

Elcar Automobiles — History and Models

History of Elcar Automobiles

Founded in the late 19th century in Elkhart, Indiana, the Elkhart Carriage Company was originally a manufacturer of horse-drawn carriages and like many carriage firms, it moved into automobile production in the early 20th century. The company began building automobiles around 1905, initially under the name Elkhart. These were generally conventional cars for the time, built with sourced components assembling vehicles using third-party mechanical components, focusing on the coachwork produced in-house. In 1915, the cars were officially branded as Elcar (derived from “Elkhart Car”), marking the true beginning of the brand’s identity.

Elcar automobiles were marketed as mid- to upper-range cars, well-made but mostly remained a regional brand because of limited production and reach. The Elcar cars were known for their quality construction often built the reliable Continental engines. The company survived into the 1930s, but like many independent automakers, Elcar struggled during the Depression. Tightening credit markets also made it difficult for smaller companies to borrow operating funds, exacerbating cash flow problems. Elcar ended production in 1933 after attempts to revive sales the company failed.

Elcar Models

Several noteworthy Elcar models were produced over the years:

Early Elkhart/Elcar Models (1905–1914):

Early Elkhart/Elcar cars models were often identified by horsepower rather than model names as company produced 2- and 4-cylinder runabouts and touring cars in the range of 20–40 hp.

Mid-1910s Models (after Elcar brand introduced):

The Elcar Seven Passenger Touring introduced in the 1910 was a classic example of a large, luxurious passenger car designed for comfort. The Elcar Seven Passenger Touring was a classic example of a large, luxurious passenger car designed for comfort. In 1915 after the Elcar brand was introduced, production of the Elcar 6-40 launched, a six-cylinder touring car with 40 hp. In 1916–1917 Elcar 4-40 and 6-50 were offered with both four- and six-cylinder engines.

1920s Elcar Models:

During the prosperous 1920s, Elcar expanded its line., the Elcar Six was offered in with 115–120 inches wheelbases. The Elcar Roadster and Convertible Coupe models were stylish vehicles that followed popular automotive design trends of the 1920s. In the late 1920s introduced the Elcar Eight, a straight-eight models, to compete with Packard, Auburn, and other upscale brands. The 1924–1926 Elcar Models were listed as Series 6-55, 6-70, etc. and the numbers reflecting engine power and wheelbase. Custom bodied Elcar were built by reputable coachbuilders, giving the Elcar an air of refinement.

Final Years (1928–1931):

In its final years, Elcar experimented with more advanced engineering approaches, including collaboration with European designers and attempts at streamlined bodies in response to market trends of the late 1920s and early 1930s. Elcar introduced the Eight-90 that was produced from 1928–1930), a luxury model that was powered by a Lycoming straight-eight engine, with sedan, roadster and touring body styles. In 1930 the company tried to revive itself by producing the “Roosevelt” model under license from Marmon, but the plan collapsed. Last models were produced After declaring bankruptcy, Elcar briefly continued with limited production—especially of taxicabs—before finally ceasing all operations and closing in November 1933. Elcar’s final cars were essentially rebranded Roosevelts with Elcar badges. Production ended soon after.

Reputation & Legacy

Elcar never reached the prestige of Packard or Cadillac but earned respect as a solid, well-built regional marque. Surviving Elcar cars are rare, with only a handful still in collections and museums. Collectors value them today for their craftsmanship and their role in Indiana’s early automotive history.