

Cole Motor Car Company

The Cole Motor Car Company established in Indianapolis by Joseph Jarrett Cole. His imagination, solid work and collaboration with other manufactures built a company that manufactured cars from 1909 to 1925. J. J. Cole learned the business of Carriage building working at Parry Manufacturing also in Indianapolis, the largest carriage factory in the world. He bought the Gates-Osborne Carriage Company and renamed it the Cole Carriage Company. J. J. Cole decided to get into cars launching the Cole Motor Car Company in June of 1909. By late 1908 and early 1909 produced a total of 170 2-cylinder solid tire high wheelers. Cole sold about 170 of these high wheelers before deciding that this type car had no future. Next the Cole Motor Car Company began to build the 4-cylinder Cole 30, a completely modern car that proved itself in numerous racing events including participated in the first Indy 500. Building “modern” cars of supreme quality, the Company grew, built factories, understood marketing, invested seriously in advertising that further helped in establishing Cole’s great reputation.

One of the first racing wins for Cole was winning the 1909 Brighton Beach Marathon, a 24-hour-race with 16 contestants. Two Series 30 Flyers, driven by William “Wild Bill” Endicott and Louis Edwards, entered the Massapequa Sweepstakes, one of the 1910 Vanderbilt Cup Races winning the prestigious 10-lap event, covering 126.4 miles in 138 min 4.32 seconds. Cole used it in its marketing by commemorating the win with a special trophy plate on all Cole 30’s sold in 1911. Cole also came up with the marketing slogan for its dealers, “The car that can win the race on the weekend and then can sell on Monday.”

The Cole was an assembled car built with components manufactured by different suppliers when Cole coined the term the “Standardized Car” in 1913. The Cole “Standardized Car” was not a low-priced automobile like the assembly line cars built by Henry Ford launched in the same year. The Cole models originally cost around \$2500 with options while a Ford Model T sold for \$550. Cole wanted to produce cars that consisted of components from suppliers that were the finest and most modern in the industry, this exemplified the Cole Car Company standard. These components included the 4-cylinder or 6-cylinder Northway powerplant, the complete electrical system with starter, lights and horn by Delco, Mayo German Silver Radiators, Stromberg carburetors, Spicer U-Joints, Firestone tires with detachable rims, Timken axles, Gemmer steering as well as an automatic Taylor Tire pump. The full Delco electrical system was employed two years before Charles Kettering received the patent for Delco in 1915. Many of these components manufactured by Cole suppliers included a number that stood as industry firsts or extremely early uses in production cars.

In the mid-teens the company adopted the slogan “A touch of tomorrow in everything that we do today” which is how Cole designed and built their cars. Cole lived up to this slogan again in January of 1915 by introducing a 346 cubic inch V8 for their cars which was offered shortly after Cadillac had September of 1914. Cole was the first company to have a detachable head on its engine allowing for easy maintenance. By 1916 the V-8 was the only engine available in all models. Cole also featured the Springfield Convertible hard top body in 1916-1918 then developed the cutting-edge Aero Eight in 1918. Cole, second only to Cadillac in luxury car sales in 1919. In 1924 a Cole V-8 was the pace car for the 1924 Indy 500 and the first pace car with balloon tires driven by Cole test driver Lew Pettijohn.

Cole was very profitable when he quietly began liquidating company assets beginning in January of 1925. During the early 1920's Cole was still producing high priced cars with the average being over \$3000 while a Model T price was down to \$265. The auto industry was changing to smaller, cheaper, mass-produced cars. Building a smaller, cheaper car was not to J. J. Cole's fancy, so he began to liquidate the company's assets while the business was still viable and while selling a total of 607 cars in 1925. J. J. Cole died suddenly of an infection on August 8th, 1925 at age 56 and Cole's great success story came to an end.

From 1909 thru 1925 the Cole Motor Car Company produced a total of 40,717 cars. As they were made with high quality steel, aluminum, and other alloys that were collected during the scrap metal drives of World War II. At this writing only 77 Cole cars are known to have survived after the war.

Cole Motor Car Company Firsts

1. First car to use Firestone Demountable tires and rims – Harvey Firestone purchased the first 50 Cole cars in 1909 to give Cole working capital and to get his demountable rims out in the market
2. Cole was the first car company to have a car with 4 closable doors in 1910
3. Coined and Trademarked the term Standardized to describe their cars in late 1912. This term caught on throughout the US in many industries
4. Used the complete Delco electrical system and starter in late 1912, over two years before of Kettering receiving his patent on this.
5. Introduced a scale production V-8 engine in January of 1915, three months after Cadillac. Both engines were made by Northway, but the Cole engine was engineered by Cole and was the first V8 engine with detachable heads
6. First car company to only build cars that used V8 engines in 1916
7. First company to introduce Balloon tires as standard tires on their cars in 1923
8. First company to introduce self-adjusting mechanical brakes in 1925

Sources: The Cole Registry, Gilmore Museum, Wikipedia,