*The Petersen Automotive Museum's 1948 Lincoln Continental Coachcraft cabriolet*