

GOLD RECENTLY DISCOVERED IN MICHIGAN!

By Lynn Kissel, Ronald L. Hausmann and Ken MacKinnon Jr.

Of the fewer than forty cars known to still exist, no less than ten Kissel Speedsters gathered at Greenfield Village, Michigan, on September 11-12, 2010. Popularly known as *Gold Bugs*, this was the largest gathering of these rare and unique cars since the 1920s, an event that likely will not be repeated in our lifetimes or perhaps ever again.

Our historic gathering grew from the plans of Michigan residents Ronald Hausmann and Ken MacKinnon, Jr., to participate with their Gold Bugs at the 2010 Old Car Festival. Ron took the lead in organizing our meeting and contacted other Speedster owners around the world. While several additional cars and owners had hoped to participate, the following ten cars were proudly exhibited at the show.

- 1920 Model 6-45 owned by Hyman Ltd. Classic Cars, St. Louis, Missouri¹
- 1921 Model 6-45 owned by Peter Heller, Chagrin Falls, Ohio
- 1923 Model 6-45 owned by Ronald Hausmann, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan
- 1923 Model 6-55 owned by Albert Nippert, Schohaire, New York
- 1924 Model 6-55 owned by Lynn Kissel, Livermore, California
- 1925 Model 6-55 owned by DeWayne Ashmead, Fruit Heights, Utah
- 1925 Model 8-75 owned by John Quam, Montara, California
- 1925 Model 8-75 owned by Ted Stahl, Gross Pointe Woods, Michigan (represented at the show by Bill Sherwood, curator at the Stahl Automotive Foundation)
- 1927 Model 8-75 owned by Ken MacKinnon, Jr., Freeland, Michigan
- 1927 Model 8-65 owned by Mark Thomas, Birmingham, Michigan

Held on the grounds of the Henry Ford museum, Greenfield Village, Michigan, the Old Car Festival is annually filled with the sights, sounds and smells of hundreds of authentic vehicles from the 1890s through 1932. Billed as America's longest-running antique car show, this year the festival celebrated its 60th anniversary with 620 vehicles (520 cars plus 100 trucks) being displayed. The Kissel Speedster owners were honored by the event organizers with preferred parking beside the Town Hall, adjoining the Village Green.

¹ We'd like to extend a special thanks to Mark Hyman for making this car available for display.

The show started strong on Saturday, but the crowds thinned when a gentle but steady rain settled over the village later in the afternoon. It was hard to dampen spirits on Sunday as the Kissel Speedster owners moved to the Village Green for a group photo. Their efforts were further rewarded when Al Nippert, Lynn Kissel and Ron Hausmann were awarded 1st, 2nd and 3rd place awards, respectively, in the 1919-1924 class, and DeWayne Ashmead was awarded a 1st place in the 1925-1929 class. Entrants were evaluated in five-year bins across all the vehicles being judged at the show.

The following paragraphs provide some historical perspective on our historic gathering.

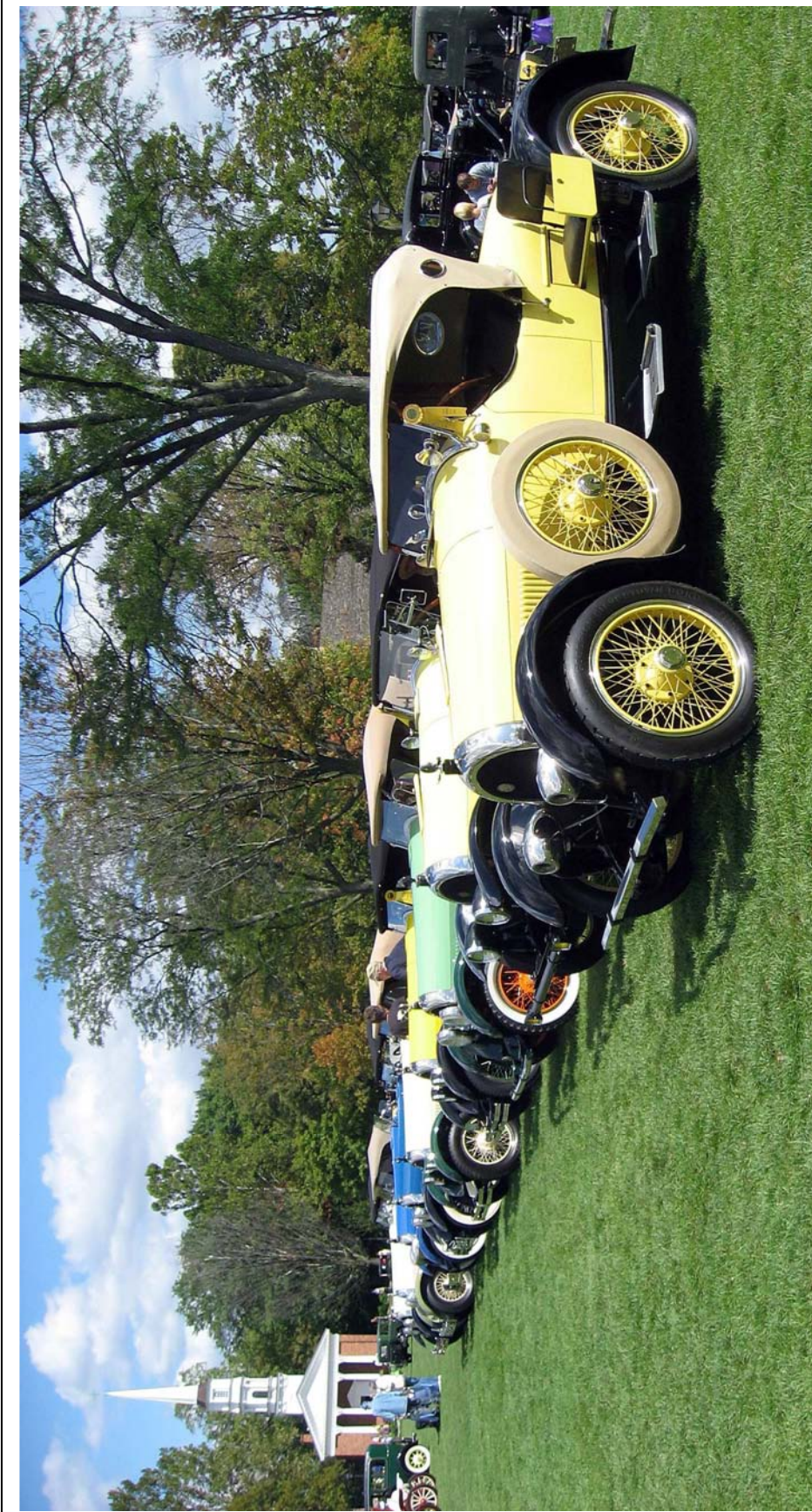
The most famous Kissel model is undoubtedly the Speedster, a sporty roadster featuring “racer cut” sides and a bumble-bee or turtle-back rear deck. This car was the result of Kissel’s engineering and interpretation of a design suggested by C. T. Silver.

Conover T. Silver was a New York City auto dealer with a flair for style. In 1914 he rebodied a Willys Knight which later became a production model called the Silver Knight. In 1917 he took a new design to Kissel that was introduced in 1918 as the Silver Special series. Kissel produced three models bearing Silver’s name and styling, a Speedster, a Tourster and a seven-passenger Touring car. Styling elements of the Silver Specials were a new “Fiat type” radiator, low-placed headlights, a hood line that ran straight to the base of the windshield and close-fit bicycle-style fenders. Making a big splash at the New York auto show, the designs were a great success and Silver’s styling touches would influence Kissel vehicles through the 1920s.

Gold Bug is a popular name coined in 1919 for the Kissel Speedster, a production model that was manufactured for model years 1918-1931. William W. “Brownie” Rowland, an automotive writer for the *Milwaukee Journal*, devised a promotion that featured the car. Driving a chrome-yellow Kissel Speedster around Wisconsin for a month, he sought to call attention for the need to improve the poor roads, inviting his readers to name the car he used. A young girl allegedly coined the name *Gold Bug* referring to the car’s color and shape. The Kissel Motor Car Company never used this name as an official designation for the car, but the moniker has stuck in the imagination of the motoring public and is associated with the car to this day.

Popular with movie stars and other celebrities, the earliest Speedsters had pull-out seats built into the body in front of the rear fenders. Later models replaced these outrigger seats with fittings to strap a golf bag to each rear fender. Starting in 1925, four-passenger Speedster models were offered with a rumble seat in place of the storage compartment in the rear deck.

Famous Kissel Speedsters owners included Fatty Arbuckle (comedian), Bebe Daniels (actress), Ralph DePalma (racecar champion), Eddie Duchin (band leader), Amelia Earhart (aviator), Douglas Fairbanks (actor), Greta Garbo (actress), Gladys George (actress), Ruby Keeler (actress), William S. Hart (actor), Al Jolson (singer), Mabel Normand (actress), Mary Pickford (actress) and Rudy Vallee (singer). Amelia Earhart’s car is part of the collection at the Forney Museum of Transportation in Denver, Colorado. In 1925, Amelia drove from San Francisco to Boston with her mother in her Speedster which she called the “Yellow Peril.” Fatty Arbuckle’s car is currently being restored in Virginia.



Kissel Speedsters on the Village Green at the Old Car Festival, September 12, 2010.



Kissel owners (left to right): Ken MacKinnon, Jr., Bill Sherwood (representing Ted Stahl), John Quam, Mark Thomas, Lynn Kissel, Ronald Hausmann, Albert Nippert, DeWayne Ashmead and Peter Heller.



A little rain is not enough to dampen John Quam's spirit.



Two custom pedal cars on display, fashioned as miniature replicas of their full-sized Kissel companions.



Lynn Kissel in his 1924 Speedster that he calls *Bugsby*.



Ronand Hausmann proudly stands next to his 1923 Kissel Speedster.



Ken MacKinnon, Jr., drives his 1927 Kissel Speedster on the streets of Greenfield Village.