

A Century of Progress: The 1933-'34 Chicago World's Fair

Chicago's World's Fair was as much about the American automobile industry as it was about celebrating the Second City's first 100 years



BY TERRY SHEA
PHOTOS AS CREDITED

In the first three decades of the 20th century, American automobile business had grown into a colossus of industry, and the car itself became ubiquitous throughout the land, transforming—and transforming—the way we lived. American automobiles were defining what it was to be “in business” in the 20th century. And now, with that fact on display, more fanfare, glory and aggrandizement than the 1933-'34 Chicago World's Fair, A Century of Progress.

The “century” in that title refers to the 100 years between Chicago's incorporation as a city in 1833 and the fair itself. Chicago's growth, from a small outpost of some 4,000 souls on Lake Michigan (formerly known as Fort Dearborn) into the fourth largest city on the planet in just 100 years was unprecedented in world

history. With 3,376,438 people counted on the 1930 census, New York, London and Paris were larger.

Just as unprecedented as Chicago's growth, the fact that those years remains the growth of the automobile industry, from its infancy in the 1890s to its place at the very top of the industry

In addition to having a showroom with the latest from its many car lines, GM built a working assembly line inside that snaked 400 feet in each direction in a large hall in its pavilion where two and four-door Chevrolet sedans went through final assembly, as many as 30 per day. Up to 1,000 people could stand on the balconies and watch as production automobiles were built right below them. The exhibit proved immensely popular and also probably prompted Ford to join the fair in its second year. But GM had exclusive rights to any on-site assembly line, and Ford, its name synonymous with bringing assembly lines to the American people, had to come up with something else.

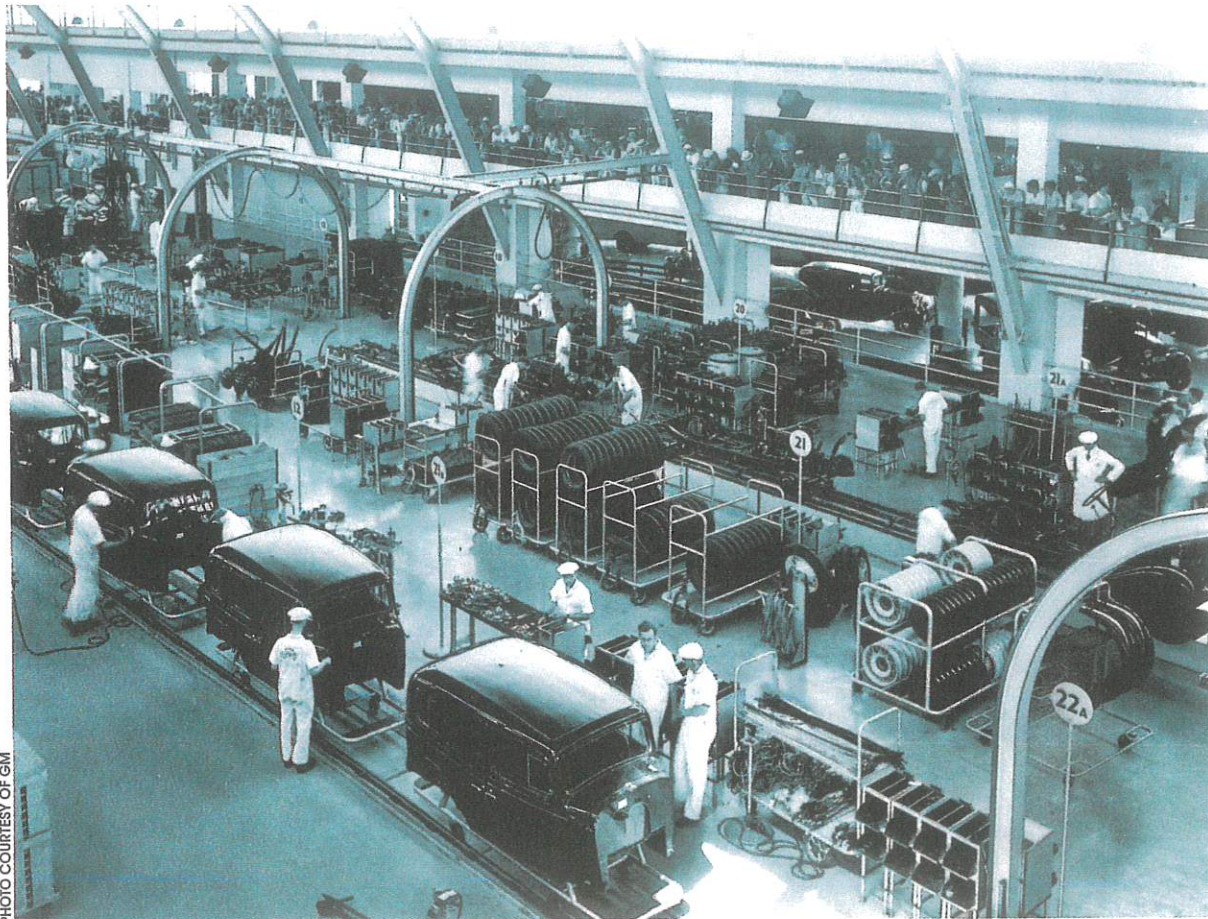


PHOTO COURTESY OF GM

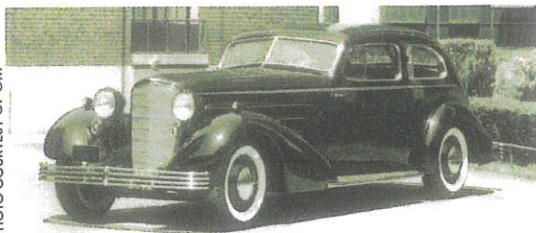


PHOTO COURTESY OF GM

The 1932 Cadillac Aerodynamic Coupe was one of GM's first dedicated show cars and the centerpiece of its vehicles shown at A Century of Progress.

Firestone

SELECTED BY A CENTURY OF PROGRESS FOR 1934

Today it is a habit for newspaper readers and visitors to again be advised by A Century of Progress to inspect the Exhibit Building at the World's Fair. The Firestone Exhibit Building is a building of modern design and construction, and it is the only building of its kind in the world.

See how rubber is gathered from the trees on the Firestone Plantation in Liberia, Africa. See it in the hall of Science where it is processed and prepared to make into rubber tires.

See the manufacture of auto parts and how they are assembled in the Firestone Building at the World's Fair. See the Firestone Building at the World's Fair. See the Firestone Building at the World's Fair.

Not to be outdone by the automakers' exhibits, Firestone had its own building and its own on-site production demonstration, manufacturing tires from raw rubber at the World's Fair.

chain by the 1930s. The auto business had become an economic powerhouse whose size few could have predicted in 1900, but by the end of the 1920s, from Wall Street to Main Street, it defined American business. And each company did its best to outshine the competition from the cars they made to the glamor associated with

them. And what better way in the years before television to reach more people than at a World's Fair?

The grand exhibition, held on 427 acres along Lake Michigan, ostensibly focused on science and industry. Hundreds of companies participated, quite a few nations showed up with their own



Modern as the "Century of Progress"

Two motor cars entirely new and different in every aspect of design—brilliantly interpreting the styling, the appointments, and the type of performance most in vogue today.

THE new spirit of modern advancement is expressed in Science Hall, the magnificent building erected for Chicago's great Century of Progress Exposition. What more fitting than to picture before that splendid audience two completely modern automobiles of the latest and most up-to-date design and form—also in style for 1933.

No single feature of design characterizes them in their splendid Oldsmobiles, yet hardly every line and contour is new. The Oldsmobile is one of the most modern automobiles—the authentic styling which adds so much to a car's value, beauty and attraction that value longer.

When we talk about styling, however, our engineers point out that Oldsmobile has built its grand reputation mainly on mechanical excellence. This always has been, and will continue to be, a fundamental Oldsmobile principle. Let us make it clear, therefore, that the 1933 Oldsmobile has a single feature as advanced in performance as they are in appearance—the latest, most powerful, most dependable cars in all Oldsmobile history. The Six is capable of 75 to 80 miles an hour, and the Eight will do 90 to 100 miles an hour in good weather. Both the engines operate very quietly and without perceptible vibration.

And let us say just this about price—yes, you simply can't afford Oldsmobile that way, because never before in this price field has any car offered a combination of style, performance and quality so closely comparable to that of the Oldsmobile. A sweeping statement and a large claim for Oldsmobile—but we make it advisedly and feel confident you will agree with us once you have seen and driven the splendid new Oldsmobile Six or Eight Eight.

Your nearest Oldsmobile dealer will gladly place one of these cars at your disposal, in order that you may personally test it and fully appreciate the unusual qualities we have built into it.

THE 1933 OLDSMOBILES

Featuring Fisher No. 2000 Fuel Injection

The New Six \$725 and up TWO GENERAL MOTORS VALVES The New Eight \$850 and up

Oldsmobile advertising touted its connection to A Century of Progress with its new models displayed in front of the fair's Hall of Science, the true centerpiece of the exposition.