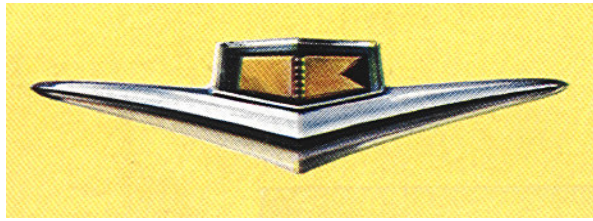


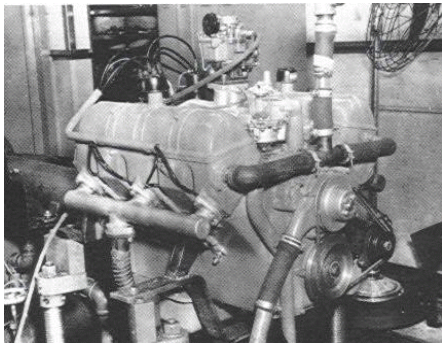
“Kaiser Flyer # 1”



The 1952 thru 1955 Kaiser “V” Emblem

How About The “V” Emblem

In 1948 the Kaiser Engineers begin development of an Overhead Valve V-8 Engine. Its original displacement was 288 cubic inches. The original Aluminum block castings (as Henry Kaiser had dictated) were changed to iron blocks in the last phase. The initial test engines experienced crankshaft failures until the balance problem was cured. It is interesting to note that the initial Chevrolet V-8 “Small-Block” prototype engines experienced crankshaft cracking at exactly the same place. The final Kaiser V8 design was a very good reliable engine and had many innovations for its time. The 1949 Kaiser designed V8 was of modern overhead valve design and used a new “green-sand” casting method. General Motors later also adopted this method of casting for the now-famous “Chev Small-Block V8” introduced in 1955. My father was one of the few Kaiser Dealers who actually witnessed the Kaiser engine running on a test stand at the Kaiser plant.



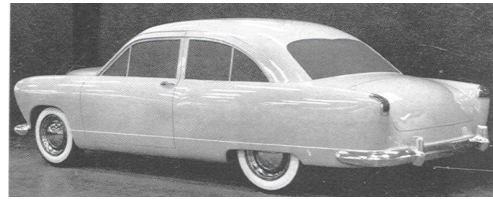
Kaiser 288-OHV Engine

The new Kaiser OHV engine was initially scheduled for production for the 1951 Kaiser models. However, Henry J. Kaiser had a passion to build an American “Peoples Car” to be to Americans what the Volkswagen was to the Germans. He had harbored this dream since before World War II had begun. Kaiser had publicly announced his intent to build a “Peoples Car” to sell for \$400 in 1942 and had actually experimented with a small fiberglass-bodied economy car as early as 1944. Over fifty prototypes were actually built. Brooks-Stevens submitted his proposal for a small car at Kaiser’s request in 1947. It was later accepted by Nash.

Kaiser’s passion for a small car would quickly tear the Kaiser-Frazer Corporation apart and contribute greatly to its ultimate downfall.

Kaiser’s “Engine Mistake” was his decision to build a small economy car at that time and use all of Kaiser’s financial resources for this one project. Most of the true “automotive” professionals at Kaiser, including Joe Frazer, advised Henry Kaiser to wait on his small car project and use Kaiser’s current financial resources to put its V-8 engine into production, expand its current full-size line, and invest in other engineering advancements. Kaiser, however, would not bend and this decision was the final straw for Mr. “Jeeps” Frazer, he left, along with several other key personnel. Kaiser was suddenly losing all of its real automotive experts and was left with only Kaiser “yes” men who would help steer the company in the wrong direction.

Can you imagine a scaled-down 1951 Kaiser with a V-8 engine! That is exactly how Howard Darrin originally envisioned his Kaiser "Small Car." It would have been the first "Pony" car and beat the Ford Mustang to market by some 13 years. How about a V-8 Darrin? If Henry J. Kaiser had only listened to the real automotive experts in the Kaiser-Frazer organization his car line might have survived and his economical "peoples car" could have been a real success when the time was right. Kaiser's small car idea was great but his timing and development choices were awful. (Read "Kaiser Flyer #3" to learn more about the "small car" project)



Could this have been the Kaiser "Pony Car"?

It was Henry Kaiser himself that stopped the tooling for the Kaiser V-8 engine in favor of spending Kaiser's resources on his personal pet project, a small economy car, later to be named the "Henry-J." Had Kaiser actually put the Kaiser "288" V-8 into production in 1951 as originally scheduled, what a difference it could have made, not only for the Darrin, but for the entire Kaiser line of cars, and history might be telling an entirely different story. (Read "Kaiser Flyer #4" for more on the Kaiser Darrin Sports Car.)

A quick glance at the 1952 thru 1955 Kaiser full-size cars reveal the "V" emblem intended to indicate the cars had a V8 engine. They were left on the cars as Kaiser did not have the resources left to redesign and replace the "V's" with a more appropriate symbol. The only modification afforded was to delete the "8" from the center of the emblem and insert a "K" for Kaiser. I have observed Kaiser cars of these years being downgraded by judges at open shows because of the "V" emblem as being equipped with the wrong engine, a "straight 6" instead of an "V-8". (What else could the "V" mean, is the reply of many uninformed judges.) The judges are actually correct in a way, those Kaisers were supposed to have a V-8 engine.

When Kaiser made the decision to discontinue the production of the Kaiser Automobiles in the United States, all the rights to the Kaiser V-8 engine were sold to American Motors. It was later placed into production by American Motors as a 327 CU V-8 in late 1956 and was first used in the 1957 Nash and Hudson cars. The engine served American motors very well for many years in several configurations and was only dropped when Chrysler bought out American Motors. Chrysler had developed many good V-8's of their own and since they were cheaper for Chrysler to produce, the AMC V-8 was dropped.

Several of the engineers who worked on the "Kaiser V8" went on to work for General Motors, Studebaker and Ford and contributed much to the development of their OHV V-8 engines.

The Kaiser small car, named the "Henry-J," diverted Kaiser's resources from its V-8 engine and history tells the rest. Although the Henry-J was a good car and very economical (it won the Mobile Gas Economy Run every year it was entered), it was the wrong thing for Kaiser at that time in history. (Read "Kaiser Flyer #6 for more about the Henry-J)

Had Henry J. Kaiser listened more to Joe Frazer it might have been possible to purchase a new Kaiser or Frazer today - and what a car it probably would have been! I'd sure buy one.

- Kaiser Bill