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1938 Buick Y Job Was First Concept Car

by Jim Stickford

The year 2013 will mark many anniversaries, but one in particular will be of interest to auto enthusiasts.

This year marks the 75th anniversary of the start of the first concept car, now on display at the GM Heritage Center.

GM legend Harley Earl started work on the world’s first concept car, the Buick Y Job, in 1938. Greg Wallace, manager of the Heritage Center, said work on the vehicle began in January of 1938 and it was first publicly shown in December of 1939. He added that he believes its debut was at the famous Waldorf-Astoria Hotel for the New York Auto Show.

The thinking behind the idea of the concept car, Wallace said, was to get ahead. Before the Buick Y Job was built, the thinking for a concept car just wasn’t there.

“From what I’ve read,” Wallace said, “they wanted to get ahead and see the direction of where to go with cars in the future.”

To that end, Wallace said, the Buick Y featured a lot of elements not common to vehicles in the late 1930s.

“What’s amazing about this car is how ahead of its time it was,” Wallace said. “It has hidden headlights and things like push-button door openers.



In an archives photo, GM legend Harley Earl and the Buick Y Job.

“This was the beginning of aircraft-inspired designs for automobiles. The wheels’ hubcaps are turbine-vented to resemble a plane’s engine and even the hood ornament, if you examine it closely, looks like a (gun)sight for a fighter plane.”

Wallace said the late 1930s was a time of glamour for travel. Planes were still relatively rare, and plane travel even rarer. There was a huge element of sophistication when people traveled by plane. They dressed up and were served hot food with white linen napkins.

Harley Earl transferred that glamour to the Buick Y, Wallace

said. If you compare the front of the Y to other production line Buicks of the time, you will notice that the Y is sleeker and lower to the ground.

“The interesting thing about the airplane influences is that they made the car more aerodynamic,” Wallace said. “Planes, by their nature, are aerodynamic, and that influence rubbed off on the cars.”

Earl was an interesting man, Wallace said. He was tall, about six feet, six inches in height. So the Y was roomy enough to accommodate him.

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Chevrolet: ‘Find New Roads’ With Brand’s New Vision

As Chevrolet continues to expand its global operations, the automaker is aligning its engineering, design and retail operations behind a single vision and communications platform – Find New Roads.

The foundation of this new guiding principle is Chevrolet’s legacy of innovation and commitment to doing the right thing for consumers, say Chevy officials.

Find New Roads will be the touchstone for the brand as it develops new products and technologies for sale in more than 140 markets.

“Find New Roads embraces the spirit of ingenuity that has been in Chevrolet’s DNA since the beginning and it will continue to guide every aspect of our business moving forward,” said Mary Barra, senior vice president of Global Product Development.

“We have sold Chevrolets around the world for almost a century, but this is the first time we have aligned behind one global vision.

“As we develop new products, our designers and engineers will be empowered to find smarter solutions to address customer needs and make their lives better.”

Since the launch of the Cruze

mid-size sedan – the brand’s first truly global vehicle – in 2009, Chevrolet sales have grown about 38 percent.

“This is the right time to launch this initiative with over 20 vehicle launches globally in 2013,” said Alan Batey, vice president, U.S. Sales, Service and Global Marketing.

“We are continuing to grow globally, especially in key emerging markets, and Find New Roads will help us drive even more consistency – both internally with our employees and externally with customers.”

Chevrolet’s approach to marketing and the retail experience is already aligning with this new global vision.

Last year, Chevrolet selected Commonwealth, a newly formed advertising agency, to service Chevrolet advertising around the world. The brand also has launched a program to train dealership personnel to approach every aspect of their business differently to improve the retail experience.

In addition to driving internal consistency for Chevrolet, Find New Roads also will be used in advertising around the world, beginning in the United States this quarter.

Author Turns the Page with New Chevrolet History Book

by Jim Stickford

As metro Detroit prepares to look to its future via the 2013 North American International Auto Show, local author Michael W.R. Davis has taken the time to look back at the last 50 years of Chevrolet’s history.

His book, “Images of America: Chevrolet 1960-2012,” was just published by Arcadia Publishing and should be on the “Local Interest” shelves of area bookstores and businesses.

Davis is from Kentucky and attended Yale University. He worked as an auto reporter in the late 1950s and went to work for Ford for 25 years, starting in 1960.

During that time, he earned his masters in history from Eastern Michigan University and has written several books on the history of the auto industry.

His most recent work for Arcadia is actually part two. Part one dealt with the first 50 years of Chevrolet.

“I had written several histories for Arcadia,” Davis said. “Then in December of 2011, they asked me if I could write something about Chevrolet’s 100th anniversary.”

Davis said he’d be happy to, and after examining the sheer volume of material available at GM headquarters and in the Detroit Public Library’s Skillman branch in downtown Detroit, he went ahead with it.

He said that branch has a huge collection of documents pertaining to automotive history.

“That’s where the National Automotive History Collection is kept,” Davis said. “It’s just about the largest public data base on auto history in the world. It’s accessible to the public and is a



Davis illustrates history with a ‘67 staged publicity photo to show “monumental changes during the ‘60s.”

marvelous place to go and dig up information.

“So I grabbed my laptop and my portable scanner and started to work. I am also a trustee there, so I have some privileges as well.”

Davis also visited records kept at GM. At first, Arcadia said no to him writing two books, but, he said, on Feb. 1, 2012, they realized he was right and asked him to write two.

The first book dealt with Chevrolet’s early years, including the company’s growth from the lumber business in Flint. The second and most recent book is about the automaker’s history from 1960 to 2012.

The Arcadia history books make heavy use of photographs, Davis said.

So he spent a lot of time writing 50- to 70-word captions that explain the photos in the book

by putting them in historical context.

The problem with that method, Davis said, is that it’s difficult to develop themes and explore these issues in depth.

But difficult doesn’t mean impossible, Davis said. He was able to use the history of Chevrolet over the past 50 years to examine what happened in the auto industry as a whole.

For example, he said that the 1960s was an interesting decade that saw the beginning of trends that still affect the industry to this day.

Trucks, for example, accounted for about 15 percent of sales at the start of that decade. Their sales reached about 30 percent by the end of the 10-year period. Today, when you include SUVs, truck sales account for more than 50 percent.

Davis said the 1960s also saw

the proliferation of vehicle options. In the old days, he said, you bought a Model T. There were no options packages differentiating types of Model Ts.

That changed in the 1960s. Davis called it a marketing ploy that gave consumers options, but forced dealers to invest heavily in carrying large amounts of inventory.

The 1960s also saw the beginnings of different kinds of regulations.

First there was safety, then emissions, then bumpers, then fuel efficiency. That decade also saw the first stirrings of a strong import segment.

Davis said that the Chevrolet book is now on bookshelves. It can be found at the local book section of Barnes & Noble stores, and, he said, his history books are popular in hobby shops associated with the car industry.

Students Awarded In STEM Fields

The National Defense Industrial Association (NDIA) Michigan Chapter is now accepting applications for its 2013 science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) scholarship program.

The organization is awarding up to \$1,500 per recipient to high school and college students pursuing an education at a Michigan college in a STEM field.

According to David Rohall, NDIA Michigan Chapter director of STEM, and senior manager of business development, Lockheed Martin Missiles and Fire Control, the scholarship program is an integral part of supporting students continuing an education in STEM.

“Our chapter works to support and encourage students to pursue an education in the fields of science, technology, engineering and math,” said Rohall.

“Offering these awards supports a viable workforce in Michigan and we are very pleased to assist and further the education of these deserving students.”

Applicants must be U.S. citizens; have Michigan residency or an active-duty military parent serving in Michigan; current or planned enrollment in pursuit of a STEM-related bachelors or masters degree program; possess a minimum cumulative GPA of 2.75; demonstrate a growing interest in STEM; and be active within the school or local community.

The scholarship application and essay topics can be found at the NDIA Michigan chapter’s website www.ndia-mich.org.

Competitive students will be contacted in May 2013 to arrange a personal interview with scholarship panel members.

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