

Kaiser Flyer # 8

8.

The Graham-Paige “KAISER” ?



Although it is a part of automotive history that Graham-Page Motors actually “created” the 1947 Kaiser car, it seems to be an obscure fact that few are aware of. How did a defunct automobile company like Graham-Paige Motors come to create the “first” Kaiser car?

You need to start with Mr. Joseph W. Frazer, a true automotive expert. Prior to 1945 Joe Frazer had spent many years with Packard Motor Company, General Motors, Pierce-Arrow, Chrysler, and Willys-Overland. He was personally responsible for creating the first strictly automotive credit agencies, the General Motors Acceptance Corporation and another similar one for Pierce-Arrow. While working at Chrysler he urged Walter P. Chrysler to develop a low-price car for the rural areas of the mid-west and even selected it’s name, the Plymouth. Contrary to some reports, the name was not associated with the eastern pilgrim location. It was selected because the name was well-known in the mid-west for it’s quality farm products and Joe Frazer being a master salesman knew he would need a recognized name for the new car. The new Plymouth line was introduced in 1926. It was a big success and Joe Frazer was responsible for getting Chrysler out of the red. Recently, Diamler-Chrysler dropped the Plymouth name as they felt it was too American. Even they were not aware it was really named after baling wire.

When Willys-Overland Motors found itself failing in 1939, Joe Frazer stepped in and did it again. He introduced a new low-priced car, the Willys “Americar.” Sales immediately soared and Joe Frazer had saved Willys from extinction. He would later move Willys to the forefront with the Army Jeep and was tagged with the nickname “Jeeps” Frazer although Barney Roos at Willys was mainly responsible for the actual development of the “Jeep”. Read my “Kaiser Flyer” #5 for more detail history on Joe Frazer and the Jeep.

But now Joe Frazer had another idea he wished to pursue. He wanted to get a new post-war car ready for the American market before the war’s end so production could be started immediately after the end was declared. He knew that war-time production facilities could be released for private ventures. He also knew that Willys was so involved with government contracts that it was the wrong avenue. He set his sights on a “has-been” automotive company - Graham Paige Motors. Graham-Paige was originated in 1927 and built several successful models. The supercharged models were fine cars and the “Shark-Nosed” 1938-39 models remain very collectible today.



Superchargers were available on Grahams from 1934 through 1940. Graham even used left-over dies from the famous Cord 812 model to build its still-remembered 1940 "Graham Hollywood" model but ceased to build cars in 1940 and turned its efforts to more lucrative war production.

In 1944 the Graham-Paige people were floundering without any idea as to what the company would do once the military contracts were terminated. Joe Frazer saw his chance and his persistence paid off in mid-1944 when Joseph B. Graham offered Joe Frazer the opportunity to "buy-in." Frazer immediately sprung into action and by September he gained controlling interest in the company and was elected President and Chairman of the Board.

Frazer immediately announced that Graham-Paige would start to work a new Post-War car. Graham-Paige stock jumped from two to twelve points. Frazer had his sales group recruit new dealers all across the country to sell his new, but yet developed car. He hired the services of two very different automotive men, Howard "Dutch" Darrin and William B. Stout. Each of these two men have a story of their own which will not be told here. Darrin was well known throughout the world for his superb styling of custom-bodied cars in Europe and in the United States. He personally designed cars for European Royalty and Hollywood personalities. He had also designed the famous Packard-Darrin. Stout, on the other hand was known for his revolutionary, and sometimes very unorthodox, engineering ideas.

The Frazer car, under Frazer's insistence, was to be of conventional mechanical design but the body designed by "Dutch" Darrin was to be entirely new. All mechanical components were to be supplied by regular industry outside suppliers and most parts, including brakes, transmissions, differentials, ignition, carburetors, suspension springs, etc., would be shared by other makes of automobiles. This would make for a much easier car to sell as its mechanical components were "proven" in other well-known cars. Joe Frazer was a true salesman and knew the value of using parts from suppliers whose names were accepted by the buying public. But, Graham-Paige did not have the working capital it would need to set up the production facilities. So, Joe Frazer went looking for money.

In late spring of 1945 Joe Frazer was having no success in finding source for sufficient capital. When he approached the Bank Of America in California he meet Mr. A. P. Giannini who knew that Henry J. Kaiser was also working on his idea for a new car and felt that these two should meet. Within two days after meeting each other Henry J. Kaiser and Joseph. W. Frazer drew up an agreement to form a combined company, the Kaiser-Frazer Corporation. A move that Frazer would later become to regret. The original plan was for Graham-Paige Motors to build the conventional Frazer car and the new Kaiser-Frazer Corporation was to build the "revolutionary" Kaiser. The Frazer design was almost complete, including the engineering. The Kaiser, however, was a far different story. Kaiser had convinced Frazer that his car too was almost ready for production, but it wasn't. They decided to share the basic body design created by Howard Darrin but none of the mechanicals were to be the same.

The Kaiser car, on the other hand under Henry J. Kaiser's direction, was to be revolutionary in its mechanical design. It was to be a smaller car with new front-wheel drive, torsion bar suspension and very economical. Henry Kaiser had been toying with the idea for a "peoples car" for America since 1942. Several prototypes had actually been built. Some were even fiberglass-bodied.

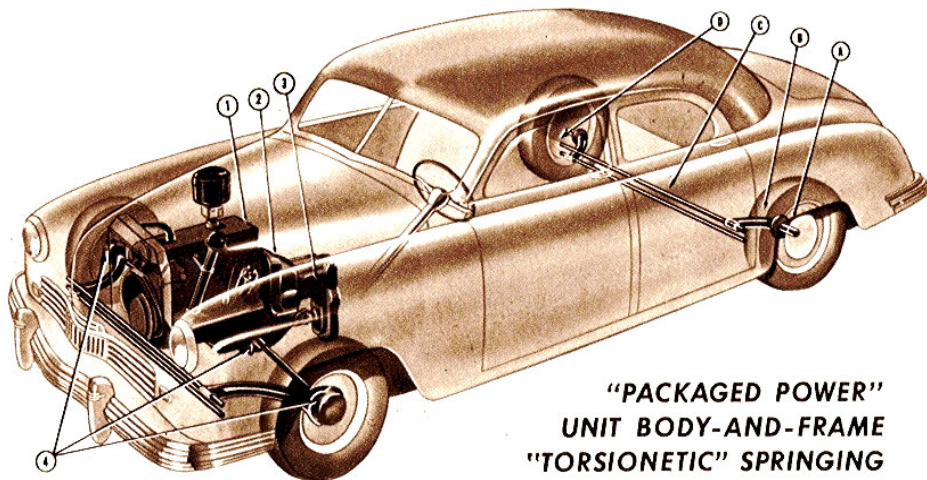
Henry J. Kaiser, himself, had dictated the new Kaiser car was to be front-wheel drive. Kaiser wanted his new car to be revolutionary in its mechanical design. The excerpt below was taken from a 1946 multi-fold brochure issued jointly by Kaiser-Frazer Corporation and Graham-Paige Motors Corporation. It clearly illustrates the "Amazing New" 1947 Kaiser was scheduled to be produced as a front-wheel drive automobile with a unit body and "Torsionetic" (torsion bar) suspension. In another announcement presented in the June 15, 1946 Saturday Evening Post Magazine the new 1947 Kaiser "with Front-Wheel Drive" was promised to be in actual production later in that same year. (See a copy of that ad in 'Kaiser Flyer' #5) Only two running prototypes were built. They were test driven both at Willow Run and at Kaiser's West Coast facility.

Presenting THE AMAZING NEW 1947

KAISER

KAISER-FRAZER PRODUCT

FRONT-WHEEL DRIVE...LOW PRICE...BIGNESS...BEAUTY



**"PACKAGED POWER"
UNIT BODY-AND-FRAME
"TORSIONETIC" SPRINGING**

Shown above are two of the time-tested, war-perfected engineering features you will see for the first time in the amazing new KAISER. "Packaged Power" Front-Wheel Drive combines engine (1), clutch (2), transmission (3), and final drive assembly (4), all in a single unit which can be lifted clear of the integral body-and-frame for easy service.

In KAISER'S new "Torsionetic" Suspension, each wheel is given independent springing, accomplished through spindle (A), supporting arm (B) and torsion-bar spring (C), anchored at (D). Twisting action of steel bar supplies springing effect. Hydraulic shock-absorbers complete the assembly, giving new smoothness of ride at all passenger-loads.

The Kaiser engineers never did perfect the Kaiser "Front Wheel Drive", the "Torsionetic Suspension" (torsion bar suspension), the "117 inch frame", the "Independent Rear Suspension" or the "92 horse power Engine" in time for regular production. This meant that the entire pre-production Kaiser was scrapped at the last minute and the 1947 Frazer car was also actually produced as the 1947 Kaiser with nothing more than minor trim changes. The two prototype front-wheel drive Kaisers were destroyed.

The 1947 through 1950 Kaisers were not really Kaisers at all but re-badged Graham-Paige Frazers.

The basic body design created by Howard “Dutch” Darrin and William Stout for Joseph Frazer, and the engineering work done by the Graham-Paige engineers, both for the new “Frazer” car, wound up being used for both cars, the 1947 Kaiser and the 1947 Frazer. Sadly, the initial Darrin design with a much lower belt-line and a slight “Darrin dip” fender line was greatly compromised by the new Kaiser-Frazer engineering staff to rush the cars into production. This made Darrin furious and from that day forward he and the Kaiser engineers were never “friends.”

The initial showing of the 1947 Kaiser and 1947 Frazer at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel in New York displayed the prototype front-wheel drive smaller Kaiser. Sadly, however, the ingenious ideas of Henry J. Kaiser for his revolutionary front-wheel drive car with a “drop-in” motor and transmission unit never reached production. The fledgling company would never have the resources to pursue those advanced ideas. The front-wheel drive car of course is common-place today, some 55 years later. Kaiser really did have the right idea for his smaller front-wheel drive car, as he did for many of his automotive concepts, but the technical advances were just not there yet. Henry J. Kaiser was truly ahead of his time. Today his 1942 idea for a mass-production front-wheel drive car and his goal of producing the outer shell of a car out of plastic are both an every-day occurrence. Most cars being produced in the late 90's and 2000's have the “Unit” front-wheel drive and many exterior body components are made out of plastic. Have you checked your fenders lately??

The first “real” Kaiser wasn’t produced until the unique 1951 Kaiser took all the industry honors for its smooth ride and was judged “America’s Most Beautiful Car” by even its competitors. Howard Darrin had finally got his design into production. Even the famous “Darrin dip” in the rear fender line was applied to the streamlined 1951 Kaiser. This “Darrin dip” also magically appeared in the 1955 Chevrolet and later in the original 1964-65 Mustang. The 1951 Kaiser was also given many awards by the European critics who were very style conscious. It was truly a revolutionary design and way ahead of its time. It wouldn’t be until the Chrysler Corporation came out with it’s swept-wing 1957 models that anything would come close to another such design milestone.

Major design feature differences between the prototype 1947 Kaiser and the 1947 Kaiser & Frazer

	<u>Feature</u>	<u>Kaiser F.W.D.</u>	<u>Production Kaiser & Prototype Frazer</u>
Body	Type of construction	Unit Body	Separate Body & Frame
	Overall length	197	203
Engine	Horsepower/Torque	92/140	100/180
	Bore and stroke	3-1/4 X 3-5/8	3-5/16 X 4-3/8
	Displacement	187	226.5
Transmission	Ratios 1st-2nd-3rd	2.605-1.603-1.000	2.571-1.550-1.000
	Location	Front	Rear
	Clutch size	Auburn 8-1/2	Auburn 9-1/4
Chassis	Type	Front stub (Unit Body)	Rail & Box
	Drive	Front wheel	Rear wheel
	Suspension type	Torsion bar	Front Indep Coil/Rear leaf spring
	Wheelbase	117	123 1/2