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Rolls Royce, Corvette, Kaiser Darrin, and Studebaker at the deVries Family Party

ALOHA REGION NEWS: On May 31st, the deVries family hosted an antique car party at their lovely home in Kailua. There were 16 fine antique cars displayed on their large lake-front lawn. This event was especially favored by sports cars owners, there were: three Morgans—including an early 1953 “Flat Radiator”, 1957 Fuel-Injected Corvette, 1954 Kaiser Darrin, 365 Porsche Coupe, 1956 T-Bird, MGB GT, & Mercedes SL. Everyone enjoyed excellent the food and wonderful car conversations.



'64 Morgan



Porsche 365



'53 Morgan



Mercedes SL

FEATURE STORY: 1954 KAISER DARRIN



When people in Hawaii think of “Kaiser”, most people think of the *Kaiser Permanente* health care system, or perhaps Henry J. Kaiser’s personal role in the creation of the Hawaii Kai community on east O’ahu in the 1950s. Students of American history will often find in their history books that Kaiser built ships during World War Two—nearly 1500 of them. And some more obscure Kaiser information includes his role in building the Hoover and Grand Coulee dams and many important road projects. Unfortunately, today few people know that there was a Kaiser Motors, which along with Frazer, actually built cars, hundreds of thousands of them, but only a mere 435 beautiful Kaiser Darrins.

Henry J. Kaiser would eventually build a personal business empire of more than 100 companies, but arguably his greatest “gift” was his organizational skills. He could create a new company out of nothing and quickly make it successful. By the early 1940s, after decades of doing the “impossible” in the business world, he began planning for a post-war car company. Kaiser knew that there would be great demand for new cars after the war, so he teamed up with Joseph W. Frazer, to form the Kaiser-Frazer Company in July 1945. Later that year, K-F leased the Ford Willow Run plant, near Detroit, Michigan, to build their new Kaiser and Frazer cars.

The Kaiser-Frazer Company got off to a good start in the post-war new car market with truly new cars, whereas the Big Three were selling mostly warmed-over 1942 models. Kaisers were innovative and sales were good in this “sellers-market”, but as the major car companies started coming out with new post-war models, the small independents like Kaiser could not keep up. Kaiser-Frazer’s peak year was 1948, when the company had 5.4% of the US new car market. Sales started to fall in 1949 and Kaiser considered liquidation, but he decided against it. Instead Kaiser decided to enter the “compact” car market in 1951 with the smaller *Henry J* model; over 80,000 were sold the first year, but overall Kaiser sales began to fall quickly in the next two years.

The story of the *Kaiser Darrin* is as fascinating as are the car’s many unique features (uniquely styled fiberglass body, Darrin’s patented sliding-doors, three-position convertible top, etc.). The story goes that Howard “Dutch” Darrin had designed some cars for K-F, but he had a difficult relationship because his designs were modified before production. Nevertheless, in 1952 Darrin decided to build a sports car himself based on the compact *Henry J* car in hopes that Kaiser would produce it. Legend has

it that when Kaiser saw the prototype he was not pleased, but his new, and much younger wife saw the car she simply *loved* it. Reportedly she proclaimed, “This is the most beautiful thing I have ever seen”—so Henry Kaiser reluctantly decided to produce it.

The Kaiser Darrin featured a 100 inch wheelbase, 161 cu in (2.6L) F-head six cylinder 90 bhp motor, and a three speed manual with overdrive transmission. The car’s best selling features were the beautiful Darrin-designed fiberglass bodies, sliding pocket doors and the three-position convertible top. Although in reality this stylish sporting car was based on the humble *Henry J* car, but the policy of creating sports cars out of economy car parts had never hurt MG and Triumph sports cars.

Unfortunately Kaiser’s timing could not have been worse: Chevrolet was about to bring the Corvette to market. From England there were boatloads of MG TFs, Triumph TR3s, Austin-Healey 100s, and Jaguar XK120s heading to America. And a few more exotic cars sports cars came from Germany with Porsche 365, Mercedes 190SL and the outstanding 300SL. From Italy there were Alfa Romeos, Maseratis, Ferraris and modified Fiats. Not to mention the truly limited production cars like the Nash Healey, Allard, Morgan, Singer, AC, Tablot-Lago, Aston Martin, Lancia, HRG, and many others. Today one can see that for a struggling car company like Kaiser, the idea of bringing a new, high-priced, and untested sport car to the market might be exciting, but it was a nearly impossible task.

Although the Kaiser Darrin was displayed at the 1953 New York Auto Show it was not available to the public until January 1954. By then many Kaiser dealers were closing down or selling other brands. In addition to the public’s lack of faith in the parent company, the car was priced at \$3,668, which was higher than many of its imported competition, and performance was not outstanding with only 90 bhp. The struggling Kaiser dealers were not interested in taking Kaiser Darrins, so many were left at the factory. While Kaiser hoped to sell a 1,000 a year, only 435 Kaiser Darrins were ever produced—and Dutch Darrin ended up with perhaps the last 50 cars: he added superchargers to some of them and six cars even received a Cadillac V-8 with 305 bhp!

Henry J Kaiser was a great problem-solver but some factors were simply beyond his control. Although we will never know what he would have done to improve the Kaiser Darrin, if the company was actually in good shape, it is reasonable to conclude that the car would have been refined and turned into a real contender. Today many people forget that in 1953 even General Motors had a hard time selling the first 300 Corvettes; only after the V8 was added in 1955 did the Corvette finally sell in profitable numbers.

The history of the automobile industry is littered with sad stories about interesting cars. Today the Kaiser Darrin is greatly admired for its beauty, innovation and rarity. It represents both the boundless hopes and dreams of the 1950s and the harsh realities of the super-competitive automobile industry. This year’s *Aloha Region* antique car display at the *First Hawaiian Auto Show* included the rare and beautiful Kaiser Darrin owned by new member Richard Johnson. He has owned the car for over fifty years and he regularly drives it around Waikiki. Kaiser Darrin ownership seems to run in the family, Richard’s son also owns a Kaiser Darrin.



The Kaiser Darrin’s patented sliding doors.

PERIOD ACCESSORIES: THE SPARTON CHIME-BUGLE HORN



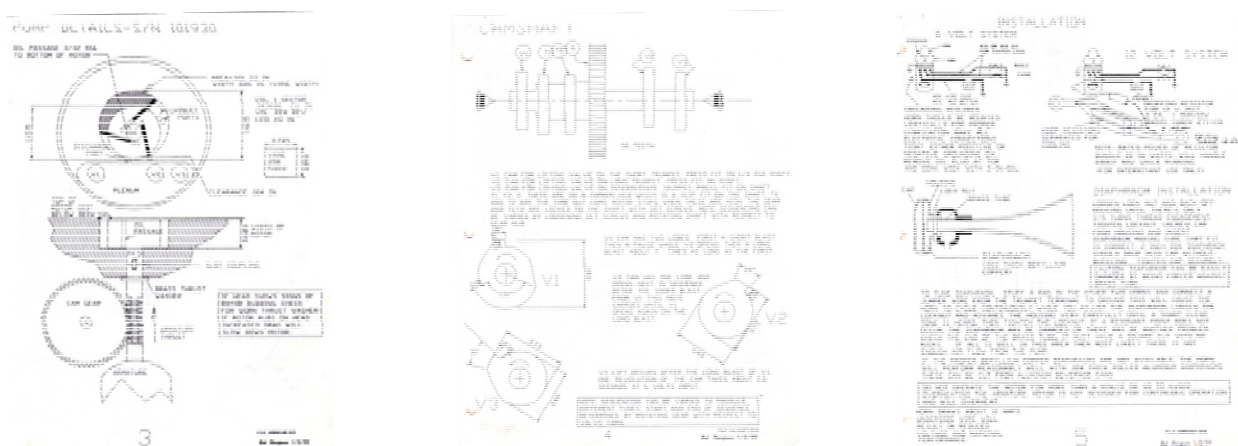
The *Sparton Chime-Bugle* horn on 1930 Cadillac 353 Town Sedan

After-market horns have been popular accessories from the early days of the automobile. Often for not much money an owner could upgrade to a larger or more impressive horn. One of the more amazing and expensive car horns was the *Sparton Chime-Bugle* horn. This accessory electric air horn was available from the late 1920s to the mid 1930s. The *Sparton Chime-Bugle* horn was manufactured by The Sparks-Withington Co. of Jackson, Michigan, USA. In 1929 the *Sparton Chime-Bugle* horn retailed for \$35.00, but five years later in 1934 the price was reduced to \$24.75—still a lot of money during the Depression years. The horn employed a 6 volt electric motor, a simple rotary air compressor and three vibrating reed horns. A complex cam and follower system controlled valves which determine which trumpet horn played and for how long. At the push of one of two buttons, either all three trumpets were played at one time (chime) or each trumpet played in sequence for simple four note tune (bugle). Three models of the Sparton air horns were available: either two, three, or four trumpets—the 4 trumpet horn could play the period-appropriate tune “How Dry I Am”.



Original Manual: *The Sparton Bugle Instructions and Service Reference*

In the late 1990s club member Bob Thompson undertook a detailed analysis of the inner workings of the *Sparton Chime-Bugle* horn. There were two local horns available for study, one owned by Arthur “Tuffy” Medeiros (#21929) and the other horn owned by Guy Slaughter (#101930). Tuffy’s horn appeared to be a little used unit and Guy’s horn was clearly well used and quite worn. Bob disassembled both horns and carefully measured all of the internal parts. He also diagrammed the electrical and mechanical components. He even tested how different weight oils affected the operation of the horn. Bob’s research led to an authoritative ten page research paper on the horn.



Three pages of Bob Thompson's detailed *Sparton Chime-Bugle* horn study

Several years ago Tuffy sold his *Sparton Chime-Bugle* horn to me for my Cadillac—it still looks good and works well! Accessory car horns were very popular and some people installed more than one accessory horn on their car. The late William Harrah, the owner of the once-massive car collection in Reno, Nevada, so loved accessory car horns that six months after he bought his first new car, a 1926 Chevrolet, he had installed eleven horns, “from simple ah-oog-ah to Sparton air horns that played tunes.” *Harrah's Automobile Collection* (1984). Do consider adding an accessory horn to your antique.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE: SHARE YOUR CAR!

Today one of the more common themes of the antique car hobby is that the members are “graying”. I regularly read articles about the aging demographics of the hobby from national AACA, Model A Ford Club, and the Classic Car Club of America. Apparently few younger people are joining our car clubs. If we want our cars to be preserved and loved in the future, it is essential that younger people discover the joys of the antique car hobby.

After many years of aging and declining membership, the *Aloha Region* has started to grow again, with new and often younger members. Although the majority of these new members have been over 50, there have been some new members in their 40s, 30s and even younger. Last year Edward DeVries joined the club after buying my 1950 Packard. At 17, Edward became the youngest member in the 36 year history of the *Aloha Region*.

But records are meant to be broken. At this year's *First Hawaiian Auto Show*, Marya and David Poore brought their son Van (9) to see our club display. The young Van Poore asked many excellent questions and demonstrated a deep interest and an impressive knowledge of antique cars. After an “inside tour” of our cars, his mother asked if Van could join our club—and at the age of 9, Van set a new record for the youngest member in *Aloha Region* history!

To have a future for our cars, hobby and club, we need younger people to take an interest in antique cars. Please drive your antique car. Take your antique car out to local car shows and Cruse Nights. Explain the history and technology of your car to friends and strangers. Take people, especially young

people, for a ride in your antique—they will *never* forget! The antique car hobby is infectious, and once someone personally experiences the thrill of antique cars, the future is secured. Share your car!



New Member!

Van Poore (9) at the deVries Party



A Future Member?

Chris Weisberger (6) going for a Model A ride

FUTURE CLUB MEETINGS

(IMPORTANT NOTE: **NO** August, October, or December Meetings.)

JULY MEETINGS:

Kailua 4th of July Parade. This is Hawaii's oldest and largest 4th of July parade. The *Aloha Region* has been invited to participate for the first time in decades. The parade officials have requested up to 10 antique cars. This is an excellent opportunity to *share* our historic cars with the community. The parade route is about 1 ½ miles and *slow*, so cool running cars do better. We will meet at Fred Weisberger's house, 90 Aikahi Loop, Kailua at between 8:00AM and 8:30AM and head to the staging location at approx. 8:45AM. A light breakfast will be served at Fred's house at 8:00AM. Unfortunately, we do not know the exact staging location until just before the parade, so please meet at Fred's house, and we will drive to the staging area together. Bring American flags, if you have some. If you are interested or have questions; please call Fred at 254-0392.

Saturday, July 19th (10:00AM-12:00pm) at Bob DeBone's Peerless Pod in Kailua. Bob's has completed the frame-up restoration of his 1932 Peerless and the car is running, safety checked, and licensed!!! Bob and family will host a meeting at "Bob's Pod". The DeBone family will provide food. Bob's Pod is located behind the Shell station in the center of Kailua. Sadly there is extremely limited on-site parking for antique cars—park modern cars on the street or the pay for parking in the structure behind the shop. Now that the car is restored, this is likely the last meeting at Bob's Pod. If you have any questions, please call Bob at 261-7518.

SEPTEMBER MEETING:

Saturday, September 20th. Roy King will host a meeting at his home at **619 Onaha St., Kahala**. See Roy's newly "re-commissioned" 1929 Model A Phaeton. There will be plenty of parking for antique cars. Food will be provided and there may be a tour/rally of antique cars around the beautiful Kahala area. This is a new location for a club meeting, so be sure to attend, and bring your antique car! Questions: call Roy at 737-1991.



More deVries' May Aloha Region Party Pictures

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IF YOU HAVE NOT ALREADY DONE IT--PLEASE RENEW YOUR 2014 ALOHA REGION MEMBERSHIP

-----Cut & Mail-----

2014 ALOHA REGION, AACA MEMBERSHIP

Name _____ Spouse _____

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Mail this form and \$10.00 to "Aloha Region, 94-1142 Manino Place, Waipahu, HI 96797-4021" (Please make checks out to "Aloha Region")

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