

# The NORCAL CLASSIC OVERVIEW



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**1924 Kissel 6-55 "Gold Bug" Speedster**  
Owned by Lynn & Jeanne Kissel

Bugsby, the name given by Lynn and Jeanne Kissel to their 1924 Kissel Speedster, is captured in the rain on Sep. 11, 2010, in Greenfield Village, Michigan. (Lynn Kissel)

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## 1924 Kissel 6-55 "Gold Bug" Speedster

Owned by Lynn & Jeanne Kissel

Story by Lynn Kissel

I am likely late to the old car hobby, at least compared to many of you that are reading this note. I repaired my first manual transmission at age 15, raced my 1967 Chevy at the local drag strip while in high school, worked as a auto mechanic during undergraduate physics studies and raced my MINI Cooper on road tracks later in life, but my interest in older cars started rather casually in the late 1990s. That's when we acquired *Moleka*, a silver 1979 Mercedes 450SL. The car is named after *Silver Moleka*, a Polish Arabian horse we once fondly owned.

While I had vaguely heard that there was a Kissel car, this was the extent of my knowledge for most of my life. For my 55<sup>th</sup> birthday, my son Andrew gave me a framed 1920 *Saturday Evening Post* magazine page containing a full-page Kissel advertisement. Hung on my office wall, I was daily reminded of Kissel cars. Becoming curious, I started doing some research. It didn't take me long to "discover" the Kissel "Gold Bug" Speedster; really sparking my interest to own one!

The Kissel Motor Car Company was founded by Louis Kissel with his four sons in 1906 in Hartford, Wisconsin. Over a twenty-five year period, the company would hand build about 26,000 cars, trucks, hearses, ambulances, taxi cabs and other vehicles. Kissels were well built vehicles that employed advanced engineering. Until 1918, the styling of Kissels could be best described as solid.

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. In 1919, the Speedster was informally dubbed the "Gold Bug" in a contest run by a Milwaukee newspaper.

Styling elements of the Kissel 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. The Speedster featured a turtle-back rear deck



*When he was new, this image of Bugsby was captured in 1925 at Fairy Bower, Gracemere, a popular picnic location outside of Rockhampton, Australia. A large folding flap on the back of the top has been opened for increased ventilation on a warm summer day.*  
(John Lewis)

and low racer-cut sides and made a big splash at the New York auto show. The designs were a great success and Silver's touches would influence Kissel vehicles through most of the 1920s.

I really became excited about the possibility of owning a Kissel Speedster, but was quickly discouraged when I found an example for sale in St. Louis that sported a six-figure asking price. I was so interested in acquiring one that I sought out co-workers that had family in Wisconsin, asking if any had an old Kissel stored in a barn.

The big break came early one morning in April, 2005, when I discovered not one, but two Kissels for sale on the internet! A small

detail was that one resided in Oslo, Norway, and the other in Sydney, Australia. I had not known earlier, but I do now, that Kissels were exported to customers around the world.

Making a long story short, after contacting both owners and some negotiations, we acquired the 1924 Australian Kissel that we call *Bugsby*. For us, the name conjures images of an old-money playboy with a feel of F. Scott Fitzgerald's novel *The Great Gatsby*. If you're interested in more details on our acquisition saga, you can read about it and many of our other adventures with *Bugsby* on our website at <http://starship.org>; look under *Bugsby* | Adventures | 2005 | Acquisition.



*At his low point, Bugsby as found by Bob Schutt on a Jambin farm, west of Rockhampton in 1962. During the 1940s, the rear deck had been cut off and the car was pressed into service as a ute (Australian for utility vehicle).*  
(John Lewis)

John Lewis, a fellow Kissel owner who lives in Brisbane, wrote a 60-page history entitled *Kissel Cars Down Under* for the 100-year anniversary of the Kissel Motor Car Company. I learned from this that *Bugsby* is the oldest of twelve Kissels that were exported to Australia and New Zealand, that he was originally sold to Fred Shuffener (owner of a saw mill and joinery in Rockhampton) and that the car was restored in 1965 by Ron Griffiths in Brisbane. We bought the car in 2005 from Bill Trollope in Sydney, who had owned it since 1976.

We started a body-off-frame "serious freshening" of the car in 2006 that we completed in 2010. We were proud to exhibit *Bugsby* at

the 2010 Pebble Beach Concours d'Elegance. I frequently drive *Bugsby* around the Livermore valley, often stopping at the Niles Canyon Railroad station in Sunol after cruising the Livermore and Pleasanton downtowns.

## 1924 Kissel 6-55 "Gold Bug" Speedster

Owned by Lynn & Jeanne Kissel

Story by Lynn Kissel

### 1924 Kissel 6-55 Speedster

Engine ..... Kissel 265-cid 6-cyl L head  
61 hp @ 2300 rpm, 4.6:1 compression  
3 <sup>5</sup>/<sub>16</sub>" x 5 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub>" (bore x stroke)  
Stromberg OS-2 carburetor  
Stewart vacuum fuel system  
Remy ignition, generator and starter

Drive train ..... Warner 3-sp transmission  
Borg & Beck 10" dry clutch  
Timken rear axle, final ratio 4.42:1  
Tires 5.50-20, Buffalo 20" wire wheels  
Top speed of 75 mph, 17 mpg

Weight, Wheelbase ..... 3130 lb, 121"

Kissel 1924 production ..... 803 (all models)  
748 cars (155 Speedsters), 55 trucks  
Existing today: 6 cars (3 Speedsters)

1924 first year four-wheel hydraulic brakes

Famous Kissel Speedster owners:.....  
Fatty Arbuckle, Ralph DePalma,  
Eddie Duchin, Amelia Earhart,  
Douglas Fairbanks, Greta Garbo,  
William S. Hart, Al Jolson, Rudy Vallee

Cost new.....\$2185 f.o.b. Hartford, Wis.



*Bugsby crossing the Rocky Creek Bridge on Highway 1 during the 2010 Pebble Beach Tour d'Elegance. (Steve Sweetman)*



*The back of his green leather seat is reflected in Bugsby's polished metal instrument panel. Shown (left-to-right) are oil pressure gauge, fuse box, ignition/light switch, ammeter and speedometer/odometer. Not shown is the 8-day black-face Waltham car clock located off of the left side of the photo. One of the three fuses housed under the fuse-box cover is a spare. The red tag on the keychain reminds Lynn to shut off the fuel when he's done motoring. (Lynn Kissel)*

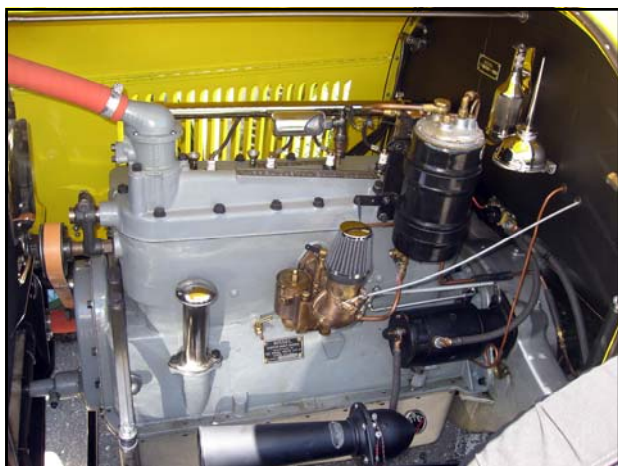


*A view of Bugsby's interior shows the intimate seating for two. Flaps cover small storage compartments in each door and there is room under the seat for papers and some tools. (Lynn Kissel)*

## 1924 Kissel 6-55 "Gold Bug" Speedster

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*The left side of the engine, showing the Stromberg OS-2 carburetor, Stewart vacuum fuel pump, Remy electric starter and Sparton SOS-A horn. Mounted to the firewall are an Alemite grease gun and oil can. Originally equipped with no air cleaner, Lynn has added a small one for touring. He has also replaced one of the primer cups with an explosion whistle, a popular period novelty. The fuel shut-off valve is at the base of the fuel pump. (Lynn Kissel)*



*The right side of the engine. Under the cover on the lower right, gears drive the cam shaft and the exposed auxiliary shaft with centrifugal water pump, Remy generator and Remy distributor. Linkage from the base of the steering box on the lower left, control the throttle and spark advance. The center two cylinders share the center port on the exhaust manifold, as witnessed by discolored engine paint indicating the extra heat load. (Lynn Kissel)*



*Bugsby (fourth from the right) joins nine of his brothers and sisters for an historic gathering of Kissel Speedsters at the Old Car Festival on Sep. 12, 2010. This swarm of Gold Bugs represents nearly 1/3 of the known surviving cars. (Lynn Kissel)*