

This is one of a series of articles about American made Full Classics® in *The Roadrunner*

Pierce-Arrow put the headlights in the fenders in 1913, other makes waited about 25 years to do it

By Les Jackson

One of the most respected Classics of all time was the Pierce-Arrow. In fact, CCCA recognizes all from 1925 through 1938 (the make's last year) plus 1921 Series 32 and 1922 and later Series 33, as Full Classics®.

The famous headlights in the fenders started in 1913 designed by the company's Herbert Dawley. The old traditional drum headlamps were available as a no cost option until 1933, but most customers preferred the more modern looking style.

It is ironic that the Pierce-Arrow which was built in Buffalo, N.Y., could not sell cars with the new headlights in that state. It seems that the legislature there thought that it would confuse oncoming motorists at night. So the New Yorkers had to opt for the older style.

The company started in the mid 19th Century making ice boxes, bird cages, bicycles and other products.

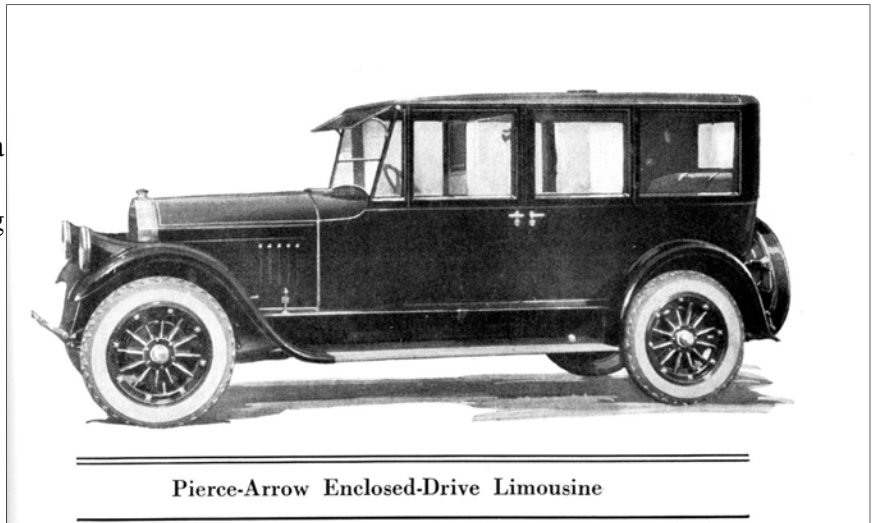
The first gasoline powered cars came out in 1901 with a production total of two.

Whereas the headlights in the fenders was ahead of its time, the cars were still

right hand drive until 1920.

During the 1920's the company stuck to the 6 cylinder design in the engine, and many thought the styling was not keeping up with the competition.

In 1928 there was a merger with Studebaker, al-



Pierce-Arrow Enclosed-Drive Limousine

Above: Enclosed-drive limousine is what Pierce-Arrow called this model in 1926. It was a 7 passenger with a 6 cylinder motor that generated 100 horsepower on a 138 inch wheelbase. List price was \$7,000. The company offered 18 different models in this series, called Series 33, and another 9 in a lesser series called the model 80, which had a 70 horsepower engine and 130 inch wheelbase.



Most 1929 Pierce-Arrows were produced before the start of the Great Depression. Bright colors were featured in many models as well as other Full Classics®. Pierce advertised eight "striking color combinations" for this rumble seat roadster. Note that this one has the old style headlights—not the ones integrated with the fenders. It had a 133 inch wheelbase and the factory price was \$2,875.

Their most famous car was the stylish 1933 Silver Arrow

Right: Looking for a modernistic style statement, Pierce-Arrow came up with the design of the Silver Arrow for 1933 auto shows. It is believed that only 5 of the cars were built. Philip Wright is credited with the design. The car was the hit of the



1933 Chicago World's Fair. The spare tire was hidden in the fender behind the left front wheel.



In the first few years of the Archer, 1928-1933, it was in the actual radiator cap outside the hood. In 1934 the cap went inside, and the Archer was only ornamental.

though each car's name was unchanged. By 1929 Pierce had an 8 cylinder car, and this was its peak production year in the Classic Era with 8,368 cars produced.

In late 1931 the V-12 was introduced and was continued throughout the remaining life of the brand. Famous racer Ab Jenkins drove a V-12 to some 14 international speed records at Bonneville averaging 127 miles an hour for 24 hours.

By 1933 Studebaker was in bankruptcy and Pierce-Arrow was acquired by a group of Buffalo businessmen and bankers and the company was independent again.

While the other remaining luxury auto companies began offering cheaper models in the 1930's, Pierce-Arrow stuck to its high level cars only. Perhaps as a result, production dropped year

Packard came out with the lower priced 120 in 1935; Cadillac down graded the LaSalle in 1934; Lincoln introduced the Lincoln Zephyr in 1936.

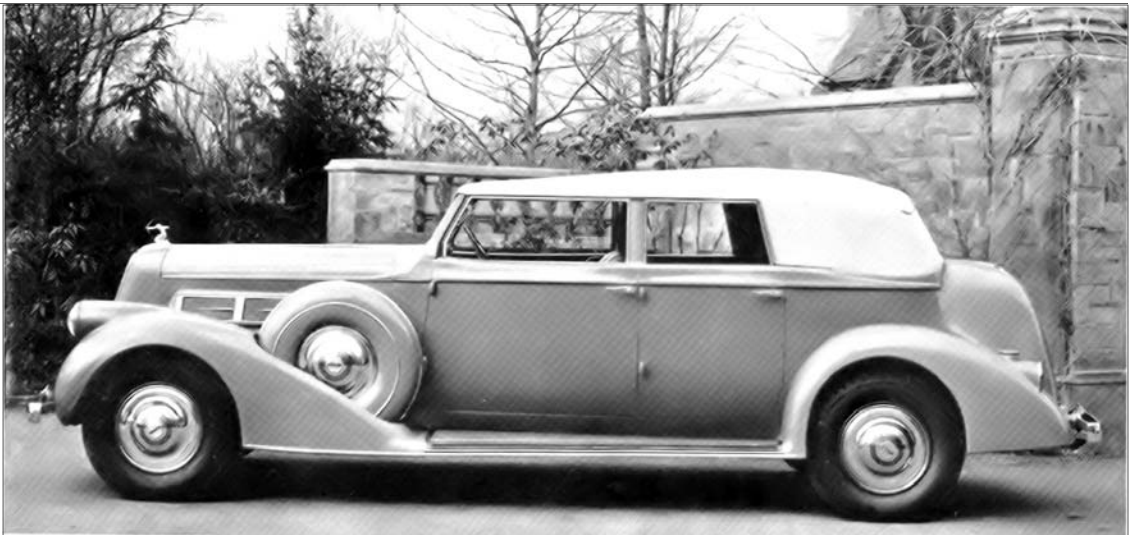
after year. 2,152 in 1933, followed by 1,740 in 1934, and 875 in 1935, and 787 in 1936, and 167 in 1937. There were some parts left over and made into 1938 models, with only tiny changes from the prior year models. There were probably fewer than a dozen 1938

Packard had a cormorant and Pierce-Arrow had an archer

Two of the most recognizable hood ornaments among Classic cars are the Packard cormorant and the Pierce-Arrow archer.

The first archer we were able to find a record of was for 1928. It was available as an option, which most buyers bought. An interesting story of cooperation is that in 1930 the Ternstedt Division of General Motors was contracted by Pierce-Arrow to design a new radiator ornament. A young apprentice in the design department, Albert Gonas, stripped to the waist and to posed for those designing the ornament. After that he took archery lessons and continued to pose for the designers. The designers were William Schnell and Bonnie Lemm. The GM division made the P-A archers from 1931 to 1933. It was then revised for 1934 because the ornament was only ornamental as the radiator cap was now under the hood.

Although a handful of cars were produced as 1938 models, the 1937 was essentially the last of the Pierce-Arrows. That year 14 different body styles were produced, most of which were available either with the 150 horsepower straight 8 or the 185 horsepower V-



12 engine. Wheelbases available were 139 inches, 144 inches, 147 inches. Shown is the 4 door convertible sedan for 5 passengers on the 144 inch wheelbase. The factory price was \$4,100 for the 8 and \$4,650 for the 12 cylinder. It was available with a partition for chauffeur use at extra cost.



Two region members own Pierce-Arrow Club Broughams. Pictured below are the 1932 owned by Bill Crumrine (right) and the 1933 owned by Les Jackson (left). These were produced during the period that Studebaker was merged with Pierce-Arrow, with Studebaker going into bankruptcy in 1933 and Pierce-Arrow spinning off as an independent company again. During these two years Studebaker produced models of very similar styling to these Pierce-Arrows. Bill Crumrine also owns a 1937 coupe (above right). Other members of the region with Pierce Arrows that are not garaged in Arizona are Don Eller's 1921 sedan and Lee Barthel's 1936 sedan.



The story behind the Pierce-Arrow headlights in fenders

In 1907, a young artist in his mid 20's, Herbert Dawley was sought out and hired by Pierce-Arrow and assigned to the sales department. He spent many years designing hardware and other items for the cars. Dawley was told to design something that would separate the cars from the other luxury vehicles on the road.

In 1913 it was ready: the fender headlamp. It was originally done for practical reasons as other headlights were so lowly mounted that every bump in the road was emphasized. With the new lights sitting on top of the fenders, the light would hit the road at a better angle.

When he presented his invention to management, Automobile Quarterly reports he was told: "Who the hell would want a pair of frog's eyes sticking up in front to them?" To make a long story short, Dawley was granted a patent and the new headlights proved popular with luxury car buyers.



George Sanders, a member of the Arizona Region owns two 1927 Pierce-Arrow 6 cylinder roadsters. This one is shown at the Pierce-Arrow national meet in Oregon this past summer. Below is one of the predecessors of the Archer.

"...Pierce-Arrow represents the highest mark of achievement obtainable in an American automobile." Automobile Quarterly, Fourth Quarter, 1990.



Since early 1999 The Roadrunner has featured different Full Classics®

In 1999 *The Roadrunner* started a series of articles highlighting various American-made Full Classics® as recognized by CCCA. This list does not include individual Arizona Region members' cars which have been featured in most issues. This current November-December 2006 issue highlights Pierce-Arrow Classics.

Covered in past issues were:

Edition

March-April, 1999
September-October, 1999
December, 1999-January 2000
December, 2003
February, 2004
December, 2004
February, 2005
May, 2005
August, 2005
October, 2005
December, 2005
April-May, 2006
Summer, 2006

Full Classic(s)® Featured

Auburn**, Brewster, Blackhawk, Buick***
Packard
Cadillac*, Chrysler*
Dagmar, Doble, Duesenberg, Dorris, DuPont and Elcar
Franklin, Hudson, Graham
Jordan, Julian, Kissel
Packard Classics for 1923 and 1924 (newly "annointed")
Reo
LaSalle
Lincoln
Locomobile, Mercer, McFarlan, Marmon
Nash
Peerless, Phantom Corsair

* Look for more complete and comprehensive articles in future editions of *The Roadrunner*.

** Auburn was also featured in the Dec. 1999-Jan. 2000 issue

*** Buick also featured in the August 2005 edition.