

G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS
NEW YORK

BUILT TO THRILL

More Classic Automobiles from Clive Cussler and Dirk Pitt

CLIVE CUSSLER

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IT DOESN'T TAKE MUCH TO LOVE OLD CARS

Living in Southern California during the nineteen forties and building a hot rod out of a 1936 Ford sedan, I fancifully developed a love for old classic cars. Not long after, I bought a black 1925 Auburn limousine for \$18 that my buddies and I drove to the football games, dressing like gangsters, wearing overcoats and with fedoras pulled over one eye. We would sneak past the security guards carrying beer and wine, hidden in a violin case.

The next car I set my sights on was a bit pricier. I recall finding a magnificent old 1915 Renault taxicab in the back of a garage and begging my dad to loan me the \$50 the owner was asking. Good ol' Dad thought I was crazy and refused to loan me the money. In another instance, I tried to buy a beautiful Pierce-Arrow limousine, but the

owner wanted more than I could afford, and he took it out to his ranch, where he cut off the rear end and used the old car as a pickup truck, an occurrence that was quite common in those days.

Years later when driving through the Colorado countryside, my wife Barbara said, "Look! There's a 1946 Ford Club coupe like I had in high school." I paid \$400 to the farmer and drove it home, where my son and I restored it in the street. This was the first car of my collection.

It still sits among the more exceptional additions that came through the years.

After the Dirk Pitt books became bestsellers, I could afford to buy the more exotic examples of classic autos. I purchased a 1955 Rolls-Royce that my wife liked because it was new the year we were mar-

ried. Then came a 1926 Hispano-Suiza Cabriolet that I bought at my first classic car auction after I had three martinis. As more cars were added, I had to buy a warehouse. One side holds the classics from the nineteen twenties and thirties, while the other side displays mostly fifties convertibles.

When I was saddened by not being able to save the beautiful Pierce-Arrow from mutilation, I never dreamed that, one day, I would own a hundred exotic cars just like it, or that I'd rescue fifty of them by having them restored to the condition they were in originally when sitting on the dealers' showroom floors.

Owning and cherishing collector cars has boomed in the last seventy-five years. In the forties, used Duesenbergs could be



bought for as low as four hundred dollars. Now they're selling at auction from one to four million dollars. First, there was a fascination for antique cars, then came the vintage cars like the Model T Ford, and a hundred other autos followed. Next, classic cars became everyone's desire. Today, it's the exotic sports cars from Fer-

rari, Aston Martin, Cobra, and, interestingly, Lamborghini—which also produces tractors—that are drawing younger collectors.

Someday, they'll all be looked upon as mechanical masterworks of art and receive the admiration that is given to van Goghs and Picassos.





1951 DAIMLER DE-36 "GREEN GODDESS" DROPHEAD COUPE

One of the most exotic cars ever built has to be the Daimler DE-36, a series of mammoth monsters known as the Green Goddesses. This immense luxury motorcar earned its eternal moniker when it made its debut in 1948 as a coupe in a glorious jade green hue. The exclusive production run of only seven drophead coupes, made between 1948 and 1953, was actually available in all different colors, although each individual car is referred to as a "Green Goddess."

Only four of these rare cars are still in existence.

This massive Daimler is one of the most opulent and prestigious vehicles ever built. Then, as now, these highly unique cars nearly defy description. The chassis upon which the huge two-door coach-built body was mounted was normally the chassis for the Daimler limousine. At over 20 feet long and almost 7 feet wide, the original Green Goddess

weighed a colossal 6,000 pounds. Coachwork was by Britain's finest coachbuilder, Hooper & Company, creating a magnificent flowing body, with their trademark flat sides over the rear fenders. A feature that contributed to the clean look was the hydraulically operated convertible top, which disappeared under a painted aluminum panel, one of the first applications of such a design.

The big, twin-carbureted, 5.4 liter straight-eight engine moved the three-ton Goliath along the road at a surprisingly respectable 85 miles an hour. Behind the tiller of this Leviathan, the passing landscape must have appeared small and rather plebeian. The driving experience has, however, been referred to as silky smooth. Extensive use of hydraulics was a luxury touch, powering the top mechanism, the metal tonneau cover, as well as an ingenious jacking system at all four corners of the car, facilitating easier roadside repairs. Flush, streamlined

wheel skirts at the rear are spring-loaded and easily swing up and out of the way, much like a garage door, for easy access to tires, brakes, and suspension. The huge front fenders are so immense they have recessed, hidden storage areas for tools or luggage.

This color combination and design is original to this car. The paint had begun to fade, so I had the body stripped down and repainted. I purchased the car in 1980, and everything, including the upholstery, is original except, of course, the new paint job. The interior of this car is quite unique with an extra-wide leather seat in the front to



accommodate three passengers quite comfortably, while the rear two passengers are luxuriously coddled in armchair, theater-style seats as plush as those in a drawing room. These are actually positioned slightly up and offset behind the front seats. This feature affords the rear passengers an unobstructed view of the road ahead.

Dirk Pitt drove this Green Goddess in my book *Cyclops*. I believe that someday soon the four remaining Goddesses will become even more highly regarded by collectors for their distinction, beauty, and undeniable rarity.





1952 METEOR ROADSTER

The Meteor was a specially constructed fiberglass-bodied roadster with a custom frame. It was designed by aerospace engineer Dick Jones in Southern California in late 1952. Jones was the archetypical California hot-rodder, designer, and engineer. His first Meteor prototype was shown in 1953, at the Petersen Motorama, in Los Angeles. The Meteor was recognized by both *Road & Track* and *Car Craft* magazines. It is an extremely rare and interesting vehicle. The car you see here has a formidable four-carburetor



1952 DeSoto Firedome Hemi engine in it. It is a very fast car.

Handcrafted production ran from 1953 to 1955 in Southern California and then from 1955 to 1961 in the Denver, Colorado, area when Jones and family relocated. According to none other than Dick Jones himself, only two complete factory-built Meteors were made and about twenty-five finished bodies were sold. To demonstrate his car's racing potential, in '56 Dick Jones took a second-place finish in his Meteor at a hill climb race near Golden, Colorado.

Sometime in 1985, this car was advertised in the newspaper as a Cunningham, an exclusive and respected American car company with undisputed racing heritage that produced some extremely rare, beautiful, and valuable sports cars for the

street. Intrigued, I took a look at it. It was no Cunningham but instead an unknown fiberglass-bodied Ford chassis with a 1952 Hemi engine in it. I bought it and eventually restored it, painting the body in the distinctive Cunningham American racing colors of white with a blue stripe down the middle. A friend, Dave Anderson of Tulsa, a fiberglass manufacturer and sculptor, examined the car and stated that whoever put it together knew what they were doing. The fittings were first-rate. But, at this point, I still didn't know exactly what the car was. One day, I was talking over the phone to a newspaper auto editor and



mentioned I owned this strange fiberglass sports car with no name. He asked, "Is the cockpit fairly large?" I said, "Yes." Then he instructed, "Describe the grille." I replied, "It looks like an ice cube tray."

Then he said, "Oh my God, you've got a Meteor."

By an incredible coincidence, Dick Jones, the creator of the Meteor thirty-three years before, was still living in Denver. When contacted, he came out and stared, astounded, at the car, and tears came to his eyes. "This is the first of my cars I've ever seen that was restored." I was proud to share it with him. The car is believed to have always been in Colorado, just like its designer. Since his poignant visit, Dick Jones was able to track down three more of his Meteors before he passed away, sadly, in 2010.





1958 BUICK SERIES 700 LIMITED CONVERTIBLE

If ever a car was created by designers with dreams of grandeur, it had to be the 1958 Buick Limited. The Limited was born in the “Age of Excess,” which it exemplified. There was so much chrome, it looked as if it was laid on with a trowel. No more massive bumpers were ever built. The grille looked like the ceiling of a restaurant whose architect never left the bar. Called the Fashion-Aire Dynastar Grille by the admen, it was composed of hundreds of little chrome boxes, which ran from fender to fender. They were



“shaped in a design to maximize the amount of reflective light.” That was a priority in 1958. But there is more chrome than that, of course, as you can see.

The Limited was the heftiest, highest-priced, and most opulent monster ever to hit the street in the fifties. This example, with a Continental kit, stretches 22 feet. It is ostentatious magnificence in the first degree.

The production run of the Limited was only one year. Eight hundred and thirty-nine were built and only



about twenty are known to exist today. I bought this car from Gordon Apker, the owner of Shakey's Pizza. Pastimes Restoration worked their magic and turned out a car that draws raves at every show it has entered.

I can honestly say that I have never seen a nicer example of designers who got carried away. Despite all that being said, she drives very well, and few cars are as comfortable riding at 100 miles an hour.

