



From The Pen Of Ken

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The Young Deserve The Truth

The Chicago machine tool show is now over. As usual, there was the policy of no one under 18 admitted unless it was an escorted student group. I am not blaming the show management. Practical problems plus the potential for a liability suit coming from some curious tyke getting involved with a working cutter make attendance limitations necessary. It's too bad that events such as IMTS cannot be used as educational resources to show our young people just how materials are machined and formed to make the automobiles they relate to so well.

It is sad because teenagers get most of their impressions about industry and technology from television and movies. Adding to the distortion, we now have the movie "Tucker." It takes someone looking backward at age fifty to remember that Preston Tucker, just after World War II, was going to revolutionize the automobile industry with his car of the future. Some four dozen units were built and that was the end of the venture. Movies are made on the theme of good guys vs. bad guys. Naturally Tucker was the good guy and the big three auto producers and their government

bureaucrat allies were the bad guys. So we have one more movie telling our young people that big industry and government are inherently evil.

Let's look at the real story of U.S. automobile development. Automobile pioneer Henry Ford was both a dreamer and a hard realist. He used the best and most practical known design data of the time. He conceived the moving assembly line, but he also pushed machine tool builders for faster and more automatic models that would produce parts quicker and cheaper. By using better automatic machine tools and the moving assembly line, Ford was able to produce cheap, but mass-market, cars. This was something that no other car builder at the time came close to doing. By 1922 Ford accounted for three-fourths of all auto production. Then Ford stumbled. GM copied the production technology and added color and styling. Within ten years GM passed Ford in market share. Tucker's was not the first attempt to buck established trends which then concentrated on styling. In 1934 Chrysler introduced the Airflow model with very advanced engineering features. The American public re-

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fused to buy it. It took fifty years for aerodynamic styling to take hold. Chrysler tried again. In the late 1940's, they introduced gasoline saving engines with adequate but not rubber burning power, passenger compartments that were easy to enter and exit, and bodies that were modular and simple to repair. A little fender bender did not take a month's wages to fix. The American public rewarded Chrysler by walking away from them. In short order their market share fell from about twenty-five percent to something like twelve. Power and flash were then popular.

Tucker never had the capital to sustain automobile production. But Henry J. Kaiser with all his resources failed in the post-war auto market. The buying public simply said "no." Remember Studebaker, Hudson, Packard, Nash and Crosley? They were established but couldn't sustain it. Even Ford with all its resources couldn't get the market place to accept the Edsel.

Who really brought about an automobile revolution? It was the Japanese and Germans, those least expected to do it. What was the gimmick? There was none. They sim-

ply went about patiently and thoroughly doing what Ford had done sixty years ago. First, they accumulated enough capital to obtain the machines and technology that would be needed to produce automobiles. They then added modern shop floor control and quality concepts that would fill the one market void that was not being supplied by any domestic producer. American cars were big, glitzy, and riddled with quality defects. The foreigners introduced economy cars with superior quality levels and styling that did not shout cheapness.

There were no lone "heroes" fighting the establishment. Nor was there a belief that the mighty were invincible. History has shown that even big corporations can make mistakes.

The foreign group simply took a page from history and emulated Ford's original success by putting together adequate capital, sound production technologies, and commitment to fill a genuine need that existing producers were not serving.

We will only be fair with our young people when we show them the true reality dealing both with technology and history.