

ANTIQUE AUTOMOBILE

VOL. 24 NO. 5

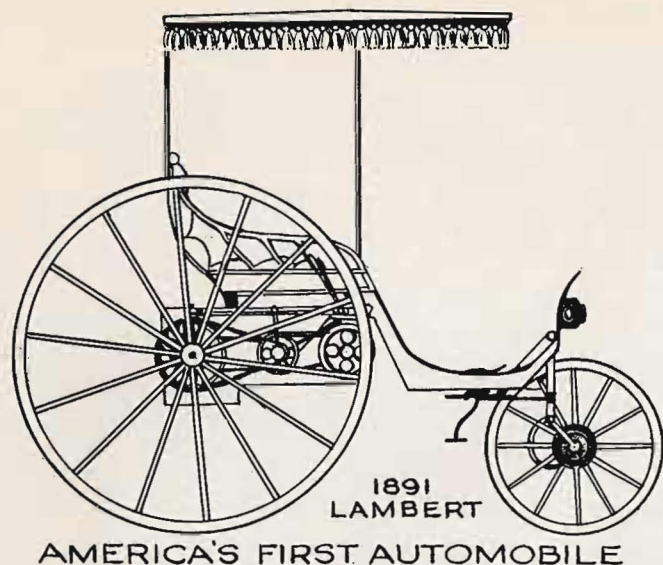
OCT. - NOV., 1960

\$1.25



1908 LAMBERT

**Historic Discovery: 1891 Lambert,
New Claim for America's First Car**



John W. Lambert's first gasoline engine motor car construction drawing dated, 1891.



IN 1891, a year before the Duryea Brothers built their first successful automobile, John William Lambert was driving a gasoline-powered automobile on the main street of Ohio City, Ohio. Credit for building America's first automobile has always been obscured somewhat by conflict between the Duryea brothers and the one-time widely advertised claim by Elwood Haynes that he produced America's first car. Present-day history books give credit to the Duryea brothers for successfully producing America's first car, having discounted the Haynes' claim. Evidence now has been established that credit for America's first automobile should go to an Ohioan.

One may well question why a claim for Lambert has been so long forthcoming. This claim, although hinted at in several of the early automotive journals, has never been pressed by Lambert or his family for two reasons. John Lambert felt that his 1891 car, although extremely successful mechanically, was a financial failure because he was unable to bring in sufficient sales to place it in manufacture. Early in 1891, as finishing touches were being put to the automobile, he distributed a sales pamphlet by mail. There were many inquiries, but no sales contracts were signed. Lambert decided at this early date that an immediate market for his automobile on any profitable basis did not exist.

Another reason for Lambert's reluctance to press a claim was that he had given up this right to a close friend, Elwood Haynes. When Haynes planned to promote his car, he visited Lambert and obtained his permission to advertise the Haynes automobile as the first American automobile. When historians began to look back to unravel the mystery as to who was first with a gasoline automobile, Lambert refused to participate in the controversy.

Lambert, during the controversy that raged on and off in the trade journals and in the history books, was apparently content with the recognition given to him as one of the early pioneers. He had been dutifully accorded the title, "Father of the gearless, friction-drive engine as applied to the automobile." Lambert also had over 600 patents dealing with automobiles and other machinery to his credit. In 1902, Lambert manufactured the Union automobile and in 1905

began manufacturing an automobile carrying the Lambert name. The Lambert car, manufactured from 1905 to World War I, plus trucks, fire engines, and farm tractors that carried the Lambert name, seemed sufficient recognition for John Lambert. There exists no evidence that he ever attempted to protest the claim made by any other inventor or manufacturer.

As an automotive historian, I have always been intrigued with the adventure, though clouded and somewhat frustrated at times, as to who was the very first to produce a gasoline automobile for sale in the United States. One of the objectives of our society's publication, the ANTIQUE AUTOMOBILE, is to unearth undiscovered and unpublished automotive history. The controversial dispute between the Duryea brothers, the myriad of other independent claims by various one-of-a-kind automobile inventors, plus the extreme difficulty of obtaining complete records on some 300 horseless carriages that were constructed up to 1895 makes the road of research almost as impassable as the main street of Ohio City where, in 1891, Lambert drove his first automobile. It has taken almost five years to ferret out substantial evidence in order to enter a claim for America's first automobile on behalf of John William Lambert.

The story starts in December of 1876. Lambert saw his first gasoline engine when he was sixteen years of age. At a tannery in Greenville, Ohio, his father saw an engine operating machinery without using a boiler. That evening, he told his son of the machine and invited him to return with him the following week to pick up the hides. Arriving at Greenville, they discovered that the tannery had burned the night before. John Lambert dug into the still-warm ashes and got his first glimpse of a slide valve coal gas engine. This first experience with a gas engine was to remain in his mind. As years rolled by, he became aware of the Otto and Benz engines; and records show that he was well aware of the Benz automobile, for which he had considerable criticism because of its extreme loss of power "with its system of belts and pulleys."

In 1890, he learned that John B. Hicks of Cleveland, Ohio, was working on a stationary gasoline engine. An agree-

ment was entered into to help finance the engine. Originally, Lambert planned to invest only \$200; but before this relationship was over Lambert spent \$3300. Before the end of 1890, a licensing agreement was drawn up between Lambert, Hicks, and one of Hicks' engineers, William Wacholtz, a German architectural engineer draftsman. The document, still in existence, provided for a "shopright or license to manufacture a gasoline engine embodying the improvements invented by the said Hicks as above stated for use only on land vehicles other than railway or tramway cars." In December of 1890, John Hicks applied for a patent from the U.S. Patent Office for his stationary, three-cylinder gasoline engine. Application number 375776 was granted.

Prior to this, under the instruction of Lambert, Wacholtz began to work on a modified Hicks engine at the Lowell Machine Works in Cleveland. Wacholtz was to oversee the making of the component parts designed by Lambert to bring about the production of the light-weight, three-cylinder engine suitable for moving a three-wheel vehicle that Lambert had designed.

Lambert in January of 1891 after expending \$3300 (the engine was still not running), ordered the unfinished engine and its component parts to be shipped to Ohio City. There he undertook the completion of the engine. Gradually the three-cylinder Hicks engine became a one-cylinder Lambert. The three-cylinder experimental engine repeatedly caused crankshaft failures. To have the crankshaft remade required journeying to Cleveland. Lambert did away with two of the cylinders, reducing the stress. He also invented a special carburetor and a system of drives that were unknown to the Hicks' patent.

Locally, Lambert was known as an ambitious and successful businessman. He settled there in 1885 when the town was then known as Enterprise, later renamed Ohio City. By 1890, he owned the local grain elevator, an implement store, the town's opera house, the town hall, jail, and he was operating a lumber yard.

As work progressed on the engine, a three-wheel buggy was built. Before the end of January, it is believed that the initial road test was made in Lambert's 80-foot farm implement showroom. The engine was a success, but the steering lever with a direct linkage to a single front wheel was a tiresome affair and had to be corrected before the car was driven on the main street.

Lambert was convinced that he had a workable engine to power his three-wheel carriage and he set forth specifications and a price of \$550 in a sales brochure which was mailed during the first part of February of 1891. Later that month, the automobile was running with the new stirrup-type steering on the main street of Ohio City.

When Lambert first appeared with his car on the main street of Ohio City, the noise and smoke caused a crowd to gather. James Yahn, now living in Van Wert, Ohio, remembers his first thought as he saw Lambert chugging down the road, "Where in heaven's name is the horse?" Yahn was fifteen at the time and with Jim Swoveland, who was beginning a 57-year career in the town's drug store, was considerably excited about the horseless carriage that coughed and belched in the center of the crowd.

Swoveland was one of the first residents to take a ride in the Lambert. Lambert had taken a fancy to the young man

Sworn Statement

I, James Swoveland, have been a resident of Ohio City since 1884. I was born on a farm three-fourths of a mile southeast of Ohio City on October 9, 1871.

I have very distinct recollections of Mr. John William Lambert's experiments with a horseless carriage. Mr. Lambert would let me into the room where he was building the automobile when most of the other fellows were not permitted to enter. Mr. Lambert did much of his experimenting at night in order that it might remain secret. The room in which he did this work was located in an elevator building he owned.

I rode with Mr. Lambert in this first car on the streets of Ohio City in the summer of 1891. I recall that there were still stumps in the dirt street and Mr. Lambert had to maneuver the car in order to avoid hitting those stumps. On one occasion he did hit the roots of one which made the car skid into a hitching rack. A number of men helped us pull the car backward and we then continued on our way.

I remember the year very well because it was the one prior to the year when we had a big fire in Ohio City and the drug store in which I worked burned. Our new drug store building had a block with the year 1892 cut into it.

I took several rides in this car both with Mr. Lambert and with a Mr. Smith who worked for Mr. Lambert. The car had two large wheels at the rear and a smaller one in the front center. It was steered by a lever. It had a fringed top.

The above statements are true and accurate to the best of my knowledge.

J. C. Martin
witness
Joanna Balliet
witness

James Swoveland
James Swoveland

Sworn to before me and signed in my presence this 9th day of February 1960.

Truman C. Martin
TRUMAN C. MARTIN, Notary Public
in and for Van Wert County, Ohio
My Commission Expires Feb. 3, 1962



Mr. James A. Swoveland, 89, a life long resident of Ohio City, Ohio, rode in America's first gasoline car many times in 1891.



INVENTOR OF AMERICA'S FIRST CAR

In 1891, John W. Lambert drove what is now believed to be America's first successful automobile. In 1891 Lambert automobiles preceded the Duryea Brothers' and that of Elwood Haynes by two years.

John W. Lambert is also considered the father of the friction-drive transmission and completed it in 1897. This friction-drive transmission first appeared on cars for sale in early 1900. The engine was transmitting power for the Union Automobile. Experimental Union cars carried the engine in the rear, later in the extreme front and finally amidships. By 1902, the Union Company was in full production and incorporated in Union City, Indiana. Lambert also had over 600 patents in the automobile, gasoline engine, and other mechanical fields.

and had previously admitted him on the trial runs in the showroom. A Mrs. O. E. Harvey is another former Ohio City resident who can attest to the date that the car first appeared. Her father was one of the many who rode as a passenger in those enchanting days.

To further substantiate the claim that the car was running on the streets under its own power as early as 1891, Walter Lewis, town photographer, was commissioned for \$1.25 to make photographs of the car. The first set of negatives taken in August of 1891 was a failure and he returned several days later to make the picture accompanying this story.

It is interesting to record that several letters are on file dated in the latter part of February and March of 1891 requesting additional information on the Lambert car. Although the letters of inquiry continued, no sales contracts were signed for the Lambert. Lambert soon realized that there was no sales potential for his automobile. He turned his efforts to manufacturing a stationary, gasoline-powered

engine for industrial and farm use. Unfortunately, late in the very year that the automobile was brought into being, it was destroyed by fire. All that exists today is a certified photograph in the archives of the Smithsonian Institution along with a drawing and a handful of affidavits of those who were privileged to ride in America's first car.

In 1892, Lambert improved his one-cylinder engine and joined his father and brother at Union City, Ohio. Space at one of the family companies, the Pioneer Pole and Shaft Company, was converted for stationary gas engine manufacturing. Business flourished and an additional plant was built in Anderson, Indiana, two years later. The new company was called the Buckeye Manufacturing Company. John Lambert moved to Anderson to oversee its operation.

It was prior to this move to Indiana that Elwood Haynes sought out and obtained the promise that John Lambert would permit him to make the claim that the Haynes car could be promoted as America's first automobile. Later in 1895, Haynes invited Lambert to accompany him in a Haynes car that was to participate in America's first automobile race in Chicago. Records show that Haynes was listed as a separate entry, as was John Lambert. Neither car was able to participate because of mechanical failures before the race. Haynes and Lambert watched the start of the race as spectators.

Returning from the race with renewed interest in the marketability of an automobile, Lambert began planning an automobile powered by his Buckeye engine. By 1898, his engine was fitted to a four-wheel buggy and operated with some success. Between 1900 and 1902, he continued his experiments using the gearless, friction-drive engine. The Lambert engines were placed at the extreme front of the chassis, then at the extreme rear, as well as in the middle on the experimental cars.

In 1902, the Union Automobile Company, Union City, Indiana, was formed and production soon reached a schedule of ten cars a month. One source lists over 300 Union cars were sold. At Anderson, Indiana, in 1904, Lambert built a second factory covering 300,000 square feet of floor space. By 1905, he formed the Lambert Automobile Company of Anderson, Indiana, and the Union Company went out of existence. The new car designed and built to John Lambert's specifications began an eleven-year manufacture of automobiles, trucks, fire engines, and farm tractors. The Lambert cars of 1906 offered eight different models, ranging from \$800 to \$3000.

The Lambert cars were fitted with motors of Lambert design, though manufactured by many independent engine builders. Builders included Rutenberg, Buda, Atlas, Continental, Trebbert, and Davis. The Lambert Company made their own bodies. Upholstery was of high quality and the final body finish was accomplished with fifteen coats of paint.

CYCLE AND TRADE of January 1906 gives a complete and comprehensive description of the Lambert cars of 1905 and 1906. During 1906, the company began producing fire engines, trucks, and farm tractors, all using the proven friction drive pioneered by John Lambert.

By 1910, the Lambert Company of Anderson, Indiana, had over a thousand employees and production had reached 3,000 cars and trucks a year. Sales of the patented Lambert

friction-drive vehicle were nationwide. Automobile journals and newspapers of this period recorded hundreds of public tests demonstrating the ability of the gearless, friction car being driven up specially built 50 percent ramp inclines, steps of court houses, and other public buildings.

By 1914, the Lambert Company's success with their farm tractor permitted them to expand with a new plant in El Segundo, California, to reach the western farm market. During World War I, the Lambert factories were converted for national defense and built shells, caisson wheels, and military fire engines. During this period, John Lambert's only son Ray was president.

At the conclusion of World War I, thought was given to the company's re-entry into the automobile business. Both father and son accurately predicted the problems that lay ahead for the automobile industry. The Lamberts correctly prophesied that a medium-sized, independent manufacturer would have to expand to a tremendous degree or eventually be merged with one of the large companies capable of tremendous mass production. Faced with these alternatives, the Lamberts decided to go into allied and associated fields of automobile manufacturing.

The Lambert company exists today as Lambert Incorporated with factories at Dayton and Ansonia, Ohio. The president of the company, William B. Lambert, is the grandson of John William Lambert and son of Ray Lambert. The principal products of Lambert Incorporated still include automotive parts, production machine tools, and an entire range of the finest lawn and industrial sweepers produced in America today. Grandson William Lambert, an AACA member, Ohio Region, is extremely proud of his two Lambert cars and the tremendous pioneer contribution made by his grandfather in producing America's first automobile in 1891.

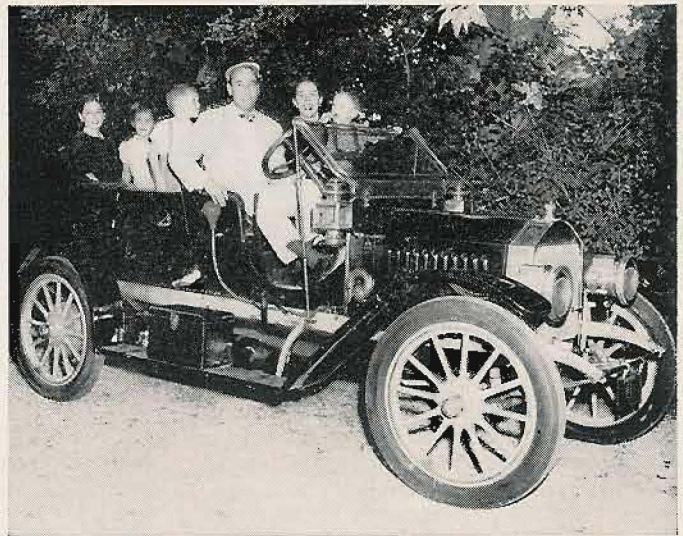
Today only a few Lambert cars exist, preserved for automotive history by members of the Antique Automobile Club of America. No Union car is known to exist nor are there any engines of the Buckeye Manufacturing Co.

The 1908 Lambert featured on the cover of this issue was restored by AACA member Ray Zuend of Dixon, Illinois. He found the car sitting under a tree in terrible condition: well weathered, rusted, with parts missing—a restorer's nightmare. In 1952, the 1908 Lambert won the Illinois State Fair Championship Grand Prize. Prior to the car's sale to the grandson of John Lambert, William B. Lambert, the immaculately restored antique automobile had won twenty-five first prizes at various meets.

William Lambert also owns a 1910 Lambert touring which was found in original condition. The car is well preserved and running today without benefit of restoration. The car was found by R. D. Jeffries who attributes the car's excellent preservation to the fact that it was a one-owner automobile.

John J. Lambert, Jr., of Buffalo, has restored a rare and beautiful AACA national prize winning 1909 Lambert touring. John Lambert, no relation to the Lambert automobile family, contributed greatly to the preparation of this article.

Another plaudit of thanks goes to Albert Ruedy, owner of a 1911 Lambert touring. I am also indebted to the Smithsonian Institution, Free Library of Philadelphia, and the Detroit Public Library, and to Mr. William B. Lambert, grandson of John Lambert, who gave me freedom of access to his family records.



William B. Lambert, grandson of John William Lambert, with his wife and children in a 1910 Lambert. The 1908 Lambert featured on our cover is also owned by the grandson of John Lambert now believed to be the inventor of America's first automobile.



A 1901 experimental model of the car that later became known as the Union, designed and built by John W. Lambert in Union City, Indiana. Note the back seat folded flat providing luggage and equipment space, predating the present drop down station wagon seats.

THE LAMBERT CO. SURVIVES TODAY

The Lambert company exists today as Lambert Incorporated with factories at Dayton and Ansonia, Ohio. The principal products still include automotive parts, production machine tools, materials handling machinery, and an entire range of the finest lawn and industrial sweepers produced in America today.

The following appears in

The Motor World

Devoted to the Automobile and kindred Interests.

of February 12, 1903.

CLEVELAND SHOW NUMBER.

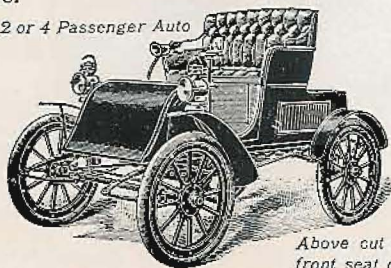
There was also exhibited for the first time the "Union" automobile, made by the Union Automobile Company, of Union City, Ind. It has been thought best to mention this separately first, because of its being a new-comer in the show line, and, second, because of the truly marvelous demonstration it made with a Motor World man as a passenger.

First, the Union must be accorded a high place, for in the Lambert engine and transmission it has a motive power that will literally take it almost anywhere with absolutely no fuss or trouble.

This engine is of 8 horse-power, two-cylinder, four-cycle balanced type.

The crank is carried in the center of the engine with a cylinder at both ends. Both cylinders act on the one crank-shaft, which is of the double-throw type. By this arrangement one piston balances the other, one connecting rod balances the other, and the shaft balances itself. Therefore, no weight is needed on the fly-wheel to balance these parts. The Lambert is a truly balanced engine and there is an absolute freedom from vibration of any kind at any time.

2 or 4 Passenger Auto



Above cut shows front seat closed.

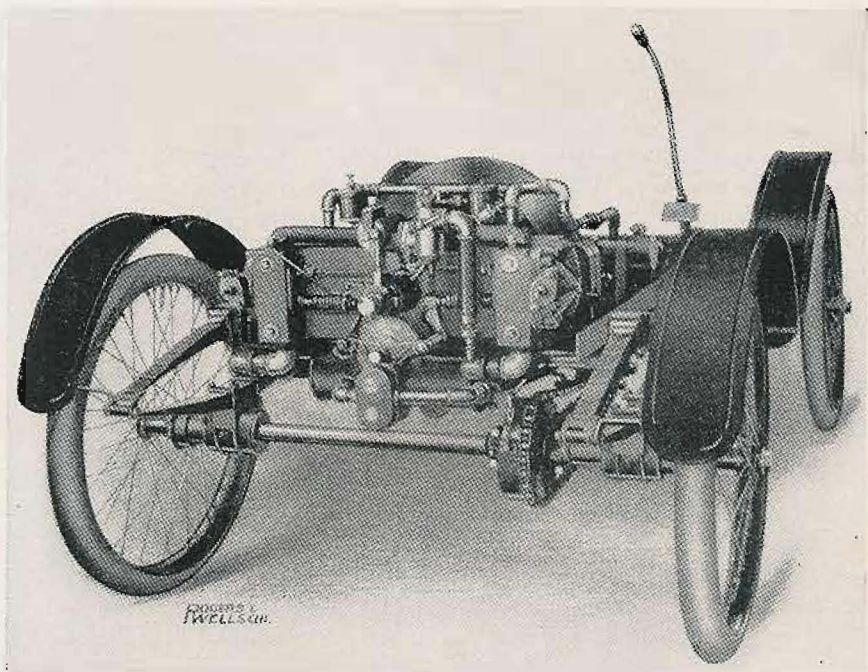
The transmission is of the much-discussed much-maligned friction system, but it does the business. The fly-wheel of the engine is of the disk variety, its face covered with a patented composition plate of special friction qualities.

The friction wheel is set direct on this plate, the shaft which carries it being placed parallel with the center, the wheel being moved in either direction on the shaft and across the face of the friction plate by means of the controller lever.

With this engine and this transmission a Motor World man was taken first up the Water street hill, from the Erie depot, next down the hill by the viaduct to where the Detroit and Buffalo boat landings are. Two thirds down this latter hill the engine was reversed and the car easily backed the en-

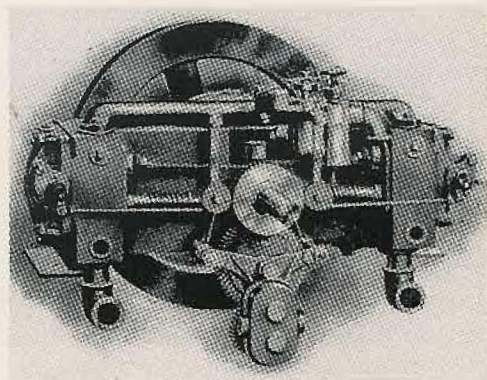
John Lambert's 1902 "UNION" CAR

After John Lambert successfully mounted a gearless, friction-drive engine in a four-wheel buggy in 1898, he continued to experiment up until 1902 with this type of engine and drive. After many experiments from 1900 to 1902, he began producing the Union Automobile in Union City, Indiana. Models were two and four passenger. The motor was started from the seat by an ingenious contrivance actuated by the foot of the operator. No turning of a crank was necessary. The car sold for \$1250 without extras. \$100 was required to accompany each order; balance subject to sight draft with bill of lading upon delivery.

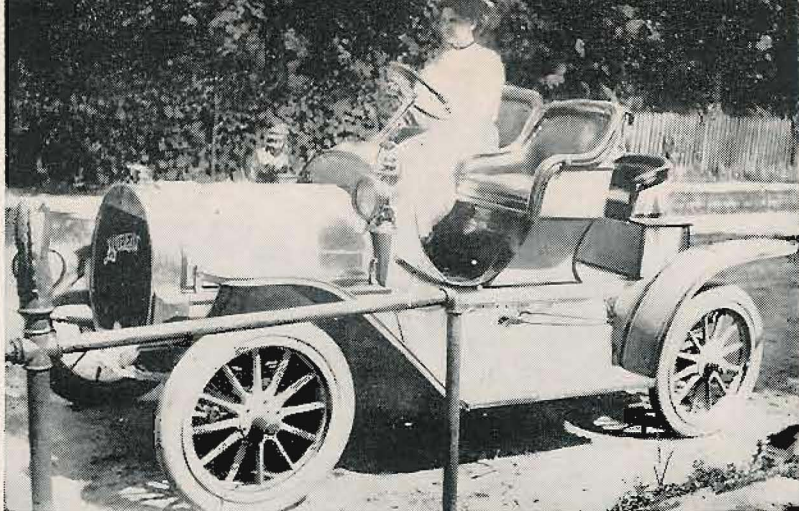


ROBERTS & WELLS CO.

The Gearless Friction Drive engine later to be used on all Lambert cars and trucks.

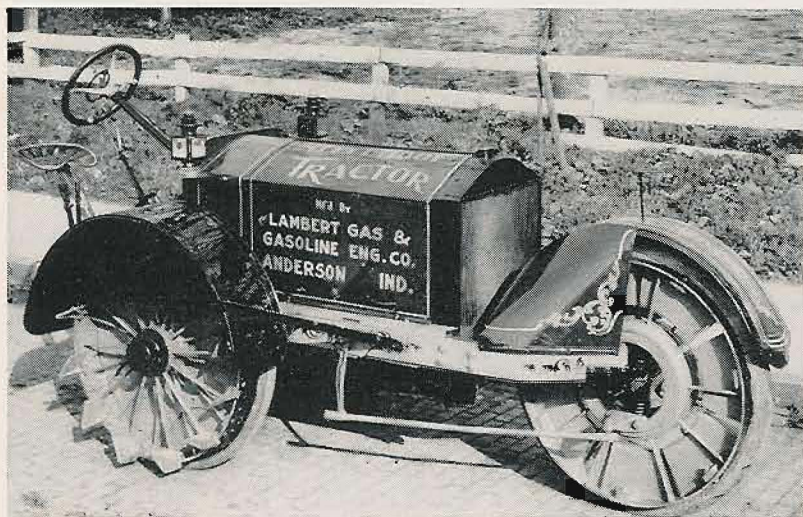


(Continued on page 400)

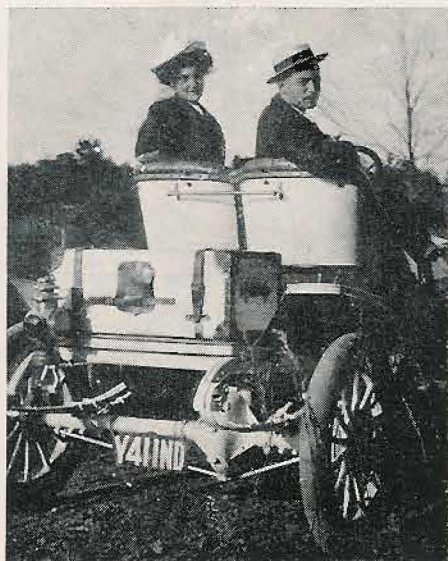


John Lambert also built an experimental car for his daughter Mae pictured here. This model with many variations was produced in 1907 and 1908 and was similar to that of her brother, Ray.

One of the many farm tractors designed and built by John W. Lambert and his son A. R. Lambert. In 1914, the company built a tractor plant in El Segundo, California, with an eye to the growing farm tractor market in the West. Today, Lambert Company still exists as Lambert, Inc., with factories at Dayton, and Ansonia, Ohio.



The special experimental Lambert was the only automobile on De Pauw campus. In 1908, it was a present to Ray Lambert, John Lambert's only son.



In 1927 Mr. Lambert visited in Ohio City and obtained this affidavit. Walter Lewis was a music teacher as well as the only commercial photographer in Ohio City. A newspaper article in the weekly Ohio City Progress of April 1, 1927, carried a story on Mr. Lambert's visit and listed 51 residents then living who had seen this car operate in 1891. The same article mentions another recent Ohio City visitor: Mr. Charles Duryea. Lambert never entered the controversy as to who made the first automobile but he prepared the important documents relative to the 1891 automobile.

PHOTOGRAPHER'S AFFIDAVIT

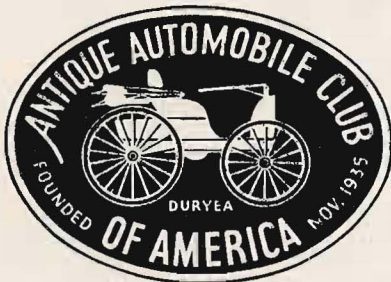
Van Wert, O. 3-25-27
 My books show that I made
 6 photographs of Mr. Lambert
 buggy for which I charged
 \$1.25. Said photographs were
 made in August 1891.
 Walter Lewis,
 742 South Walnut St
 Van Wert Ohio
 P.S. I made the trip in this
 buggy with Mr. Lambert out
 to the O. & G. Farm in
 order to get a photo, but failed
 to get a satisfactory negative,
 but later in the same month
 made the negative in my
 Lambert's Hall.
 W.L.
 Sworn to and Subscribed
 to this 5th day of April
 1927
 J. P. Moore
 Justice of Peace

AACA OFFICIAL EMBLEMS



**BRONZE OR ALUMINUM
CAR MARKER**

Each \$3.50



DECALS

An attractive yellow background decal with blue printing, 2 1/8" long, for use on your modern car, in your home, or office, is available. 8 for \$1.00



Gold Plated (actual size) Lapel Button, Dress Pin Charm, each .. \$2.00.



DUSTER OR BLAZER EMBLEMS


The design, letters and border are embroidered in gold on deep (Packard) blue cotton twill. This emblem can easily be sewn on a duster, cap, raincoat or wind-breaker, and the colors will not run. Each . \$1.00

strength. The upholstery is leather and made so it can be snapped in and out as in a race car.

To lower the radiator it was moved forward of the front crossmember and dropped 4 1/2" by means of angle brackets. The rest of the job was a routine of making the machine resemble a conventional type Speedster by installing a round gas tank on a small rear deck, a tool box, and of course a spare tire rack. The lightness of the car necessitated the installation of shock absorbers to keep it on the road.

Now after all this the big question is, "Will it go?" Answer: "It sure will." Second gear is quite sufficient for starting out and the acceleration in high gear is surprising. I have never gone over 80 miles per hour, but perhaps not many other Speedsters have either. I feel the car is capable of at least 85. The feature that impresses me more than the speed is the fine performance in high gear at low speeds.

While attending the Spring Meet at Ocean City, Joe Murchio related a very heartwarming story to me. With a similar 4 cylinder Chevrolet, he defeated a former Indianapolis Stutz race car in an exhibition race in New Jersey. Perhaps in the eyes of the "Mercer" crowd this isn't much of an accomplishment.

This story is not intended as an endorsement of racing, speed, or disrespect of originality which is a prime purpose of our Club, but rather to relate this member's experience with one Speedster which I hope will be among many in the future. Perhaps the old "Speedster Bug" might even infect enough members to have a new class for competition. 

THE WORLD MOTOR

(Continued from page 346)

tire way up the hill, never faltering for an instant or making any fuss whatever.

To anyone who knows this grade the performance can be appreciated. Sufficient to say it is one of the steepest to be found anywhere.

After this the Lake Shore depot hills were easy, though they both are climbs of the severest kind. No attempt whatever was made to "rush" them, the car simply keeping on its way up the same even rate of speed of which it had been travelling.

There was absolutely no vibration, no pounding, no strain. The facts speak for themselves, and are given simply because they are facts and of the kind that are thought worthy of recording.

FOR SALE



One of our Rolls Royce Phantom 111's, installed in a spacious hold and being battened down for a safe voyage to Chicago, Ill. from England. Mascot, wing mirrors, etc., removed and in the custody of the Ship's Officer for safety.

ROLLS-ROYCE 1936 Phantom 111 V.12 limousine by Barker, with wind up division. Only one titled owner since new. Perfect engine, tyres, and new car appearance. \$1,960.

BENTLEY 1927 3-litre Red Label Speed Model tourer. One of the much sought after H. M. Bentley rebuilds, with slab fuel tank on rear, chromed radiator, Marschall headlamps, and fold flat windscreen. Full weather equipment. \$1,260.

BENTLEY 1935 3 1/2-litre, with convertible body by Thrupp & Maberly. Recent overhaul of engine, rear axle, shock absorbers, ride control, etc. One owner since purchased for \$11,200 in 1945. Maintained by RR Authorized Service Agent. Price \$1,470.

BENTLEY 1950 with James Young sedanca de ville body (complete top over front seats disappears). New engine fitted by RR July 1960. A graceful, attractive car offering the benefits of both open and fully enclosed motoring. \$4,200.

LAGONDA 1938 V.12 Mulliner two door special sports saloon. Recent complete engine overhaul. \$1,820.

LAGONDA 1938 V.12 convertible in immaculate condition throughout. Low mileage. One of the few convertible bodies fitted on the advanced design V.12 Lagonda chassis designed by W. O. Bentley who joined Lagondas after his own Bentley Company was absorbed by RR in the Thirties.

We ARE NEGOTIATING FOR:—Rolls Royce 20 tourer two seater. The body needs restoration. Suitable for renovation at home.

Rolls Royce 1935, 20/25 with 2/4 seater convertible body by Van den Plas. Only three owners since new, and engine overhauled last February by RR dealer. New top and tyres.

Please remember that we can supply, on request, a stock list of post-war RR and Bentley cars at reasonable prices, with condition and mileage guaranteed by RR Official Retailers.

WING COMMANDER

R. E. KIRKBY,

Prospect Motors,

33 Station Square, HARROGATE
Yorkshire, England