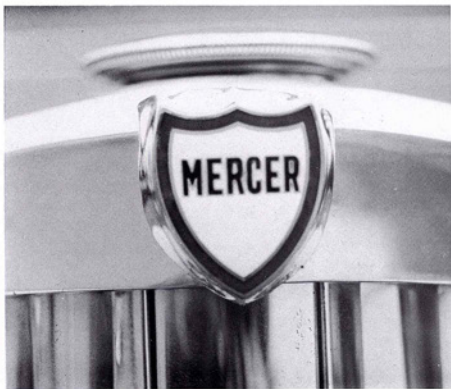




M E R C E R



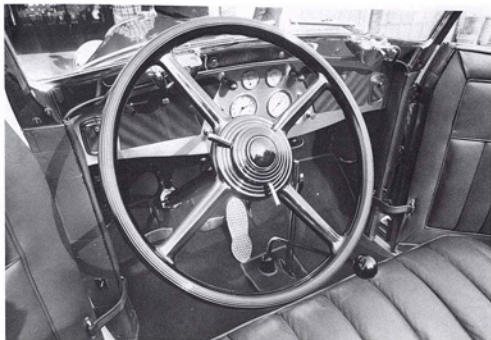
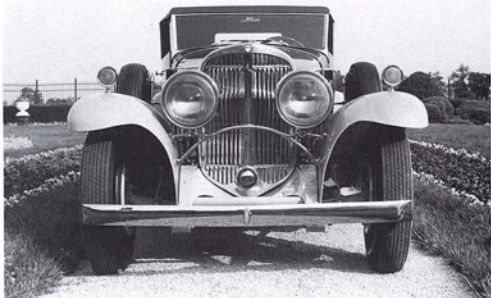
1931 Mercer Model SR Convertible Coupe, Merrimac
Owner: William S. Locke of West Lafayette, Indiana
Photos: Roy Query, Special Interest Autos

Mercer. To old car enthusiasts, the name calls to mind a single word. Raceabout: monocoque windshield in front, round gasoline tank in the rear, two bucket seats in between, coachwork totalling hood and fenders in a yellow vivid enough to blind. The car was blindingly fast too. With numerous race victories, the Raceabout made Mercer famous. Only the Stutz Bearcat was in its league. Production in the Trenton (Mercer County, New Jersey) factory seldom exceeded 500 cars a year in all body styles, but in the Mercer price class, that was enough for a profit. Advertisements from 1914 boldly declared that "the Mercer is the Steinway of the automobile world."

But by the twenties the Mercer Automobile Company was playing offkey. A Wall Street-inspired merger with Simplex and Locomobile proved disastrous. By 1926 Mercer Motors (as the firm had been retitled during reorganization) was performing only service work. In 1928 Harry M. Wahl, a former associate of Billy Durant's, decided to revive the marque. Wahl was no starry-eyed dreamer. Legends die hard; the very mention of Mercer was magic. But the name and a few parts were all Wahl bought. Outbid on the Trenton factory, he turned to the Elcar Motor Company of Elkhart, Indiana. Chief engineer Mike Graffis was enthusiastic.

The Mercer's straight-eight engine, modified from the Continental 12K, delivered 140 hp, squarely in the upper power echelon among American cars. The 135-inch-wheelbase chassis featured a Belflex suspension system providing a satin-smooth ride. Merrimac provided striking convertible coupe coachwork. Just one car was completed for exhibit at the Hotel Montclair during New York Automobile Show week in January 1931. Meanwhile, everything that could have gone wrong had—the stock market crashed, ill health felled Wahl, Graffis was grappling with the failure of Elcar. Even as spectators were admiring the new Mercer, Mercer Motors was being sued into receivership. From the Hotel Montclair, the show car and its companion exhibit chassis were taken to the Cutter Automobile Agency in Dover, New Jersey. Frank Cutter and Mike Graffis thought a new Mercer remained a possibility. But by now that had become a starry-eyed dream.

Ask Bill Locke how long he has owned the '31 Mercer and his reply is "since it was new." That is, wittily, correct. In 1950 Bill discovered the car in the old Cutter dealership and, finally, in 1964 was able to buy it. The odometer read 00004. Driven sparingly since, the Mercer's now less than 100 miles were accumulated principally on the Indianapolis Motor Speedway. The car remains as it was acquired—totally original and history's final evocation of the magic that was Mercer.



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