

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

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FOR WEDNESDAY RELEASE

MUSEUM TO OPEN FIRST EXHIBITION ANYWHERE OF AUTOMOBILES

SELECTED FOR DESIGN

Well-designed American and European automobiles will be displayed on an 8-foot-wide elevated roadway in the first floor galleries and the garden of the Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, from August 29 through November 11 in the first exhibition anywhere dealing with the esthetics of automobile design.

8 AUTOMOBILES, as the exhibition is entitled, will also include enlarged photographs of cars selected for their excellence as works of art and for their relevance to contemporary problems of passenger car design. The older cars, dating back 20 years, were chosen not to show historical progression but to show prototypes of design still valid today. The exhibition was arranged by Philip C. Johnson, Director of the Department of Architecture and Design.

Three Basic Designs Illustrated

The 8 automobiles were selected as examples of three visually pleasing ways of combining the essential parts of a car: wheels, motor and passenger compartment. One approach, which is to combine the motor and passenger compartment in a box clearly separate from the wheels on which it rests is illustrated by the 1931 Mercedes SS and the Military Jeep. The Mercedes, designed and manufactured in Germany, was lent to the exhibition by D. Cameron Peck. This fast five-passenger sport and touring car is designed on a heroic scale with each detail appropriately developed for the total effect.

The Army Jeep was manufactured by the Willys-Overland Motor Company and lent by the company to the exhibition. Besides being a beautiful tool for transportation, it has won approval for much more than its practicality: it is one of the very few genuine expressions of machine art.

As a variation on the design approach of a "box on wheels" the British MG and the 1939 Bentley are exhibited. The MG, a popular two-passenger sports car built by the Morris Car Company in England, was lent by the Sports and Utility Motors Company of White Plains.

The MG gives the illusion of being the unenhanced piece of machinery which the Jeep actually is, but unlike the Jeep, its stylistic understatement is the result of careful attention to appearance itself. The tight, downward curve of the back is complemented by the long rising arabesque of the front fender. Both lines are related by a door the top of which is curved to form an elbow rest. As in the Mercedes, chromium plating is applied to individual parts of the machine which naturally lend themselves to this kind of decorative treatment, such as the radiator cap and frame of the folding windshield, instead of as additions superimposed in the form of meaningless decorative strips.

The 1939 Bentley was lent by Briggs S. Cunningham. In this car each side of the "box" is clearly defined and limited by a sharp edge, which results in the Bentley's characteristic swift and precise contour - the famous "razor edge." The fenders are a modification of the body itself.

"Single Envelope" Design and "Separate Envelope" Design

A second approach to the design of automobiles is illustrated by the 1949 Cisitalia, a two-passenger competition model sports car designed by the well-known Italian designer Pinin Farina and manufactured in Italy. This car was lent to the exhibition by John Wheelock Freeman. Here the motor and passenger compartment as well as the wheels are all included in a single envelope, modeled by swellings and depressions. The envelope incorporates the elements which in the Mercedes, for example, are superimposed on the body.

A third way to combine the essential elements of a car is illustrated at its most extreme by the Talbot, a French three-passenger sport and touring car lent by Carroll Bagley. This car combines separate envelopes for each part in a composition of similar shapes, and, as a whole, forms an expressive symbol of streamlining.

Two other American cars in the exhibition besides the Jeep, the 1937 Cord, lent by Charles F. Hewitt and the 1941 Lincoln Continental, lent by Bimel Kehm, are, like most cars, not as consistent in design. The Cord has pontoon fenders contrasting with a coffin-shaped hood, while the boxiness of the Lincoln Continental is altered to include the front fenders and the hood in one molded piece.

Gallery of Enlarged Photographs

Enlarged photographs of 8 additional cars will be shown in an adjoining gallery. They include: the 1951 Muntz Jet, a massive American sports car; Raymond Loewy's first postwar design for Studebaker Champion, shown as the most original postwar design; the pre-war Lincoln Zephyr, selected as the first successful streamlined car in America; and the 1951 Ford which is described as the "neatest of the deck and turret designs."

Photographs of two recent cars by Pinin Farina, leading automobile designer of today, will be shown in addition to his Cisitalia. They are the Maserati and the 1950 Bentley. Farina is now preparing body designs for an American manufacturer. Two rear-engined cars, both designed in Germany by Dr. Porsche, will also be shown in photographs; the Volkswagen the blunt curves of which are the result of a new rational analysis of the problems of automobile design, and the Porsche, which illustrates the extreme development of the seemingly one-piece metal lid.

Illustrated Catalog Accompanies Exhibition

A 24-page illustrated catalog, to sell for 50 cents, accompanies the exhibition. In outlining the purpose of the exhibition, Mr. Johnson says:

"An automobile is a familiar 20th-century artifact, and is no less worthy of being judged for its visual appeal than a building or a chair. Automobiles are hollow, rolling sculpture, and the refinements of their design are fascinating. We have selected cars whose details and basic design suggest that automobiles, besides being America's most useful Useful Objects, could be a source of visual experience more enjoyable than they now are."

Cars Exhibited on Special Roadway and under White Canvas Canopy

The elevated roadway, on which the cars will be exhibited, extends from the first floor galleries into the Museum garden, where it is covered by a white canvas canopy. The Cisitalia will be shown on a marble paved strip at floor level; the roadway will be paved with white pebbles. Special lighting will illuminate the galleries and the garden.