

Under the Hood, April 2019

It is commonly believed the **Chevy built their first V8 engine** with the creation of the 265 ci small block in 1955. However, that is not correct. While many manufacturers were still building flathead engines (similar in design to your Craftsman lawnmower) even into the late 1950's, Chevy was building more efficient 4 & 6 cylinder overhead valve engines. In 1918 (yes, way back then) Chevy built their first overhead valve V8 engine. This engine was for the **Chevy Model D**. The engine was 288 ci (4.7 liter) and produced 55 hp at 2700 rpm.



Reports show that Chevy built 3- 4,000 Model D's. I have never seen one in person, but I have seen photos. The engine was rather strange by modern standards in that the starter, distributor and generator were all located in the valley of the V. The fan belt only served the water pump.

Chevy dropped the Model D after one year. This car had the unwelcome distinction of being featured in a 2011 publication "Worst Cars of All Time" as #11 of 100. However, I suspect one reason it had a short life is that the Model D was Chevy's foray into higher priced cars and the price was \$1,385, a princely sum in those days. Famed athlete Jim Thorpe was an original owner of a Model D. His car is one of the ten Model D's thought to still exist. Another Model D is part of the rotating display at the GM Heritage Collection. After this one-year V8, Chevy reverted to 4 cylinder engines until 1929 when the first "Stovebolt 6" was offered. The 6 produced 46 hp, and variations of this 6 cylinder design were continued in production for the next 4 decades, and in the first Corvettes. The 1929 Chevy had a price of \$595, so you can easily see why the Model D was not a big seller. You can use this story as your next bar bet as everyone assumes Ford beat Chevy to the V8. Ford's first V8 (flathead design) was produced in 1932. This engine originally displaced 221 ci and provided an impressive 65 hp, and by 1934 had increased to 85 hp. The difference is that Ford continued to produce their flathead V8 until 1954 when they introduced Ford's first overhead valve V8. Some would argue that Ford rushed their flathead V8 into production to compete with the new Chevy 6, as all Fords up to this point were 4 cylinder vehicles.

Have you ever been to Hickory Corners, Michigan? Surprisingly, this is the home of the **Gilmore Car Museum**, one of the largest car museums in the country. The Museum has about 400 vehicles on display and is open year around to visit. The collection includes muscle cars, brass era vehicles, vintage camping trailers, a full size service station, vintage railroad car diner plus a large race car collection.

AJ Foyt's 1960 Meskowski caught my attention as this was AJ's first championship race car. In the NW, we are somewhat spoiled with the large LeMay Collection at Marymount and America's Car Museum



near the Tacoma Dome, but we should be aware that there are a lot of car crazies elsewhere in our country.

Thinking of car museums, have you ever seen a Playboy? During the later years of WWII, a group of investors decided to create a new car (Playboy Automobile Company) as soon as the war ended. Their prototype was introduced in the fall of 1946. This car was what we would today call a subcompact and was powered by a 1.5 liter, 4 cylinder putting out 40 hp. Compare that prototype to the full-size Fords,



The 1948 **PLAYBOY**

Plymouths and Chevys that were produced prior to the start of the war and then re-introduced as soon as possible after the war. A total of 97 Playboys were produced before the company was forced into bankruptcy. The assets were purchased by Kaiser and I suspect some of the tooling was then used to produce the Henry J (named after Henry J Kaiser) automobile in 1950-54. Sears even sold a badge engineered version of the Henry J, called Allstate, in 1952-53. One urban legend has a friend telling Hugh Hefner that he should appropriate the name

of this short-lived automobile for his upcoming magazine. True? Who knows?

Although my last experience with Route 66 was a disappointment, I guess I am a bit of a romantic and cannot resist the lure of Route 66. Recently, Judy and I traveled to New Mexico. Route 66 went through the middle of Albuquerque. We were headed east from town towards the Turquoise Trail for the leisurely drive to Santa Fe, when we left the freeway for a section of Route 66. This was the "Singing Road". For about ¼ of a mile, you put your right tires on the special rumble strip and you clearly hear "America the Beautiful". I was doubtful, but I admit the tune was quite clear. We were driving a rental car with a relatively short wheelbase. I



wondered how different the tune would sound if we were in a much longer wheelbase vehicle. On this trip we had purposely planned some quirky side trips. A short way off the Turquoise Trail, you can find the Tinkertown Museum. TripAdvisor names Tinkertown as a top ten small museum in the USA. Built by Ross Ward, a circus model builder and carnival sign painter, over a period of 40 years, the museum features thousands of hand carved miniature figures and dioramas. Many of the scenes are mechanized, so we watch the butcher chasing the chicken and the trapeze artists swinging through the sky. Larger items include a significant collection of circus type machines to tell your fortune or otherwise take your money. Ross died in 2002, but his widow still runs the museum and I suspect the reasonable entrance fee is her retirement income. Coming south from Taos we took the slower "low road" back to Santa Fe. The Village of Embudo is just a bend in the Rio Grande River, but it is also the home of the **Classical Gas Museum**. Part of the collection is stored outside and consists a wide variety of whatever the owner found interesting. However, there is one building where everything inside is either fully restored or in original condition. The owner/collector spent his lifelong career in the service station industry. When we arrived, he was sitting outside in a folding chair near the entrance to the

building. Inside is a collection of everything service station related. Original pumps, signs, and other



collectables. I remember the cardboard display boards which would be in the station windows and have everything from radiator stop leak products to the latest and greatest oil additives. The displays were 100% complete with product, as if he plucked them from a station in the 1950's or 60's. The entrance fee was a voluntary contribution to the local animal shelter. As we were leaving I stopped to talk to the owner and mentioned that my father had owned a Texaco station. At this comment the owner jumped up and proceeded to take us back into the collection for another 20 minutes while he told us story after story about Texaco.

Did you know that at one time there were 50,000 Texaco stations in the country? The Indian Refining Company developed and patented the first wax free lubricating oil and marked the oil under the Havoline name. Texaco coveted the process and Havoline name and ultimately bought Indian Refining. This wax free process is still the standard in the world for conventional motor oils. As we got back into the car Judy commented that I had been bested by a trivia expert. Quickly, how many museums did I mention this month?