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This 1901 Geneva Steamer is still on display at the Henry Ford Museum, Dearborn, Michigan, one of the first four such cars produced in Geneva, Ohio. It was the first of several vehicles produced by the Geneva automobile industry, between 1900 and 1923. We present herein, a short history of that industry.

THE GENEVA AUTOMOBILE INDUSTRY - - - -

On May 8, 1901, the first Geneva Steamer rolled out of the Factory Row plant of J.A. Carter. It was a "Thing of beauty to behold", and was the beginning of the short lived Geneva, Ohio automobile industry.

The steamer was a steam driven horseless carriage, one of which is still on display at the Henry Ford Museum, Dearborn, Michigan. Built like a buckboard, the car was powered by a marine type double acting, two cylinder steam engine, rated at six horse power.

The throttle and reverse levers were combined in one, and worked from the center of the seat. The steering post was also in the center and provided a lever which could be steered from either side of the seat. The nine gallon gas tank was also in front. A copper water tank at the rear came forward on two sides of the six gallon boiler.

The car must have been exciting to see, with a shiny black wood body sporting red line trim, red wire wheels, and red gears with black trim. The brown leather seat had 27 slightly turned spindles painted bright red. A mirror decked the right front and metal railing bedecked the hood. A plate on the rear of the car bore the words THE GENEVA AUTOMOBILE AND MFG. CO., GENEVA, OHIO.

The elegance of the car was enhanced by brass side lights which brought many comments when the vehicle was displayed at the Pan-American Exposition, Buffalo, New York, in 1901.

Carter, in 1894, had formed the Geneva Cycle Company, the forerunner of the Geneva automobile industry. It was located in the Western Lock Company building on Geneva's Factory Row. He bought steam car patents from a man named Thompson, got funding from Cleveland interests, hired Thompson as his plant superintendent, and began producing the steam cars.

The steamer was up against heavy competition. The Stanley, Locomobile and White Steamers were well into production. In addition the community of Geneva, with a population of 2,300 in 1900, was not able to support the company.

It was easy to start a company in those days, with no income tax, and no Securities and Exchange Commission. Ambition and effort were the most necessary ingredients, with funds of secondary consideration. Even so the steamer project seemed doomed from the start.

There was a lot of enthusiasm as the project started, but that enthusiasm did not sweep the country as had been expected.

In recent years, a letter was received from Emmett Taxter, of Mt. Vernon, New York, telling of his part in the Geneva Steamer business.

Mr. Taxter told of working in the factory with men named John Patt, Rany Stone, Phillips, Charles Griggs, George Jones, Roy Baldwin and Red MacDonald.

In addition to the Geneva Steamer, the company produced a "racing bug" called the Turtle, according to Taxter. This car was entered in a race at Cleveland against a Ford, two steamers owned by Roland and Walter White, and a gas car owned by A. Winton.

"Red MacDonald drove our car and came in second. Then we went to Grose Point, Michigan and won twice, including a \$150 cup. I do not believe that Henry Ford was worth \$5,000 at the time."

Unfortunately, the lack of national interest, the stiff competition from other steamers, lack of local financing and support finally led to the downfall of the Geneva Steamer. By 1903, production had dropped to about 20 cars, and by 1904, the plant and machinery were sold to the Colonial Brass Company.

The second attempt at automobile manufacturing in Geneva began in 1908, in the

old Factory Row plant. E.L. Ewing began production of the Ewing Taxi with a plant crew of 50 men.

The taxi sold for \$3,000 and was made until 1910. It was a large vehicle, having an enclosed passenger section with a roof protruding over the open driver's seat. It was powered by a four cylinder engine which was not manufactured in Geneva. Actually, the Geneva plant was an assembly plant for premade parts.

The Ewing Taxi was an impressive looking vehicle which was displayed at the 1909 National Auto Show in Madison Square Garden, New York.

Once again, the lack of local backing forced Ewing to look for help elsewhere. The company was bought by General Motors, and in May 1910, the manufacturing was moved to the GM Buick plant at Flint, Michigan. At that time, GM bought out several floundering auto manufacturers. Several of these units succeeded, but the Ewing Taxi was among those that did not, and it was dropped from the GM line.

Despite the previous failures, a third automobile venture began to take form in Geneva. It proved to be even less successful than the first two, but began with a flourish and the promise of "the best car in America."

The formation of the Heifner Motor Car Company was announced July 9, 1920. It was claimed that more than \$100,000 had been spent on research and experiments for the luxury car.

Lambert Heifner was a local man, and launched a huge advertising campaign to promote the luxurious models.

The sports model was to sell for \$6,750, and the touring car up to \$16,500, an unheard of price for a vehicle, at the time. In those days, a standard Chevrolet car sold for \$595. The company took an option of the Geneva Canning Co. plant, later the Du-All Manufacturing Company.

While no Heifners had yet been built, the company spent the last six months of 1920 gathering stock holders. It was said that five Akron men put up \$50,000. Genevans were asked to come up with \$10,000.

The two Heifner models were described as follows. The sports car had a wheel base of 138 inches. The touring car had a 148 inch wheel base. Both were to have a four cylinder Wisconsin engine rated at 81 horsepower.

Both models sported built-in golf club racks, optional disc wheels, and power tire pumpers. Body style followed European types, with V-shaped grills, and four wheel hydraulic brakes.

The manufacturing plant sounded like a worker's paradise. The five acre plant was to include a 180 foot swimming pool, club rooms and a roof garden, billiard room, bowling alley and tennis courts, in hopes of enticing investors.

Despite the "come ons", the needed money was not raised and the company folded in April, 1921. Only one Heifner, a sports model, was ever assembled, and it never ran. It was said that the disgruntled mechanic who assembled the car was never paid for the job, therefore kept out a vital part, making sure the car was inoperable.

Work had begun on one of the magnificent touring cars, but was stopped before the unit was finished.

By this time, Genevans were most skeptical about the automotive industry. But, this didn't stop the H. B. Young Motor Company of Cleveland from relocating their business in Geneva.

It was announced that the "Little Giant" trucks would be made in the building vacated by the Heifner Company. Young explained that the company made the move because of lower overhead and better transportation facilities in Geneva.

In July, 1921, the first Little Giant truck was produced and production began on chassis for one, one and one half, two, two and one half and three and one half ton trucks. These were produced through 1922. While figures are not available for exact production numbers, it is known that at least 12,000 were made, both in the Geneva plant and the former Euclid plant, over a 13 year period.

Genevans Glenn C. Webster and Fred E. Chapman joined the board of directors of the Young company in 1921. A boost came when Canton interests bought into the company as well as purchasing the Simplicity Wheel Company, Madison.

The operations at the Madison plant were moved to Geneva, which gave Young a line of power plants and auto accessories necessary to the truck production.

Just at a time when Young Company stock holders were heartened by announcement of an order for 12 new trucks, the company suddenly, on December 20, 1922, went into receivership. The president, H. B. Young, blamed the failure on a slow down in the truck business and, once again, lack of community financial backing.

The plant was sold to the Tad Buckle Company, Connecticut, on February 26, 1923, ending a two decade auto industry for Geneva.

As history now shows, Geneva's greatest contribution to the auto industry was not any of these production ventures. It was, rather, in the life of Ransom E. Olds, born in Geneva in 1864, the son of Mr. and Mrs. Pliny Olds.

The father, Pliny Olds, was a blacksmith, whose brass works shop was on Eagle Street. The Olds home, now the Glenn Morris residence, 112 South Eagle Street, was dedicated as a Century Home by the *Ashtabula County Historical Society*, June 25, 1979.

The young Olds was said to have a highly inquisitive mind, with dreams of the time when a horseless carriage would replace horses and buggies. Born into a farming family those who knew him speculated as to whether the youth would become an innovative farmer or an inventive mechanic.

It is thought the young Ransom began his initial interest in mechanics in the brass shop which stood on the southwest corner of Main and Eagle Street.

When he was still in his teens, the Olds family moved to Lansing, Michigan where the interest in the automobile grew and the first Oldsmobiles were produced. The REO car, named for Ransom E. Olds, was also made by the company.

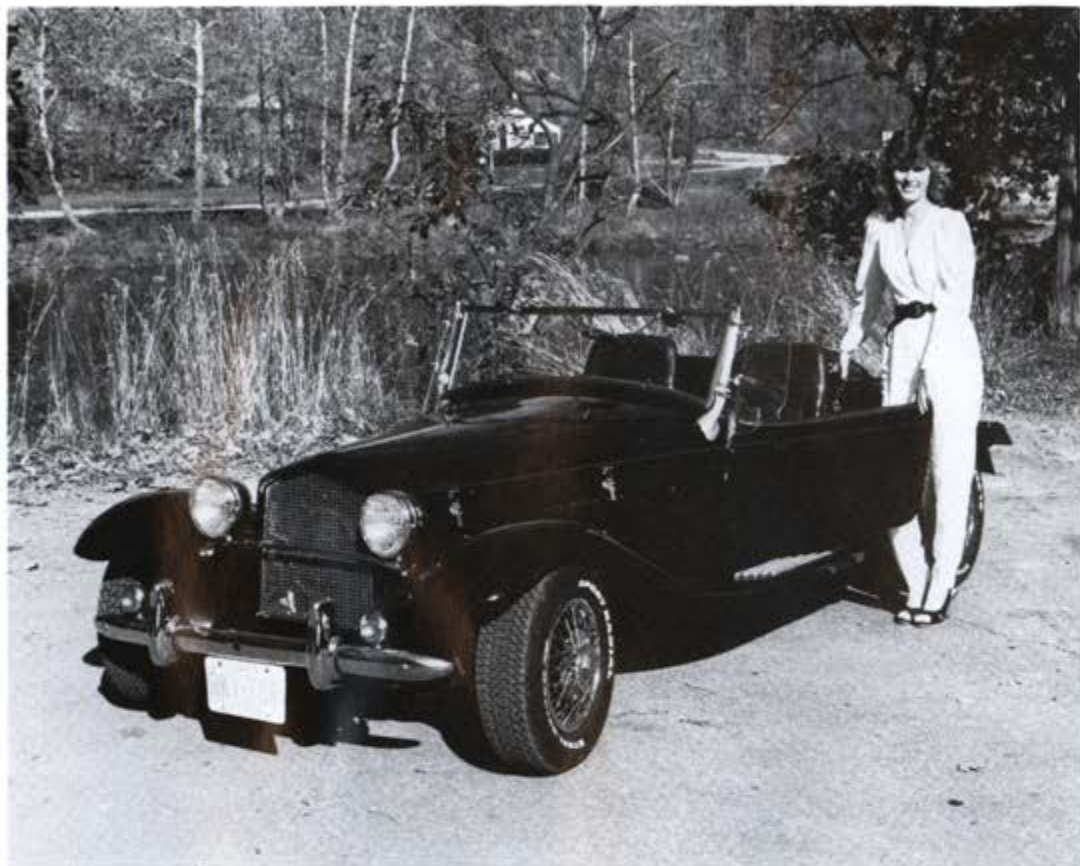
The first Olds were high wheelers, like a buggy, with the single cylinder engine under the seat. They sold for \$750. The REO division was organized in August of 1904, in Lansing, with a production of 5,000 cars that year. It is said that the Olds car was two years ahead of Henry Ford of Detroit.

In 1900, Olds had produced a curved dash runabout which inspired the popular song "In My Merry Oldsmobile." This car was the first gasoline powered car produced in quantity in the United States. It was also the first auto priced in a range practical for the buying public, with over 16,000 sold for between \$650 and \$750. It burned up the roads at a grand 20 miles per hour.

Geneva still proudly claims Ransom E. Olds as one of the most famous of native sons. During America's 1976 Bicentennial celebration, the REO/OLDS Club of America held their national meeting in Geneva.

Olds never quit being inventive, continuing to tinker in the basement shop of his retirement home in California. Here he developed a radio controlled lawn mower that he could operate from a chair in his yard.

Ransom E. Olds died about 1950, having realized his boyhood dreams and contributing to the American auto industry, even until the present day, remaining a bright star in Geneva's proud history.



Photographed October, 1983. Apache II and Carol Russell.

In 1984, the automobile industry has returned to Geneva, with the planned production of 500 unique cars by Ray Headley, in the Automotive Plastics Company building, 59 Pleasant Avenue. It will be produced by Headley Motors Corporation, a new corporation separate from Headley's Plastics company.

Unlike the earlier automotive efforts, the Headley project is fully locally financed, and not up against competition from the big automobile companies.

The limited edition car is hand built, with all body components built in Geneva. It has a hand-rubbed acrylic lacquer finish in the buyer's choice of black, white, blue, brown or red, with hand pin striping. Named the Apache II, the car is a blend of the 1930's style roadster and modern technology. It has a fiberglass body, Ford transmission, four cylinder turbo charged 2.3 liter engine, disc brakes, electric windows and air conditioning. It is a unique car, designed for the buyer wanting a collector's item or a vehicle out of the ordinary.

The car was designed by Headley, a native of Madison, Ohio, and is hand sculptured and completely different from any car ever produced. Unlike the 1930's models, it sports either a convertible or hard top.

The first of the Apache II's is expected to sell for \$30,000, and will be sold through Ford dealerships, with 250 to be produced per year, for two years.

Headley originally produced dune buggies, called Apaches in the Geneva plant. Thus the name Apache II for his car. The Automotive Plastics Company produces sheet metal replacement parts for Chevrolet trucks. In addition, Headley builds one-of-a-kind show cars and produces four car shows a year, including one at the Colliseum, Richfield.

The Apache II could bring long overdue recognition to Geneva, Ohio, for a successful contribution to the American automobile industry.