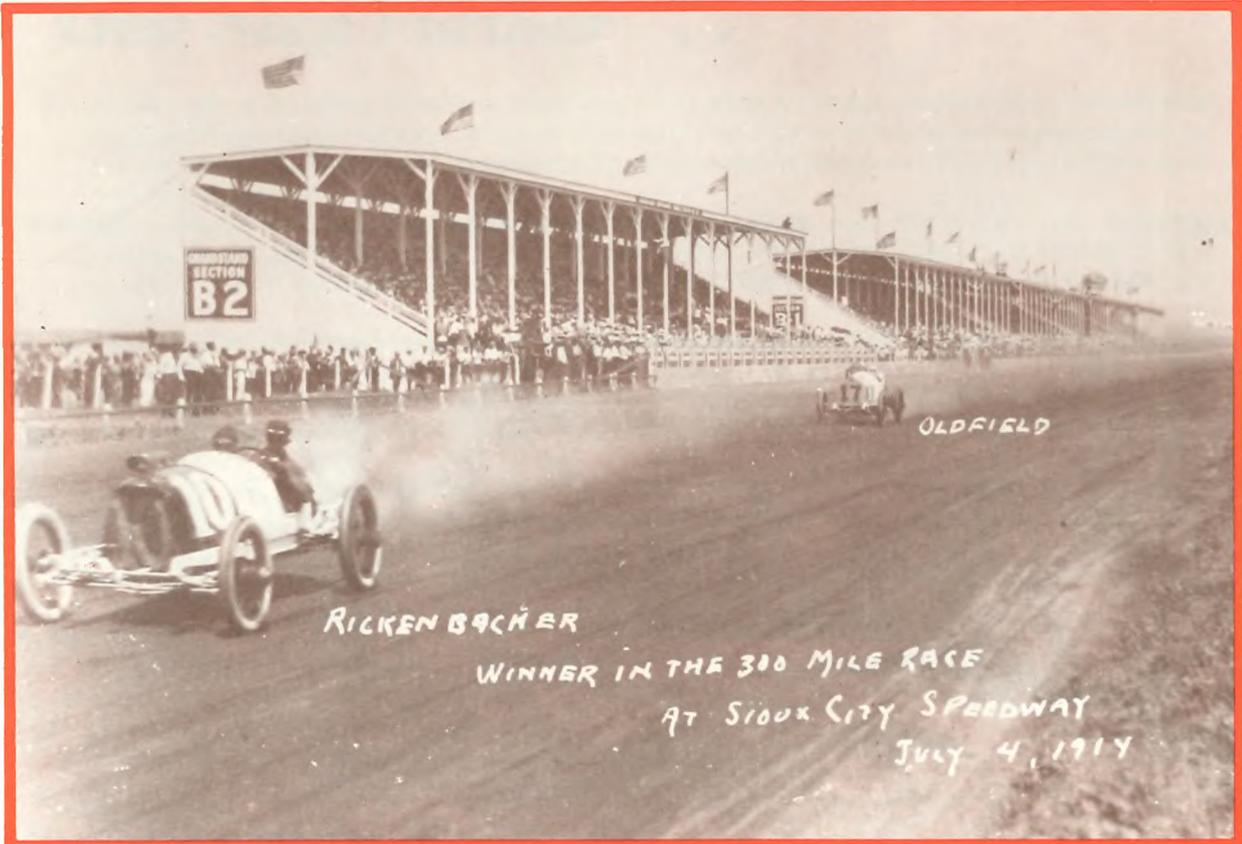


The Way to Go

courtesy of Woodward Photo Service, Sioux City.



Eddie Rickenbacker roars down the track in a car built by Fred and Augie Duesenberg of Des Moines. Just as people had enjoyed fast race horses, they also enjoyed fast racing cars. Before this race at Sioux City, the Duesenbergs had entered the Indianapolis 500 in 1913 and 1914, and their car came in tenth both times. Then on July 4, 1914, with the famous Eddie Rickenbacker at the wheel, a Duesenberg car won first place on the new Sioux City dirt track. His average speed was 78.8 miles per hour. Duesenberg cars continued to break records throughout the 1920s.

Today we take automobiles for granted. They are everywhere. Most families own a car. Buses, too, provide motorized transportation in cities as well as for cross-country travel. Trucks deliver goods all over the country. We would not know how to get along without these forms of transportation.

Back in 1900 horses provided power for most travel. People usually thought in terms of ten-mile trips. If they wanted to go farther, they planned to take a train. Railroad depots were usually no more than ten miles from where a person lived. Trains came and went often. For example, in the town of Jefferson

there were seven westbound and six eastbound trains daily.

But trains had their limitations. Railroad transportation began and ended at the depot. For trips between town and farm, for emergencies, or for pleasure riding, people used a buggy or a wagon, pulled by a horse.

Then came the automobile. It solved the problem of slow, short-range transportation, and it bridged the gap between the railroad station and a traveler's final destination.

The first motorcars appeared around 1900. At first, people did not think of them as something useful; they were more like toys. Early cars were also **expensive**

and undependable. They always seemed to be breaking down, and tires went flat as often as once or twice a day on an all-day trip!

But automakers worked to improve their machines and lower the cost. By 1908, Henry Ford had brought out his Model T. It was **inexpensive**, reliable, and built to run well on country roads and in small towns. It was simple to take care of, and the cost was low enough so that many people could buy it. The speed at which people traveled

expensive adj. — high priced.
inexpensive adj. — not high priced.

in a Model T (20 miles per hour) greatly reduced the time it took to get from one place to another. It wasn't long before several motor car companies were producing inexpensive vehicles. Soon the whole country was on wheels, driving toward many changes in their daily lives.

The owners of these more dependable, low-cost autos still faced a few problems. In the winter, water in the radiator expanded as it froze, popped the metal seams, and leaked out. To prevent this, some drivers just drained the radiator, put the car up on jacks, and stored it for the winter season. Some kept the car in use by filling the radiator with hot water in order to get it going. Horse blankets covered the motor and radiator to keep it warm while the occupants conducted their business or visited with friends.

Springtime brought different problems for motorists. Roads turned to **quagmires** as they thawed. Sometimes, people laid boards over the muddy stretches and the drivers who could keep all four wheels on the planks continued on their way. Those who bogged down in the mud would seek help at the nearest farmhouse. With a team of horses, the car could be pulled out of the **mire**. Some farm people charged for the service, others had no fee.

Learning to drive and care for a car was simple. It took only a knowledge of basic mechanics to fix something if a gasoline-powered engine should happen to stop. Farmers had an advantage in that they were

quagmire *n.* — soft, sticky mud.

mire *n.* — soft or deep mud. *v.* — to sink or stick in mud.



During the early days of automobile use, cars broke down often. It was common to see people stopped at the side of the road, fixing the car. This Ford belonged to a family in Casey, Iowa.

already **experienced** with gasoline engines because they had used power on their farm machinery. Boys and girls who grew up when those first autos came into use learned to drive at an early age. Some were only eleven or twelve years old. There was less concern about serious accidents then, because cars did not go very fast and there were so few of them on the road.

As people used automobiles for transportation, their way of life began to change. They traveled longer distances and took more trips than in the past. Social life began to include many more activities. Shopping habits changed. Education and health care improved.

Good roads or bad, lowans took to the highway, venturing far from home in their automobiles. One family traveled to see relatives in New Hampshire, another went to visit a brother in South Dakota. Carloads of summer vacationers headed for

experienced *adj.* — having knowledge or skill gained from doing or seeing things.

Lake Okoboji and even to the Rocky Mountains of Colorado, camping along the way and cooking their meals by the roadside. Most people had lived their whole lives within a few square miles, **acquainted** only with a few neighbors and those in the nearby town. These same people could now travel to visit faraway relatives. They could also travel to other areas of the country to see firsthand how others lived.

The choices seemed to end only at the ocean's shore. By the 1920s motor outings and vacations had become a national activity, and lowans jumped into their autos right along with the other travelers.

Weekends became a time for travel as well. People began to look forward to Sunday drives into the country for sightseeing or picnics. People who before had lived too far away could now enjoy an afternoon of baseball, and hometown games attracted larger crowds. Saturday night

acquainted *adj.* — having knowledge of something.

became shopping and fun night, especially for farm families. People drove to town, listened to the band, met their friends, shopped (some stores stayed open til midnight), and saw the latest movie.

Iowans had lived **isolated** from one another on farms or in small towns. Now they could easily meet to exchange ideas. Often they met to learn something new, or to solve a problem of a neighborhood, the town, or the school. Automobiles provided an important chance for women to leave their homes for a few hours and still get their daily housework finished. For women who worked outside the home, automobiles provided a wider choice of places to live. No longer did the rural schoolteacher have to **board** with a family near the school — she could live in a nearby town and drive to work.

Before automobiles appeared, Iowans planned a few major shopping trips a year. Usually, they traveled to a city to stock up

isolate v. — to set apart or away from others.

board v. — paying to eat and live in a house.

on things they needed. The rest of the time people shopped by mail or in the nearest small town. With a car, shoppers could choose to shop in one of several towns, not just the nearest one. Once, it had taken all day to travel ten miles, shop, and return. With a car, a person could travel sixty miles in the same amount of time. Because shopping habits changed, long established stores in smaller towns lost business as people chose to drive on to a city to trade. But while some businesses disappeared, new ones were established to meet the new needs of motorists.

Even the way people shopped for groceries changed. Most grocery stores ran a free delivery service for town customers at the time automobiles began to appear on the streets. A note with an errand runner or a phone call placed the order. The store clerk selected the items and the groceries were delivered to the house. With an automobile, a housewife could drive to the store herself and choose the items she wanted. Brand name products had just begun to be advertised, and they competed

with other goods in price. Now the housewife could compare prices and quality and make her own selections. Soon, merchants began to advertise specials to attract the shopper on wheels. And although families might continue to shop at their favorite store, they could be lured by a special, and become introduced to another grocery store.

The grocery store as we know it today could not have developed without the car. After the 1920s the number of small grocery stores became less as a few larger stores attracted more and more of the business. Most stores stopped their regular delivery service by the early 1940s when World War II gasoline **rationing** forced a cutback in motor vehicle use. Grocery stores also continued to develop toward one-stop shopping centers by adding meat counters, dairy cases, and even over-the-counter drugs.

As people traded in their horses for cars, **livery stables** and blacksmith shops went out

rationing n. — the allotment or share of a supply; as in gasoline rationing.

livery stable n. — place where horses are boarded and where horses and carriages may be hired; sometimes called *the livery*.



In the 1940s this mobile library brought books to the town of Fertile, where there was no library.

of business. In some cases, livery stable owners wisely switched to automobile repair and service. Automobile garages and gasoline service stations soon replaced the livery stables and the blacksmith shops. Iowa's carriage manufacturers also felt the effect of automobile use. They either went out of business or changed to the manufacture of automobiles.

Because it was possible to travel a long distance in a short time, education improved, especially for students living in rural areas. For many years children attended country schools within walking distance of their farms. These schools, however, only went through the eighth grade. High schools were most often located in towns, and the chances of attending them



Before Rural Free Delivery (RFD), people on farms had to pick up their mail at a post office in town. This usually meant the family waited for mail until someone went to town for some other errand. RFD brought daily mail delivery to farm dwellers. Automobiles replaced the horse and buggy on RFD routes, making it possible to increase the distance covered from eleven to forty-four miles.

Automobiles Registered in Iowa, 1901-1979

1901	60	1928	673,532	1955	970,890
1902	80	1929	716,062	1956	974,814
1903	100	1930	707,399	1957	989,790
1904	150	1931	670,972	1958	1,006,986
1905	730	1932	608,976	1959	1,049,392
1906	900	1933	563,807	1960	1,072,453
1907	1,790	1934	592,158	1961	1,088,954
1908	2,970	1935	619,522	1962	1,127,335
1909	5,200	1936	645,596	1963	1,152,577
1910	9,930	1937	659,174	1964	1,192,788
1911	28,980	1938	652,018	1965	1,238,714
1912	44,990	1939	673,162	1966	1,278,179
1913	72,480	1940	692,493	1967	1,299,538
1914	103,087	1941	717,321	1968	1,335,317
1915	140,109	1942	658,422	1969	1,367,233
1916	191,587	1943	615,437	1970	1,387,707
1917	244,962	1944	597,757	1971	1,423,455
1918	262,313	1945	590,650	1972	1,449,638
1919	340,243	1946	624,759	1973	1,480,929
1920	407,578	1947	679,306	1974	1,506,124
1921	430,678	1948	736,046	1975	1,542,796
1922	469,871	1949	809,365	1976	1,584,953
1923	536,215	1950	880,605	1977	1,617,707
1924	576,704	1951	898,131	1978	1,531,190
1925	614,318	1952	885,492	1979	1,703,725
1926	649,178	1953	913,272		
1927	650,292	1954	926,326		

THE GOLDFINCH (ISSN 0278-0208) is published four times per school year, September, November, February, and April by the Iowa State Historical Department, Office of the State Historical Society, 402 Iowa Avenue, Iowa City, Iowa 52240. Available by yearly subscription in quantities of ten for \$24. Second-class postage paid at Iowa City, Iowa. POSTMASTER: send address changes to: THE GOLDFINCH, Office of the State Historical Society, 402 Iowa Avenue, Iowa City, Iowa 52240.

THE MOST SATISFACTORY
INVESTMENT FOR
THE COUNTRY PHYSICIAN.
HARRY P. ENGLE, M.D.
NEWTON, IOWA.

When I purchased an automobile I had had no experience with machinery of any kind, and knew practically nothing concerning the principles of a gas engine.

My three years' experience in a motorcar has been with a single-cylinder, 9-horsepower, water-cooled gasoline machine. I have taken care of it myself. I have averaged over 3,000 miles each year and have found the cost of driving a motorcar to be less than keeping a team, and the comfort, convenience and pleasure place the automobile so far ahead that I never expect to own another horse. I have driven the machine at all times of the year, over all kinds of roads. With the patent chain tire grips for mud and ice and calcium chloride for zero temperature you can always be sure of getting back home.

After driving the car about six months I sold my horses, but when the roads are very bad I depend on the livery, preferring, as I did when I owned a team, to drive the livery horses over the worst roads. Mrs. Engle is also an automobile enthusiast and handles the car with perfect ease, starting the engine without difficulty, and I feel sure that everything will be all right when she is out driving.

Ninety-five per cent of all my trouble has been with the pneumatic tires. A medical friend tells me that he has completely solved this problem by using solid rubber on his machine, and that the solid tires do not (as claimed by pneumatic people), jar the machine to pieces. I have concluded to try them when in need of new tires.

There is no question about the usefulness of an automobile to a physician. It is so much quicker and can be left standing anywhere without an attendant. It can easily cover twice the ground in a day that a horse can, and in the summer, when the warm weather is hard on a horse, the auto is a great advantage, as both machine and driver are cooler when going fast.

—*Journal of the American Medical Association*, 1906

were much better for town children than for those living on farms. Students from farms often boarded in town which meant they could not help out at home. There was also the expense of board and room. With an automobile, students could live in the country, drive to and from school every day, and still help on the farm.

Even before automobiles, rural schools had begun to **consolidate**. This meant the students needed to be transported several miles from home to the consolidated school. Horse-drawn wagons served as the first buses, but before the end of the 1920s faster motor-powered buses had replaced the old horse-drawn hacks.

Doctors were among the first to use automobiles for business. They often visited patients at home, and with a car the doctor could reach a patient miles away in a few minutes. Gone were the long buggy rides taking an hour or more each way. Patients could also get to a city hospital and the special care available there. Fifty years ago the State University Hospital in Iowa City purchased a fleet of cars to provide transportation to the hospital from any place in the state. This meant that Iowans could receive special care for illnesses that could not be treated in nearby towns. The transportation service still transports patients to Iowa City.

By 1922, Iowa was second (behind California) in the number of people per automobile in the state. For every five Iowans there was one car. Even during

the Great Depression (the 1920s and 1930s) when people had little money and many were losing their farms, automobiles remained in use. By then, cars were considered necessary by those who owned them. Although the number of cars purchased decreased, people repaired their old cars and kept them running.

During the early 1940s the nation was at war. Passenger autos went out of production while factories turned out tanks, machine guns, and airplanes for the armed forces. By the time the war was over in 1945, the cars people owned were very old. Manufacturers could barely keep up with demand. More people wanted and purchased cars each year.

By the 1960s the problems created by the large number of automobiles in use could not be ignored. The exhaust from autos polluted the air. Accident rates climbed as careless drivers continued to use the highways. In 1973, gasoline consumption was higher than the supply. Gasoline shortages, combined with high prices for fuel caused people to think about the way they used their cars. Some people decided to use other means of transportation when they could. The state of Iowa helped to finance eighteen city bus systems to encourage more efficient fuel use.

Some people predict that new forms of transportation will someday replace automobiles — others say cars are here to stay. We do know that seventy years ago, whether traveling short distances or long, for business or pleasure, Iowans chose automobiles as the way to go.

consolidate v. — to unite; to consolidate several schools.