

Cars, Cars, Cars

The modern era of automotive technology began with Henry Ford. He created the Model T, also known as the “Tin Lizzie.” In 1913, Ford began producing his vehicles using conveyor belt technology, which he developed after studying how meatpacking plants worked. Using this assembly-line approach, Ford could turn out 1,000 cars every day. By the late 1920s, Model T Fords made up 68 percent of the world's cars. That was a total of about 15 million cars. Automobiles changed our lives in many ways.

A Philadelphia lawyer tried to cash in on the growing popularity of automobiles. The lawyer, George B. Selden, became the first person to get a patent for a motorcar. He patented a simple blueprint, then required auto manufacturers to pay him five dollars for every car they produced. Ford would have no part of that. He took Selden to court and was able to get the patent voided. In 1890, there were about 8,000 cars on roads in the United States. Within five years, that number multiplied ten-fold. By 1915, there were nearly 2.5 million cars on U.S. roadways.

Two well-known automobiles that were produced were the Edsel and the Mustang. The Ford Motor Company produced the Edsel in 1958. It was a car only its manufacturer could love. Edsel was named for Henry Ford's son, who died in World War II, but it never sold very well. Some people believed it failed to excite buyers because it was ugly. It had a front grille that was shaped like a toilet seat, and a speedometer that glowed an eerie red color when the driver exceeded a certain speed. Edsels were discontinued after only two years.

On the other hand, Americans loved the Ford Mustang. This American classic was introduced in 1964. The Mustang was a small and sporty car that was aptly named. Its engine was wonderfully responsive. The Mustang once won the Tiffany Award for Excellence in American design.

Unit 11

- The Edsel was a car that did not appeal to consumers. Describe a modern car that you find unappealing.

- The classic Ford Mustangs cannot pass the safety codes of today. Some people are suing Ford, trying to hold the company accountable for devastating accidents resulting from the original poor design. Do you feel this is justified or malicious?

- If you were to invent a car, what would distinguish it from other cars?