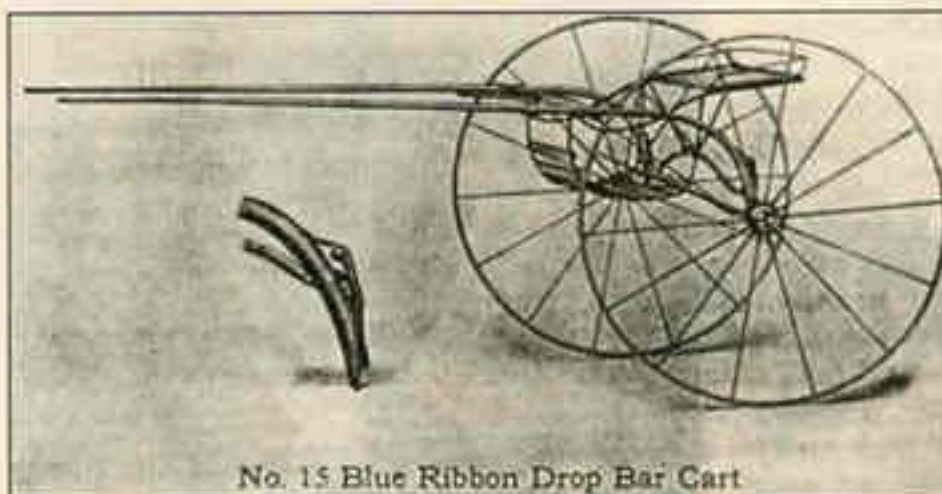


# THE MAN AND HIS CARS

## Part I



1. It could be said that J. Dallas Dort and William Crapo Durant launched what eventually became General Motors when they became partners in the Flint Road Cart Co. on Sept. 28, 1886 and produced horse-drawn road carts similar to this Blue Ribbon Drop Bar Cart that quickly made them millionaires.

There are times, in this wacky business of motor car history, when it seems a personality, a man overshadows the cars he built. If we took Henry Ford as an example, it would be hard to decide which had the greatest impact on history, the man or his cars. The impact of both were enormous.

Then there are men like J. Dallas Dort, who certainly had to overshadow the cars he built. Dorts, made from 1915 to 1924, were perhaps a bit better than the average run of assembled cars. But they were assembled motor cars, nonetheless.

But the man? There is little question but that his impact on motor car history is far greater than that for which he usually is credited.

We would have to begin by talking about William Crapo (Billy) Durant, truly one of the giants of the industry. He's the man who made Buick a success; who created General Motors, the greatest motor car-making combine of all times; then created Chevrolet; and finally, Durant Motors, which also glowed for a time as a motor-making combine.

But even before that Durant had been a millionaire, partner with J. Dallas Dort in the Durant-Dort Carriage Co., the biggest maker of horse-drawn vehicles in the world.

Why all this talk about Durant? Well, it is simply impossible to separate the careers of the two men, to tell the story of one without the other. In fact, we will go so far as to suggest that without Dort some of the most spectacular success chapters in the life of Durant might never have taken place.

In any case, when Dort was born in Inkster, Mich., on Feb. 2, 1861, the guns of the great Civil War had not yet begun to thunder. But the infant had scarcely begun to exercise his lungs when his parents, Josiah and Marey Dort, gave him the name Josiah Dallas Dort.

Despite the fact that it was his father's name, young Dort decided early in his life that he didn't like the name Josiah and preferred to be known as J. Dallas Dort.

Dort's career might be labeled something like, "From Crockery to Carriages to



2. Officials of the Flint Road Cart Co.'s successor, the Durant-Dort Carriage Co., pose with William C. Durant, far left, and J. Dallas Dort, center with mustache, in an early photograph.

Cars." By the time he was 15 he was already a salesman in a crockery store in Ypsilanti, Mich., where he had gone to attend Michigan State Normal School. He was still going to school while selling the crocks. Incidentally, in those days before plastic, tin and aluminum containers, crockery was a very important item in American households.

No matter, by the time Dort was 24 he had been employed in several stores owned by J.H. Wortley, first in Ypsilanti, then Jackson. By the time fate began aiming its big blow at the young man he was with a hardware store in Flint, Mich.

Or was it Billy Durant about to strike?

The two were already friends on that particular day in September 1886, when Durant started walking down the street to a business appointment but stopped off at the hardware store to say hello to Dort.

But the real blitzer came as a third young man named Johnny Alger happened to be driving by on a strange little high wheel horse-drawn cart and also stopped at the hardware store to chat. He also knew the two men and he wanted to show off his new cart.

The cart had a very unusual, and patented, suspension system which allowed the driver (it was a one-passenger affair) to go barreling down a rough road, and they were mostly rough in those days, without jolting the stuffings out of the the driver.

It was when Alger began explaining all this, proudly, that he noticed Durant was registering a bit of skepticism. Alger then made his challenge: "Climb up, I'll give you a ride and prove it," he said.

That climbing up took a bit of doing because, as we said, the gig was designed for only one passenger. But Durant managed to squeeze himself on half the seat and away they went, to deliver Durant for his appointment at the gas works.

That was when Durant did indeed become convinced that there was something unique about the little cart. It was so unique, in fact, that Durant decided immediately that he wanted a part of the action.

After asking a few questions he found out that the cart was being made by the Coldwater Road Cart Co., about 120 miles from Flint.

It probably tells us something about this man Durant when we learn that he was

indeed so excited about the little cart that on that very evening he was on the train, headed for Coldwater. He walked into the business the next morning to ask if he could buy an interest in the firm.

"Why not buy it all?" came the response from Thomas O'Brien, one of the partners in the project. When Durant asked the price it became apparent that it was no big deal after all. The two partners, O'Brien and William H. Schmedlin, agreed to sell the business, their stock of parts and the patent for \$1,500. The deal included two finished and brightly painted carts.

The partners were willing to let it go for such a bargain price because, it seemed, they were involved in other business deals and needed some cash, fast.

Durant quickly agreed to the deal but he too lacked that much cash, fast. We have to remind ourselves that in 1886 even \$1,500 was a lot of money, especially for a young man just getting started. So, Durant's promise to the cart makers was, "It's a deal." He would, he said, show up with the cash in five days.



When Durant returned to Flint he did two things. First, he went to the bank and managed to talk his way to a loan of \$2,000 (he figured he would need \$500 to get started) and he told his friend Dort about the hot new deal.

Now it was Dort's turn to get excited. Did Durant want a partner? He did. For \$1,000 Dort could have half of the deal. Now it was Dort's turn to raise some fast cash.

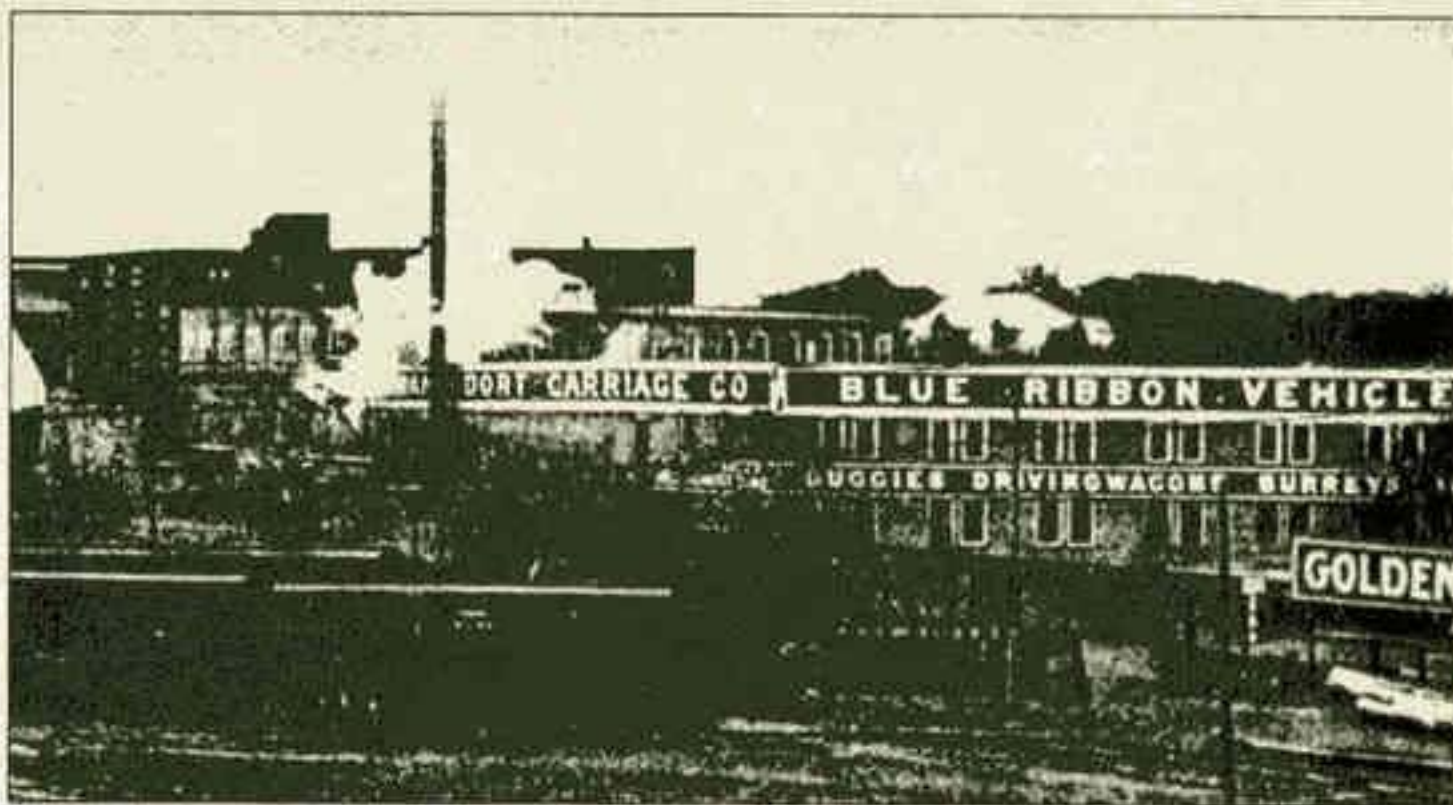
He managed to talk his boss at the hardware store into backing him for \$500 and then headed for Inkster to ask his mother for the other half. He got it.

In fact, when the two new partners got around to organizing their new company it was Dort who was named president. Durant said he didn't want the title. All he wanted was the freedom to make things go.

He did. In fact he moved so fast he had 600 of the carts sold before the new company had a chance to make a single one. He did it by shipping one of the two "samples" to the Wisconsin Tri-State Fair where the little gig promptly won the blue ribbon prize for horse-drawn vehicles and Durant began busily writing orders.

Knowing they could never set up a production line fast enough to fill the orders, the two men turned to another carriage and wagon maker to start production. Later they set up their own production facilities.

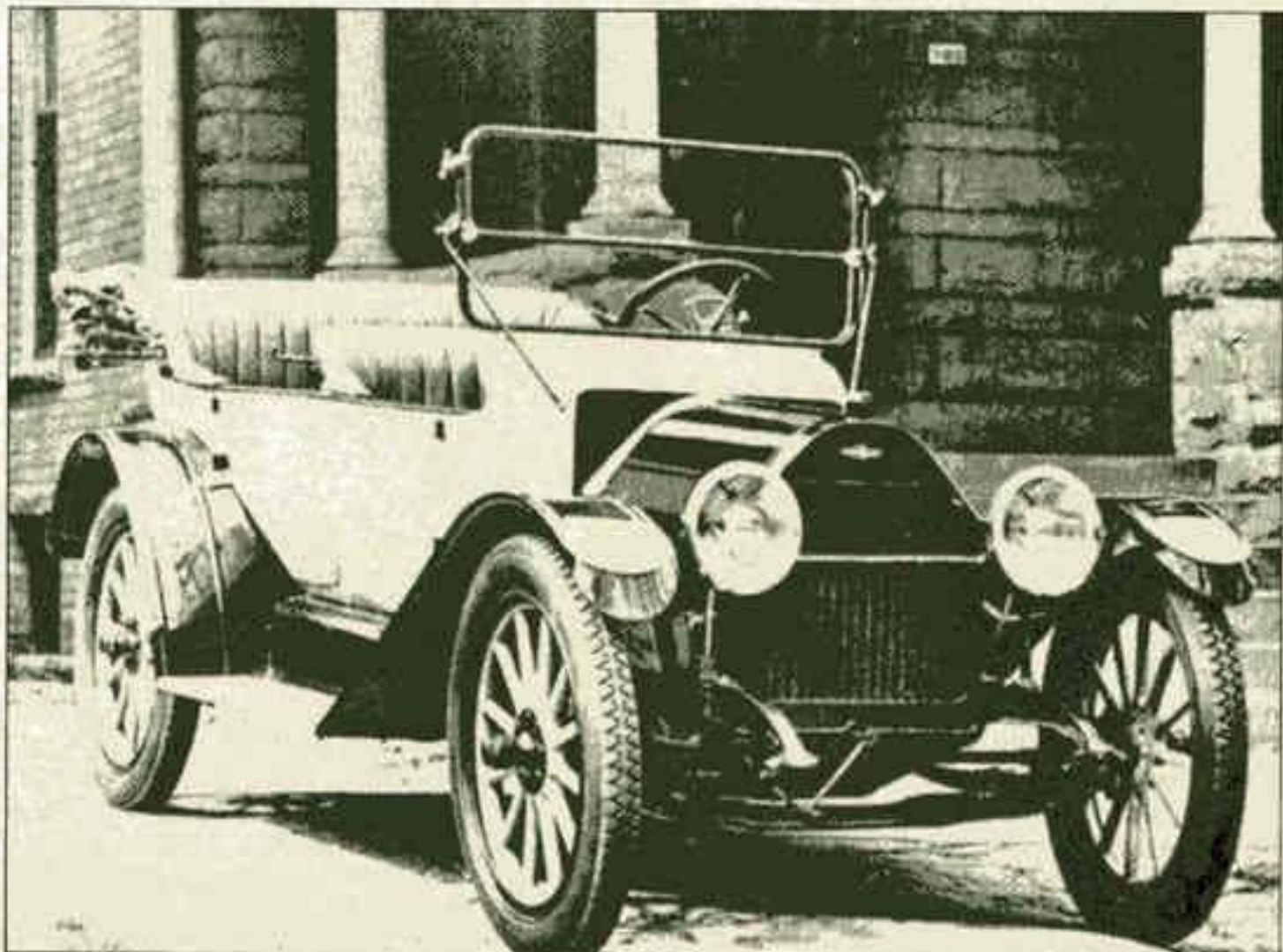
Oh yes, we almost forgot. After that blue



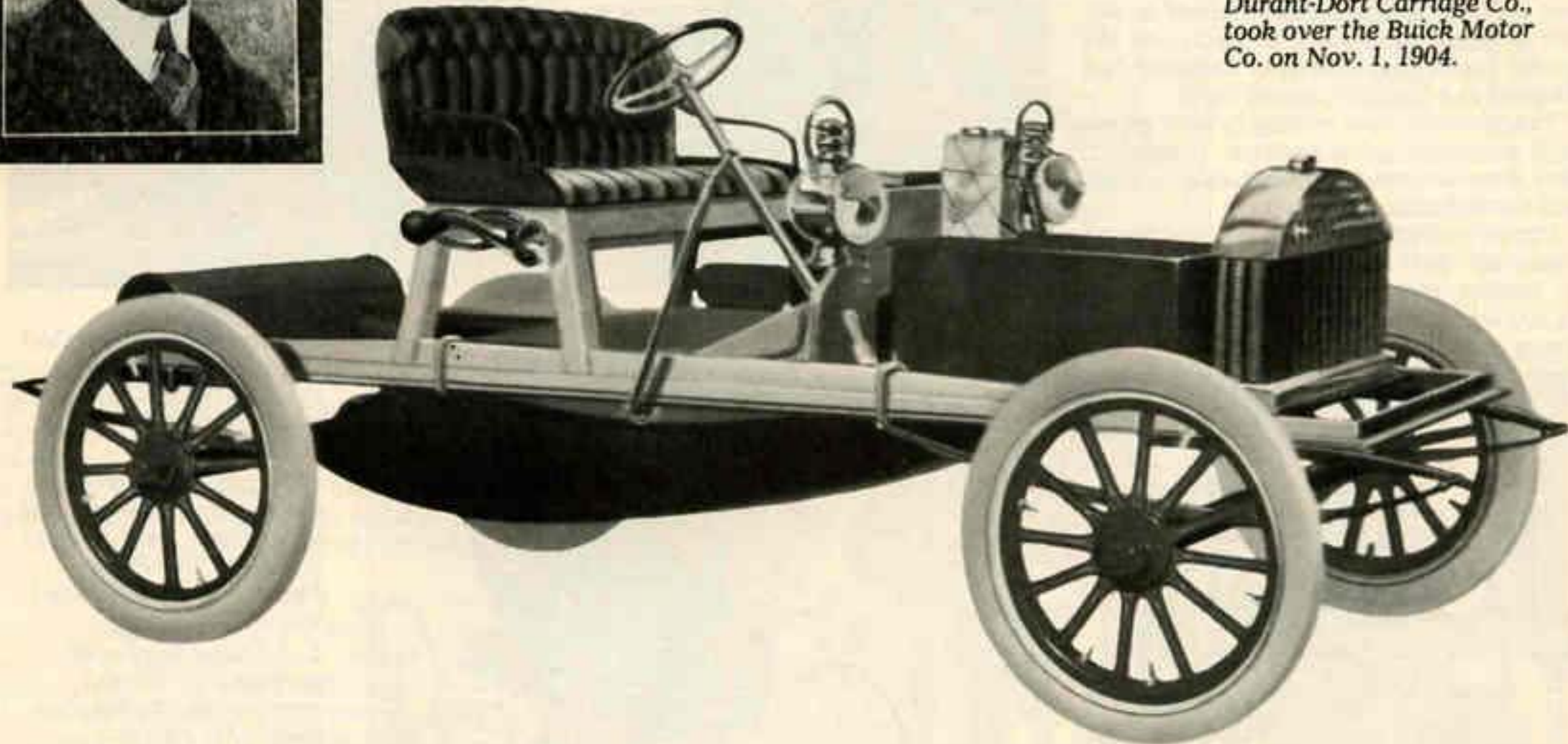
3. This is the Durant-Dort Carriage Co.'s first building in Flint, Mich., as it appeared in the early 1900s.

4. Durant and Dort were constantly improving and diversifying their product line. This Blue Ribbon Limousine Buggy is just one example.

5. J. Dallas Dort's old partner Billy Durant created the Chevrolet as part of his plan to recapture control of General Motors. This 1914 series H-4 Chevrolet was one of the earliest. Dort aided Durant in his endeavors, both financially and as a friend. He started producing Dort motor cars in 1915 with the aid of a former chief Chevrolet engineer.



7. This is a likeness of J. Dallas Dort near the time of his death at age 64 in May 1925, shortly after the end of Dort production, which spanned the period 1915-1924 and saw the manufacture of more than 107,000 cars bearing the Dort name.



6. With financial backing from Dort, Billy Durant got the Buick company on a firm footing by 1905 and saw it zoom to second in sales behind Ford by 1908. This 1903 Buick Model A prototype was one of very few Buicks produced when Durant, co-owner of the Durant-Dort Carriage Co., took over the Buick Motor Co. on Nov. 1, 1904.

ribbon win in Wisconsin, the obvious name for the little gig turned out to be "The Blue Ribbon Road Cart".

After that things moved so fast the two partners never had a chance to catch a breath. The next year, the first full year of operation, the company turned out and sold 4,000 of the little gigs.

By 1893 the company, which had begun with that tiny capital of \$2,000 in borrowed money, was recapitalized at \$150,000. By 1895 that went to \$1,500,000. The people of Flint could hardly believe the miracle that was happening before their eyes. These two young men suddenly were the biggest successes in town.

Emboldened by their sensational success, and seeing a need for light four-wheeled buggies incorporating many of the features of the little Blue Ribbon, they started making these too, with more booming sales. The name of the company was changed to the Durant-Dort Carriage Co.

Before it was over, the company had plants in Atlanta, Ga., Pine Bluff, Ark., Toronto, Canada, and Kansas City whipping out axles, wheels, spokes, shafts, the works. By the early 1900s the company was said to be the biggest maker of horse-drawn vehicles in the world, making as many as 150,000 carts, buggies and carriages per year. The two young partners were millionaires.

Oh yes, the automobile. These two men were up to their scalps in the making of vehicles powered by horses and here was the age of the motor car, creeping up on them. They had been so busy they hadn't

had time to take a look. But all one needs to do is look at the dates.

In Europe the age of the motor car had begun around 1885 and by 1900 the industry was well on its way. In the U.S., we remember, the famed Duryea brothers had demonstrated their first successful internal combustion motor car in 1893. By 1901 the famed Curved Dash Oldsmobile, destined to become the first mass-produced motor car in America, had appeared.

A.B.C. Hardy, a friend of the Durant-Dort team, took a trip to Europe, saw all that motor car boom and returned with fire in his eyes to try to sell Durant-Dort on the idea of making automobiles. No dice. The two were too busy making buggies, and money. It was even said they both hated the noisy, clattering contraptions, as well they might. The things could threaten their business.

When Billy Durant's daughter came home one day and told her father she had taken a ride in a motor car (it was an import, incidentally), Durant gave her a chewing out. Those things were dangerous, he told her.

But eventually it had to happen, another bolt of blitz, virtually another cart-gig incident, to make Durant and Dort see the light.

There had been this man David Dunbar Buick, who had made a small fortune when he invented a process for putting porcelain on bathtubs. But he was more interested in engines than bathtubs so he sold out the bathtub business and began

tinkering. The new motor cars, instead of scaring him, intrigued him. He too would jump in.

As it turned out, Buick was a much better mechanic and inventor than a businessman. First, he blew his own fortune trying to make the project go. Even the backing of another Flint carriage maker, James H. Whiting, failed to get it going.

Whiting was convinced the new little Buick was a good machine but it needed some spark plug businessman to make it go. He decided that Billy Durant was that sparker. At first Durant said no. That was to be expected. But Whiting persisted. "Just try taking a ride," he told Billy. Durant finally agreed and that was when, just as it had with the road cart, the magic began to work.

Billy not only liked what he saw, and experienced, but also he asked to "borrow" the little Buick for a few days. The days stretched into weeks as Billy Durant put the tough little Buick through every mud hole he could find, bounced over every bump. The car took it. Billy was sold.

It is hardly necessary to tell old car fans what happened after that. Just as it had with the cart business, Buick production, and sales, under the dynamic leadership of Durant, and with the support and some financial backing from Dort, took off. By 1905 Buick production had zoomed to 750 cars. By 1907 to 4,641. By 1908 to 8,820. The only make of American car ahead of Buick was another upstart named Ford.

By this time Billy Durant was convinced there was no limit beneath the sky and his



# THE MAN AND HIS CARS

## Part II

AUTOMOBILE TRADE JOURNAL.



# DORT

The Acme of Simplicity, Accessibility, Durability



They called her Cucumber Kate and she was a cool sister. In fact that was why they hung that "cucumber" tag on her — cool as a cucumber.

But Kate was a car, a 1919 Dort, carrying the cucumber name as she set a string of records in California for speed, endurance and economy. In the speed category she beat the time of two California crack trains, on a run from Los Angeles to San Francisco, two ways.

On reliability, Kate won the Stockton to Yosemite endurance run, through the hot summer desert and over the toughest mountain passes.

And on economy, she turned in a record of 24.3 miles per gallon on the Los Angeles to Yosemite run, sometimes climbing grades as steep as 20 percent.

A couple of years later, when Dort's first six-cylinder model was introduced, one of these also was put through one of the most punishing tests of all. She made a total of 34 trips up and down Lookout Mountain in Tennessee within 24 hours, with her transmission locked in high gear and carrying from four to six passengers each trip.

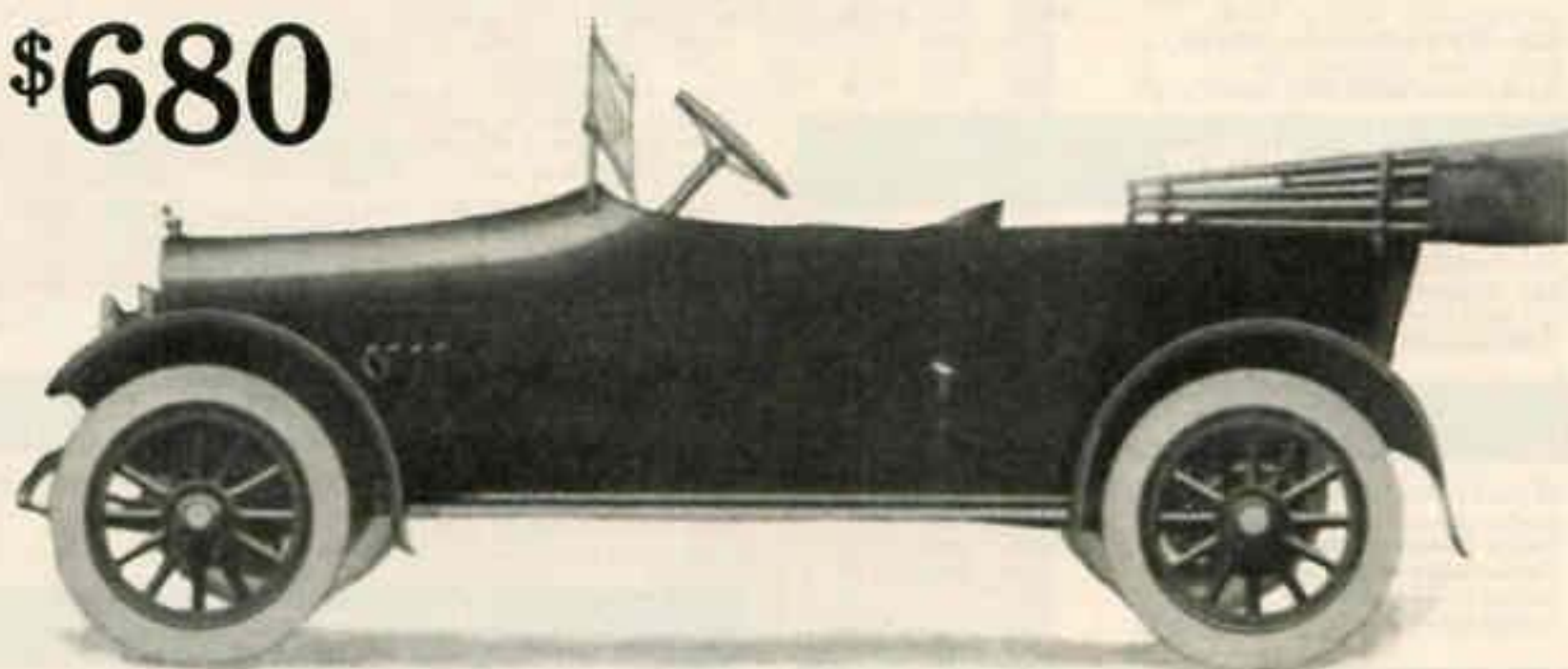
It was just more Cucumber Kate stuff. Not many cars of that period, it was said, could even climb Lookout Mountain in high gear and many a car was forced to stop on the way up to let a boiling radiator cool down.

All these records take on a bit more significance when we remember that Dort cars all relied on thermo-syphon cooling, with no water pump, relying on the action of hot water rising to the top, sucking cool water at the bottom.

Critics said it was a lousy cooling system, the hardest to keep cool. It was probably because Dort people had been stung by such criticism and felt the need to prove that Dort cars stayed cool, despite thermo-syphon; or, maybe, because of it that they ran these tests. If it was properly designed, it worked, and the mountain-climbing stunts proved it.

But it all went to prove as well that Dort motor cars were not just more run-of-the-mill assembled clunkers. Perhaps J. Dallas Dort made that clear to Etienne Planche, when he hired the man to design

## \$680



The two DORT models shown herewith are the season's best sellers. They are a combination of qualities now most in demand;—the price that the buying public can afford to pay.

They are handsome, sturdy, dependable cars, built by a maker of 28 years manufacturing experience, during which time they have never marketed a failure. They compare favorably in all respects with cars of much higher price. They are capable of standing the heaviest strains of travel, yet are light in weight, easy to control, economical to operate.

Quality is shown in every line of the DORT. It is further emphasized by these specifications of the 5 passenger touring car:—

**Motor**—4 cyl. cast en bloc, 3¼ x 5 L-head type; aluminum crank case, three-point suspension.  
**Lubrication**—Constant circulating splash system.  
**Cooling**—Thermo-syphon system.  
**Clutch**—Leather-faced cone.  
**Transmission**—3 speed selective type, nickel steel shafts and gears.  
**Drive**—Through Spicer Universal joint and nickel steel shaft to rear axle.  
**Axles**—Front, I-beam section; rear, floating type, nickel steel gears and shafts.  
**Brakes**—Internal expanding and external contracting.  
**Wheels**—Artillery type.  
**Tires**—30 x 3½ inches.  
**Springs**—Front, semi-elliptic; rear, full cantilever.  
**Steering Gear**—Universal worm and nut type, left drive.  
**Wheelbase**—105 inches; tread 56 inches.  
**Equipment**—Electric generator, lights and horn, one-man top, windshield, speedometer, tools, license bracket, etc. Electric Starter \$45 additional.

## \$495



This Roadster is of equally high quality. Its specifications are yours for the asking.

Send for complete specifications and our dealers' proposition



The mark "DORT" on your motor car is the "Sterling" brand of uniform quality throughout—a brand of value to you—a visible guarantee of satisfaction from its makers—a self-imposed obligation of their continued service to its owner.

**Dort Motor Car Co., Flint, Mich.**



his first Dort motor cars — they must be good. He wanted no junk sold under the name of Dort, after that name had once graced the No. 1 maker of horse-drawn vehicles in the U.S.

Planche came to Dort with good credentials. Even before leaving his native

France, Planche had served his training period at Peugeot. Then, after coming to the U.S., as early as the 1908-1909 period he had designed a monster car called the Roebing-Planche, for Washington A. Roebing, a wealthy New Yorker who wanted to go into the motor car business. The

huge four-cylinder engine was said to produce an astounding 140 horsepower.

Although this project fell apart, for various reasons, Planche continued to make history by designing the first Chevrolets for the famed Billy Durant, one-time partner of Dort. For a time Planche was also an engineer at Buick. Now the new Dorts would be his babies.

Actually the new Dorts were not J. Dallas Dort's first venture into the motor vehicle business. In 1912, the Durant-Dort Carriage Co. brought out two small trucks, one a four-cylinder job rated to carry 1,600 pounds and a small two-cylinder machine rated for 1,000 pounds.

Production of these machines was halted, however, when Dort made his decision, in the 1914-1915 period, to go into the business of making motor cars and would need the Durant-Dort plant to make them.

From the beginning it was clear that Dort was making no attempt to compete in the luxury car market. When the new Dort roadster came onto the market in 1915 it was priced at \$495, very near the Model T Ford class. And even the larger Dort touring sold for only \$680.



The decision to do it in the low-price field was probably influenced by the fact that even as the No. 1 maker of road carts and light buggies, Durant-Dort had always aimed at the low-price field. Perhaps that was why they had been so successful — the Model Ts of the horse vehicle days.

In any case, there does seem to be some confusion about whether Dort made his own engines. Most Dort historians have said the engines were Lycomings. However, a news story in *Motor World* for January 1915, announcing the new Dorts, said otherwise.

Said *Motor World*, "The motor itself is a product of the Dort company, which is closely allied to Chevrolet and other Flint industries." Was the magazine suggesting that the engines were being made in the Chevrolet plant?

The *Motor World* story also said Dort was using two sizes of engines, a smaller 3 x 4 for a 92-inch wheelbase roadster, and a 3 1/4 x 5 engine in a 105-inch wheelbase touring.

The magazine story also described two unusual features of the Dort engines. First, the extraordinary length of the main bearings, 3 5/8 inches for the front bearing and an unbelievable 4 1/8 for the rear, with a crankshaft diameter of 1 3/4 inches. The second unusual feature was called the "twin ejector" exhaust system, with two

Dort Fleur-De-Lys Roadster, \$695.

Which will be featured by the Dort Motor Car Co.



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MOTOR WORLD

JULY 27, 1919

# DORT

*Quality Goes Clear Through*



## "Cucumber Kate's" Records

### Road Test

Los Angeles to San Francisco and Return

In this trip of 820 miles "Cucumber Kate" beat the time of both the Owl and the Lark, crack trails of the Southern Pacific, by one hour and one minute, although there was no intention of making a speed record. Covered mileage in 34 hours elapsed time, four hours of which were spent in San Francisco and Oakland. Car performed perfectly.

### Reliability Run

Stockton to Yosemite

Under auspices A. A. A. "Cucumber Kate" was first in its class of all cars under \$1,000. Going was very severe, especially in mountain passes and through desert tracts where for some miles it ran in low gear. Despite this, overometer showed radiator at summer heat.

### Economy Run

Los Angeles to Yosemite

"Cucumber Kate" won 2nd place in its class, A. A. A. government run. Roads severe. Many of the grades as high as 20%. But "Cucumber Kate" was in first of nearly every contest. A long sandy stretch caused most entrants to halt but the Dort held its summer heat temperature. Not a single instance of mechanical trouble during trip. Averaged 24.3 miles per gallon of gasoline for the 375 miles.

These trips cited, together with several scouting trips, totaled up a mileage of 4,000 miles during the month for reliable "Cucumber Kate."

## "Cucumber Kate's" Notable Performance

Filing up some real road records and totalling 4,000 miles in the same month, "Cucumber Kate," the stock Dort touring car used by Earle C. Anthony, Dort distributor for California as a scout car, has hung up an enviable record on the coast.

Its novel nickname was earned by the remarkable efficiency of its cooling system. The reliability and economy run were under A.A.A. auspices and observation.

As you know, it is not now and never has been the policy of this company to offer any specific exploit of the Dort as conclusive evidence of the qualities of the car.

Rather have we preferred to base our statements upon the average performance of the Dort in the service of thousands of owners and over a long period of actual use.

Nevertheless the records of "Cucumber Kate" you will note at the side are of real value because they do confirm what we have said from time to time about the Dort, and they can be accepted as further truthful evidence of the reliable and economical performance ability of this car.

DORT MOTOR CAR COMPANY

Flint Mich.

Canadian Factory, Gray-Dort Motors, Ltd., Chatham, Ontario

1. The Dort entered the automotive market in 1915 with two models, a five-passenger touring, and a two-passenger roadster, both top-quality low-priced cars, as this February 1915 ad in the *Automobile Trade Journal* shows.

2. Slight styling changes and new body styles marked the 1917 models, which included this Fleur-De-Lys three-passenger roadster which had a split front seat and sold for \$695.

3. This ad for Cucumber Kate in the July 23, 1919, *Motor World* touted the reliability, economy and cool-running virtues of the thermo-syphon-cooled Dort.



## SPECIFICATIONS

**ENGINE**—Four cylinders cast in bloc. Cylinder head is removable to permit the removal of carbon and re-grinding of the valves when necessary.

**BORE**—3½ inches, stroke 5 inches.

**VALVES**—Located on right side, and specially designed to prevent warping.

**PISTONS**—Very light, cast iron, with three rings and special arrangement for preventing smoking.

**WRIST PINS**—Liberal in size, hardened and ground.

**CONNECTING RODS**—Drop-forged steel, double heat treated, the lower end bushed with a special die cast bearing metal, the upper end with phosphor-bronze. Shims are provided for adjustment of lower bearings.

**CRANKSHAFT**—Heavy forging of 40 carbon steel, double heat-treated, carefully balanced, and all wearing surfaces ground. Upper half of crank-case is cast iron, and carries the crankshaft bearings by removable caps provided with shims for adjustment. Oil pan is a steel stamping, easily removable.

**COOLING**—Thermo-syphon with extra liberal water jackets and cellular type radiator, and a four-blade fan driven by a 1-inch belt.

**LUBRICATION**—Plunger pump feeding oil troughs. Connecting rod dipper splash oil from constant level troughs to all parts of engine.

**CARBURETOR**—Carter improved side inlet, easy starting and especially economical.

**IGNITION**—Connecticut Battery system. Switch combined with that controlling lights, is carried on instrument board.

**STARTER**—Equipped with Bendis drive geared to flywheel. Storage battery.

**LIGHTING**—Gear driven generator. Ammeter with switches on cowl instrument board.

**CLUTCH**—Leather faced cone with means for insuring easy engagement.

**TRANSMISSION**—Selective, three speeds forward, one reverse, in seat with motor.

**REAR AXLE**—Three-quarter floating, nickel steel beams. Differential and pinion adjustable in both directions from outside of case. Propeller shaft mounted on Timken roller bearings, axle shafts are on Hyatt high duty roller bearings. Axle shafts are nickel steel, heat treated.

**FRONT AXLE**—I-beam, steering knuckles and levers drop forged steel, double heat-treated.

**WHEELS**—Artillery type, 12 spokes, demountable rims. Front wheel bearings are Timken rollers.

**FRONT SPRINGS**—Semi-elliptic, 2 inches wide by 37½ inches long.

**REAR SPRINGS**—Cantilever, 2 inches wide, 48 inches long.

**BRAKES**—Emergency, internal expanding, operated by hand lever; service, external contracting, operated by pedal. Drums 11 inches diameter.

**STEERING GEAR**—Improved nut and screw type.

**GASOLINE TANK**—Located in the rear of chassis. Vacuum feed to carburetor; capacity 13 gallons; Stewart vacuum system.

**TIRES**—Goodyear 30 x 3½. Non-skids both front and rear.

**FRAME**—Extra heavy pressed steel, narrowed in front to permit short turning radius.

**FENDERS AND HOOD**—Heavy gauge steel with baked enamel finish. Hood and radiator same color as body.

**TOP**—One man type, attached to windshield.

**CURTAINS**—Side Curtains open with doors. Special pocket in seat back provides storage space.

**WINDSHIELD**—Double adjustable with lower glass curved to match top of cowl.

**HORN**—Electric. Mounted under hood. Dutton on top of steering column.

**SPEEDOMETER**—Stewart, on cowl instrument board. Illuminated by instrument board lamp.

**TOOLS**—Standard tool kit in bag, with jack, tire pump and tire repair outfit.

**WHEELBASE**—108 inches.

DORT MOTOR CAR COMPANY

Flint Mich.



separate exhaust passages, one for the No. 1 and No. 4 cylinders and the other for No. 2 and No. 3.

The purpose of the twin ejector system, the article explained, was to make sure the back pressure from one cylinder, on the exhaust stroke, didn't leak into another cylinder on the intake stroke, before the exhaust valve had fully closed.

In any case, the two motor set-up for the first Dorts in 1915 seems to be verified by the 1923 *Branhams Reference Book*, which also shows two engines for Dort, but gives a slightly different stroke, 4¼, instead of 4. A *Michigan Motor Vehicle Register* for 1918 also shows the two engine sizes for Dort for 1915. This Register calls the larger car, the Model 5, a 1915-1916 model.

But, the record seems to indicate that Dort used the two engine line-up only that first year, 1915, after which only the larger engine was used, which leaves us with a

small mystery. Was it possible that the smaller engine was a Planche design, and the larger engine, despite the *Motor World* article, a Lycoming? Virtually every record available does indicate that Dort did indeed later use Lycoming engines. The size of the larger engine remained at 3¼ x 5 through 1917.

Another noteworthy feature of the new Dort, according to *Motor World*, was that all driven parts, from the clutch to the rear axle, and including that rear axle, were made of nickel steel for extra strength. Normally, the use of nickel steel added to the price of a car, which gives further proof that Dort, despite his entry in the low price field, did intend to produce something a bit better than the competition.

When the new Dorts were first introduced at the New York Auto Show in January 1915, colors for the touring models

were shown as green and red, with black fenders, with green and black the colors for the small roadster.

Tires were given as 30 x 3½ for the touring and 30 x 3 for the smaller car. The clutch was a cone type, with a standard three-speed transmission. Ignition was by Connecticut and starter-lighting by Apeldo, at \$45 extra.

Interesting from a historical standpoint was the fact that from the beginning the Dort was also assembled in Canada, by William Gray & Sons/Campbell, Ltd. of Chatham, Ontario, under the name Gray-Dort. The Canadian version was virtually identical to the U.S. model, with the exception of the name plate and hub caps. The Canadian company did, in the later years, add a few body styles not available on the U.S. models. These were usually of a more ornate sedan type or sports models. It is also interesting to note that in some years the Canadian Dort actually outsold the U.S. models.

The 1916 Dorts were virtually unchanged, except for the addition of demountable rims to facilitate tire changes. A spare rim was also now attached to the rear of the car but if you wanted a tire on that rim you had to pay extra for it.

Incidentally, for a sales slogan, how about, "Own a Dort — you'll like it." It was a bit less than poetic, that.

For 1917 the Dorts were called the Model 6, for the roadster, and Model 9 for the touring, plus a sedanet and a center door sedan. In the roadster area a three-passenger "Fleur-De-Lys" model was available. That sedanet, incidentally, was a two-top job, with one regular touring ragtop, plus a semi-rigid winter top, a compromise between the regular sedan and the ordinary touring. Prices began at \$695 for the roadster, which now ran on the same wheelbase as the other models, and with the same engine. The touring went for \$725, the sedanet at \$815, and the real sedan at \$1,065, the first time a Dort topped \$1,000. For \$30 extra you could have wire wheels on any Dort.

For 1918, the biggest Dort improvement was a bored out engine, to 3½ inches, bringing the cubic inch displacement to 192 inches, for a bit more "oomph". The models now would be 8 and L1, the 8's for the roadsters. Starting and lighting were now standard, by Westinghouse, with a Carter carburetor. Horsepower was now 35.

It might be remembered that World War I was going on, which meant that the 1918 Dorts remained unchanged through 1919. Dort, like other major manufacturers, was involved in war work.

The major change for 1920 was to move the gas tank from its old cowl position, with gravity feed, to the rear, with vacuum feed. Perhaps the biggest change was in appearance, with a body line including a handsome boat-tail roadster, the touring, a sedan and a "Foursome Coupe". Both the touring and roadster were now listed at \$995, and the closed cars at \$1,535. Post-war inflation was boosting prices. Incidentally, the open cars now had slanting windshields but the closed cars still had to

4. This 1922 Dort sedan is one of the many locally-made cars in the Alfred P. Sloan Museum in Flint, Mich. (Jim Scott photo)



5. Something new was added in 1923 Dorts: a six-cylinder engine. This \$1,365 1923 Dort Six Harvard coupe was but one of eight models that year, with prices ranging from \$990 for the three-passenger roadster to \$1,495 for the Harvard sedan.



6. The 1924 Dort Six sport touring five-passenger car had numerous items of standard equipment, including a motometer, windshield cleaner, sidemount spare tire with carrier and cover, rear trunk rack, side lights, spotlight, stoplight, nickel trim, disc wheels, full crown fenders and Spanish leather upholstery, all for \$1,245, f.o.b. Flint, Mich.



7. The Dort Six Harvard sedan for 1923 was the top-of-the-line model.



## DORT SIX

The Dort Six introduced November 1st and welcomed by the public with an enthusiasm seldom accorded any motor car has now, by its superb performance under every conceivable condition, justified and strengthened the conviction that it would establish an entirely new standard of value. The Dort Six motor with its wonderfully developed lubrication system—years ahead of ordinary design—that has created such wide interest among engineers and car owners alike, will be on display at the show. See it!

1923 DORT SIX HARVARD SEDAN



DORT MOTOR CAR COMPANY, FLINT, MICHIGAN

make do with "straight up".

The big style change, however, would come in 1921, when a Rolls-Royce type radiator and hood would be used. It was a fad thing, with several makes of American cars aping the R-R. Inflation was still boosting prices, with the open cars going for \$1,215 but with the closed models down slightly to \$1,445.

The 1921 styling would be carried over to 1922, but with a mid-year introduction of dressed up sport models. The new sporters, introduced in the fall, would have nickel bumpers and radiator shells, with windshield wings, khaki tops and spotlights, plus disc wheels.

But despite the dressing up, prices of the new sports models would be \$1,105. Prices of the other models were also cut, drastically. The reason: After two prosperous boom years following the war, in 1922 a short but sharp economic depression hit the country, knocking car sales for a loop. A number of makes bit the dust this year. Dort coupes and sedans were now priced at \$1,165 and \$1,195.

Mechanically, the 1922 models were improved, with multiple disc clutches taking the place of the old coners. Pistons and connecting rods were lightened, to boost performance. Water flow through the radiator was increased by 28 percent. The transmission was beefed up, with heavier gears. Tires went to 31 x 4. Seats were black leather. The Dort was growing up.

But the biggest change of all was still to come. By the end of the year Dort was able to announce that for the first time

there would be a Dort six, with a spanking new engine by Falls. It would have overhead valves in a time when most cars were still side valvers. Bore and stroke would be 3 1/8 by 4 1/4, for 195 cubic inches and 45 horsepower. Lubrication would be full pressure. The wheelbase would now be 115 inches. Dort admen would claim the new six would travel from two to 60 miles per hour in high gear. Who needed an automatic transmission?

But with all this advanced engine, Dort still stuck with thermo-syphon cooling. Since Dort had traveled with this system from the beginning, with performances like that of Cucumber Kate, why argue with success?

This was the car, the new six, they took to Lookout Mountain for that amazing 24-hour run, up and down the mountain with full load, in high only, for 34 times. Again, who could argue with success? On top of everything else, it was claimed the new Dort did all this while getting 24 miles per gallon of gas.

Prices for the new sixes started at \$990 for the roadster and touring, with a Yale sedan at \$1,195 and a Yale coupe at \$1,145. A Harvard sedan, top of the line, went for \$1,495 and the Harvard coupe at \$1,365.

It must be remembered, however, that the coming of the six did not mean the dropping of the fours. The line of fours had prices of \$865 for the roadster and touring, with \$1,370 for a four-cylinder Harvard sedan.

But, as we said, the big news was the

new sixes, without question the finest Dorts ever made. Said a Dort adman, "This amazing Dort cuts straight through accepted values to set a new standard for six-cylinder cars." No faint praise, that.

These fine 1923 Dorts continued, with few changes, through 1924, and for the beginning of 1925. But now something new was in the works, involving J. Dallas Dort, the man who had once been, with Billy Durant, the top manufacturer of horse-drawn vehicles. Dallas Dort was preparing to call it quits.

It was said that if he had been able to find a man with the proper qualifications, he would have turned the enterprise over to him. But without a son to carry on, and unable to find such a man to fill his shoes, Dort decided it was simply time to close down the whole operation.

No, Dort was not broke. Nor was his company against the wall. True, a new type of competition, and a shakeout of small makers, was taking place in the 1920s. But Dort undoubtedly could have kept going.

Dort had never been the engineer, a man like Howard Marmon, to whom motor cars, their development, improvements, their guts, wheels and gears, had been the driving power in his life. Dort had simply been a businessman — a successful one, but not one to whom mechanical creation had been the inspiration.

He had proved that he could do what Billy Durant had done, if not on such a grand scale: to organize and run successfully a motor car-making enterprise. Production of Dorts had peaked around 30,000 units per year in the boom right after World War I. Altogether, by the time Dallas Dort began liquidating the company in 1925, the total had neared 100,000 cars. This was far more than some cars with better known names had done, and not a figure to be ashamed of.

So, early in 1925 Dort simply announced that he was liquidating the company. Production of new cars would cease. He was in the process of doing this when, on May 17, 1925, he went out to the Flint Country Club to play a round of golf, his favorite game. Dort had largely created the country club.

But now, in his round, he suddenly collapsed. He had died of a massive heart attack.

Perhaps his heart knew that the Dort enterprise had ended.



Next month  
The beginnings of Oldsmobile

### OLDS PHOTOS WANTED

Upcoming Free Wheeling columns will feature a history of Oldsmobile. Readers who have photographs or other items that illustrate the history of the Oldsmobile company, its people and its cars are encouraged to submit them for possible publication. Please send the photos and other material to Menno Duerksen, 194 South Greer St., Memphis, Tenn. 38111. Enclose a stamped, self-addressed envelope if you want your materials returned.