

*Prospectus*

**Disposition  
of  
1937 Chrysler Imperial  
Model C-15 Town Car**

**From the Deaccessioned Collections  
of the Suffolk County Vanderbilt Museum**

**November 4, 2011**



180 Little Neck Road, Centerport, NY 11721

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## Documents

- Vanderbilt Board of Trustees meeting minutes, October 16, 1958, in which the offer of the Chrysler as a gift is discussed
- Vanderbilt Board of Trustees meeting minutes, December 3, 1959, in which the trustees agree to accession the Chrysler into the collections
- Vanderbilt Museum Deaccession Form for Chrysler, October 16, 1992
- “Custom Chryslers” article, Walter Gosden, *Hemmings Classic Car*, June 2011

# Introduction

The Suffolk County Vanderbilt Museum is seeking bids for the purchase of a rare, truly one-of-a-kind Chrysler automobile. The vehicle was donated to the museum in 1959. The Chrysler was deaccessioned from the museum collections in 1992. Proceeds will be used to establish an endowment for the care and maintenance of the museum's historic archives, collections and exhibitions.

The automobile, a 1937 Chrysler Imperial Model C-15 Town Car, is a masterpiece of Art Deco automotive design. Commissioned by Walter P. Chrysler for his daughter, Bernice Chrysler Garbisch, the car is made of hand-worked aluminum (no factory-produced body panels were used) and has her initials, BCG, inscribed on its rear doors. The car's rarity and authenticity has been verified by the Chrysler Museum in Detroit.



**Vanderbilt Mansion courtyard, circa 1986**



**Vanderbilt Estate, 2006**

The 8,000-pound, seven-passenger car is 19 feet long and has a 130-horsepower, eight-cylinder in-line engine with a three-speed manual transmission. The odometer reads 25,501 miles. Details include coachwork by LeBaron, leather interior and upholstered seats.

The Chrysler has spent much of its life in storage, on the Vanderbilt Estate, in an automotive museum, in a county-owned garage and now once again on the estate. The condition of the car, which has most of its original parts, has deteriorated because of a lack of environmental control in some of its various storage environments.

This prospectus includes the Chrysler's provenance (in museum terms, the proof of authenticity and past ownership), historical reference, various archival documents, technical specifications, the car's accession and deaccession, articles, images, appraisals, and disposition and sale information.

# Provenance

The 1937 Chrysler Imperial Model C-15 Town Car (vehicle identification number 9999296) was accepted into the Suffolk County Vanderbilt Museum's (SCVM) collection on December 3, 1959. Minutes of the SCVM Board of Trustees meeting on December 3, 1959, list this vehicle as a donation by Harry Gilbert, 50 East 77<sup>th</sup> Street, New York, NY. The minutes state that this is a Chrysler car custom-made for Walter P. Chrysler. Mr. Gilbert's offer to donate this vehicle to the museum was discussed by the SCVM Board of Trustees at its meeting on October 16, 1958. Copies of minutes are attached.

There are no indications in the minutes of the SCVM Board of Trustees nor in the archival records of the museum that the donation was conditional. The New York State Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) was contacted on September 19, 2011, and it reported that it could not locate any DMV records for the vehicle and identification number listed above.

A brief description of the car: Chrysler, 1937, seven-passenger town car with an eight-cylinder, in-line 130-horsepower engine. This car was custom-built for the Chrysler Family and carries the initials "BCG" on the rear doors, for Bernice Chrysler Garbisch, daughter of Walter P. Chrysler.

The SCVM board of trustees officially accessioned the Chrysler into the museum collection in 1959 and assigned it the accession number 959-3-3. This tripartite number reflects the year of accession, the collection category and the object number.

The Chrysler was on display at SCVM for an undocumented number of years. At some point, the vehicle was transported to the Long Island Automotive Museum in Southampton, NY, where it remained until 1992.

On June 27, 1992, the vehicle was returned to SCVM. The Chrysler was officially deaccessioned from the collections by the SCVM Board of Trustees on November 15, 1992, for reasons stated on the attached deaccession form. The Trustees obtained an appraisal in 1993 and actively explored the disposition of the Chrysler. Despite due diligence by the Board, no transfer or sale was ever achieved. After almost two years on the SCVM property, the Chrysler was transported to a Suffolk County garage facility at the Anson Hard House, Yaphank, NY, on April 6, 1994, where it remained for another 12 years.

The Chrysler was returned to SCVM on April 21, 2006, where it remains stored today. The front and rear bumpers were removed in order to fit the Chrysler into the garage space, and stored. The condition of the vehicle has deteriorated because of the lack of environmental control in the storage environments.

## Reference

Walter P. Chrysler was an icon of American industry, and the automobiles that bear his name endure as a product of American ingenuity and pride. Aside from his automotive corporation, Chrysler is best known for the design and construction of the Chrysler Building in New York City, one of the most recognizable structures in the United States. Chrysler was named *Time* magazine's 1928 Man of the Year. Both Mr. Chrysler and his wife died in 1938. This 1937 Chrysler was custom-made for one of Mr. Chrysler's daughters, Bernice Chrysler Garbisch. She had three siblings, Thelma Chrysler Foy; Walter P. Chrysler, Jr. and Jack Forker Chrysler. Walter Jr., the last surviving sibling, died in 1988.

The Vanderbilt Museum contacted Brandt Rosenbusch, curator at the Chrysler Museum in Detroit, to authenticate that this car is the one-of-a-kind automobile built for Bernice Chrysler Garbisch. Rosenbusch provided SCVM with images of the newly fabricated automobile from his museum archives and verified that this was the same vehicle. Another image of the vehicle, photographed in the SCVM courtyard circa 1986, was posted on the Chrysler Imperial Club's website.

There has been renewed interest in the 1937 Chrysler, as evidence by a feature story in the July 2011 (issue No. 82) of *Hemmings Classic Car* magazine: "Custom Chryslers," by Water Gosden (copy attached). Gosden is a respected automobile historian and coachwork expert who worked for and was mentored by Henry Austin Clark, Jr. Gosden has 45 years of experience as an active collector of World War II era automobiles and as an automobile historian and author.

Gosden is a past director, vice president and editor of the Society of Automotive Historians; member and regional director of the Classic Car Club of America, former librarian of the Long Island Automotive Museum (where the Chrysler was stored), and author of more than 200 published articles and research papers on pre-war, luxury-car coachwork and styling. He was invited to view the 1937 Chrysler and offered an expert opinion on March 10, 2011. Other automotive experts were consulted and/or viewed the vehicle to offer expert advice on the best way to conduct the disposition of such a unique automobile.

# Current Appraisals

## Car Specifications and Description

*(This is a conglomeration of all appraisal information)*

Vehicle Identification:	9999236
Year/Make/model:	1937 Chrysler Imperial Model C-15 Town Car, a seven-passenger limousine
Odometer reading:	25,501
Mechanicals:	Straight 8-cylinder in-line engine rated at 130 horsepower, 3-speed manual transmission
Body specifications:	Length 19', width 6'6", height 5'10", weight 8,000 pounds, 140" wheelbase.  Aluminum body by LeBaron, painted black, leather interior, upholstered seats  Initials "BCG" on the rear doors (Bernice Chrysler Garbisch, daughter of Walter P. Chrysler)
Options:	Custom limousine amenities
Provenance:	This car is a one-of-a-kind (or one-off) and was custom built for the Chrysler family. The complete ownership history is not known. The car was in the possession of donor Harry Gilbert by the late 1950s. Ownership was transferred to the SCVM collection in December of 1959.
Condition:	Poor, and in unrestored condition

Qualified independent appraisers provided valuations of the vehicle. There is a wide range of opinions on the value as the vehicle is a "one off" or "one-of-one," is in original unrestored condition, and has a history of ownership by a high-profile person. At the same time, the car will require full professional restoration.

The appraisers have experience with valuing museum-grade historic vehicles, and one of them as experience with vehicles that have high-profile owners.

Due to the poor condition but rarity of this vehicle, the appraisers had a difficult task in setting a value point. There is no direct comparison for this vehicle, nor will another vehicle of this ilk likely surface again. The appraisal values range from \$73,500\* to \$307,750.

*\* Note: This low appraisal report did not include a VAF (Value Appraisal Formula, nor did it cite or include specific comparisons.)*

For additional information, please contact Lance Reinheimer, Director of the Vanderbilt Museum:

Phone – 631-854-5550. E-mail – [director@vanderbiltmuseum.org](mailto:director@vanderbiltmuseum.org)

This prospectus also will be posted on the Vanderbilt Museum website.

## **Disposition Process**

The disposition of the 1937 Chrysler automobile will be carried out in accordance with the official acquisition and deaccession policy of the SCVM, and in accordance with guidelines and recommendations set forth by the American Association of Museums.

The 1937 Chrysler is not original to the SCVM collections, was not the property of William K. Vanderbilt II, cannot be cared for and/or exhibited with the integrity it is due, and does not directly support the mission of the SCVM. Therefore, the Board of Trustees deaccessioned the automobile in 1992. (See the attached deaccession forms.)

The current Board of Trustees has decided to sell this deaccessioned collection piece to benefit Mr. Vanderbilt's original collections.

Heeding the expert advice received, the sale process will entail:

- Announcement of the offer for sale in publications to reach serious collectors of historic vehicles
- Establishment of a 45-day window for prospective buyers to view the vehicle at SCVM by appointment

- Call for sealed bids on the vehicle in “as is” condition
- Notification will be sent to the highest qualified bidders to meet at a date to be announced, to negotiate the vehicle sale. This procedure will be officiated by the museum director under the auspices of the SCVM Board of Trustees.

**FINAL ACCEPTED SALE PRICE MUST BE SANCTIONED BY MAJORITY VOTE OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES IN A FORMAL MEETING AND RECORDED IN THE MINUTES OF THE PROCEEDINGS**

- Sale of the vehicle to the highest qualified bidder – within 10 calendar days, upon approval of the SCVM Board of Trustees – with a deposit of 30 percent of the sale price
- Payment of the balance of the sale price and removal of the automobile by the purchaser within 30 days of approved sale. Transfer of vehicle ownership occurs upon full payment of the approved sale price.

The specific process outlined above is intended to provide any and all prospective buyers with equal opportunity.

Viewing: 45 days (by appointment) beginning November 7, 2011

Sealed bids: Minimum bid \$125,000

No verbal bids will be accepted.

**Sealed, written bids must be postmarked by December 23, 2011**, and mailed to Lance Reinheimer, director of the Vanderbilt Museum, 180 Little Neck Road, Centerport, NY 11721

Notification: Highest qualified bidders will be notified and invited to on-site sale meeting at 180 Little Neck Road, Centerport, NY 11721

Sale Date: To be announced.



# Images

The museum has a limited number of images of the 1937 Chrysler, some of which are included in this prospectus.

Two such images, provided to the Vanderbilt Museum by the Chrysler Museum in Detroit, show the vehicle in its newly minted state. An image of the Chrysler pictured in the SCVM courtyard (circa 1986) was posted on the Chrysler Imperial Club website and is included with this prospectus.

Color photographs of the vehicle in its current condition were taken by SCVM staff members from various vantage points and are included with this prospectus. None of the images has been altered or manipulated in any way by SCVM.

These images are intended only to provide documentation and reference for the appearance and condition of the vehicle. These images should not serve as a substitute for a personal inspection of the vehicle by a prospective buyer.

At a meeting of the Board of Trustees of the Vanderbilt Museum, held at Centerport, N. Y., October 16, 1958 at 2:00 P. M., the following were present:

Miss Louise E. Ockers, Chairman  
Capt. John T. Tuthill, Jr., Treasurer  
Mr. Joseph V. Kelly, Trustee  
Mr. Walter Fasbender, Executive Director  
Mr. Woodhull B. Young, Curator  
Mrs. Verna K. Martinsen, Secretary.

After inspecting the butterfly collection, the trustees met in the library at 2:20 P. M. Director Fasbender gave the following work report: Re-stuccoing of the hangar where large pieces of cement have fallen out; a 500' trench dug for the telephone wires at the entrance gate; a dial system will be used after Oct. 29th, and the new telephone number was given the trustees; a figure of \$2,630.00 was submitted by Poole & Cumella, 85 Grandview Street, Huntington, N. Y., for work on alteration; considerable lawn re-seeded; water main fixture replaced at no cost to the museum; flagpole painted and ball atop, gold-leafed.

Attendance to-date is 3,352 ahead of last year's figure of 34,406, making a total of 37,758 for 1958.

The following resolution was offered by Treasurer Tuthill, seconded by Trustee Kelly and approved unanimously:

RESOLVED, that the butterfly collection, accumulated by Dr. Groth, a German Lepidopterist, during the years 1890-1946, and now valued at \$8,000.00 be accepted by the Trustees of the Vanderbilt Museum and/or Suffolk County Park Commission. The collection having been given to the museum by Mr. Harry Gilbert, "Soundview", Bay Crest, Huntington, N. Y., and be it

FURTHER RESOLVED, that a certified copy of this resolution be forwarded to Mr. Gilbert by our County Attorney.

Trustee Kelly offered the following resolution, which was seconded by Treasurer Tuthill and approved unanimously:

RESOLVED, that the polar bear exhibit, given by Mr. Charles Stoll of Hicksville, N. Y., together with all costs of installation, be accepted by the Trustees of the Vanderbilt Museum and/or Suffolk County Park Commission and be it

FURTHER RESOLVED, that a certified copy of this resolution be prepared by the County Attorney, and forwarded to Mr. Stoll.

The offer of an antique car collection, now owned by Mr. Harry Gilbert was then discussed. It was the consensus of opinion that under certain considerations it would make a desirable display and that the trustees would be interested in hearing more about it.

The director stated that the car which won the Vanderbilt Cup in 1908 would be driven over the old route again on Oct. 25th. Director Fasbender said he had been contacted about leasing this old car for the winter, and it has a connection with car exhibits on the Vanderbilt Cup Races.

In discussing the possibility of a planetarium, the

At a regular meeting of the Board of Trustees of the Vanderbilt Museum, held at Centerport, N. Y., at 9:45 A. M., on Dec. 3, 1959, the following were present:

Miss Louise E. Ockers, Chairman  
 Capt. John T. Tuthill, Jr., Treasurer  
 Mr. William W. Hulsiking, Trustee  
 Mr. Walter Fasbender, Executive Director  
 Mr. Woodhull B. Young, Curator  
 Mrs. Verna K. Martinsen, Secretary.

The new parking area was inspected by each trustee, prior to convening. Director Fasbender stated that the work was let by the Suffolk County Department of Public Works to Joseph Zanghi, 47 South Saxon Ave., Bayshore, N. Y., and would include drainage and landscaping at a cost of \$13,463.00. This area will provide parking for thirty-five cars. The old parking area was re-surfaced by letting of contract to Rason Asphalt, Inc., 15 Columbia St., Port Jefferson Station, N. Y., at a cost of \$2,940.00 and, the road to the hangar and parking space 40 x50 at the curator's residence, was done in the same way at a cost of \$1,836.45.

The 1959 season showed an increase of 1,566 visitors; gate receipts were \$20,163.25, which with our sales made a total of \$22,923.25 in deposits. Our register showed visitors from 18 countries and 37 states.

An audit received Sept. 8, 1959, from the County Auditor, Mr. Fred B. Rose, Jr., and prepared by Mr. Miller and Mr. Neff, for the year 1958 showed all securities totaled \$2,882,939.00 for 1958 and \$3,515,593.00 for 1958; receipts and admissions, plus a carry-over of \$400.00 totaled \$21,546.40 and a total balance in "Expendable Earnings" of \$53,040.54, as of Dec. 31, 1958.

Director Fasbender reported that Mr. Harry Gilbert of 50 East 77th Street, New York 21, N. Y. has given an automobile, which was especially made for Walter P. Chrysler in 1937, to the museum; also, William K. Vanderbilt's books and nine framed pictures from Mr. Barclay H. Warburton, III, Saracon Farm, Ipswich, Mass., have been received. A gift of a fossil, by name Disjunctus (extinct butterfly shell brachiopod) has been offered by Miss Acacie Najarian of 351 Marine Ave., Brooklyn 9, N. Y.

It has been recommended, that due to increased costs, total insurance on buildings be increased. An inventory and appraisal has been taken, but as yet no report has been received.

Director Fasbender then showed slides of the masonry on top the Road Museum, of the ornamental tips which need repairs. The following resolution was offered by Treasurer Tuthill, seconded by Mr. Hulsiking and unanimously approved:  
 RESOLVED, that an estimate for repairs of ornamental masonry, using fiber-glass, on the Road Museum, be obtained.

Curator Young stated that several sets of Vanderbilt Museum publications have been sent out during the year, and also specimen have been requested, by colleges for examination.

Director Fasbender said that the hangar had been re-stuccoed by our mason, this year. Also, a leaf-loader has been acquired this year, which has greatly facilitated the cleaning of the grounds.

As there was no further business, the meeting adjourned at 10:40 A. M.

Respectfully submitted,

*Walter Fasbender*  
 Walter Fasbender, Executive Director  
 Suffolk County Park Commission.

to the Honorable  
 County of Suffolk  
 County Center  
 Riverhead, N. Y.  
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Suffolk County Vanderbilt Museum  
Curatorial Dept.  
P.O. Box 0605, 180 Little Neck Rd.  
Centerport NY 11721-0605  
(516) 262-7854

DE-ACCESSION FORM

Acc.# 959.3.3 Type of Object AUTOMOBILE

Object Title: 1937 CHRYSLER Artist/Maker: \_\_\_\_\_

Source:

Original bequest: \_\_\_\_\_ Purchase: \_\_\_\_\_ Donation: X

Donor: HARRY GILBERT Address: (DECEASED)

Reason for De-accession:

1. Does not fit within the collecting scope of the Museum. X
2. The Museum is unable to store properly. X
3. The Museum is unable to conserve. X
4. The condition has significantly deteriorated and cannot be conserved. \_\_\_\_\_
5. The object duplicates a better example in the collection. \_\_\_\_\_
6. The object lacks documentation. \_\_\_\_\_
7. Other (please describe.) \_\_\_\_\_

Recommended method of Disposition:

Auction: \_\_\_\_\_ Trade: \_\_\_\_\_ Sale: X Donation: \_\_\_\_\_ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

(explanation)

Arguments against Disposition:

Estimated Value: \$2,000 - 15,000 (1987)

Recommendation initiated by: STEPHEN RICE  
Name

COLLECTIONS MANAGER  
Title/date

Reviewed and accepted by:

1. Collections Manager, SCVM Stephen Rice date: 10/16/92
2. Executive Director, SCVM [Signature] date: 10/16/92
3. Chair, Collections Committee Steven Gittelman date: 10/19/92
4. President, Suffolk County Vanderbilt Museum  
(for Board of Trustees) Carl H. [Signature] date: 11/15/92
5. Chair, Parks Committee, Suffolk County Legislature  
(for Suffolk County) \_\_\_\_\_ date: \_\_\_\_\_

Method of Disposition: \_\_\_\_\_

Name/Address of Recipient: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Disposition: \_\_\_\_\_ Records marked: \_\_\_\_\_

RARE CUSTOM CHRYSLERS



THE COACHBUILT CLASSICS

\$4.99

# Hemmings CLASSIC CAR

THE DEFINITIVE ALL-AMERICAN COLLECTOR-CAR MAGAZINE

JULY, 2011 #82



**PRIZED PLYMOUTH**  
ONE-OWNER BARRACUDA 318



**MEASURE OF SUCCESS**  
FORD'S BELOVED F-100

## '50s LINCOLNS

*STYLE AND DASH WITHOUT THE FLASH*

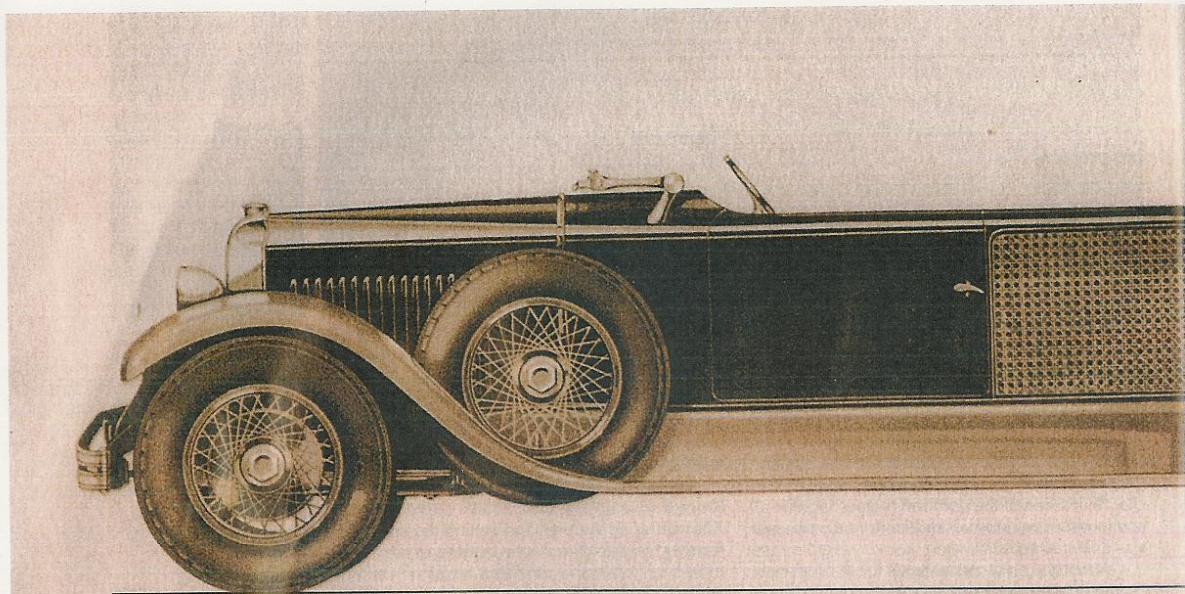


**HOME RESTORATION**  
RESURRECTING A 1933 BUICK  
MODEL 57 SEDAN



**PLUS:**

- 1926 OAKLAND VS. PONTIAC
- 1958 EDESEL CITATION
- HOW CARB CHOKES WORK



## Custom Chryslers

*Domestic and European coachbuilt models*

BY WALT GOSDEN

**W**alter P. Chrysler's new company bearing his name roared onto the automotive scene in 1924 like one of the steam trains he worked on early in his career. For over a decade, Chrysler had been making an impact in the auto industry, becoming well known and respected. He made his mark and his fortune at Buick, first as manager, then as president, and he left the firm with a wealth of both money and experience.

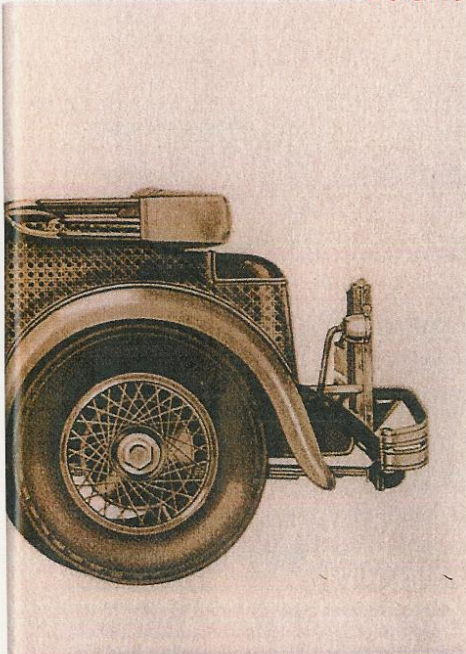
He knew that in order to sell a product, you had to cater to your buyer. Chrysler automobiles were solidly built, well engineered and very stylish. Even with the substantial variety of cars for sale in that pre-war era, there were buyers out there who had the assets that allowed them to own a custom-bodied car. Walter Chrysler was well aware of this, too, and saw it as a market he did not want to neglect, either at home or abroad.

### IN THE UNITED STATES

One of the earliest custom-built Chryslers featured a coachbuilt body by Brewster & Company, located at the Queensboro Bridge Plaza in Long Island City, New York. The car was completed by early August 1925, for Janet Grace, the wife of John P. Grace, the president of steamship company W.R. Grace; he was also vice president of Ingersoll-Rand. No doubt Mrs. Grace used this two-passenger car as personal transportation from their Manhasset, Long Island, home to social events at the country clubs they belonged to.

The custom-bodied cars of the era were designed and built to meet the requirements of the buyer; this didn't necessarily always translate into a well-balanced design. The Grace Chrysler had a stylish sweeping curve to the door post/cowl molding, with the front edge of the door following that line, but the rest of the body was stiffly

## Locke



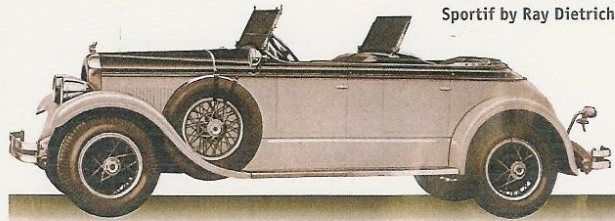
The "Touralette" built by Locke in 1928 was perhaps its most unusual body that year. The short-coupled two-door phaeton had a built-in trunk, and the body was painted to simulate caned basketry. Reportedly, 21 examples sold.

## Brewster



Although best known for Rolls-Royce bodies, Brewster built at least one custom for Chrysler, based on a 1925 model B-70 and special-ordered by Mrs. John Grace.

## Dietrich



Chrysler's first custom body on the Imperial 80 chassis was 1927's Sportif by Ray Dietrich.

geometric and very perpendicular. The rear deck was abruptly squared off to provide a commodious trunk, and the top material was leather, not canvas, so it did not lie very flat when lowered. Interestingly, the light color of the body was also used on the wheels, brake drums, chassis and springs; the family crest was painted at the center of the door window beltline molding.

The introduction of the series 80 Imperial to the Chrysler line in 1927 allowed the company to offer a luxury car to the public. Custom coachwork was available on an individual order basis, and a separate sales folder on the "Sportif" was printed in that same year. The car was a dual-cowl, dual-windshield, four-passenger phaeton. Color separation on this particular car was unusual for the era; the lower portion of the body and the fenders were in a light color, with the chassis, wheels and body/hood above the beltline in a bold, darker

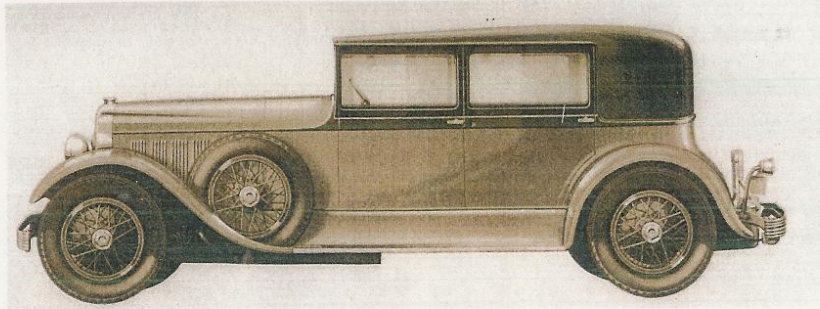
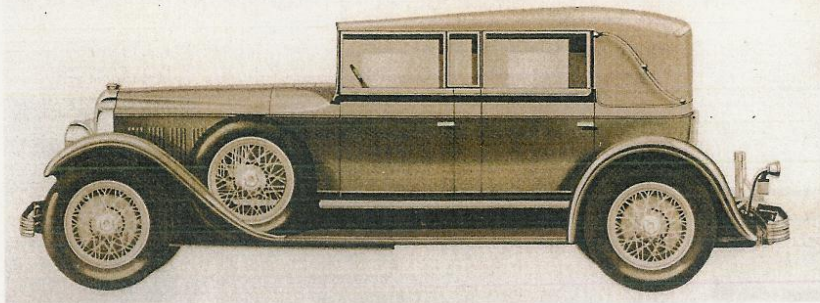
contrasting color. The rear quarter of the body was gracefully curved inward, incorporating a narrow recessed area behind the rear seat into which the skeleton top could be lowered, completely concealing it. The documentation didn't note the body designer and builder, but the overall design concept was offered in 1928 by Dietrich.

Chrysler reached the next rung on the sales ladder when the Imperial model 80-L was introduced in November 1927. This car would have a respectable 136-inch wheelbase, and Chrysler had already negotiated with coachbuilders Locke, LeBaron, and Dietrich to create a variety of very handsome body styles beyond the factory bodies. Confident that they would see brisk sales of these extra-special custom creations, they went so far as to include realistic renderings of the custom coachwork on individual pages in the huge showroom album that was placed with the larger



## Dietrich

Dietrich produced a number of stunning bodies for Chryslers, including this 1928 Imperial convertible sedan, top, and four-passenger sedan, bottom. The convertible featured the most colors available on a custom Chrysler for that year, mating black fenders with a main body color and both lighter and darker accents.



dealers, noting the body builder under each.

"Semi-custom" or "production-custom" coachwork was an option where a manufacturer could offer a special body in its promotional literature. These cars were still much more expensive than the regular factory coachwork, but because they were built in runs of three to five at a time, they were less expensive than a truly custom "one-off" body that an individual customer might have specifically built for their use.

The custom coachwork designs offered by Chrysler in 1928 on the series 80-L chassis were a "Touralette" with coachwork by Locke; a four-passenger, close coupled sedan, convertible sedan and dual-cowl phaeton with coachwork by Dietrich; and a club coupe (no quarter window), town coupe (with quarter window), convertible coupe, dual-cowl phaeton and close coupled sedan by LeBaron. This was quite an impressive offering for a company that was only four years old.

For 1929, Chryslers were totally restyled, with their fender line now having a thinner, leaner look; the narrow ribbon radiator shell was now found on all models. Locke would now be the primary supplier of custom coachwork for Chrysler models 75 and Imperial. The factory sales catalog on the series 75 illustrated the convertible sedan, but did not note that it had a Locke body, although these production customs did have a "Locke Co." body plate affixed to the bottom of the cowl.

The rear doors on this Locke body had a unique feature: the top of the door just above the hinge was notched and stepped back to accommo-

date the center body frame structure that held the center posts. Unlike most center supports on convertible sedans, these were not full solid posts, but framed a narrow vertical piece of glass. A header piece between the posts, which was not in line with the normal build, acted as a division window.

A similarly styled body built by Locke was available on the Imperial chassis as well, but from period photographs, it doesn't seem the Imperial version required notching the top of the rear door. This was most likely avoided due to the longer wheelbase on the Imperial.

Locke also built a town car on the series 75 chassis. It, too, had wood wheels, but of a different style than those on the convertible sedan. The size of the center hub and hubcap, as well as the choice to paint or to leave the wood spokes natural, along with the amount of plating of metal parts, were all individual decisions that affected the overall appearance of the car.

For 1929, semi-production custom bodies that were credited to LeBaron for design and production in 1928 now graced the line without mention of LeBaron, and were most likely adapted to the line of body styles offered and built by the factory.

Chrysler made a showing at the custom body salons that were held annually in New York, Chicago, San Francisco and Los Angeles. The first appearance of a custom-bodied Chrysler was at the 1926 New York Salon. These cars were listed in the souvenir catalog and publicity as "Imperial Chryslers" and were on just one exhibit stand, that of Fleetwood, which showed the Chrysler with a

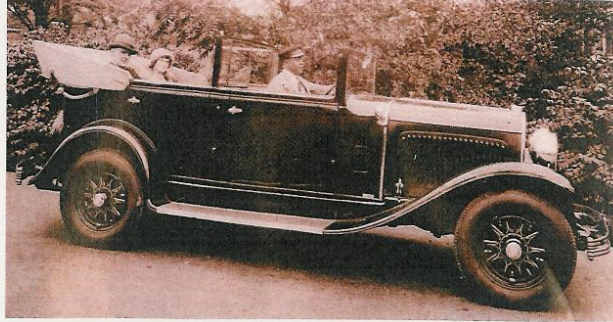
town car body. It would be the only time Fleetwood would exhibit its coachwork on a Chrysler chassis at a salon.

The number of Chryslers at the salons increased for 1927, and Locke, LeBaron and Dietrich all had their coachwork on the Imperial chassis at the New York Salon. Chrysler paid for an advertisement in the salon catalog, strategically placed inside the back cover so the last thing you saw (and hopefully remembered) was the beautiful Dietrich-bodied convertible sedan.

The salons were always scheduled to take place from December through early February. They usually started in New York, and then traveled west to Chicago, San Francisco, and finally Los Angeles; the cars shown in New York in December 1927 would also appear at the following three salons across the country. For Chrysler, this was true for the 1927-'28 salon, and also for 1930. No Chryslers were shown at the December 1929 New York Salon, but Locke did show four body styles—a sport phaeton, seven-passenger touring car, convertible coupe and a roadster—at the Chicago, San Francisco and Los Angeles salons. Locke would supply the custom roadsters and phaetons for the Chrysler Imperial in 1929-'30, building them at their Rochester, New York, plant.

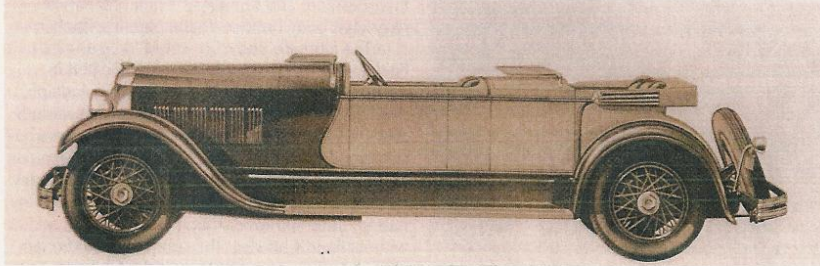
In 1930, the next major styling change for Chrysler's Imperial was revealed to introduce the 1931 cars. The big Imperial Eight, model CG, cars would now see four body types deemed Custom Models. LeBaron coachbuilders had issued lavish color catalogs, illustrated by artist Roland L. Stickney, showing their body styling on various chassis since 1928. Their final catalog for 1939-

## Locke

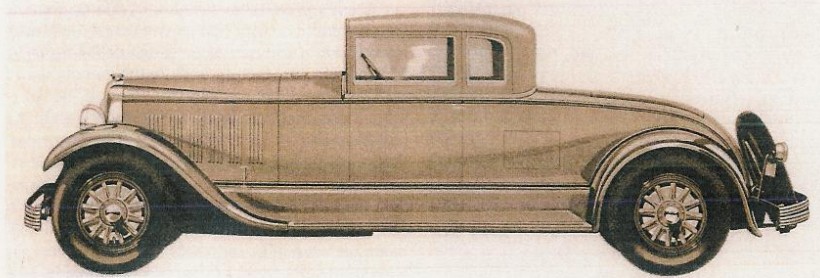


Locke developed a close working relationship with Chrysler that allowed it to create cars beyond those listed in the regular or even semi-custom lines, such as the 1929 series 75 town car at top. The series 75 convertible sedan below it was a semi-custom body; Locke's design wasn't mentioned in Chrysler sales literature, but the car carried a Locke & Co. cowl tag.

## LeBaron

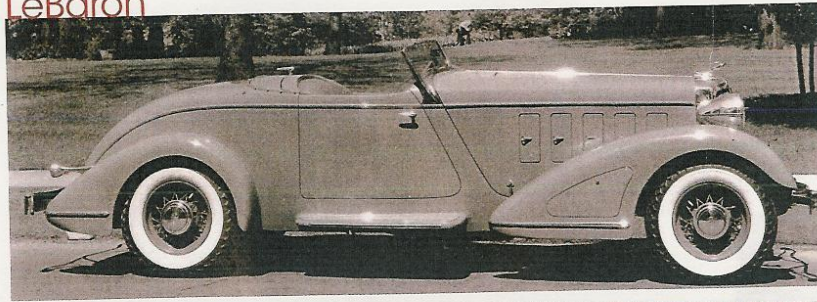


LeBaron created the "Traveler" sport phaeton for 1928, styling the car with a very low profile and subtle pinstriping.

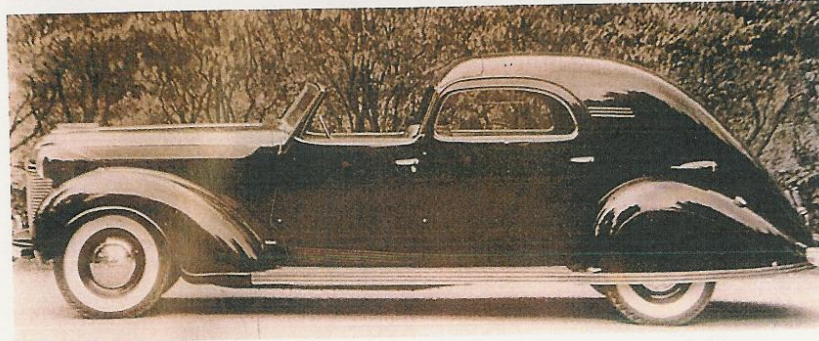


Among LeBaron's many designs for Chrysler was this stunning 1928 Imperial town coupe.

## LeBaron



In 1932, LeBaron built a two-passenger speedster, top right, for Walter P. Chrysler Jr. In 1937, LeBaron and Briggs produced a dramatic town car, right, for Mrs. Chrysler, using no production body panels.



'41, however, was the only one that showed their coachwork on a Chrysler Imperial chassis—the five-passenger sport phaeton.

The roadster and the sport phaeton made quite an impression on the motoring press. *Vanity Fair* and *Country Life* magazines noted the “slanted door line and V windshield,” as well as the way the upholstery on the front seat wrapped up and across the top of the door cap, reminiscent of the treatment for the open-cockpit airplanes of the era. The Chrysler copywriters had a field day. They identified the phaeton having “body designed by LeBaron,” but for the roadster, they claimed “the greatest roadster creation by the creator of the roadster vogue” without a mention of LeBaron!

According to information in a Chrysler salesman's data book for 1931, the prices for the Imperial Eight started at a list price of \$2,745 for a five-passenger sedan and went up to \$3,145 for a sedan limousine. LeBaron's custom models consisted of a stationary coupe at \$3,150; convertible coupe at \$3,320; custom roadster at \$3,220; and custom phaeton at \$3,575. To each of these cars, a delivery and equipment charge added \$200 to the price. The only factory accessories offered were a radiator grille for \$40, metal trunk for \$50, and a pair of metal tire covers for \$30. A choice of six wire or wooden wheels was included in the delivered price at no extra cost. Keep in mind that a new 1931 Plymouth roadster cost \$535 and a four-door sedan cost \$635.

By 1931, with the Great Depression enveloping the country, the demand for custom-bodied cars had shrunk dramatically; many body builders were going out of business or limping along. The

custom body salons came to a close, with the final salon being held in Chicago in early 1932.

The Airflow styling adopted by Chrysler in 1934 did not have a chassis that could be supplied to body builders even if they required one. In those dim Depression years, though, there was a glimmer of hope that still remained. Chrysler products continued to receive custom bodies and their designer and builder was one of the most respected body builders in the country: Derham.

The Derham Body Co. could trace its origin back to the carriage building days. Located in Rosemont, Pennsylvania, just west of Philadelphia, the company took on a franchise to sell Plymouths and De Sotos by 1937. Their sales of Chrysler's basic “bread and butter cars” didn't amount to much, but it did give them a link to a major car company in hard economic times. Derham was still creating custom automobiles during the Depression, and with its tie to Chrysler, the company could order chassis easily; even the six-cylinder Chryslers would see Derham coachwork fitted.

Derham was economical in its efforts; often, a factory-produced four-door sedan could be transformed into a formal or sport sedan or town car by modifying the factory body in the greenhouse area and completely redoing the interior. Thanks to the solid engineering of Chrysler's cars, Derham had great latitude; for instance, the integrity of the Briggs all-steel body gave Derham a solid foundation when they started to cut open the roof area over the front seat to transform a sedan into a town car. Padded roofs were added after the rear quarter windows were filled in to create formal sedans. New front seats were produced, to be fitted to an

add-on division window panel. The end result was a custom car at an affordable price.

Wholly custom-bodied cars were still produced when orders came in, but by cleverly and stylishly revamping existing factory bodies, Derham was able to turn a profit while their venerable peers closed up shop; Derham became one of the few quality coachbuilders left in the country. Their volume of work was not what it had been a decade earlier, but there was enough to leave them as the final coachbuilder dating to the carriage days. Custom and semi-custom-bodied Chryslers were made into 1942, when the war halted car production; Derham lasted well into the post-war years.

#### IN EUROPE

As a new car company, Chrysler didn't waste anytime making itself known in Europe. The company quickly established a presence in England, Belgium and, to a lesser extent, France. Its major presence was in England; Maxwell-Chrysler Motors Ltd. came to Mortlake Road in the Kew Gardens area of Surrey, just about five miles from the center of London. This would remain the headquarters for Chrysler in the United Kingdom until World War II.

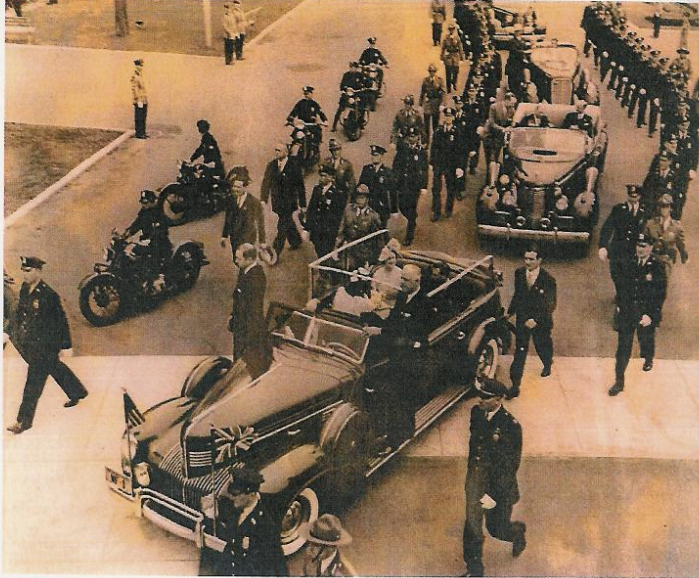
The annual Motor Show took place in October, and the 1925 edition, held at the Olympia Exhibition Hall, saw Chryslers on display at four stands. Chrysler had its own space with a sectioned show chassis, plus three cars with factory coachwork. English coachbuilders Hill & Boll showed a two-door sports saloon; Short Brothers showed a four-door touring car and James Young displayed an "all weather" convertible. This was quite an accomplishment, considering Chrysler was not even two years old.

By 1926, the Maxwell name was dropped from the company title in England; from then on, they were known as Chrysler Motors Ltd. For the remainder of the Roaring Twenties, Chrysler would regularly display factory coachwork at the salons, and several English coachbuilders would consistently show a Chrysler with their own custom coachwork as well. James Young, Hoyal, Pytchley, Hamshaw, Offard & Sons and Carlton Carriage Co. presented saloons, coupes and convertibles on the series 60, 65, 72 and 77 chassis.

Carlton began a good, but somewhat sporadic relationship with Chrysler Motors Ltd. around that time. In 1928, Carlton only built drophead (convertible) coupes on Chrysler chassis, and did so consistently for 1928 through 1931. For the next five years, though, Carlton switched its alliance to Buick, but built on both Chrysler and Buick chassis for 1937-'38, after which the annual motor shows ceased for the duration of the war. During the Depression years, Chrysler continued to exhibit factory coachwork at the various motor shows, and in 1933, English coachbuilders John Charles and the Motor Bodies and Engineering Co. created custom saloons on the Chrysler Royal Eight chassis.

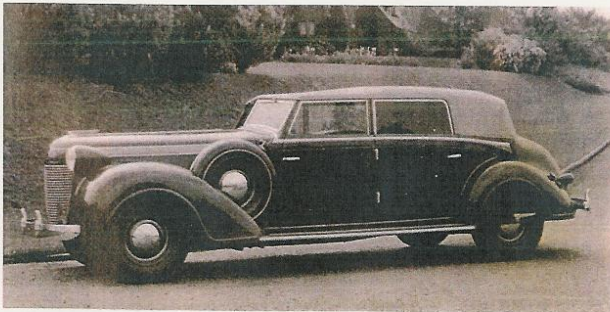
For 1936, Abbot coachbuilders showed a four-door cabriolet on a Chrysler chassis, but the Chrysler that received the most attention at the show was a saloon. The Super Power Streamline Saloon

## Derham



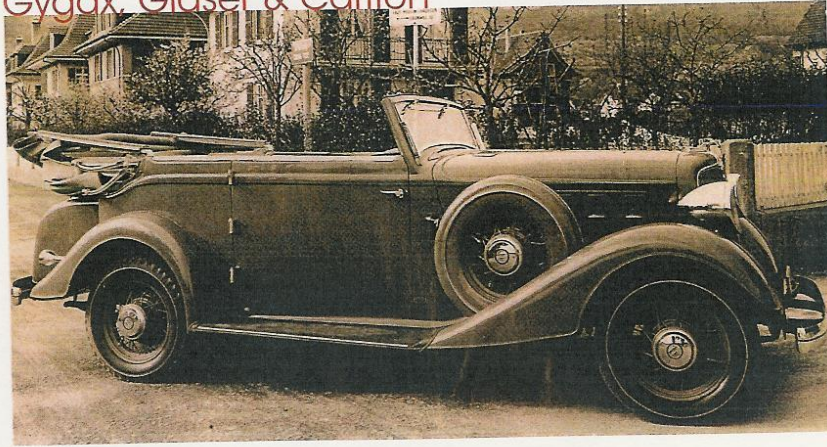
On its 1937 Imperial convertible sedan, below, Derham built the entire body from scratch, including the cowl and windshield area. The 1938 Custom Imperial convertible sedan at bottom was also designed by Derham.

Derham built a special open parade phaeton for use at the 1939-40 New York World's Fair; the visiting King George VI and Queen Mary of England rode in a custom-bodied 1939 Imperial C-34 fitted with a bulletproof glass enclosure.



Swiss coachbuilder Jean Gygax built this convertible sedan on the six-cylinder Chrysler chassis in 1934.

## Gygax, Glaser & Carlton



was on the 121-inch wheelbase chassis that was used in the "Kingston" Eight series (this was the Deluxe Airstream series C-8 in the U.S.). The main coachwork, including fenders and trunklid, was by Carlton, though it went uncredited. Press of the day described it as a "sports saloon of aerodynamic design and special girder construction."

The Super Power saloon was designed by Chrysler engineers, with land-speed record holder Captain George Eyston consulting on its styling. The special saloon was an expensive car: a Chrysler six-cylinder Kew (rebadged Plymouth) was 345 pounds sterling; a Kingston saloon, whose chassis the custom saloon shared, was 525 pounds; and the Super Power saloon was 825 pounds.

For 1937, the Super Power saloon was once again shown, but this time it graced the stand of its body builder, Carlton, now labeled as the Chrysler Super Power "Carlton" Streamline Saloon to leave no question as to who was responsible for the car's construction.

The final Motor Show before the war was held in 1938, and Chrysler continued to show a full range of cars, from the Kew up to an Imperial; Carlton would show a drophead coupe on the Wimbledon six-cylinder chassis. Despite the lack of Motor Shows during World War II, Chrysler continued to print a lavish sales catalog for the U.K.

market. The one car with a custom body illustrated for 1939 was a "Carlton English coachbuilt Four-some Drophead Coupe" on a Wimbledon chassis.

For the most part, the rest of Europe was covered by the Chrysler Sales team based in Brussels, Belgium. At the 1925 Brussels Salon, Chrysler had an exhibit, but no custom coachbuilt bodies were shown—only factory coachwork was on display. Chrysler continued to exhibit at the Brussels Salon, and by 1938, Chrysler, Plymouth, De Soto and Dodge each had their own exhibition stand.

Chrysler was also active in France, although the company was not as well represented there as in England and Belgium. However, as early as 1927, Chrysler did have an exhibit at the annual Paris Salon, held at the Grand Palace. The company's base of operations in France was on the main avenue in Neuilly-sur-Seine, but by 1929, it listed contact information with the Brussels distributor and gave no address in France. The Imperial was noted as appearing at the 1929 Paris Salon, but without much fanfare. Chryslers would continue to be shown at the Paris Salon through 1938.

A fair number of other custom bodies were designed and fitted to Chrysler chassis beyond what we have mentioned and shown here. As more information and quality period photographs surface in the future, we will share them with you. ☺

Germany's Glaser built a valance-fendered body for a 1932 Chrysler model C1, below, while England's 1939 Chrysler Wimbledon, below right, was fitted with a body by Carlton.

