



S T U D E B A K E R

In 1926 Albert Russel Erskine scanned the figures and noticed that Studebaker was selling proportionately more of its higher-priced than moderately-ranged six-cylinder cars. Supplementation at the top of the Studebaker lines was suggested—and eight cylinders in a prestige car seemed just the ticket. Erskine pondered all this from a position of strength. In 1911, when the wagon-building empire of the Studebaker brothers was transformed into Studebaker Corporation, he was treasurer. Appointed president four years later, he became a virtual meteor, tripling sales in less than a decade, which made Studebaker stockholders very happy. Now his two top engineers balked at Erskine's prestige car idea. He solved that by firing them and hiring Delmar G. "Barney" Roos, whose resumé included top engineer-

ing posts at Locomobile, Pierce-Arrow and Marmon, and whose usual rejoinder to "why" was "why not." Erskine had his man. He asked the peripatetic Ray Dietrich to "consult on body matters." In two years Studebaker had a straight-eight President at the top of its model lineup. Meanwhile, Studebaker's president was doing some engineering of his own—which resulted in a merger with Pierce-Arrow during the summer of '28. A marriage made in heaven, Erskine thought, affiliation with the top-drawer Buffalo company would allow for mutual support and cooperation beneficial to both, and would provide him an extensive

eastern plant particularly well suited for Studebaker's export trade.

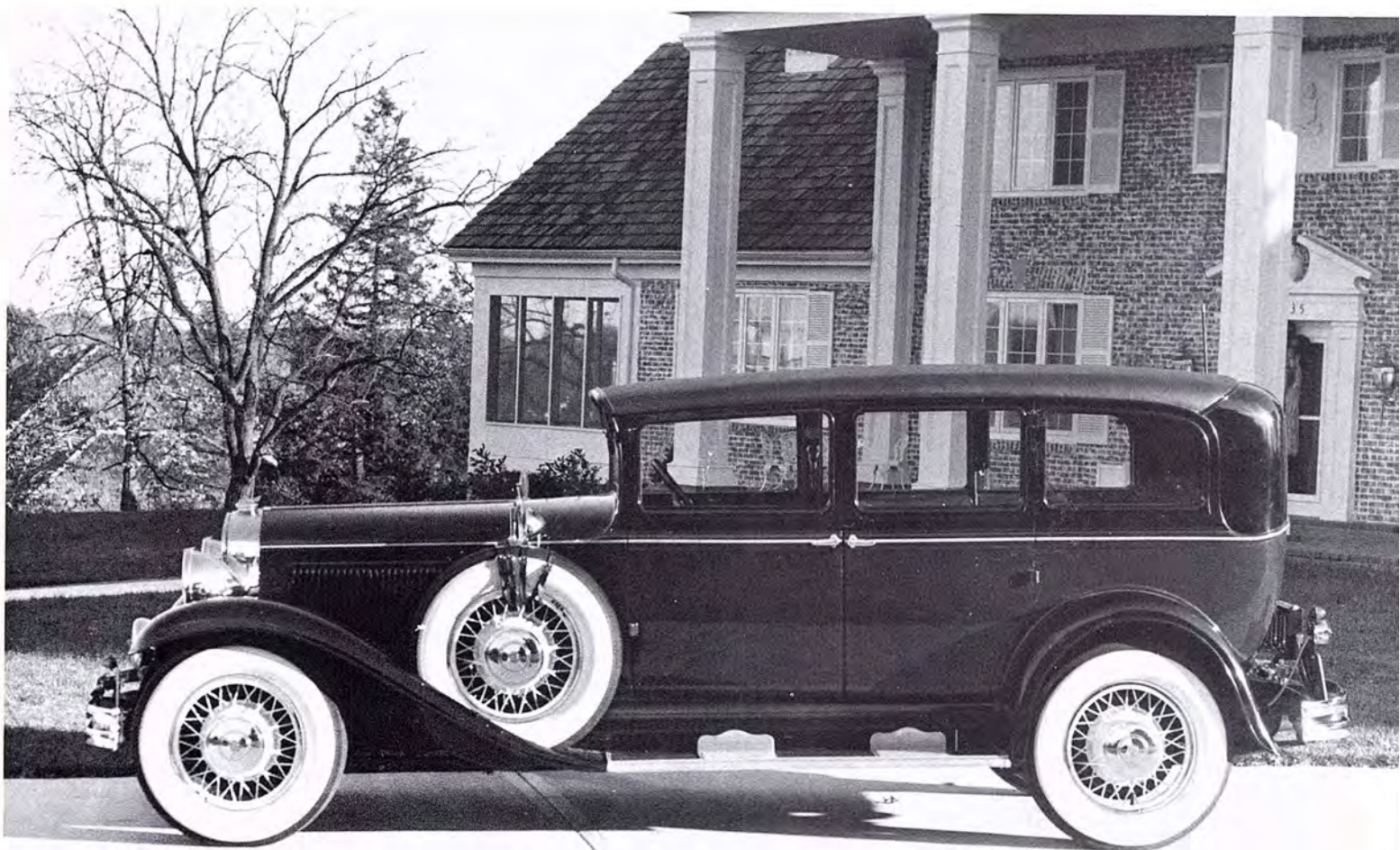
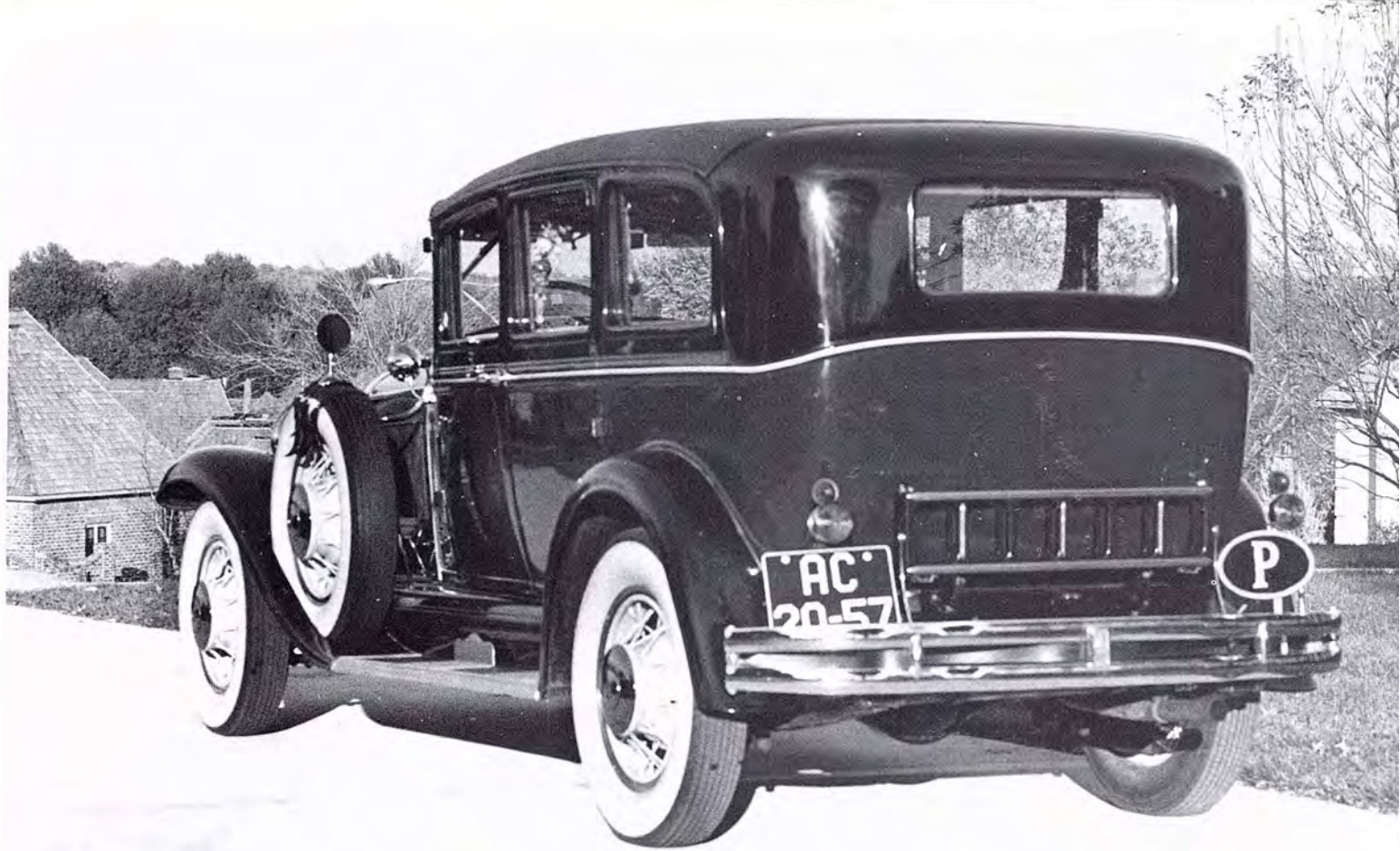
Portugal was the original destination of Whitney M. Kerr's '30 President Seven-Passenger Sedan where it resided in the garage of Marshal Carmona who had taken over the country in a 1926 coup d'état and was elected president in '28. At some point during the turbulent Salazar era, the car was put into storage. Brought to this country in 1980, it was acquired by Whitney in 1985: "The odometer read 34,300 kilometers (21,000 miles) at the time. Since then I've driven the car over 12,000 miles. There's a wonderful flow of smooth power, and the three-shoe Bendix brakes are excellent. The President performs nicely at 60 mph. It's fun to drive in heavy, fast city traffic and keep up with modern cars."

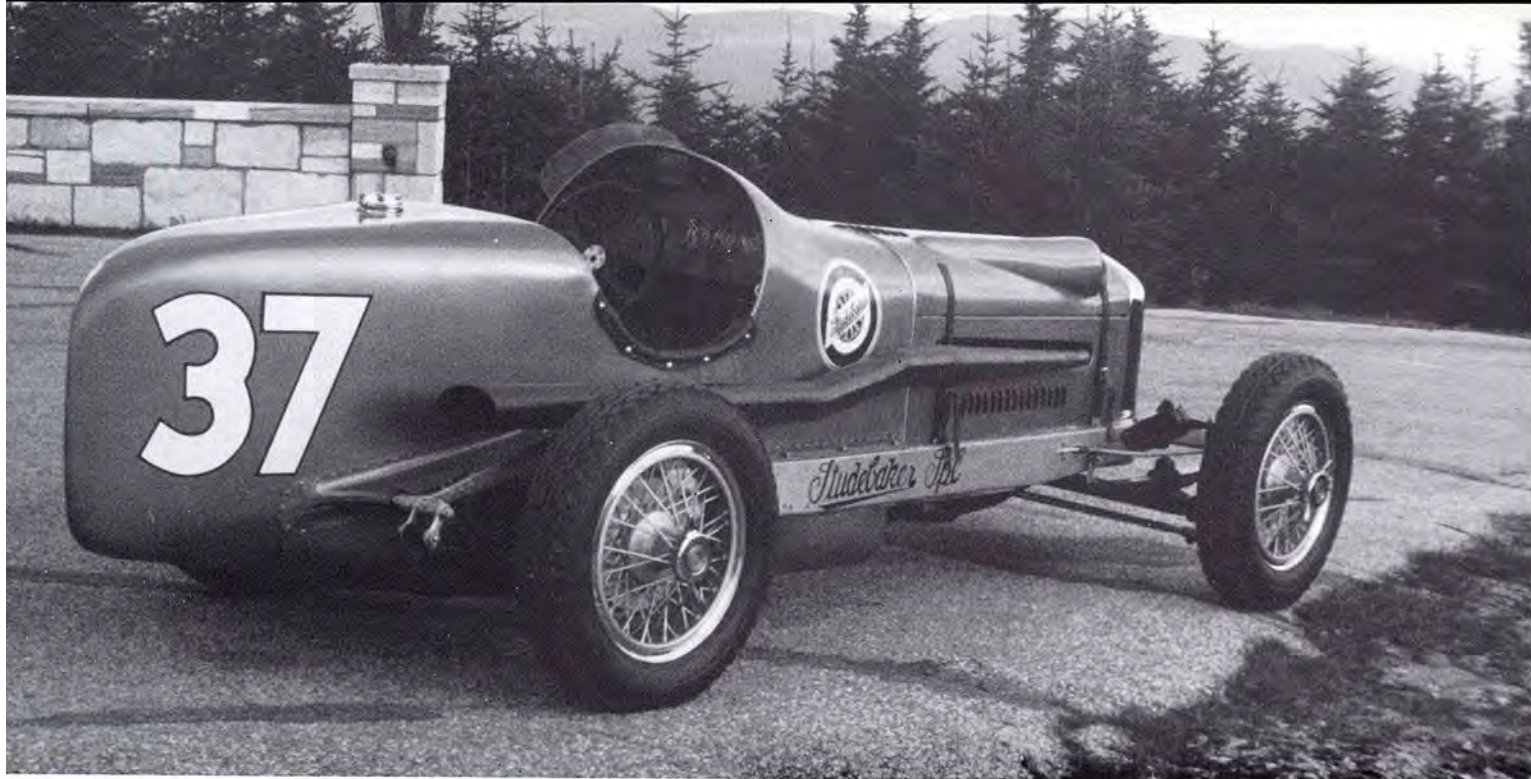
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1930 Studebaker President Series FE Seven-Passenger Sedan

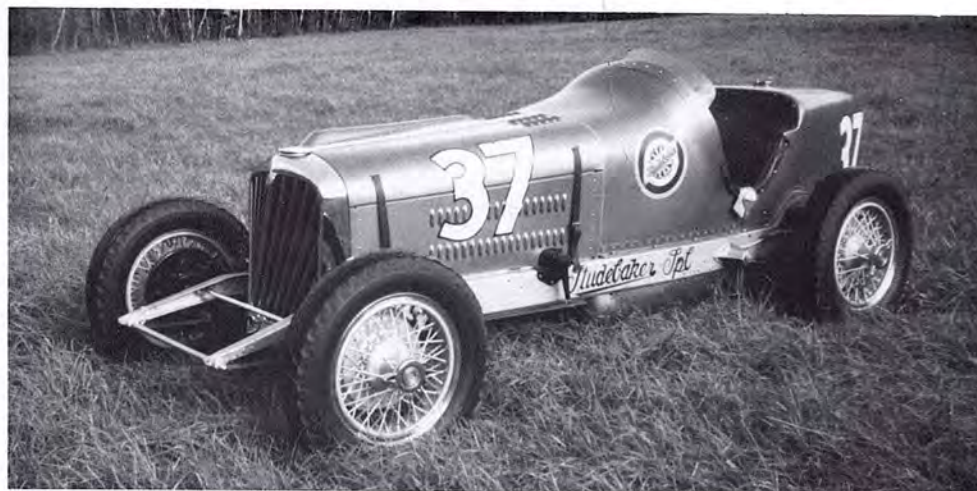
Owner: Whitney M. Kerr of Overland Park, Kansas

Photos: Carder Photography

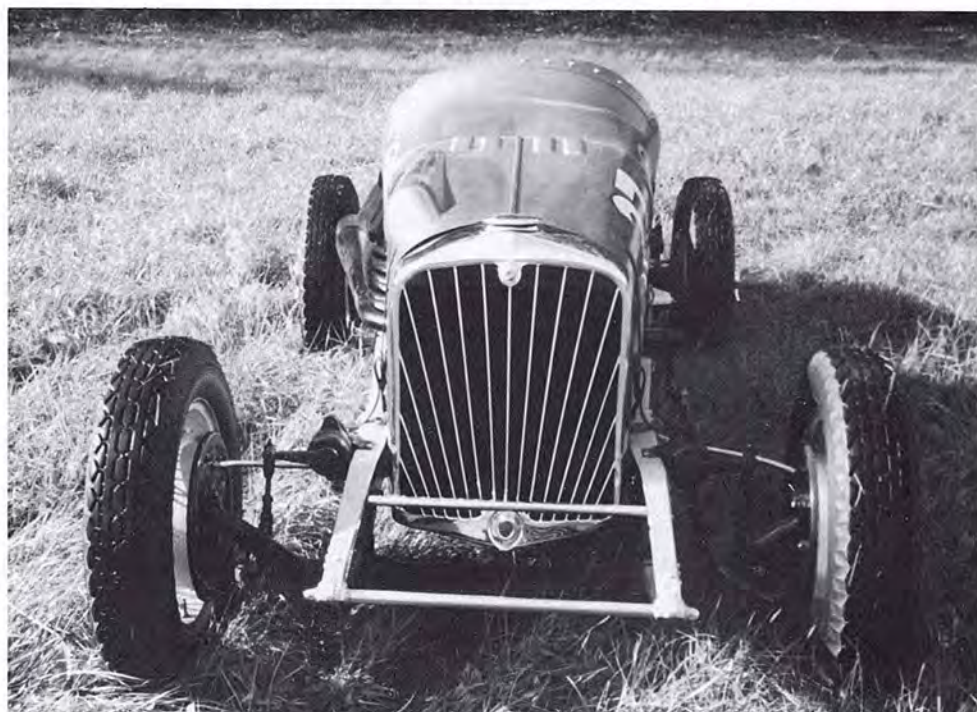




In July of 1928 four Presidents were driven 25,000 miles around the board track at Atlantic City, the two sedans averaging 64 mph, the two roadsters over 68 mph. If the Studebaker stock car could perform that well, test track supervisor George Hunt reasoned, just think what a Studebaker race car might do. Corporation executives looked the other way as Hunt raided the parts shelves and enlisted the on-company-time assistance of Studebaker mechanics to build a President-based race car. Herman Rigling of Indianapolis provided the coachwork. In 1931 the Hunt Special won Pikes Peak and was leading the Indianapolis 500 late in the race when an encounter with a patch of oil sent it into the wall. South Bend was ecstatic at the car's potential. The Studebaker President, Albert Erskine concluded, deserved a full factory-sponsored team. The Hunt Special was repaired and served as prototype, Herman Rigling again provided the coachwork, the cars' drivetrains and engines were 85% stock President. Although the checkered flag would not be waved for the South Bend company, the Indy performance of the Studebaker Specials was terrific: three of the five cars entered in '32 finished, in '33 seven of the first twelve finishers were Studebakers. Bob Valpey's car is the original Hunt Special: "It finished 6th in the 1932 Indy 500, 12th in '33. Ab Jenkins owned it for many years. It's been mine for three. The car appeals to me for many reasons: the style of the open two-man Indy-type racer, the stamina and durability of



1931 Studebaker President Indianapolis Race Car
Owner: Robert W. Valpey of Center Harbor, New Hampshire



the Studebaker President engine. No other Classic using stock components came close to equalling Studebaker's racing achievements of this era. This is a very exciting car to drive. It's not highway legal, of course, but I've driven it numerous times in vintage events, both road racing and hill climbing."

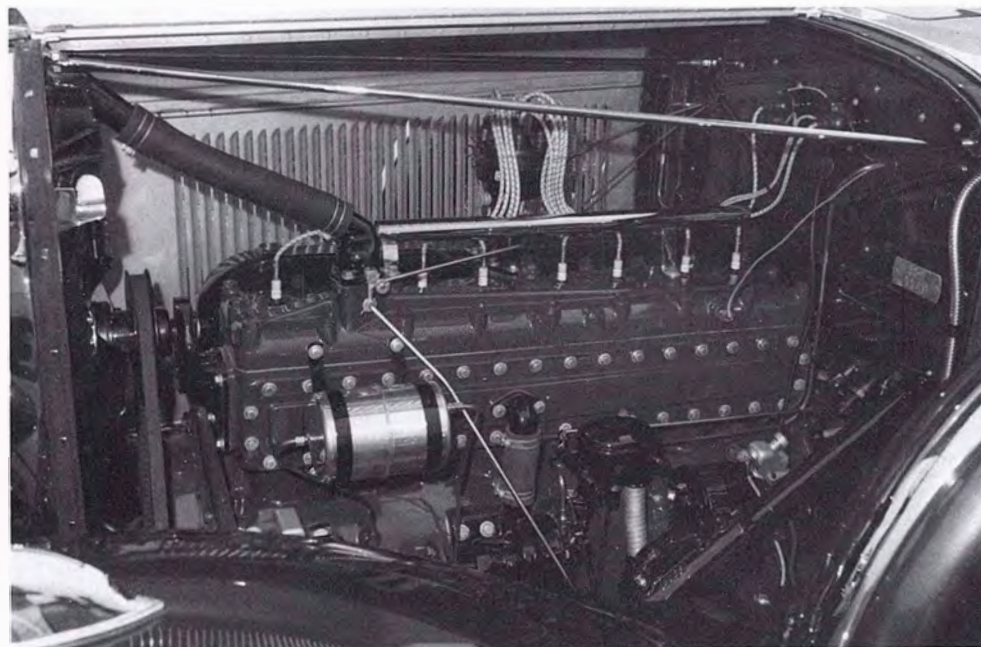
Studebaker Presidents became even

finer cars in 1931. The original 337-cubic-inch straight eight had five main bearings. Now it had nine, plus seven more horses for 122 hp at 3200 rpm. Freewheeling (controlled by a button on the shift knob) was new and so was the styling, with the vee of the radiator grille complemented by a deeper version of same in the single-bar front bumper. The Presi-

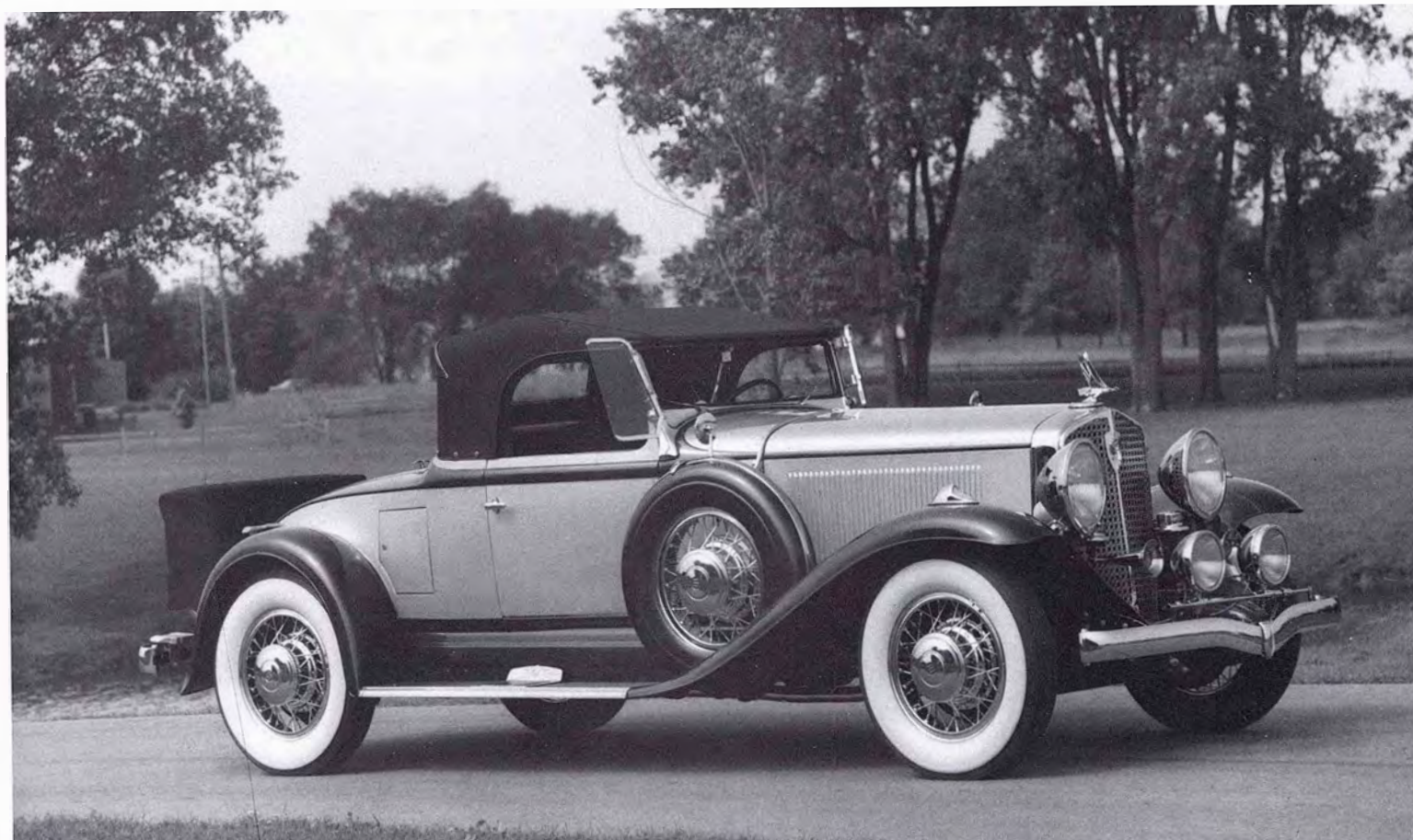
dent's double-drop chassis remained rugged. Lubrication was provided by "high pressure lubricators which enable the driver to forget the grease rack for 2,500-mile intervals." The clutch was automatic, the steering wheel adjustable, the shock absorbers double-acting Houdailles, the transmission a three-speed Warner. Sales of the new Series 80 President totaled 6,340 cars.

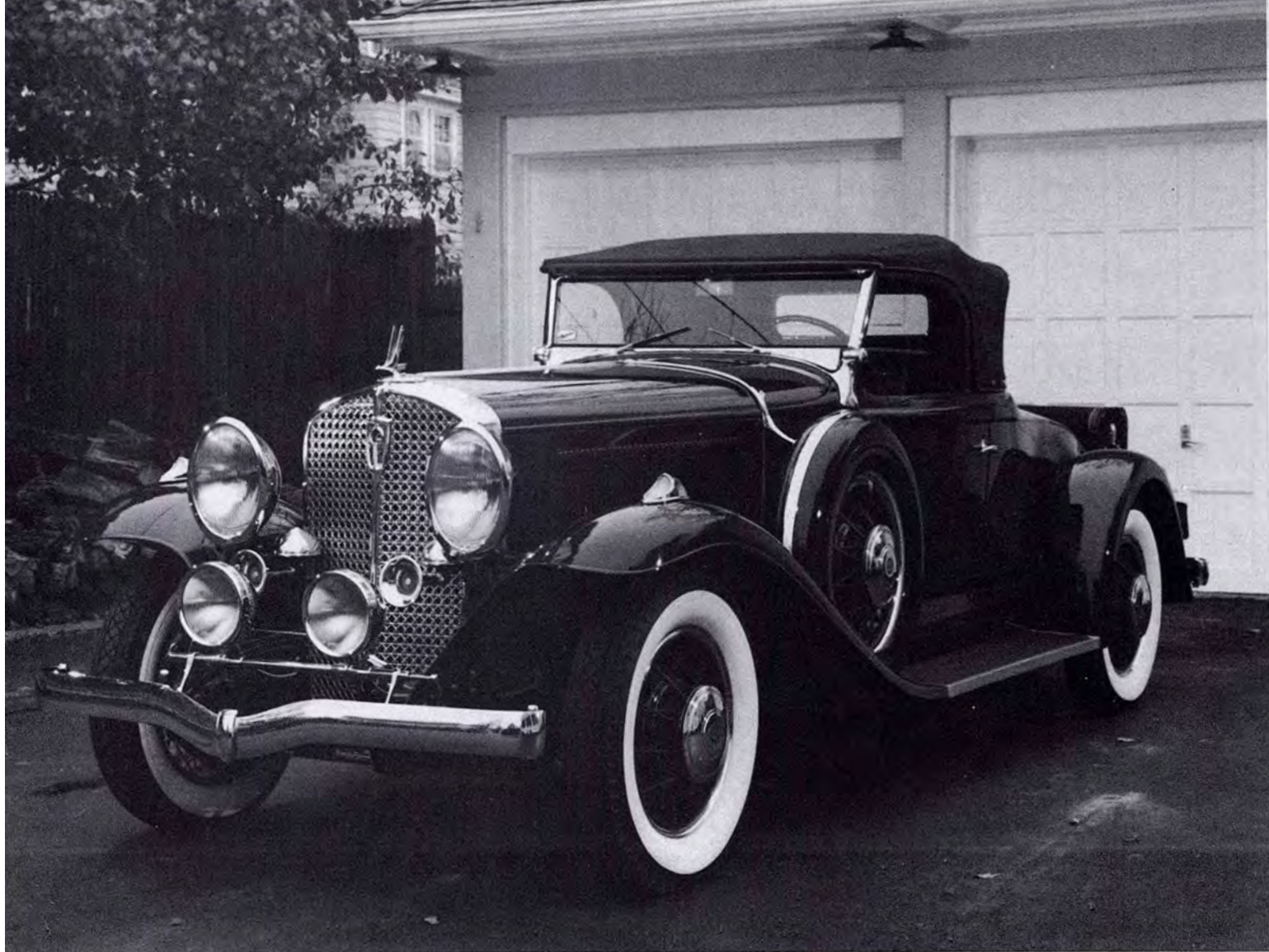
The "Presidential" styling speaks to Ray Miller: "With chrome radiator stoneguard, twin salon horns and sidemount spares, this car radiates elegance. Visitors to our museum are always commenting on this car's appearance."

Whitney E. Kerr has owned his Four-Season Convertible Roadster since 1983: "This very handsome car will outperform most Classics of 1931. That the straight-eight engine is rugged was demonstrated by the 25,000 miles over the old board track at Atlantic City. And few stock car engines in the history of the Indianapolis 500 have ever competed as well as the Presidents. Many design features and parts were shared by Studebaker and Pierce-Arrow during this period. Barney Roos designed the straight eights for both companies. Some people have called the President the 'baby Pierce.' Collectors who own Presidents, Cadillacs and Packards of the same era will attest to the superior



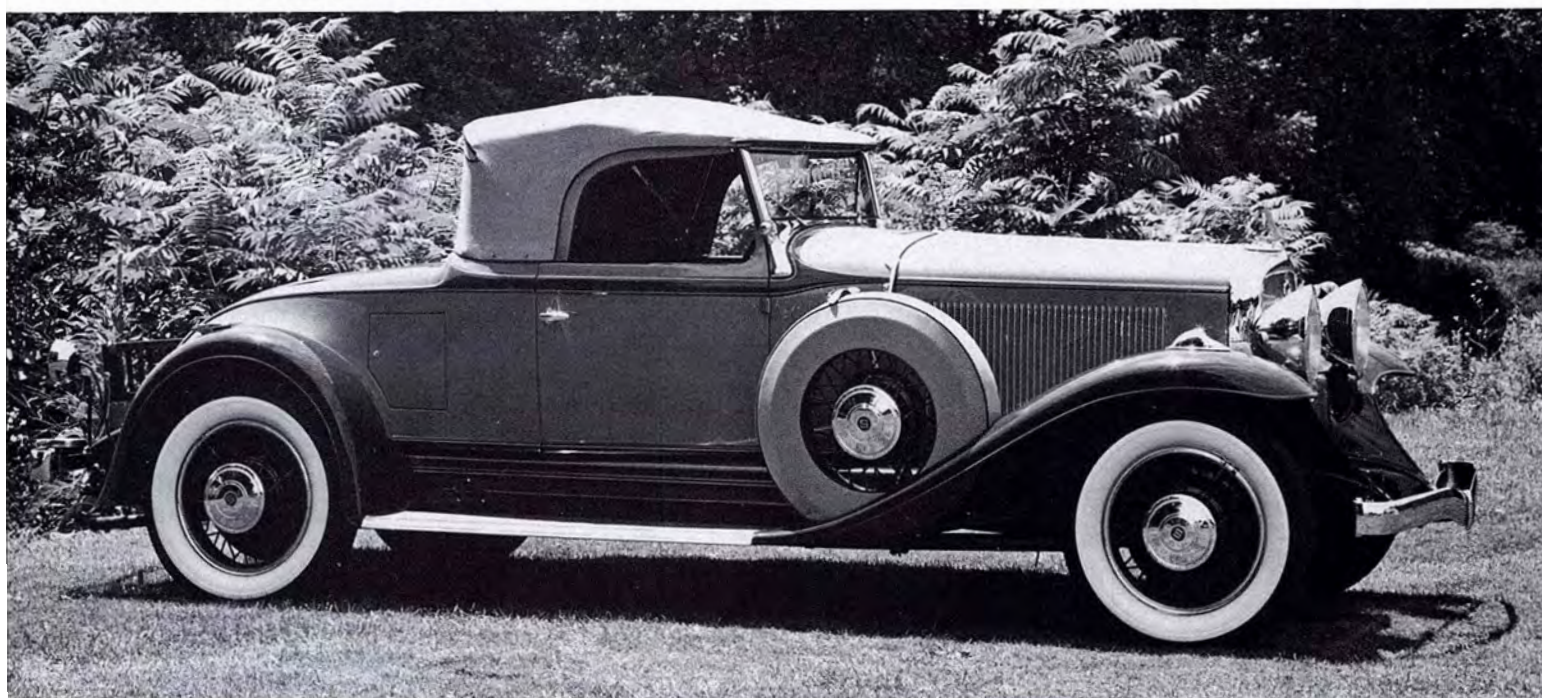
*1931 Studebaker President Series 80 Four-Season Convertible Roadster
Owner: S. Ray Miller, Jr. of Elkhart, Indiana*





1931 Studebaker President Series 80 Four-Season Convertible Roadster

Owner: Whitney E. Kerr of Kansas City, Missouri



1931 Studebaker President Series 80 Four-Season Convertible Roadster

Owner: John E. Morgan of Manalapan, Florida

Photo: K. Karger

handling and performance of the big Studebakers. Unfortunately, the high production volume of the lower-priced Studebaker sixes and Dictator and Commander eights have overshadowed the much-lower-production President models."

"I like high performance cars and this is one," says Tom Lester. "And the 'convertibility' of this body style from roadster to convertible is super."

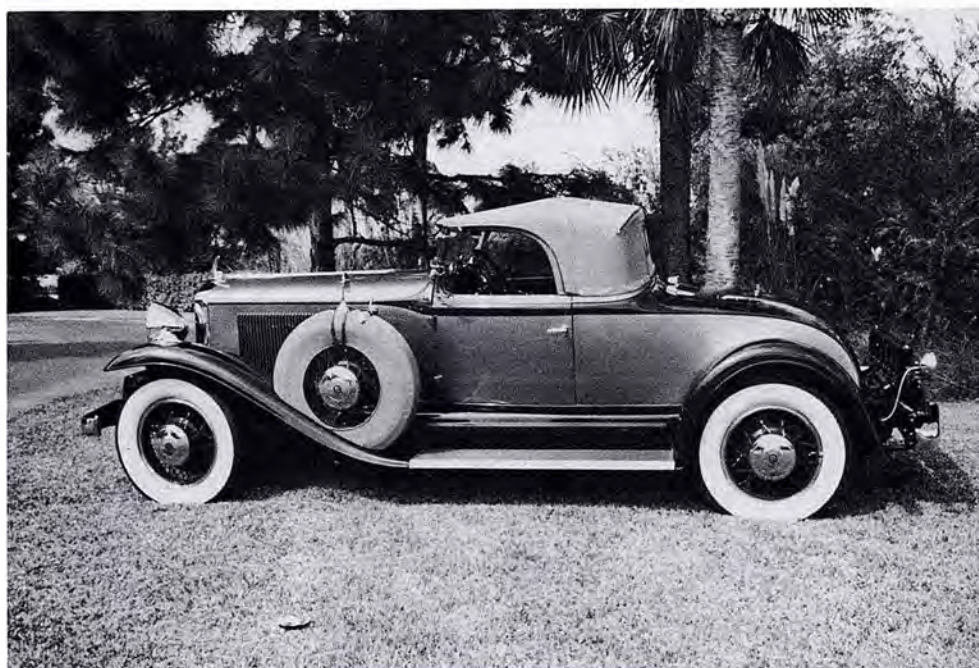
Comments John Morgan: "When I was a young man I felt this was one of the finest cars made and hoped to own one some day. Now I do. A car similar to this model set eleven stock car speed records at Muroc Dry Lake in California in November of 1931. George Hunt both tuned and drove it and took the flying mile at 91.79 mph and the hour at 90.35."

Fewer than 2,400 Studebaker Presidents were sold in 1932. Previous model years had seen both a short and a long wheelbase for the President, now just the longer (135 inches) was used. The French-style windshield visor introduced in 1930-what Studebaker called its "jaunty polo cap"-was eliminated but further changes were few. Tom Sparks bought his '32 Series 91 Coupe from singer Phil Everly nearly three decades ago and considers it "one of the best driving Classics I have ever owned."

If the declining sales figures might seem to have preordained discontinuation of the prestige President line, that was only part of a story which took a tragic turn as the Great Depression raged. In late March of 1933 Studebaker Corporation was in receivership. In early July a devastated Albert Erskine took his own life. Survival was the sole Studebaker priority now. The big President died with the man whose idea it had been.



*1931 Studebaker President Series 80 Four-Season Convertible Roadster
Owner: Thomas J. Lester of Deerfield Beach, Florida*



*1932 Studebaker President Series 91 Coupe
Owner: Tom Sparks of North Hollywood, California*

