

**BY RON VERSCHOOR**

Opening the brochure for Packard's 1930 734 Speedster model, the first word of the copy is "Performance." That, coupled with the cover image of two Speedsters negotiating the banked curves of the Packard Proving Grounds at speed tells you everything you need to know about this very rare offering.

Packard ownership conferred a certain level of prestige, having cultivated a well-deserved reputation for quality, exclusivity and luxury during its 30-year history. But the Speedster was different. Those traditional characteristics remained, now greatly enhanced, perhaps even upstaged by Packard's emphasis on performance. >



# PRESTIGE AND POWER PACKARD'S LEGENDARY 734 SPEEDSTER

“The thrill of soaring power unleashed at a toe-touch is his who drives the Speedster.”



Speedster Runabout formerly owned by Ray Scherr. Photo by Grace Gluck



William Vaccaro's Speedster Runabout. Photo by Grace Gluck



## THE SPEEDSTER RUNABOUT

**THE SPEEDSTER PHAETON**



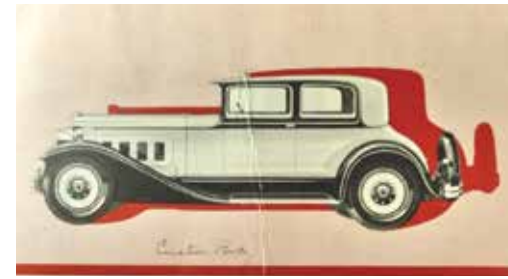
Photos from top: Don Sear's Speedster Phaeton at the 2006 Grand Classic in Monterey; Bruce Grinager's Speedster Phaeton at the CCCA Museum Experience

The 734 Speedster drafted off the 1929 626 Speedster formula—the largest engine paired with the smallest chassis—but benefited from improvements, described in the brochure as “Enlarged and refined over the first Speedster.” Addressing the stubby appearance of the 626 Speedster, the 734 Speedster employed an eight-inch longer chassis (wheelbase of 134.5 inches vs. the '29's 126.5 inches) which allowed for more flowing lines. Visual appeal was further enhanced by lower and narrower bodies based on the standard models.

While use of the Speedster moniker during the Classic Era conjures up images of two-passenger, open models, Packard's 734 Speedster offering was broad: a two-passenger Runabout in boattail form, four-passenger Phaetons, Sedans and Victoria Coupes, and a late addition, the Roadster with rumble seat that could also accommodate four passengers. Only the Runabout employed dual sidemounts; the other body styles featured a single rear-mounted spare tire. All Speedsters appropriately carried the “Custom Made by Packard” body tag.

Powering the Speedster was the Custom and Deluxe Eight 385-cubic-inch, straight-eight engine massaged and modified with a dual updraft Detroit Lubricator carburetor, a finned exhaust manifold, vacuum gasoline booster pump and high-compression heads. These and other mechanical improvements increased horsepower from 106 to 125 for cars equipped with the 4.85:1 compression ratio head and 145 with the 6:1 high compression head. Coupled with a lighter weight chassis and body, the Speedster in Roadster guise had a power-to-weight ratio of 29.6 lb/hp compared to 44.3 for a 745 Deluxe Eight Roadster. A 4:1 axle ratio

**THE SPEEDSTER VICTORIA**

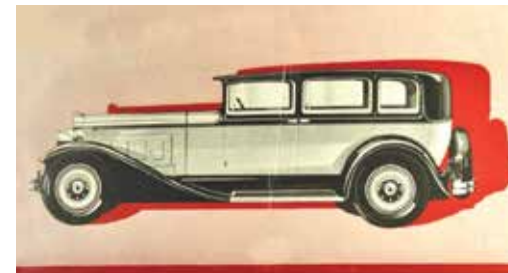


“ A three-to-one gear ratio and high compression head may be specified at no additional cost. ”



The Nethercutt Collection's Speedster Victoria

**THE SPEEDSTER SEDAN**



The CCCA Museum's Speedster Sedan. Photo by Don Desmett



Speedster Roadster formerly owned by Robert W Valpey

made for brisk off-the-line acceleration but a 3.3:1 ratio could be specified for high-speed cruising, making 100 mph speeds possible. In a most un-Packard-like manner, the brochure makes note of a "release valve on muffler operated from the front seat floor for high speeds." While not a traditional cutout, this valve channels exhaust directly through the center holes in the baffles resulting in a purposeful, yet dignified exhaust note.

The emphasis on power came with a high price tag, making the Speedster the true top-of-the-line model for 1930. Open 734 Speedsters were priced at \$5,200 with closed styles priced at \$6,000, significantly higher than the comparable body styles on the 745 Deluxe Eight chassis which ranged in price from \$4,585 to \$4,885 and more >

“Strictly custom built and may be developed in any upholstery or color harmonies that please the owner’s expression of good taste.”



clockwise from top: The Hilarides’ Speedster Roadster, body 452-6; The Big 8 produced up to 145 HP in the Speedster; The only body style with a rumble seat.

### 1930 PACKARD 734 MODELS

Body #	Body style	Price	Weight	HP	LB/HP ratio (@ 145 HP)	Estimated Number built
422	Runabout	\$5,200	4,210	125 or 145	29.0	39
443	Sedan	\$6,000	4,580	125 or 145	31.6	19
445	Phaeton	\$5,200	4,205	125 or 145	29.0	32
447	Victoria	\$6,000	4,525	125 or 145	31.2	17
452	Roadster	\$5,200	4,295	125 or 145	29.6	6

For comparison, Packard Custom, Deluxe and Standard Eight models listed below.

412	740 Roaster	\$3,190	4,245	106	40.0	
422	745 Roadster	\$4,585	4,695	106	44.3	
403	726 Sedan	\$2,375	4,295	90	47.7	



Note the updated front end treatment and bumpers on this Speedster which was customized by Indiana Packard dealer J.L. Heaton. Photo courtesy of the Pebble Beach Concours d'Elegance

#### FURTHER READING

- “Castle in Hawaii: The Tale of William Vaccaro’s Packard Speedster,” by Walt Gosden, *The Classic Car*, Winter 2014.
- “Some 1929 and 1930 Packard Speedsters,” by Brooks T. Brierley, *The Classic Car*, Summer 2013.
- “The Case for My Classic: Packard’s Speedster of 1930,” by Bruce Grinager, *The Classic Car*, March 2001.
- “734 Speedster Phaeton: One Car, Sixty-Six Years, Three Lives,” by Beverly Rae Kimes, *The Classic Car*, June 1996.
- “Classic Speedsters: The Cars, the Times and the Characters That Drove Them,” by Ronald D. Sieber, Steering Wheel Press, 2021.

than twice as expensive as the 726 Sedan, priced at \$2,375.

Exclusivity was ensured with a very limited production run. Inclusive of all five body styles, production estimates range from 113 to 118, the latter based on the motor number range of 18403 to 184120. Considering Packard built 36,364 automobiles for the 1930 model year, the Speedster series accounted for less than one-third of one percent of production. Exclusivity at a price.

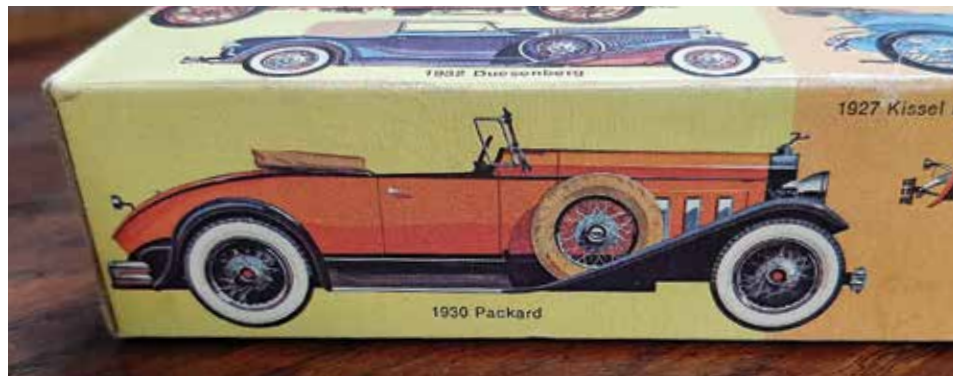
Packard’s marketing appeal in the brochure describes the prospective 734 Speedster owner this way:

*“Thus the commuter—the one who loves a swift car for the open road—or the admirer of keenly responsive mechanics, will find the Packard Speedster all that can be asked of an all-around motor car richly endowed with that great motoring attribute: PERFORMANCE.”*

Or more accurately, Performance and Prestige.

There are currently seventeen 734 Speedsters listed with the CCCA. ●

#### POSTSCRIPT



My introduction to the Packard 734 was a bit of a throw-away several decades ago. An image of a Runabout appeared on a 1970s-era box of Kleenex facial tissue. This was the compact, “Little Travelers” size and artwork on the box featured renderings of 14 automobiles from the early 1900s to the 1930s. Captioned as a “1930 Packard,” the car is clearly a 734 Speedster Runabout. From the coral or salmon colored paintwork with brown fenders, I’m guessing the artist used the ex-Harrah Runabout for inspiration. How old is this box? I’m not sure, but it does have a universal pricing code and those were first used in 1974. The price sticker on the box shows a cost of 13 cents. Like the car itself, values have increased significantly. One current online auction site lists an unopened box for \$70.

The bottom side of those Kleenex boxes featured a larger, single image of one of the 14 cars, plus a brief description. The box I have describes in greater detail a 1906 Renault and I’ve seen other boxes with the 1932 Duesenberg on the bottom. Does anyone have a box with the 734 Speedster on the bottom?