



*Bay Area
Horseless Carriage Club*



ANNIE
LYNN AND JEANNE KISSEL'S 1914 KISSELKAR

What's a Kissel?

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I like driving my old cars around the Livermore Valley. I like the looks, the finger pointing and the thumbs up (at least I think they're thumbs) that I get from people I meet. But I don't have a good answer yet to the number one question that I'm always asked; "What is it?"¹

"It's a Kissel," I answer. Yet I know that nine out of ten people have no idea what I'm talking about and my answer doesn't really scratch their itch. In fact, it's hard to shout the name "Kissel" across two lanes of traffic or a parking lot and be clearly understood. When I'm faced with a puzzled stare signaling their state of mild confusion, I typically follow my answer with a question of my own, "What's a Kissel?" I anticipate that this is the next question they have but are afraid to ask.

Part of a wave of German immigrants that came to the US starting in 1848, Conrad Kissel (b.1812, d. 1872) and family emigrated from Alsace to Addison Township in Washington County, Wisconsin, in 1857. His son, Ludwig "Louis" Kissel, moved to Hartford, Wisconsin, in 1883 where he owned a hardware store and farm implement business.

In 1890, Louis created a partnership with his four sons and subsequently purchased the Hartford Plow Works, with four large buildings involved with the manufacturing and distributing of farm machinery. In addition to distributing engines from other manufacturers, the Kissels developed their own gasoline engine. By 1906, the Kissel family was also involved in home building and sales, with a stone quarry and sand pit and facilities for milling their own finished lumber.

In 1906, Louis with his sons George and William incorporated the Kissel Motor Car Company. Over a twenty-five year period, this company would hand build about 26,000 cars, trucks, hearses, ambulances, taxi cabs and a number of other vehicles. Kissels were well build vehicles that employed advanced engineering for the time.

My great-great-grandfather Joseph Henry Kissel (b. 1822, d. 1892) emigrated from Alsace to Western New York State in 1850, seven years

¹ I have a better answer to the question "What do you do?" My standard response is "Eat pizza and drink beer."



Photo 1. Kissel hardware store c1890. From the left: William Kissel, Wilber Myear, Adolph Kissel, Louis Holce, Otto Kissel, George Kissel, Peter Melius. In about sixteen years, William and George will form the Kissel Motor Car Company with their father, Louis.

before the Hartford Kissels. A modern Alsatian phone book lists eight families with the Kissel surname, making me think it likely that I'm a distant relative with the people who built the car.²

With a last name of *Kissel*, how could I *not* want to own one? On the down side, only about 150 complete Kissels are currently known to exist, making it more difficult to find parts and information on this relatively rare make of automobile. My life might have been a whole lot simpler had I been born a *Ford*.

For those of you that participated in the 2009 Old California Tour, September 9-12 out of Scotts Valley, California, you may have already met **Annie**. She is the latest car to be added to our small family. *Annie* is a 1914 KisselKar Model 40 (four cylinder) 5-passenger touring car. She is one of three surviving 4-40s of the fewer than three hundred that were originally built by Kissel in 1914.

I say that if you were on the tour you *may* have met *Annie* as I broke several teeth on the ring gear in the differential after the first afternoon of touring. *Annie* spent the final three days of the tour in the hotel parking lot.³

² On the other hand, if we go back far enough, *you* and I are related, too.

³ The best place to break an antique car is in your garage; the second best place is in the hotel parking lot. I broke the gears while out for gas, a few blocks from the hotel. Although she

1914 KisselKar Model 40 Selected Specifications

Wheelbase	121"
Weight	3880 lb
Engine, cylinders cast in pairs	4 cyl, 40 bhp
4 ½" x 5 ¼" (B x S)	334 cid (5.47 l)
Lunkenheimer air-pump-pressured fuel system	
Bosch DU-4 duplex magneto & coil	
Esterline E-6 6V generator, Dual 6V storage batteries, 12V starter, 6V lights	
Cone clutch; Final drive ratio	4.58:1
Transmission, sliding gear with overdrive	
1st	3.22:1 R 4.30:1
2nd	1.75:1
3rd	1:1
4th	0.85:1
Wheels	25" with demountable rims
Tires	35"x5"
Brakes	2 wheel mechanical, 14"x5"
Cost new	\$1850
1914 production 896 (all models), less than 300 Model 40s produced	

We acquired this car from the estate of the late Ann Klein, founder of Universal Vintage Tire and a well loved member of the antique Bentley community. James Henry Fisher acquired this KisselKar in 1949 from John Julien for his daughter (born Elizabeth Ann Fisher on May 20, 1931 in Lancaster, Pennsylvania).

Ann rebuilt the engine on the KisselKar herself and got a husband in the bargain. Phil Brooks tells me this story about how Ann and Bill Klein met; he says he's heard Ann tell it several times. Apparently Bill had heard about the KisselKar that Ann was rebuilding and wanted to meet her and see the car.

Ann was working underneath [the KisselKar] when Bill came up, saw the feet sticking out from underneath, so he calls out "Say, do you know what you're doing under there?" Ann slithers out from under the car, looks up and says, "I certainly do!" It was essentially love at first sight between Bill and Ann

The KisselKar was stored at Klein Kars from before 1977 until after her death in 2007. Note the KisselKar-like spelling of the company name, a subsidiary of Universal Vintage Tire that Ann

started in Lancaster in 1968. We've named the car *Annie* in Ann Klein's honor.

We acquired *Annie* in October 2008 and had the car delivered for display to the Wisconsin Automotive Museum in Hartford, Wisconsin. In June 2009 I exhibited the car at the KisselKar Club meeting in Hartford then trailered her to our home in California.

In July 2009 we exhibited *Annie* at the inaugural San Francisco Concours d'Elegance in the Presidio. We were pleased to be awarded a 2nd place in the preservation class.

In August 2009 we participated with *Annie* in the Heart of the Redwoods Nickel Era Tour out of Fortuna, California. To my delight she completed all four days of the tour. However there is more than one picture of silver-haired men pushing *Annie* to get her started.

Later in August 2009 we exhibited the car at the Great Gatsby Festival and Tea at the Tallac Historic Site, South Lake Tahoe, California. The Dodge Brothers and Sisters (car club), which organized the antique car displays at the festival, placed *Annie* in a place of honor in front of the Pope estate. Inside the Pope house, actors and volunteers in 1920's attire give tours and reenactments of life within a wealthy family of the era at their lake retreat.

I've mentioned our misadventure in September 2009 on the Old California Tour. The car is currently off the road awaiting repairs. I've ordered a new ring and pinion gear and expect that *Annie* will be ready in time for the 2010 show and touring season.

If you are interested, you can read more about *Annie* on our website at <http://starship.org>; start with *Annie | About*.

I look forward to seeing many of you on the 2010 Spring Tour, May 26-29, out of Soledad, California. On this tour, let's see if I can get *Annie* out of the parking without breaking anything important!

protested, I was able to nurse *Annie* back to the hotel without special assistance.