

They called C. Harold Wills a perfectionist which did not help the Wills Sainte Claire in the market

He left Ford with more than \$1.5 million in profit sharing

By Les Jackson

Childe Harold Wills played a big part in the early success of Ford Motor Company before he left the company in 1919. He received a check for **\$1,592,128** as part of a profit sharing arrangement with owner Henry Ford.

He had pushed the use of vanadium steel which was vital to the Model T. He assisted in engineering the car, including the planetary transmission and even designed the Ford script (which is still used today). He and Henry were close friends and Henry was the best man at Wills' wedding.

Wills worked closely with Henry Ford starting as his draftsman in 1902 when he was 24 years old. By 1919 he wanted to update the Model T, but Henry was not interested, so Wills left the company.

We have all read about executives who leave large companies these days and receive huge payments, even when they are being fired. When Harold Wills (he did not use his first name) left Ford it was on the best of terms.

But what could his profit sharing amount be in today's dollars: Answer: \$1,747,726,669. That is 1097.7% more than the original amount.

Periodically the Roadrunner prints an article about American made Full Classics®. The most recent article about Stutz was in the November December 2007 edition.

What did Wills decide to do with a part of his big fortune? First he bought 4,400 acres in Maryville, Michigan, in order to construct a model industrial community. What he knew best was automobile engineering and design. So he joined with another former Ford employee John R. Lee to make a car that would be "10 years ahead of its time." Their plant was built in 1919 on some of the land Wills had bought on the St. Clair River in the Detroit metropolitan area.

Two years later the first of their new V-8 cylinder

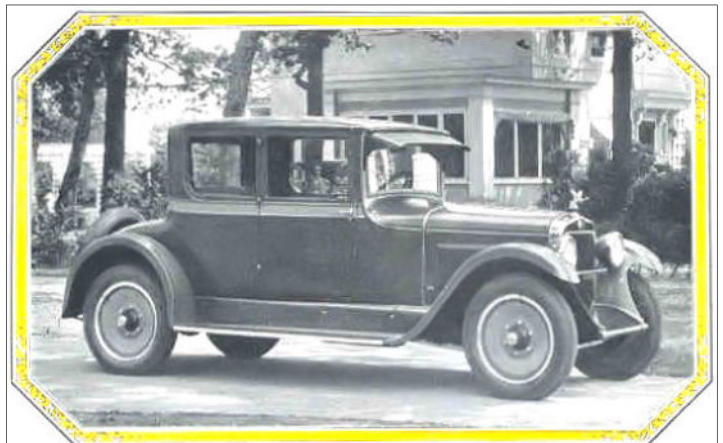
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A 1925 Wills Sainte Claire 6 cylinder roadster. An ad for the 1925 cars said "So impressively superior in stamina and style that first pace in exclusive favor can be augured boldly and without reservation." Wonder who wrote that?



This is a 1922 V8 powered Wills Sainte Claire roadster with rumble seat pictured in the fall at the Natural Bridge area in Virginia.



In 1925 one of the models Wills Sainte Claire offered was this 2 door 4 passenger coupe (Victoria style). Note the solid wheels, commonly used in these cars.

Going through the alphabet with U.S. made Full Classics[®]

Since early 1999 *The Roadrunner* has presented articles about various American-made Full Classics[®]. This list does not include individual Arizona Region members' cars which have been featured in most issues. This issue highlights the Wills Sainte Claire. Previous makes in this series of articles are shown in the list below. These prior stories and pictures can be found on our web site, www.arizonacc.com. Click on Classics A to Z.

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
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 April-May 2006
 Summer 2006
 November-December 2006
 January-February 2007
 March-April 2007
 Summer 2007

Full Classics 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 recognized)
 Reo
 LaSalle
 Lincoln
 Locomobile
 Nash
 Peerless, Phantom Corsair
 Pierce-Arrow
 ReVere, Roamer, Ruxton and Rolls-Royce (made in America)
 Stevens-Duryea
 Stearns-Knight, Studebaker

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

** Auburn was also featured in the December 1999-January 2000 issue.

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



Above: One of the Wills Sainte Claire ads for the 1925 model. The text reads "Italian in speed. French in smartness. English in economy of fuel. American in price and power." Note the geese flying in formation in the ad.

Right: Note the front bumper of this Wills Sainte Claire roadster.



Below: The 1925 Wills Sainte Claire's "Gray Goose Traveler," a touring car design.



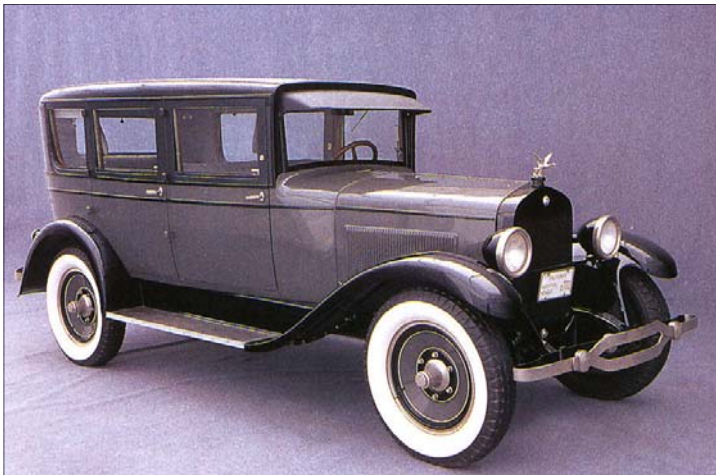
Below: One of the sleeker looking Wills Sainte Claire designs is this 1925 roadster with rumble seat.



(Continued from page 8)

cars was built. They added the letter “e” to Saint and Clair because it made it sound classier. The engine was at 60 degrees and had overhead valve and camshaft construction. The inspiration for the engine was Hispano-Suiza’s V-8. Many thought the styling of the new cars was pedestrian and ordinary, particularly for a luxury car.

The 4.3 liter engine used aluminum connecting rods with a single overhead camshaft for each bank of the V-8. Brake horsepower was 65 at 2800 rpm. The engine had seven main bearings and an automatic clutch which disengaged the fan at speeds over 40 miles per



This 4 door sedan with “suicide” doors is part of the Nethercutt Collection in California. It is a 1926 model T-6 with the relatively newly introduced 6 cylinder engine. It was 273 cubic inch displacement and had a bore of 3¼ and a stroke of 5½ inches. Horsepower was 66.

hour. Top speed was about 75 mph.

Molybdenum was used in the new cars, the first ones to use the metal. The car was light weight and strong, but for the price, many considered it to be too small. Prices for the 1922 model varied from \$2,875 to \$4,775.

In August, 1921, one of their stock cars set a record covering 689 miles from Detroit to New York City in 20 hours 6 minutes. (Remember the roads were not very good in those days.)

The Gray Goose was chosen as the car’s symbol and was frequently used in its advertising. In 1925 one of their cars was called the “The Gray Goose Traveler”. It was a 4 door phaeton.

Other models offered that year included the 2 door cabriolet roadster, 4 door brougham, 5 passenger se-

This series about Full Classic® cars does not include those made outside the United States. The reason is that our research materials do not include much information about non-U.S. cars. We welcome any region member to contribute one or more articles about foreign Classics. Contact the Editor.

dan, 4 door town car, 7 passenger sedan, 2 door roadster and the 2 door 4 passenger coupe (victoria).

The company ended its first life by the end of 1922, during the post World War I recession, after about 4,200 cars had been produced.

It was said that Wills would shut down assembly when he thought of an improvement he could make.

John Lee and the other officers of the company left. Wills got the company back in 1923 and it began its second life.

Balloon tires were introduced in 1924 along with four wheel hydraulic brakes.

The V-8 had been a very expensive engine to build and was difficult for most mechanics to maintain. A new 6 cylinder car was introduced as the W-6 model in 1925 to be sold along with the V-8 for that year and the next.

In August, 1926, a stock 6 cylinder Wills Sainte Claire set a transcontinental record from San Francisco to New York City in 83 hours 12 minutes.

For 1927 only the six cylinder car was regularly built. V-8s were by special order only. Wills approach to the luxury market of the early 1920’s was that people would be willing to pay premium prices for automobiles with superior quality without the cars being luxurious or extra large. Apparently he was wrong.

It is believed that the company never made a profit.

With his company gone, Wills participated as an engineer in the development of the Ruxton (a Full Classic®) and later was a consultant on metallurgy for Chrysler, which purchased his factory in 1935. Five years later he died of a





Above left: Hood ornament and logo on a Wills Sainte Claire. Above right: As pictured in the CCCA "The Classic Era" book, this is a 1926 Wills Sainte Claire T-6 Roadster owned by Terry and Rita Ernest of Port Huron, Michigan.

stroke. He was 62.

Total production of Wills Sainte Claire cars was just under 12,000 cars from 1921 until the end.

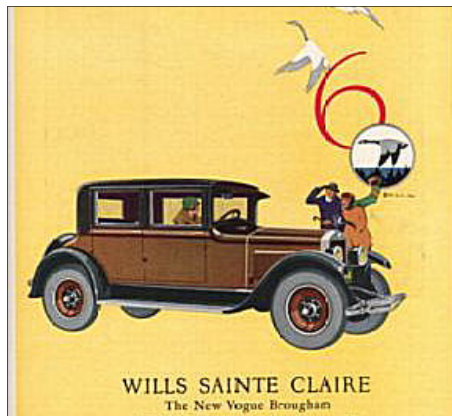
The V-8 models had produced 65 or 67 horsepower and were built on 121 inch and 127 inch wheelbases. The sixes produced 66 horse power and rode on 127 inch wheelbases.

Prices varied from a low of \$2,475 for the 1923 five passenger touring car to a high of \$4,775 for the 1922 seven passenger town car.

All Wills Sainte Claire cars are considered Full Classics® by CCCA.



The 1926 Wills Sainte Claire cab roadster. The top was Burbank cloth with natural wood bows which may be "folded down easily and quickly." Upholstery is beige hand-crushed Spanish leather. Note the suicide doors.



Pictured at center of page: In 1926 Wills Sainte Claire offered a six cylinder engine. This is one of the cars with that engine. It is called "The New Vogue Brougham" model. Also offered in 1926 was a V-8 engine, as the company offered from its beginning.

When in Michigan, visit the Wills Sainte Claire Museum in Marysville

In April, 2002, volunteers opened the Wills Sainte Claire Museum at 2408 Wills Street in Marysville. It is open the second Sunday of each month from 1 to 5 p.m. Ten (two of which are recent additions) of the Wills Sainte Claire cars are on exhibit along with at least one Model T Ford.

About 80 Wills Sainte Claire cars are believed to still exist. Twenty-two are owned by CCCA members according to the 2007 handbook.

Before going to the museum you may want to contact the Director Terry Ernest at 810-987-2854 or willsmuseum@sbcglobal.net. The museum will stage two events this summer "the Past and Wheels" on August 17 and "Rumble in the Park" on August 16.

The building that houses the museum was used by Dow Chemical to build munitions during World War II.

