

Pass It On®...

Never Give Up.

Lessons learned from Preston Tucker, creator of one of the most innovative cars in American history.

Preston Tucker was inducted into the Automotive Hall of Fame in 1999, quite an accomplishment for somebody who only built 51 cars.

What was it about him that made him so indispensable as an innovator? As the Hall of Fame puts it, "Tucker is described as a visionary who changed the automobile establishment."

He grew up in Michigan — the heart of American car country. By age 16, he was flipping cars: buying clunkers, fixing them and reselling them. His mind was constantly at work on how to improve current designs.

He took a job at the Michigan police department because he wanted to drive a police car. Automobiles in the early 1900s didn't come with heaters, and Michigan was notoriously cold in the winter. Young Preston cut a hole in the dashboard of a police car to let the heat from the engine into the cab. He was promptly banned from driving.

Tucker ran a gas station, sold cars, worked on race cars and never stopped dreaming. In those days, the steps to prototype were simple: Draw it. Build it. Try it. Refine it. There were no computer-generated models, just trial and error.

After a failed attempt at selling the military a faster tank with a rotating turret, Tucker turned back to car design, sensing that the American public would be ready for a leap into the future following WWII. His barn workshop would produce many of the innovations featured in the Tucker Torpedo, designs years ahead of their time: a padded dashboard, pop-out windshield, disc brakes, rear engine, and most famously, a cyclops headlight that turned with the wheels.

But funding for the company did not come easy. The SEC came down hard on Tucker, and he was distracted by mounting debt and legal battles. He won the battle but lost the war. He could only produce 51 cars before his company went bankrupt. Ironically, a Tucker is worth over a million dollars today. The 47 cars still in drivable condition

would pay off the company's debt with plenty left over for investment in future growth.

The Tucker automobile production building eventually became a Tootsie Roll factory. Many of the unique designs and innovations by Preston Tucker were adopted by other manufacturers and became standard. Automobile historians will say that Preston Tucker's real accomplishment was changing the mindset of car makers from creating mere transportation to focusing on families and safety.

History turns on innovation. At a time when Detroit was making yesterday's cars, Tucker was speeding into the future.

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