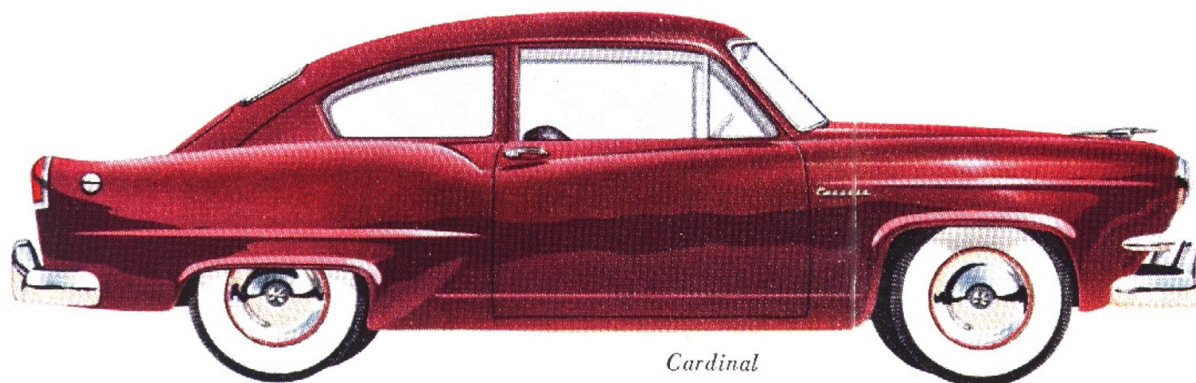


“Kaiser Flyer # 6”

Kaiser - 1952 Henry-J



What is a “Henry-J” Kaiser ? - Well, it’s just one of the most pleasurable cars built during the years of 1951 thru 1954.

Who manufactured the Henry-J car ? - Kaiser-Frazer Motors, USA of Willow Run, Michigan.

Who was Kaiser-Frazer Motors ? - Here’s a brief History lesson.

Just as World War II was ending, the Kaiser-Frazer Corporation was formed to produce new Automobiles for the new-car thirsty post-war crowds. The first Kaiser-Frazer Cars were released in 1946 as the first mass-produced 1947 new car models. They were unique designs for their time with design contributions by Mr. Howard "Dutch" Darrin of Paris who also designed several “custom-bodied” cars including the famous “Packard Darrin”. He also designed and built the prototype of the beautiful “*Kaiser Darrin*” fiberglass sports car.

Although Darrin had created an entirely new modern design for the 1947 Kaiser-Frazer cars, he felt that the Kaiser-Frazer engineers had ruined his design with major production compromises to rush the new 1947 models into production, and he was furious. Darrin's design was low-slung and sleek, and although Darrin's basic body lines were somewhat adapted and the first Kaisers and Frazers were quite good-looking, they were much more fat and bulbous than the original Darrin design.

During the years 1947 through 1954, Howard Darrin continued to contribute his design talents to Kaiser (Frazer had bowed out of the company in 1951). However it was not until the 1951 Kaiser cars were finalized that Howard Darrin felt his original beautiful designs were really applied to the Kaiser cars. *The 1951 Kaiser was a truly beautiful car and is still considered as one of the most pleasant-looking automobiles ever built.*

The “Small-Car” gas problem - Late in 1948 Harry Truman, then President of the United States, warned the Detroit auto-makers that gasoline prices would be raising dramatically within a few short years. None of the “Big Three”, GM, Ford or Chrysler, took any head to this warning, however, two of the “Independents”, Kaiser-Frazer and Nash, listened carefully. Both Kaiser and Nash felt that they may be able to get a jump in the economy car market and beat the big three automakers in that market since they intended to react in a very short time frame. They knew that the big three took 3 to 5 years to develop a new car, but they could develop theirs in a much shorter time.

Henry J. Kaiser had always wanted to develop a new “Peoples Car” for America, one that could become the “Volkswagen” for the American automobile market. Kaiser had actually announced his intent to build his “Peoples Car” in 1942 and now he had his excuse to begin on his pet project. (Note: Volkswagen only sold 2 cars in the US in 1949!) Kaiser immediately started work on his small car in earnest.

Nash also had wanted to build an economy car and started working toward what would become the “Rambler” and “Metropolitan”. The Rambler became a very profitable line for Nash and was later also built by American Motors when Nash and Hudson merged.

The Kaiser “Small Car” was a different story. Kaiser made three critical mistakes in developing and marketing its small car.

His first mistake was his decision to build the small car for 1951 and use all of Kaiser’s financial resources for this one project. Most of the true “automotive” professionals at Kaiser advised Henry J. Kaiser to wait on the small car and use Kaiser’s current financial resources to expand its current Full-size line, and invest in other engineering advancements. Kaiser would not bend and this decision was the final straw for Joe Frazer, he left. Kaiser’s decision would cost him many of his real automotive experts that would later prove fatal to the Kaiser automotive venture.

Kaiser’s second mistake was to delay putting it’s own OHV V-8 engine into production. The Kaiser engineers had been working on their own modern overhead valve V-8 engine since early 1949 and had pioneered the “green-sand” casting method later used by General Motors for it’s now famous Chevrolet “small-block” V-8. Can you imagine a small 1951 Kaiser with a V-8 engine! It would have been the first “Pony” car and beat the Ford Mustang to market by 13 years. If Henry Kaiser had only listened to his real automotive experts his car line might have survived and his “peoples car” could have been a real success when the time was right. The Kaiser V-8 engineering was later sold to American Motors who, with the help of several of the relocated Kaiser engineers, released it in 1957 as a 327 cubic-inch OHV V-8.

Kaiser’s third mistake was to not use the design offered by Howard “Dutch” Darrin. His design for Kaiser’s small car was a scaled-down version of the 1951 full-size Kaiser and it was beautiful. Kaiser, however was having financial problems which led him to accept the “AMP” overall design. It was so ugly before Howard Darrin “fixed it” that several of Kaiser’s best men quit. The little Henry-J turned out to be a “cute” little car but not the snazzy looker it could have been. Read my “Kaiser Flyer #3” for more details about this incident.

We all know the rest. The Japanese all took Truman’s advice and geared up to introduce their small cars into the US within a few years. If Kaiser had kept his small car idea but executed it differently and at the right time, wow!

Kaiser and Frazer created the biggest threat ever made to the Detroit establishment of US Automakers. The Kaiser-Frazer organization really gave Detroit a “wake-up” call. Things would never be the same after Kaiser-Frazer. No other group of people had, or will have, the impact on the American Automobile that this “up-start” free-thinking group of widely diverse professionals had. Even though several independent car makers such as ***Packard, Studebaker, Hudson and Nash*** certainly impacted the very early “Detroit Establishment”, their combined overall post-war impact was minuscule compared to Kaiser-Frazer.

Credit has never really been given to K-F for their contributions to the industry, both in the United States and overseas. Many don't realize even now that K-F's impact did not stop at our shores. Their overseas operations and influence were substantial. In fact, the Kaiser cars were produced in Argentina until 1962 when Ford bought the rights to the Kaiser Argentina line.

Not many Henry-J's survive today. Although there are many Kaiser and Frazer cars still on the road today, the number of Henry-J's is extremely small compared to the 123,305 actually built. Even though their popularity and recognition is better than most of the other Kaiser cars, their survivor rate is far less than the average Kaiser-Frazer car. This is sadly a consequence of their popularity. Their very rigid but light-weight body and unique fast-back style made them a favorite for hot-rodding and drag racing in the 1960's thru the 1980's. Many were butchered up for racing and lost forever. They are being searched out today and many collectors are now snatching them up in an attempt to save as many as possible.

This “Kaiser Flyer” was written and provided by Bill Brown (“Kaiser Bill”) of Altonah, Utah. Bill is the son of Bill Brown (Sr.) of Perry, Florida who was one of the first original factory-authorized Kaiser- Frazer Dealers signed in 1946. The Perry dealership was one of the better and larger buildings built specifically for a new Kaiser-Frazer dealership. It is still intact and is currently being used as a National Guard Armory. Until his death in early 1999, Bill Brown, Sr. still lived in Perry and gave “Kaiser” advice to his son who currently owns several Kaiser and Frazer cars, including two Henry-J's and three *Kaiser Darrin Sports Cars*.

Keep-em Running - ***“Kaiser Bill”***
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