

# Stutz started as an Indianapolis race car; but by 1925 it stressed ‘Safety, Comfort, and Beauty’



## The founder had left the company long before the Classic Era began

By Les Jackson

The story of the Stutz Full Classic® from 1925 to its end as a car company in 1935 was a very different one than its early days when Harry Stutz was associated with the company.

The earliest years were an emphasis on speed. In 1897 Harry Stutz built his first car, a gas buggy. He was only 20 years old. He was innovative in many of his endeavors.

He built the American Underslung, a car with a lower center of gravity as the chassis was hung below the springs and axles. This arrangement in the first of the company’s cars was said to reduce the chances of a roll over, this making it a safer car. These were produced in 1906 and 1907.

The safety theme would be revived by the Stutz car company many years after Harry Stutz was no longer associated with the company.

### The racing era at Stutz

After leaving American Underslung, Stutz built a car to enter the Indianapolis 500 in 1911. It placed 11<sup>th</sup> in the race and the slogan “The Car That Made Good in a Day” was adopted.

In 1913 Stutz’s car placed 3<sup>rd</sup> at Indy, and the following year it was named the Bearcat. At this time Mercer with its Raceabout was a great rival.

Speed continued to be emphasized as Cannonball Baker drove a Bearcat coast to coast to break the old record by 7½ hours.

Even though many sources provide information about the Stutz car, there are many differences in the data involving production, price, horsepower and displacement of the engines.

## Next in the Classics A to Z Series

Periodically the *Roadrunner* runs stories about Full Classics® made in America. In this issue we continue the series with Stutz. Prior stories can be found on our web site,

[www.arizonaccca.com](http://www.arizonaccca.com). Click on “Classics A to Z” at the top of the home page. Watch for a story on the Wills Sainte Claire and Willys-Knight in a 2008 issue.

Harry Stutz quit the company in 1919 and it was mostly idle until the beginning of the Classic Era in 1925.

### The Safety, Comfort and Beauty Period

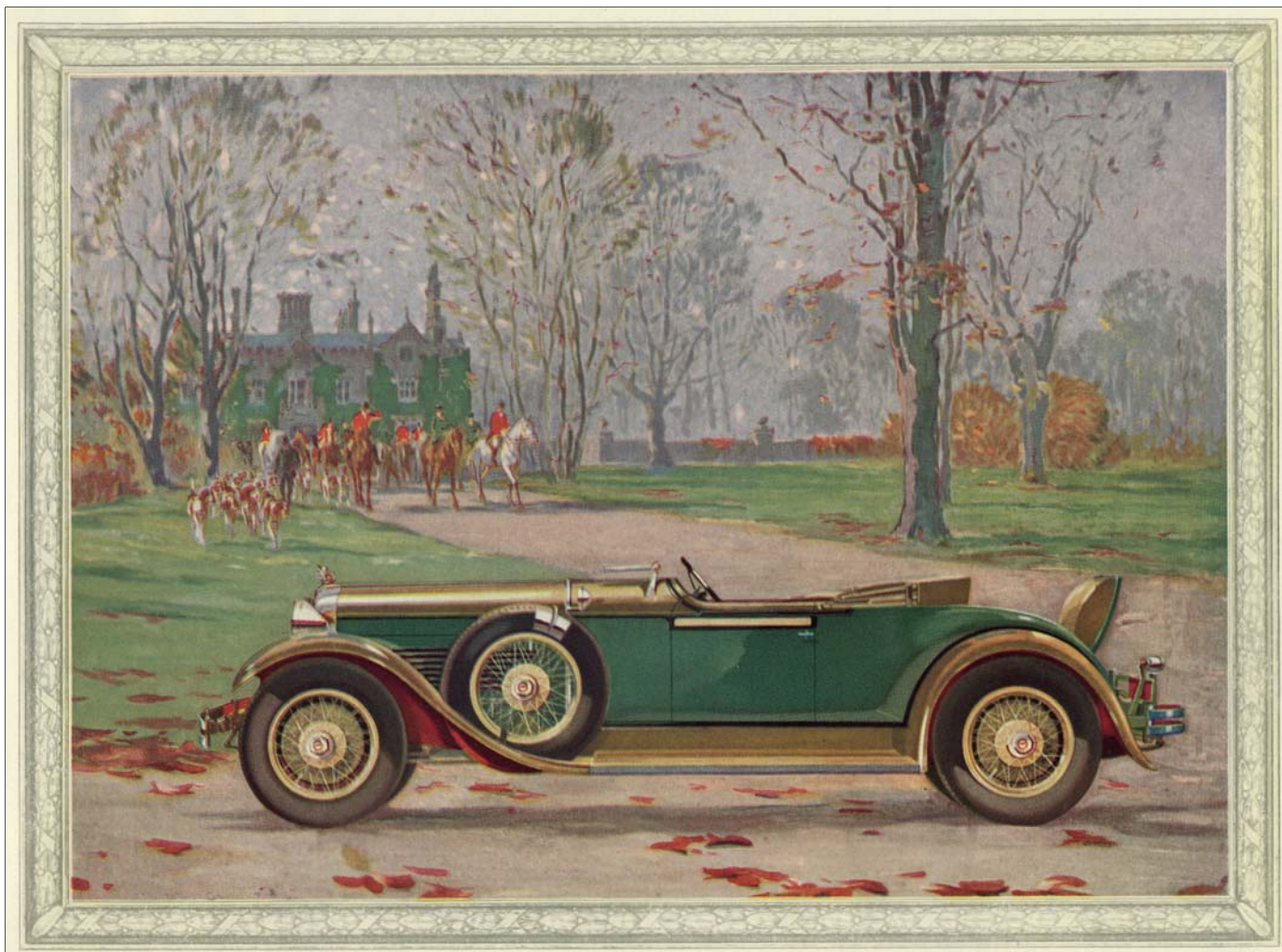
In 1922 Charles M. Schwab, who had been head of Bethlehem Steel took over the company and three years later hired Frederic E. Moscovics as president. Moscovics, who previously worked at Marmon and



This is the 1927 “Vertical Eight Safety Chassis” 2 passenger Speedster by Stutz. Advertising comments included “Body five inches nearer the ground”, “lower center of gravity”, “worm-drive rear axle...improves with use”, and “non-leaking hydrostatic brakes”.

Franklin, said the company would concentrate on safety, comfort and beauty (no mention of speed).

In 1926 Stutz brought out what was called the Safety Stutz. It featured a “vertical eight” engine with a “safety chassis.” (Packard of that era had a straight eight engine.) The Stutz engine was a 289 cubic inch overhead cam eight cylinder producing 92 horsepower at 3200 rpm. Dual spark ignition was featured and the engine had a nine bearing main crankshaft.



Clearly there were significant styling improvements from the 1927 Stutz as this is the 1928 Custom 2 passenger Speedster by Stutz. It was called a 2 passenger despite having a rumble seat that would seat two additional people for a total of four.

Sales which were 2,160 in 1925 increased (one source says to 5,069 units, another states to 3,692. Many early car manufacturing records are in disagreement).

The Safety Stutz was built low to the ground and featured hydraulic brakes operated with a mixture of alcohol and water. Safety glass, such as it was in 1926, was also used. Brewster designed the bodies.

One interesting feature was the Weymann body Monte Carlo which was covered with a light weight fabric of synthetic leather over a light weight wood that did not rattle, thus reducing sound problems. The public was underwhelmed, however.

Even though speed was no longer stressed the car could go from 10 to 50 mph in 15 seconds (good speed for the era). It used a Timken worm drive differential. The early 1926 Stutz had a 131 inch wheelbase. Late in the year a larger 145 inch wheelbase was introduced.

### **Ettore Bugatti helped Stutz**

Even though speed was not a big part of Stutz advertising, the 1927 model was improved with help from Ettore Bugatti, the famous Italian auto designer, who modified the ports and manifolds in the head. The redesigned engine enabled Stutz to win the stock car championship; it won every race it entered that year.

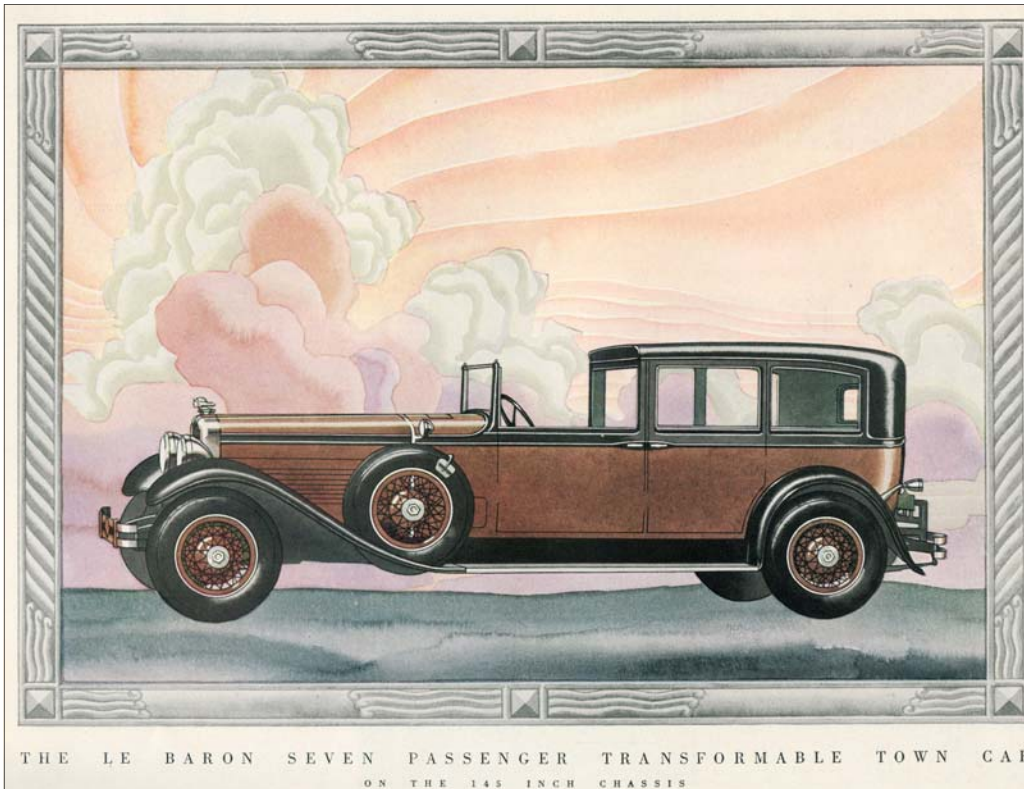
By the end of the year LeBaron was designing the bodies.

A unique model BB convertible victoria with body by Locke & Co., was a 2 door with room for five inside PLUS a rumble seat. [Editor Note: We wish we had a photo of this car to include with this article].

In 1928 Stutz introduced the Blackhawk as a series in the Stutz line. It had the smaller 131 inch wheelbase, but sported a 110 or 125 horsepower engine, depending on the source of the information. A Stutz

*(Continued on page 11)*

Left: LeBaron built this 7 passenger transformable town car on the 145 inch chassis for Stutz for 1929. The transmission featured four forward speeds. Also included was the "Noback" device designed to prevent the car from rolling backward on hills while in neutral without applying the brakes, one of Stutz's safety features. It was many years before this was common in American cars. Other 1929 models included the 4 passenger speedster, 2 passenger rumble seat speedster, 2 passenger torpedo and a convertible sedan.



THE LE BARON SEVEN PASSENGER TRANSFORMABLE TOWN CAR  
ON THE 145 INCH CHASSIS

Right: Rollson was the coach builder for this 1931 Stutz DV32 (dual valve) convertible victoria. How would you like to drive this car with its blind rear quarters and no outside rear view mirrors? Stutz emphasized "safety" in its 1931 black and white brochures and advertising. Buyers could select their own body builders; this Rollston was not advertised by Stutz. Only about 300 cars were built by Stutz in 1931. Photo by Bud Juneau.



Left: Brunn designed this body on the dual valve 1932 Stutz Patrician coupe. The company president, Edgar Stanley Gorrell, was interviewed by *Time* magazine and commented that nine separate motor companies had approached Stutz with offers to buy, sell, merge or be merged. Gorrell answered "No. Stutz will stand alone. Stutz by itself has too satisfactory a position to warrant or demand a merger." From 1932 to 1933 production decreased more than 60 percent and in 1937 the company was gone.



DV DUAL VALVE PATRICIAN COUPE BY BRUNN



"Ra" the god of the sun, was used as the Stutz hood ornament and appeared in its advertising (right).

entered the Indianapolis 500 coming in second to a 4½ liter Bentley. A Blackhawk Stutz was also second in the LeMans race after leading most of the way.

Sales in 1928 were down and in 1929 or early 1930 Moskovic resigned or was ousted as president of the company.

In 1929 The Blackhawk became a separate make and was no longer a series under the Stutz name. Blackhawk offered a choice of a 6 or an 8 cylinder motor with horsepower of 85 and 90 respectively.

As the depression took hold in 1930 production at Stutz plunged with only an estimated 1,318 cars produced with either the Stutz or Bearcat nameplate. Prices varied from a low of \$2,395 to a high of \$3,855.

Racing attracted the Stutz again as it was ninth in the 1930 Indy, and won the 140 mile Mexican race from Nuevo Laredo to Monterrey at a speed of 70 mph beating a Studebaker Commander Eight by 2 minutes.

From then on it was downhill each year with estimated production in 1931 of 310, in 1932 of 206, in 1933 of 80, in 1934 of 6 and finally 1935 with 2. The last year for the Blackhawk was 1930.

In 1931 Stutz was the first to introduce bodies where the doors dropped to the running boards and covered the frame rails.

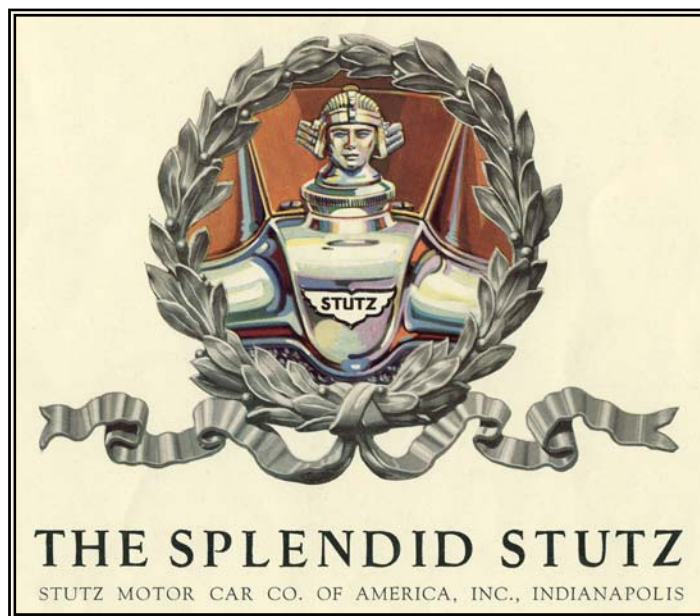
Engines were increased in power and prices were

only modestly reduced in these declining years. Starting in 1932 Stutz offered an option of a 156 horsepower engine called the DV32 (16 intake valves and 16 exhaust valves) as well as a SV16 with 113 horsepower which could be bought with a supercharger to increase horsepower to 143.

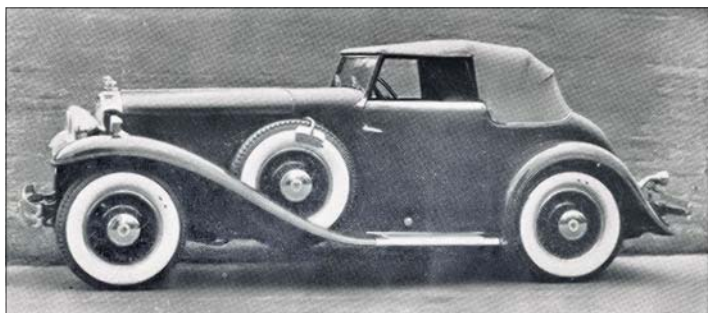
The company was liquidated in April, 1937. During its closing months it produced a small truck called the PakAge (nc).

All Stutz cars from 1925 until the end are considered Full Classics® by CCCA.

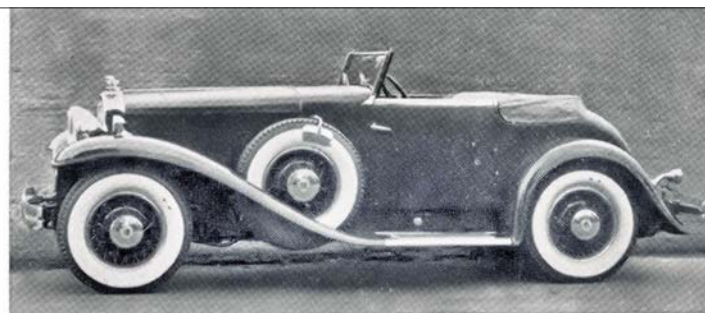
In 1970 the name Stutz Blackhawk (nc) was revived as a \$75,000 luxury car.



Below: The 1933 Stutz models were virtually unchanged from the prior year. This is one of the "Salon Sports Models", the Super Bearcat on a 116 inch wheelbase. The company also produced the Pak-Age-Car (nc) in 1933 for light deliveries to compete with the horse and wagon in house to house delivery. The engine could be replaced with a spare one in 15 minutes.



Super Bearcat, 116-inch Wheelbase



Super Bearcat, 116-inch Wheelbase