

Featured Car

The Packard Darrin Convertible Victoria of 1941 was one of the great Classic designs

By Les Jackson

Photos by Julie Sackett

Classic Car enthusiasts usually agree that the Packard Darrin Convertible Victoria designs of the period 1937 through 1942 were among the best of the entire Classic Era. This is a Super 8 Series 180 on a 127 inch wheelbase.

Howard "Dutch" Darrin was the designer of these distinctive Full Classics®.

Neil DeAtley of the Arizona Region acquired his 1941 Darrin Convertible Victoria Super 8 Series 180 in 2007, and plans to take it on a CARavan later this year. Neil has a number of Full Classic® and non classic cars. He and wife Patricia spend part of their time in Arizona and the rest in the Northwest. (The garage hop by the Region in April included Neil's garages and lunch around the DeAtleys' pool . See story on page 16 of this issue.)



This is the 1941 Packard Series 180 Super 8 Convertible Victoria in Saratoga Beige color at the DeAtleys' home in Scottsdale, Arizona. Neil acquired the car in 2007. Above right is the leather interior of the Darrin.

pool . See story on page 16 of this issue.)

Neil bought the car from Tom Crook, the well-known Washington state car dealer who specializes in Packard Full Classics®.

Dutch Darrin was an American born in 1897 who flew U. S. war planes in World War I in France. He remained there after the war and formed the partnership of Hibbard and Darrin to build custom car bodies for rich European clientele. In 1931 Hibbard left and joined General Motors.

Darrin joined with a banker to form Fernandez and Darrin to continue the custom car business. As economic conditions worsened in Europe in



Note the padded dash top area on the 1941 Darrin Convertible Victoria. This car has both Aero-drive and the Electro-mechanical clutch accessories.

1937, Darrin returned to the U.S. to Hollywood.

Darrin's first custom Packard Convertible Victoria was done for the movie actor Dick Powell in 1937. It started as a Packard 120 coupe which was structurally changed and modified. The Hollywood crowd so admired the car that many of the stars of the day had Packards modified by Darrin to be similar to the Powell car.

These celebrities included Clark Gable, Tyrone Power, Errol Flynn, Chester Morris, Al Jolson, Ruby Keeler, Preston Foster and Gene Krupa.

All of the Darrin 2 door convertibles featured the cut-away or dipped doors. (See also the Chrysler article on page 8 of this edition of the *Roadrunner* for a picture of an earlier car with somewhat similar doors.)

Darrin joined Packard and designed the 1940 Darrin Convertible Victoria and the Packard Clipper line which debuted in 1941 and continued even after World War II. During the war he was a contract flight instructor for the American military.

He later joined Kaiser and designed the 1951 Kaiser Manhattan (nc), a much admired post WWII design, and the Kaiser Darrin (nc).

There were substantial changes between the 1940 Packard Darrin Convertible Victorias and the 1941 version. The manufacture of the 1941 version

was done by Sayer and Scoville in Cincinnati.

The front end was structurally strengthened and increasingly sound proofed. The "suicide" doors in the 1940 were replaced by rear opening doors, which also increased the stability of the car. The 1941 version had the headlights in the fenders rather than in separate pods. The standard hood ornament was no longer the cormorant, but it was stylized and streamlined.

Other changes were addition of chrome strips in the back sections of the front and rear bumpers, changes in the sides of the hood, new parking lights and other changes consistent with the changes from the 1940 to the 1941 Packard.

All of the Darrin designed cars eliminated the running boards that were so common on many other cars of the era. Darrin hated running boards.

It has been said that many of the pre-1941 Darrins were somewhat wobbly in the front end and tended to vibrate at speed. With the design and structural changes in 1941 and the shift of the manufacturing to the plant in Ohio instead of from small builders in California, these problems were largely eliminated.

An interesting feature of the 1941 was the padding at the top edge of the dash.

There are no definitive numbers as to how many Darrin Convertible Victorias were built but the estimates are there were 50 of the 1940's and only 35 the following model year. It is estimated that a total of 924 Packard 180's were built for the model year

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1941 including touring and formal sedans (Packard bodies), sport brougham and limousine (LeBaron), sport sedan (Darrin), all weather cabriolet and town cars (Rollston).

Prices of the 1941 Darrin Convertible Victoria started at \$4,550 when introduced in September 1940 and increased to \$4,595 in June of 1941.

Mechanical information about the 1941 Packard Darrin Convertible Victoria: 160 horsepower at 3600 rpm with 3½ x 4 5/8" bore and stroke displacing 356 cubic inches, hydraulically operated tappets for quieter performance, 9 bearing crankshaft, vacuum-automatic spark control, 20 gallon fuel tank, dual down-draft carburetors, 5 gallon radiator capacity, and 7.00 x 16 tires.

What did Packard say about the 1941 Super 8 Custom 180 Convertible Victoria by Darrin

“Glamour car of 1941! The Packard-Darrin Convertible Victoria, the car that restored motoring to the sports realm, is easily the year’s most alluring creation. Exceptionally low and speed-streamed, this car would not look out of place on a race course. In fact, its sumptuousness is apt to come as a surprise. Tweeds or tails—either way you’re right!

“This car can even match your moods! Top up, you ride in swank luxury that defies any weather. Tot down—and it completely disappears—you head into the wind snug in the lee of the smartly raked windshield and extra wide side windows.”



A brief history of the DeAtley Packard and its several owners and changes

The Darrin Packard currently owned by Neil DeAtley was originally sold by Stahl Motors of Monterey, Cal., on May 29, 1941 to Howard Viet of Pebble Beach, CA. Mr. Viet died in the early 1950's and the car was eventually sold by his widow to Mark Raggett of Carmel, Cal. in about 1955.

Raggett had known the Viet family for years. The original color of the car was Chicory Green. (Editor’s note: We have a 1941 Packard Super 8 club coupe whose top is Chicory Green color.)

During the Raggett ownership, the engine block was cracked, and was replaced with a 1948 block from the dealer that originally sold the car. Raggett had the car repainted to a Packard dark brown and had a new top put on. The car was shown at the Pebble Beach Concours in 1956.



The next owners were Patrick Young of New Hampshire and Tom Mix of Massachusetts in the mid 1960's. Young bought out Mix's share after that. The car was driven from Carmel, California to New Hampshire, but the overdrive was not working so it was driven in third gear. The tires were replaced before the trip.

Young had the valves ground and did extensive cosmetic restoration. The body was sound but work was done on the rear fenders and the trunk. He painted the car red and had a new interior and new top installed.

Charles Viall of New London, Connecticut bought the car in 1968, and sold it to Harold Mistele of Detroit in about 1971 or 1972 who drove it only about 50 miles while he owned it.

The next owner, in January of 1983 was John Elson of Versailles, Ohio, whose wife did not like the color. Elson repainted it Saratoga Beige and had a new top installed. After driving the car some 500 or 600 miles, he sold it to Bill Weltyk of Oak Brook, Illinois in April 1990.

A new correct engine block was installed to replace the 1948 block. The engine was completely

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rebuilt and the engine compartment detailed. New wiring was installed as were the fender skirts. The trunk was refurbished and the spare tire was replaced. The tire dealer thought that the spare was the one that came with the car when it was new, 40 years before.

Other modifications included rear bumper guard chrome plating, Darrin style side view mirrors, hub caps and trim rings replaced, Darrin signatures replaced and correct heater installed.

The body was stripped to bare metal, blocked and sanded and repainted Saratoga Beige (its present color). Installed were a new interior, dash plastic and wood grain and top.

In April 2007 the car was sold to Tom Crook and two months later Neil bought it from Tom.



Left: The camber style ash trays in the back seat of Neil DeAtley's 180 Series Darrin Convertible Victoria. Above: Looking at the rear bumper guard. In the front the bumper guard has "180" stamped into the metal on the bottom rail.

Electromatic Clutch, Aero-drive key 1941 Packard options

Two important options offered by Packard in 1941 were Aero-drive (an overdrive unit) and the new Electromatic Clutch, which was developed as competition for the Chrysler fluid drive system.

The Electromatic Clutch was a semi-automatic clutch operation process. A switch on the dash put the feature in operation on cars with the option.

When the two features were both in a Packard, as is the case with Neil DeAtley's Convertible Victoria,

the driver starts in second gear and steps on the gas. When passing 20 miles an hour a green light appears, the driver momentarily moves the foot off the accelerator and the overdrive activates.

When slowing down or stopping, it shifts back automatically out of overdrive. See the illustration below from a 1941 Packard folder entitled "Mechanics and Marvels"

