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HISTORY ON THE FIELD: THE AMELIA ISLAND CONCOURS D'ELEGANCE

From Rétromobile to Pebble Beach, there's History on the Field. This and future articles will look to highlight certain examples at shows and concours—vehicles with automotive history appeal.

Here are examples seen at the Amelia Island Concours d'Elégance. The concours listed 326 vehicles in 40 classes in its show program; and it was to take place on March 12th, but a dire weather forecast caused a move to Saturday, March 11th. Perhaps all the cars couldn't make it—but the rain did come the following day.

Our first example comes from the **Tampa Bay Automobile Museum** (see: tbauto.org). If it looks familiar, it appeared in March-April 2012 *SAH Journal* #255 in the *Rétromobile* coverage by *Kit Foster*. The car was auctioned then by Bonhams and now will reside at this museum in Florida. Museum representative Olivier Cerf was with the car and information sheets were available to

spectators. Here's the text of the flyer for the car, the 1925 Gérin Aérodyne Berline prototype (slightly edited):

"Jacques Gérin designed two cars while enlisted in the army in 1919, the first one driven by a propeller and the second one with a mid-engine and many unique features. This second car was the "Aérodyne." The body, made of pieces of wood laminated between cast aluminum, is a space frame. There is no chassis.

"The shape is aerodynamic. The body was never finished and it is now being made by our shop following the drawings and patent from Jacques Gérin. Sheets of aluminum will be formed to follow the contour of the frame. The car was patented in the early twenties. Manufacturing of the prototype was done by Ratier (Ratier-Figeac today) in the suburbs of Paris in 1925-26.

"The 2-liter overhead valve engine is

mounted in front of the rear axle. As with everything else in the Gérin, it was a very modern engine for the twenties. Valve springs are tronconic (tapering) to suppress the vibrations, the rockers pivot on ball bearings and there is no oil needed on the top of the engine. Chevron gears were selected for distribution. There is a dual ignition with one magneto and one distributor.

"It has independent suspension on all four wheels with hydraulic shock absorbers. The suspension works through articulating arms. The front wheels have hydraulic brakes with four shoes per wheel. The drums of the brakes are the rims of the wheels themselves. Steering is a rack and pinion design, and the steering wheel is adjustable in height.

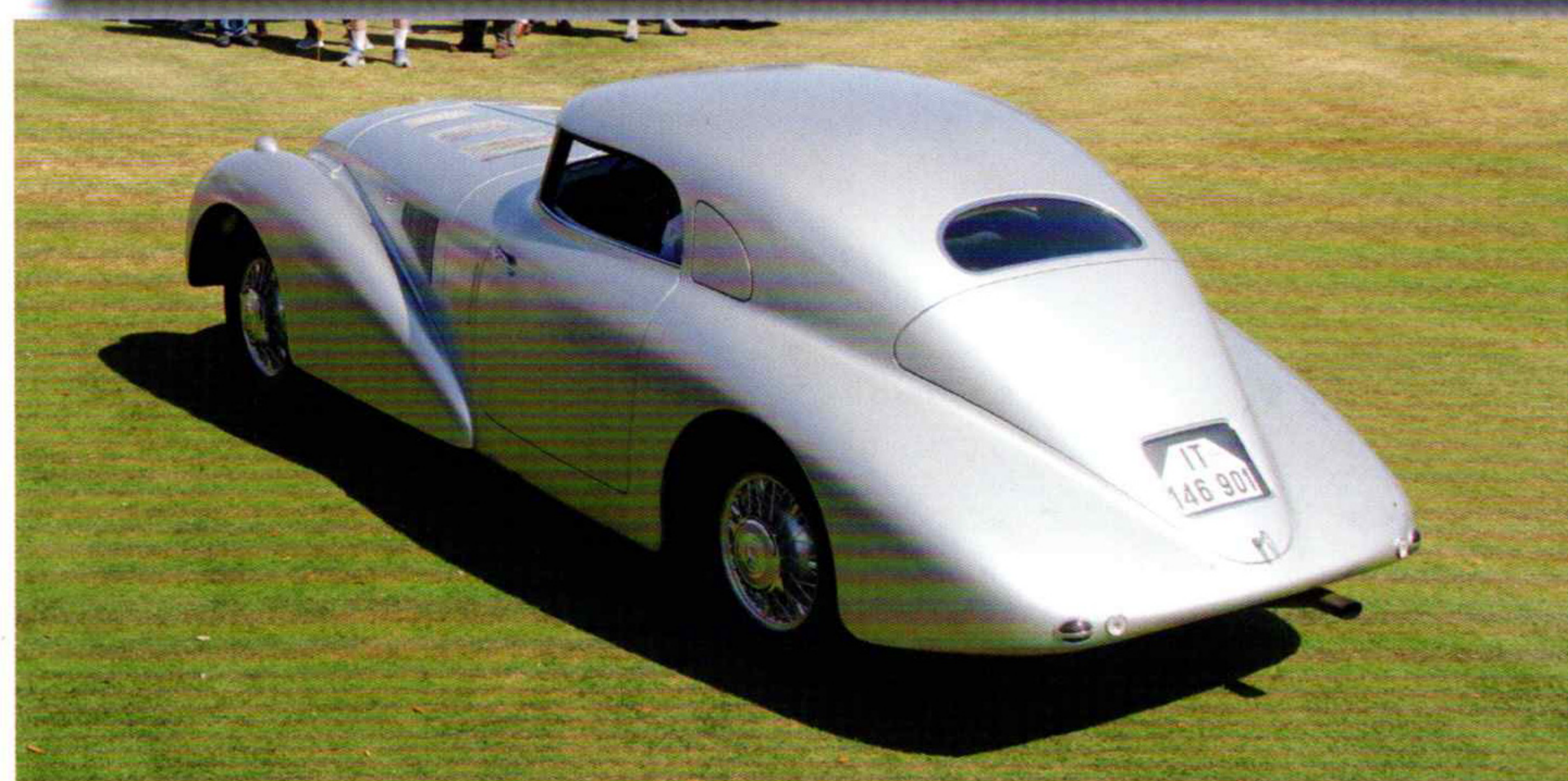
"The transmission is also original; the rear shafts, with inboard brakes, use a small diameter gear to drive the main gear in the wheel. The rear wheels oscillate around the transmission shaft."

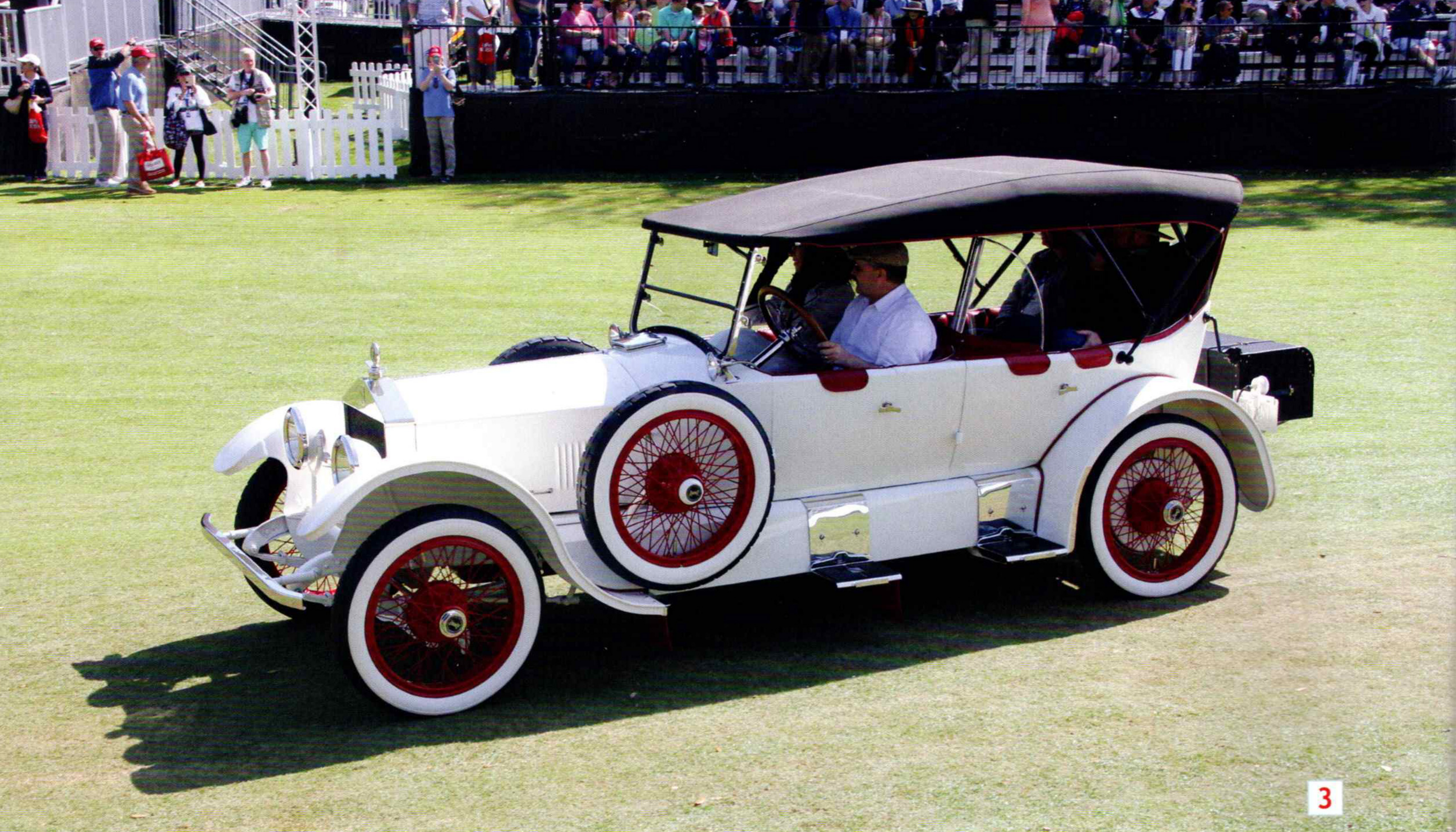
Our next example [2] is the 1938 Mercedes-Benz 540 K Streamliner (Mercedes-Benz Classic, Stuttgart). Here's the description:

"The 1938 Mercedes-Benz 540 K Streamliner was developed by the 'Sonderwagenbau' department in Sindelfingen under the leadership of Hermann Ahrens. It perfectly illustrates the innovative power of the Mercedes-Benz brand and its expertise in the development of one-off vehicles capable of satisfying the most stringent standards of design comfort, quality and customer experience. The 540 K Streamliner was systematically designed to optimize aerodynamic performance for long distance driving at continuously high speeds. It was sculpted from front to rear to allow for minimum air drag. It has a curved windshield and low roofline tapering to a point in the middle of the back and merging from there into the horizontal line of the softly curved rear section. It features fully integrated headlights. In 2014, following a restoration by Mercedes-Benz Classic, it produced the incredible drag coefficient of 0.36 in the wind tunnel, a significantly lower value than the approximate 0.57 associated with a standard 540 K Coupe body."

Our next example [3] is the 1918 Roamer C-6-54 Sport Touring (Jeff and Rebecca Schreiner – Mondovi, WI). The Roamer (Continental Motors Corp., Detroit & Muskegon, MI) fits the historical profile of many early 20th century manufacturers. Built from 1916 to 1929 they were quality cars (ranging from \$2,750 to \$4,500) and were marketed as "America's Smartest Car." They were offered in a wide range of colors and options. Their most recognizable feature, perhaps then as now, is the nearly identical appearance of their radiator to the Rolls-Royce radiator. Fewer than 12,000 cars were produced and only a comparatively few are thought to survive. This car (No. 9N49786) was offered in the RM auction at Hershey in 2009.

Our next example [4] is the 1930 Minerva Hibbard and Darrin convertible sedan (Wayne Carini and Ralph Marano – Portland, CT). The car's placard gave a history of Minerva, but this car's specific history makes it all the more interesting. This unrestored car was literally a "barn find." Its first owner (Webster Woodmansee) was a Wisconsin attorney. Its second owner, Edwin Winter





Mead (Norfolk, CT), carried on a correspondence with Tom Hibbard. Its third owner was a recluse. John W. “Hawkeye” Hawkinson, descendent of Amos Whitney (of Pratt & Whitney fame), shunned a life of privilege to live life in a scenic farm in upstate New York, but retained his taste for automobiles. The car was the subject of the season 9 opening episode of *Chasing Classic Cars*, Road to Minerva(na). After Amelia, the car (chassis 57804) will be seen next at the Gooding auction in Pebble Beach.

Our last car [5] is the 1915 Simplex Crane Model 5 Brewster 2-door convertible (Michael and Joannie Rich – Orwigsburg, PA).

The Simplex Crane is often overlooked, as it sits in relative obscurity. *Jay Leno* has one, and once described the company’s aim as having been to build an American Rolls-Royce. Echoes of that are in the description (slightly edited):

“The Simplex Crane Model 5 was one of the most expensive cars available at the time. With the chassis costing \$5,000, fitting custom coachwork would have run another \$3,500-\$5,000. There was a standard turn-key touring car body that was available for \$1,500 but for the clientele of a Simplex price wasn’t an issue. Production was quite limited. This Brewster bodied Simplex was

built for Philadelphia department store tycoon John Wanamaker. He ordered it to be painted in Princeton University’s colors, orange and black, as his son was a graduate of the university. The Simplex Crane Model 5 owes its incredible 110 horsepower L-head powerplant to Henry Crane, whose luxury automobile company was purchased by Simplex in 1914. While the car was built in 1915, records indicate the Crane Model 5 was capable of 80 mph. Stopping at this speed would be an issue as there are no front brakes. Pedal operation is through the driveshaft while the rear brakes are operated using a hand lever.”

—R. Verdès

