

ASME Honors The Model T



**May 20, 2005, 11:00am
Greenfield Village
Dearborn, Michigan**



ASME Honors The Model T
Mechanical Engineering Landmark Designation
Ceremony
Friday, May 20, 2005
Greenfield Village 11 a.m.

Welcome	Leonard A. Anderson Vice President, ASME Great Lakes Region
ASME Landmarks Program	R. Michael Hunt Chair, ASME History & Heritage Committee
History of The Henry Ford	Steven K. Hamp President, The Henry Ford
Model T History	Robert Casey Curator of Transportation, The Henry Ford
Plaque Presentation	William A. Weiblen Past President, ASME
Acceptance	Edsel Ford Ford Motor Company Board of Trustees, The Henry Ford
Closing	Leonard A. Anderson Vice President, ASME Great Lakes Region

Reception in Village Pavillion
to follow ceremony

When Ford Motor Company introduced its new Model T on October 1, 1908, company officials were sure they had a winner. Yet even an inveterate optimist like Henry Ford (1863-1947) could not predict the vast changes that his rather homely new vehicle would produce.

The Model T was not influential because of its technology. It did boast some advanced features, like a four-cylinder engine with a detachable cylinder head and a one-piece cylinder block. It did use lightweight, high-strength vanadium alloy steel. But one key to its early success was a simple thing like ample ground clearance, allowing it to deal with abysmal rural roads. At \$850 the new car was cheap for its day, but still cost \$30 more than the average worker's annual wage. The key to the Model T's importance lies in Henry Ford's oft-quoted desire to "... build a car for the great multitude ... so low in price that no man making a good salary will be unable to own one." Ford fervently believed that if automobiles could be priced low enough, people would clamor for them. Once he had the basic Model T design in place, he began a relentless drive to put this belief into action.

"Machines," Ford said, "are to a mechanic what books are to a writer. He gets ideas from them" Ford and his engineers took ideas from armories, tin can factories, watch factories, meat packers, bicycle makers, farm machinery makers. Adding their own ideas and applying them all with consummate genius, they had, by the end of 1913, built a huge new factory, created the moving assembly line, and driven the price of a Model T down to \$550. But the pace and nature of work on the assembly line was distasteful to workers. Labor turnover was so high that, on January 5, 1914, Ford Motor Company announced that it was nearly doubling its prevailing wage rate to \$5 a day, an unheard-of amount of money for unskilled or semiskilled work. Suddenly more people wanted to work for Ford than there were jobs to fill.

What flowed from this series of bold innovations was more than an endless stream of Model Ts-it was the very foundation of the twentieth century itself. The assembly line became the century's characteristic production mode, eventually applied to everything from phonographs to hamburgers. High-wage, low-skilled factory jobs accelerated both immigration from overseas and the movement of Americans from the farms to the cities and into an ever-expanding middle class. The creation of huge numbers of low-skilled workers also gave rise in the 1930s to industrial unionism as a potent social and political force. Higher wages allowed workers to buy the very goods they produced, including cars.

The Model T spawned mass automobility, altering our living patterns, our leisure activities, our landscape, and even our atmosphere. Finally, mass automobility meant that everywhere there was crude oil in the ground, from the Permian Basin to the Persian Gulf, there was a potential for wealth and conflict. By the time the last Model T was produced on May 26, 1927, it was obsolescent technology, fast being superseded by more powerful, more comfortable competitors. But nothing has equaled its impact.

The 1927 Ford Model T, on display at The Henry Ford, is the 15 millionth Ford Model T to be produced. This touring car has a 4-cylinder, in-line, water-cooled, 176.7 cu. in., 20 hp engine, and its price at the time was \$380. It came off the line at Ford's Highland Park, Michigan, plant on May 26, 1927, and marked the end of Model T production. Eight of Ford's longest serving employees—John Wandersee, August Degener, Frank Kulick, Fred Rockleman, Charles Hartner, Charles Maida, Peter Martin, and Charles Sorensen—each stamped a serial number numeral on the engine. Henry Ford's son Edsel drove the car off the line, accompanied by his father, Martin, and Sorensen. The car as always remained in the possession of Ford Motor Company or The Henry Ford.

Robert Casey,
Curator of Transportation,
The Henry Ford

The History and Heritage Program of ASME

The History and Heritage Landmarks Program of ASME (the American Society of Mechanical Engineers) began in 1971. To implement and achieve its goals, ASME formed a History and Heritage Committee initially composed of mechanical engineers, historians of technology and the curator of mechanical engineering at the Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. The History and Heritage Committee provides a public service by examining, noting, recording and acknowledging mechanical engineering achievements of particular significance. For further information, please contact Public Information at ASME, Three Park Avenue, New York, NY 10016-5990, 1-212-591-7740.

Founded in 1880 as the American Society of Mechanical Engineers, today's ASME is a 120,000-member professional organization focused on technical, educational and research issues of the worldwide engineering and technology community. In 2005, ASME celebrates 125 years of continued service and leadership - setting the standard - for professional engineering societies worldwide.