

## **July Car of the Month Foreword**

*The Car of the Month for July, 2015, is coming home for a visit after an absence of nearly 40 years. Thanks to the generosity of its current owners, David and Lorie Greenberg, the classic car will be displayed at the 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Rohr Car Show on September 19. Bill Rothermel's article, which follows, tells the story of this grand automobile, its history, and its connection to the Manassas community and the Bull Run Region. – Steve White*

### **1933 Chrysler Imperial CL Dual Windshield Phaeton By LeBaron By Bill Rothermel SAH**

Walter Percy Chrysler always seemed to be in the right place at the right time. His Chrysler Corporation, born in 1925, was flourishing. By 1929, Chrysler's expanded product line included Plymouth, Dodge, and DeSoto, encompassing the low- and mid-price ranges. His own name was reserved for the top-of-the-line, and, beginning in 1926, the Imperial moniker identified the finest in the Chrysler lineup.

Ego might have tempted Chrysler to join with other luxury car manufacturers in developing twelve- or sixteen-cylinder engines, but never did. Such extravagance, he thought, was unnecessary. But Chrysler did add a straight-eight engine to the lineup in 1931. Gearheads can identify this engine by its red cylinder head. It was not remarkable technically, but its large 384 cubic inch displacement helped provide first-rate performance. Chrysler's road handling was already esteemed and its ride qualities superb. But the big news from Chrysler in 1931 was the stunning drop-dead gorgeous looks of the new Imperial, which, of course, would be fitted with that big new engine.

Chrysler was duly impressed with the handsome lines of the Errett Loban Cord's front-wheel drive L-29 introduced in 1929, and Walter P. was not averse to borrowing styling cues. Like the L-29, the new Chrysler Imperial sported a ground-hugging profile, graceful curves, and deeply setback canted grille, but the overall effect was uniquely Chrysler. Chrysler knew a good thing and stuck with the classic styling theme through 1933.

All Imperials offered in 1931 boasted semi-custom coach work by LeBaron, including the phaeton, roadster, coupe, and convertible coupe styles; a total of 330 were produced. For 1932, the Imperial was divided into two series, the CH and the CL. Both carried the straight eight with the CH being mounted on a 135" wheelbase, while the CL continued on the long 145" version.

Most semi-custom bodies were again by LeBaron in 1932. The founders of LeBaron chose the name to evoke French style and prestige. Supporting the body was a new double-drop "girder truss" chassis with free-wheeling vacuum operated clutch, power assisted hydraulic brakes, and drop center wheels. Engineering, always a Chrysler hallmark, was highlighted by details such as "floating power" motor mounts, which deadened engine vibration. Ride quality is described as superb, both then and now.

Our Car of the Month is a dashing handsome 1933 Imperial with coachwork by LeBaron. It is one of only 36 5-passenger phaetons produced for 1933 and was Chrysler's most expensive car at \$3,395.00. It was delivered new to Louis Marx of the Marx Toy Company, a man of discriminating taste. It is now owned by David and Lorie Greenberg of Hewlett Harbor, New York, but the car has a fascinating local history.

Back in the 1940s, Edgar Rohr of Manassas purchased the car for \$125.00 exclusively for its tires. Rohr wanted the tires for his family business, but in fact never took them off the car. The Chrysler was put on blocks for a time, but Rohr finally chose to put the elegant car to use. Being a volunteer fireman, he painted it bright red with yellow stripes. Lore has it that many couples were chauffeured in it on their wedding day.

The Chrysler was well-known in Manassas until the late 1970s or early 1980s when Rohr sold it to raise capital for a garage to house his expanding collection. The lucky next owner was Duesenberg collector Rick Carroll of South Florida, who later sold it to David Huckins of New Hampshire. Huckins restored the car in the late 1980's. The Greenbergs obtained the car from the Huckins estate in January, 2014, and have been actively showing it throughout the United States, where it is a consistent award winner.

Honors include:

March 2014, Amelia Island Concours d'Elegance, Most Elegant Chrysler Award

May 2014, Greenwich Concours d'Elegance, Most Distinguished Pre-War Automobile Award

June 2014, The Elegance at Hershey, The High Society Award

September 2014, St. Michaels Concours d'Elegance, Most Elegant Open Car Award

February 2015, Boca Raton Concours d'Elegance, Excellence in Class Award

Doomed by the Great Depression, just 151 Imperials found buyers in 1933, the final year for this series from Chrysler. But the company had plans and was preparing for a modern replacement few knew about. That car was the radical Airflow, which debuted in 1934.

### **Afterword**

While Walter Chrysler was not lured into the V16 competition, one 1933 Chrysler Imperial was destined to be powered by a V16 engine. And here's the rest of that story.

Playboy industrialist, motorsports promoter, and race boat champion, Lou Fageol, of Oakland, CA, purchased a new Chrysler CL Custom Imperial Phaeton in 1933. After a year's experience towing his race boat, Fageol decided the car needed more oomph than the straight-eight's 135 horsepower provided. Money being no object to Fageol, he decided to replace the Chrysler engine with a 165 horsepower V16 salvaged from a 1930 Cadillac seven-passenger sedan. So, whatever happened to that unique hybrid car?

Laurence "The Baron" Dorcy, heir of Great Northern Railway founder, James Hill, was a well-known and fascinating collector, with homes in California and Maui. In 1973, he purchased the 1930 Duesenberg previously owned by my father. He kept that car for 31 years, restoring it twice. By 2004, his appetite for car trading was undiminished, but funds for high-dollar purchases were running low, proving there's no such thing as an unlimited budget. Something had to give. So, reluctantly, Dorcy donated the Duesy to the Smith Collection - Museum of

American Speed in Lincoln, NE, and reaped a sizeable tax write-off in return. His next conquest was now within reach.

While researching the Duesenberg story I was doing for Automobile Quarterly, I enjoyed speaking and exchanging correspondence with the fascinating Mr. Dorcy. When I asked what car could possibly be worth the sacrifice of the Duesy, he told me the story of the legendary Fageol Chrysler V16 and his lust for that car. What Dorcy didn't tell, but what I learned later, was that this would be the third time around for his ownership of the V16 Chrysler Imperial. And the third time was the charm. He kept and enjoyed the car right up until his death in 2011.

So, while Chrysler may not have made a V16, there was indeed a V16-powered Chrysler Imperial by LeBaron, albeit just one. Last I heard, that car was awaiting a new owner. Bull Run member and author, Christopher Cummings, book, "Cadillac V16s Lost and Found," includes a good account of the Fageol car. – Steve White