



For years I had attended the Pebble Beach Concours d'Elegance and spent a good amount of time looking at the magnificent cars in the Duesenberg Class. The thought of owning one of those great cars was unthinkable until I happen to look at the Gooding & Company auction catalog for the 2013 Amelia Island Auction. There in glorious color, was a bright red 1931 Duesenberg with contrasting maroon fenders and beltline and a tan canvas roof. The estimated price range made the car even more interesting and I started to consider registering as a telephone bidder as I had not planned to attend the Amelia Island Concours that year. I might not to have ever gotten around to registering for the auction if Garth Hammers of Gooding & Company had not called to see if he could assist me in acquiring a car at its auction. >

J-338

1931 DUESENBERG J LEBARON CONVERTIBLE SEDAN

BY AARON WEISS



I mentioned the Duesenberg to Garth, and before I knew it, I was registered and assured that a representative would call me when the Duesenberg went over the block. Keep in mind, that I was considering a car sight unseen on Garth's representations, that it was the real deal and would be a great addition to my collection.

On auction day, I received the dreaded phone call. I could hear the cacophony of the auction in the background and then the announcement of the auction lot number and a description of the 1931 Duesenberg J-338, LaBaron Convertible Sedan. Usually a bit hesitant to aggressively bid, I instructed the agent to make a stab at the car. I could hear the auctioneer announce another bid. The agent immediately asked if I wanted to counter. I was told that there was only one other buyer and that I could get the car with another bid. Why not? Another bid was made. Dead silence, then the count down, and I hear the words I am not sure I was prepared for . . . "Sold, to the telephone bidder!" "Congratulations" the agent said, and an adrenalin rush immediately went through my body as the reality of the moment set in, and the thought of writing a huge check filled my mind. I was now the proud owner of a Duesenberg.

I was ambivalent about the purchase wondering what I had gotten myself into and how much work the car might need to make it concours competitive. Better yet, how much would it cost to make it concours ready? Two weeks passed and I received a call from the carrier wanting to know if he could drop off the car at my collection Sunday morning. I agreed, commiserating that this meeting would interrupt my regular morning workout. Sunday came, the car arrived and aside from travel dust, it looked better than I had expected. Next on tap was an evaluation by Randy Ema. But first a side note.

When car guys congregate, the first question asked is not "How

Photos clockwise from top left: Sunday, August 26, 2018 on the lawn at the Pebble Beach Concours d'Elegance; Thursday, August 23, 2018 in front of the Lodge on the Pebble Beach Tour d'Elegance; The engine-turned instrument panel.



are you?", but "Have you bought anything lately?" I mentioned the purchase to a friend with the request for confidentiality, as I had not yet found the right moment to mention the purchase to my wife, Valerie. The "friend" told his wife but forgot to mention that Valerie did not know and to keep it to herself. That weekend at a cocktail party my wife's friend could not contain herself and mentioned to Valerie, "I heard that Aaron bought a new car." Valerie was upset and marched across the room where I was talking to a group of men. "Aaron," she asked, "Did you buy a new car?" "No" I responded, and she then went back to her circle of woman reporting back that contrary to what this one

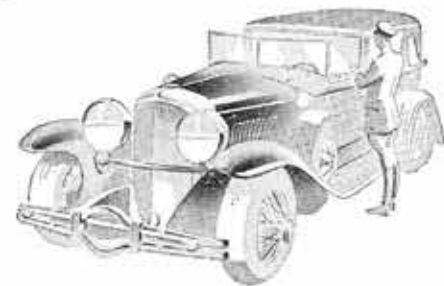
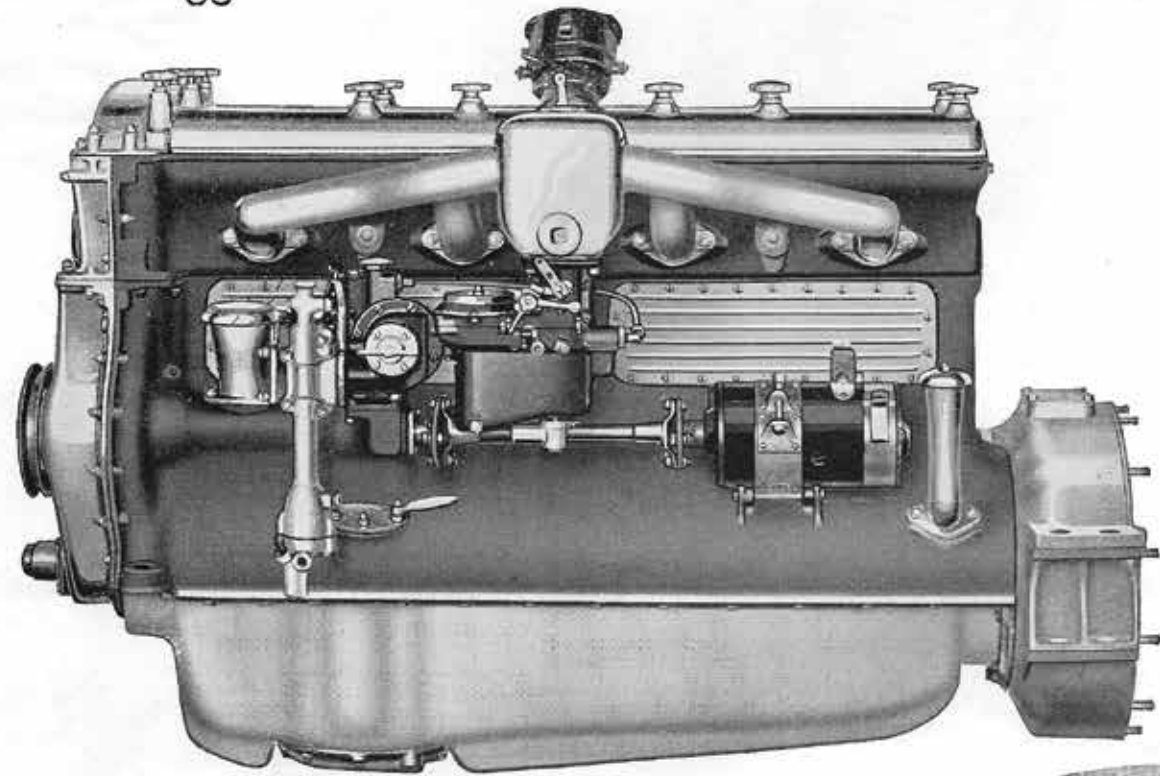
woman had said, I had not bought a new car. One of the women responded, "You did not ask the right question. Go back and ask if he bought another car." Valerie marched back across the room, looked me straight in the eye sternly and once again asked, "Did you buy another car?" "Yes," I responded. Valerie countered, "You lied to me."

"No I did not. You asked if I bought a new car, I have not. The car I bought is over 85 years old. You asked if I bought a new car, and I responded honestly. No, it's a very old car."

Randy Ema visited my collection the following week to survey the car. After two hours of going over every inch of the >



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There are decided advantages in having at your command, twice the horsepower possessed by any other car. The greatest benefit is that of tremendous reserve power. No motor car gives the best performance when operated at its maximum of power or speed. With the average automobile, 65 miles an hour is such a strain on the motor that engine noise and vibration become excessive and result in discomfort and nervous fatigue to driver and passengers. . . . To a Duesenberg, 65 miles an hour is little more than idling along. Noise and vibration are hardly perceptible. The throttle is not even

half open. Only 60 horsepower is required, leaving a vast reserve of power for acceleration and hill-climbing. . . . Nor is it in engine power alone that a Duesenberg surpasses all other motor cars. In the preponderance of aluminum parts that make for lighter weight, in the far greater strength of frame, in the unique automatic lubrication system, in superlative driving ease and riding comfort, and in all those refinements of mechanism that make for automotive perfection, a Duesenberg definitely earns its title of The World's Finest Motor Car.

Chassis \$8,500

DUESENBERG, INC., INDIANAPOLIS, IND.



vehicle and a trip around the block, Mr. Emma gave it a thumbs up. "Everything is correct, it just needs a good cleaning." Over the following three years, the car underwent a sympathetic restoration under the direction of Greg Morrell and Bob Mosier's shop.

Visitors to my collection during this time were treated with an incredible view of the Duesenberg without its front fenders and hood enclosure. The chrome was plated, the aluminum polished, the engine block and radiator shroud painted and then the car and its disassembled fenders were shipped to Nick's Old Car Specialty for some major paint work. The biggest decision that I had to make was whether to replace the whitewall tires with blackwalls. I took a poll of a group of my friends that owned Duesenbergs and the consensus was white walls. When I visited Coker Tire to buy the new tires, I failed to specify white walls and ultimately bought a set of black walls. I hate returning items, so I decided to mount them on the car. The black walls really made the car look more aggressive and as you can see in the pictures, they remain on the car. The final touch on the Duesenberg was a new interior and top installed by Kenny Sisk. The Duesenberg was now almost ready for Pebble Beach! The final touch was a thorough detail courtesy of a crew from Jay Leno's garage. When completed, it was truly stunning.

Every old car has a story and this Duesenberg as no exception. On September 15, 1930, William S. Rupert of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania took delivery of Model J Duesenberg J-338, chassis 2350. J-338 had been used previously as a factory demonstrator. When new, the car was bodied as an Arlington sedan by Derham. In 1933, the sedan was purchased by William Ferguson, also of Philadelphia. Near the end of

Photos clockwise from top left: The advertising copy of this period ad is concise: **265 Horsepower.** 'Nuf said.; Correct apple green engine paint

1944, Mr. Marion Roberts of Grand Island, New York purchased J-338/2350 as well as J-127/2152 which, following a previous chassis renovation, had been fitted with a new LeBaron Convertible Sedan body. Mr. Roberts allowed both Model Js to languish on his property before finally selling the automobiles as a pair to John North of Maryland in 1965. By mid-1967 Mr. North sold the pair to noted Duesenberg collector Homer Fitterling. During Mr. Fitterling's ownership, J-338 was treated to a thorough restoration by his collection manager, Keith Brown. It was at this time that the LeBaron Convertible Sedan body was removed from chassis 2152 along with its firewall and installed on the restored chassis of J-338/2350. Mr. Brown reports that once the convertible sedan's restoration was finished, it was a main attraction of the Fitterling collection and was displayed in the foyer of his museum. Auburn-Cord-Duesenberg Club records show that in July 1988, J-338 was inspected and certified by Duesenberg historian Fred Roe and was granted ACD Category One status, the original Derham sedan body noted as "gone."

Upon Mr. Fitterling's passing, his entire collection was purchased as a group for \$13 million by collector Ed Weaver. Following Mr. Weaver's passing in 1995, his estate was sold at auction. J-338 was sold along with 20 other Duesenbergs among approximately 200 collector automobiles. A copy of a judging sheet declares that J-338 was subsequently shown at the 1996 Port Gardner Bay Concours where it earned high marks. In 2001, the convertible sedan was purchased by Robert Petersen and had been displayed with his collection in the years since. After my purchase of the Duesenberg, there was a story in the *Los Angeles Times* that criticized the Petersen Museum's board for selling a number of their cars in order to raise money to remodel the museum. I had to ponder if that added provenance to the car.

Well, that's my story and I am sticking to it! •