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The story behind Nash. [195-?]

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THE STORY BEHIND

Nash



**A CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS
LEADING TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE
WORLD'S MOST MODERN CARS**

THE MODERN Nash automobile, with its direct predecessors, the famous Rambler and Jeffery automobiles, has a romantic history extending far back into the bicycle and carriage era.

When Charles Williams Nash resigned as president of General Motors Corporation to purchase the Thomas B. Jeffery Company of Kenosha, Wisconsin, on August 16, 1916, he acquired a profitable, well-known business which began back in 1879.

Thomas Buckland Jeffery, a native of England, was a struggling inventor in Chicago—his chief distinction had been the invention of the railroad velocipede—when he decided to return to his homeland for a visit, in 1878. While in England he saw a bicycle which so interested him that he contracted for the necessary parts to assemble a number of them in the United States.

In 1879, nearly a year after he signed the contract, Jeffery offered his first bicycle for sale. He called it the "Rambler," and it became one of the most famous names in bicycle history.

In 1881, he and R. Philip Gormully formed a partnership which later became the G & J Manufacturing Company.

About this time Jeffery invented the clincher bicycle tire. Known as the G & J tire, it was made of pneumatic rubber, and revolutionized the bicycle and its use. It was the forerunner of the clincher-type automobile tire. The G & J Tire Company was formed in the 1880's to manufacture the product.

Thomas B. Jeffery and his son Charles were among the thousands who witnessed the famed Times-Herald automobile race in Chicago in 1895.

The race over, young Charles discussed with typical enthusiasm the possibility of building automobiles. His father, too, was interested.

In the next few years Charles drove and tested all makes of gasoline carriages, constantly devising ways to improve existing vehicles.

In 1899, Gormully and Jeffery sold their profitable bicycle business to the American Bicycle Company, and turned their attention to the automobile.

While Thomas Jeffery was searching for a plant

in which to produce automobiles, Charles designed and hand-built a car with backing of the American Bicycle Company.

On September 22, 1900, visitors to the International Exhibition and Race in Chicago saw for the first time this Jeffery-designed car. It was called the "G & J." Although this car was not marketed, its design was the basis for the first Rambler.

among Charles Jeffery, too, was an inventive genius. He was the first to put his engine in front of the car under the hood, and the first to put the steering mechanism on the left. Although Americans drove on the right side of the road, practically all cars until about 1907 were steered from the right side of the vehicle. Even the first Rambler to be marketed followed this "conservative" trend at first.

On December 6, 1900, *The Kenosha Evening News* reported that Thomas B. Jeffery had purchased the Sterling bicycle plant of that city for \$65,000, and speculated that he was to use the plant for automobile production.

It was not until early March, 1902, that he was ready to place his first new automobile on the market. With his son he had built and tested models A and B during 1901, but Jeffery was not satisfied with his product until models C and D were built. Priced to sell for \$750 and \$825, these cars were shown at an automobile exposition in Chicago's Coliseum, March 1, 1902.

In that first year, 1,500 Ramlers were built and sold. The Rambler was the world's second mass-produced automobile—a year after Oldsmobile and a year ahead of Ford.

Discussing this new entry into the automotive field, *The Motor World*, on March 6, 1902, said: "Here is rare value for the money."

The first Rambler met with great success. A Lima, Ohio, owner wrote the company:

"I am more than pleased to write you concerning our experience with the Rambler. It is truly a wonderful piece of mechanism. It starts immediately, runs like a jack rabbit and stops only at our will."

Within the next few years, gradual improvements were made on the Rambler which was the first automobile to make available a spare wheel (at extra cost). By 1905, total floor space of the Rambler factory was 14 acres, with another 33½ acres of ground area available for expansion and testing.

Thomas B. Jeffery died March 21, 1910. This industrial genius, inventor and automotive pioneer, at 65, left behind him 35 years of important contributions to transportation.

In 1914, the heirs of Thomas B. Jeffery decided to give their product a new name. Thus, the renowned "Rambler" gave way to "Jeffery." The Rambler, which had been photographed in all its glory with President Taft at the tiller, which had won many endurance tests, which had traveled thousands of muddy, nearly impassable miles throughout America in the early part of the twentieth century, was no more. But the Rambler spirit persisted, and the name of its builder now was on the lips of thousands of Americans.

By 1916 the products of the Thomas B. Jeffery Company ranked with the best of the day, and the Jeffery name was widely and favorably known. But the owners were anxious to retire. On August 16, 1916, Charles W. Nash, who resigned as president of General Motors to build a car under his own name, took active charge of the business which he had purchased from the Jeffery family.

Nash himself was one of the great builders of the automobile industry, which he entered as president of Buick after 20 years in the allied carriage business. His success was achieved with unusually difficult beginnings. When he was 6, he was bound out to a Genessee County, Michigan, farmer under a guardianship court order. He was to work for his room and board until he was 21, and then to receive \$100 and some clothing. But six years was enough for him, and when he was only 12, he ran away—on his own from then on.

Married when he was 20, he was still making only one dollar a day at 27, when he joined the Flint Road Cart Company as an upholstery stuffer. Here, natural qualities of leadership brought him to the superintendency of the plant within six months. He was vice-

president and general manager of the company, then known as the Durant-Dort Carriage Company, in 1910 when he entered the automobile business. Forty-six years old, he became president of Buick, then within two years, president also of Oakland Motor Company, the Olds Motor Works, General Motors Truck Company, and president of General Motors.

For the remainder of 1916, Nash continued to turn out Jeffery cars. In the Fall of 1917, the 1918 Nash model was introduced, which was the first Nash-designed car. The name Nash meant a great deal to many Americans even at the beginning, for 10,000 cars were sold in the first full year of production.

Nash Motors Company produced more than 11,000 Nash trucks in 1918—a record unequaled by any other manufacturer prior to that time. Most of these trucks were the famous four-wheel-drive Quad which did a magnificent job in World War I.

In 1924, Nash acquired the trade name and equipment of the LaFayette Motor Car Company which was founded in 1920 at Indianapolis. This company, which was moved in 1922 to Milwaukee, produced expensive cars, selling for more than \$5,000. Nash did not continue production of the big LaFayette, but in 1934 introduced a low-priced LaFayette which was produced until the Fall of 1940, when it was superseded by the Nash "600."

For its bodies, Nash, in 1919, turned to the Seaman Body Corporation which, too, has a rich tradition going back to 1846. In that year, A. D. Seaman founded a furniture manufacturing business in Milwaukee which went into automobile body production in 1909. In 1919, Nash Motors purchased a half interest in the business. The other 50 per cent was purchased in 1936.

Within a few months after this purchase, Nash Motors Company merged with the Kelvinator Corporation of Detroit, and C. W. Nash became chairman of the board and George W. Mason, president of the new company—the Nash-Kelvinator Corporation.

Shortly after the merger, the Nash Motors Division began a long-range program which eventually led to the introduction of the Nash "600," an automobile built on an entirely new principle. Known as

"Airflyte construction," its heart is the underbody: a shallow boat of stamped steel channeled lengthwise and crosswise by carefully-spaced, strength-giving corrugations, reinforced on the edges by foldovers that form hollow trusses, and stiffened with welded structural elements. The result was less weight, increased size and strength and a rattle-proof, squeak-proof and safer body.

In 1938, Nash introduced "conditioned air" heating systems, which eventually were copied by practically all manufacturers. Known as the "Weather Eye," the system operates on the principle of forced fresh air, constantly circulating, eliminating dust and fumes and providing frost-free windows and added passenger comfort.

World War II temporarily halted the Nash expansion program. During the war Nash-Kelvinator Corporation built more than \$600,000,000 worth of air-

craft material, including engines, propellers and helicopters. After the war the company continued its rapid growth, as sales passed the 100,000 mark in 1947 for the first time in nearly 20 years.

In 1948 a new assembly plant was opened for West Coast distribution near El Segundo, California. On June 6, 1948, Charles W. Nash died. He was succeeded as chairman of the board of Nash-Kelvinator Corporation by George W. Mason, who also continued as president.

In 1950, Nash Motors revived the famous Rambler name. In April, the convertible was introduced, followed in June by the "all-purpose" Rambler station wagon. A complete line was planned, with steel and other restrictions being the only handicaps to the realization of Nash Motors' postwar goal of 250,000 cars annually.

Nash Motors

A DIVISION OF NASH-KELVINATOR CORPORATION, DETROIT