

“Kaiser Flyer # 7”

The Unique Kaiser - Frazer

“Traveler” & “Vagabond”



*Kaiser's “Convertible” Station Wagon - The First “Hatch-Back” Car
Another Kaiser “First”*

In 1949 the Kaiser-Frazer Corporation devised the first real “Hatch-Back” sedan. The standard model was named the “Traveler” and the deluxe model was called the “Vagabond”. The rear deck area was divided into two pieces. The upper part included the rear window and folded upward. The lower part folded down somewhat like the tailgate of a pickup truck. The rear seat bottom folded forward and the seat back folded down to create a large flat cargo area from the tailgate to the back of the front seat. The K-F engineers had created a “convertible” Station Wagon. A normal-looking sedan could be “converted” into a Station Wagon in just seconds.

This idea was very unique and revolutionary for the 1940's. The concept was very sound and was later widely copied by most auto manufacturers and is common today on many “hatch-back's”. Henry J. Kaiser's personal desire for a Kaiser “Fishing Car” had resulted in another Kaiser “First”. He told his son, Edgar, that “he was tired of driving station wagons that drove and rode like a truck”. He wanted a luxurious car that could be “converted” in less than a minute into a “utility” car - - Mr. Kaiser's name for a “Hatch-Back”. The actual time required to convert the new Kaiser Traveler into a utility cargo hauler was *just 10 seconds*.

The “Travelers” and “Vagabonds” were promoted to a very wide range of users, including, campers, hunters, fishermen, carpenters, florists, farmers, emergency ambulance companies, and undertakers. This meant it had to accommodate some heavy loads and required much heavier rear springs and shocks to handle the expected “cargo”. The rear body had to be also strengthened considerably to allow for the rear hatch-back arrangement. *Several hundred changes were actually required to the “standard” sedan for the conversion.*



49 Kaiser Vagabond Dash

The more deluxe “Vagabond” models were offered in very high-quality interior appointments including top-grain leather upholstery. They were very luxurious and had beautiful interiors much like the top-of-the-line convertibles. Again, Kaiser-Frazer was ahead of the times.



The 1951 Frazer Vagabond - America's most luxurious Hatch-Back

Kaiser models of the “Travelers” and “Vagabonds” were initially offered in the 1949 and 1950 model years. The luxurious Frazer “Vagabonds” were offered only in the 1951 model year. Kaiser continued to offer the “Traveler” body style through the 1953 model year. There were no “Travelers” released in 1954 or 1955 (the last year of US production). When Kaiser production was transferred to Argentina, the “Traveler” was dropped, reportedly due to production costs. Many thought it would have been a successful model for the South American market, this author included.

“The Story” - The much promoted version as to how the “Traveler” idea was born gives Henry J. Kaiser himself the credit for this unique model. Late in 1948 Henry Kaiser called his son, Edgar, to his basement garage. Mr. Kaiser had drawn the outline of the “Hatch-Back” in the dust on a 1948 Kaiser sedan. Mr. Kaiser called it a “Utility Car”. Within just a few weeks, the Kaiser developers created a prototype and the model was quickly put into production.

The Kaiser and Frazer Travelers and Vagabonds have become much sought after “classics” by admirers and restorers alike. They are fairly easy to restore as most parts are interchangeable with the sedans except for the “hatch-back” doors and the rear window. Mechanical parts are also readily available. They remain one of the most unique cars of their time and are vivid evidence of just a part of the Kaiser-Frazer influence on the automotive industry. They are an historic vehicle and are recognized by the “Milestone Car Society” as one of the milestones in automotive history.

- “Kaiser Bill”