

Packard Plans a New Golden Era



Sketch from design section reveals lines along which Packard is thinking.

**All Detroit is
watching as this
company once again
tries to storm the
glorious peak it held
back in the '20's**

By Gene M. Brown

"I hear Packard has itself a new head man to puff it out of hot water," the assembly-line veteran remarked. He was downing his five-o'clock beer in a Detroit bar last summer. Nobody was surprised at his information—Packard had changed top brass before.

"I also hear this new head man is fixing to push Cadillac out of the top luxury sales slot!" he continued. This time he got a reaction. Everyone within earshot broke out in loud, unbelieving guffaws. That was last July.

Today, nobody around Detroit is laughing at Packard. For Packard, the company with the golden past, is planning a new golden future for itself.

Jim Nance (James J. on the letterhead) is the



1899 First Packard



1914 Packard Coupe



1929 Packard Phaeton



1937 Packard 12



1946 Packard Clipper

Custom-built Caribbean, a modification of the Pan-American, is the first of Packard's new line of luxury cars. It sells for \$5,200.



"head man" who's taken over. In less than a year, things are moving so fast that an employee of Packard since 1911 says he's "never worked so hard" in his life. A competitor, looking out of his window, remarks: "Half the smoke coming out of that chimney is coal smoke; rest is Nance."

And he isn't exaggerating—too much. While Packard had brought out only two new car models between the mid-thirties and 1949, in just one year Nance has changed the face of existing models; brought out the Pan-American sports car to sell for about \$6,000; changed Packard's entire selling concept; jazzed up production; cut costs; and generally, as his public relations staff will tell you, "raised constructive hell."

This seems to be just what the company needs. For Packard's history is similar to that of the man who was once rich, lost most of his money, and then tries to get back into the top brackets.

But let's go back and see how it all happened.

It may be an old bromide that "the bigger they are the harder they fall" but Packard certainly proved it true. Packard had fallen hard despite these significant "firsts" in car making:

In 1900 the "Ohio," forerunner of today's Packards, sported a steering wheel instead of the then conventional tiller. This was three years before Ford Motor Company was organized.

In 1903, the year the Ford empire took root, a man named Tom Fitch drove a single cylinder Packard named "Old Pacific" from San Francisco to New York. It took Mr. Fitch a mere 60 days.



Monte Carlo is special Coupe de Ville model which Packard commissioned Richard Arbib to design. It's now being exhibited around the country as an example of what to expect in the way of luxury from Packard.

In 1913 Packard showed the public a car using forced lubrication—a method still in general use.

In 1914, Packard engineers developed the bevel gear. The year 1926 was a year for hypoid gearing at Packard.

It's small wonder that before the end of the '20s newspapers wrote about Packard as they do today about the Rolls-Royce. Packards were described as cars "with the typical characteristic luxury look."

At the peak of its "class car" popularity, Packard had more different models than there are makes of cars produced today. In 1935 it brought out 43 different cars priced from \$1,000 to \$5,000.

But the depression had begun and Packard was worried. Somebody decided upon an economy campaign. This meant, to Packard's executives, that they must cut down on the number of models and shift their sales and production emphasis from luxury to low price. Now Monday morning quarterbacks realize this reasoning couldn't have been worse.

As soon as the de-emphasis plan took hold, Packard became just another lower-priced car. People buying luxury cars turned to other makes. Investigations of past recessions and depressions would have shown that only the very lowest priced items in an industry and, oddly, the highest priced items, continue to sell in any quantity. The middle bracket suffers.

That's where Packard placed itself. It suffered.

Even with wrong economic emphasis Packard proved to the world it hadn't totally lost its design sense, although many of its competitors were sure Packard had lost its sense of timing. Despite warnings of a coming war, Packard in 1941 introduced a hot design designated as the "wind streaming." These were the first modern cars with front fenders bleeding back into front doors.

The design went over. Only (Continued on page 70)

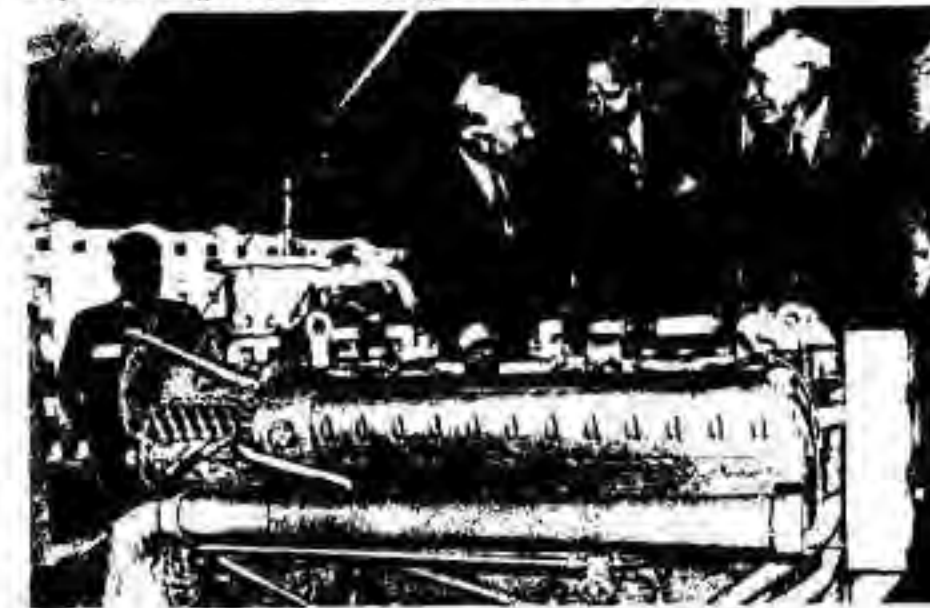
Automotive and business writer Gene M. Brown covers cars for the NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE.



"Pregnant Elephant" is what Packard's new head man, Jim Nance, calls this 1948 model which helped send the company skidding. Salesmen almost couldn't give them away.



New Packard Patrician represents a real face-lifting job. However, Nance makes it clear that this is only the first step in a long series of exciting new plans for Packard.



Dynamic President James J. Nance, center, checks details of Packard's new Navy diesel engine with two vee's. Nance arrived at Packard right after rejuvenating GE's Hotpoint.



Packard Plans Golden Era

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Packard couldn't capitalize on it. Public demand boomed but Packard couldn't meet orders. And, with war work cutting into production, all the companies in the industry found they could sell almost any car design to the public—just so long as the car could move. So, Packard had tipped its style hand and lost a race. The design was so good that the Russians "invented" it after World War II and still use it for their top cars.

Then came the crusher, the car that almost killed them—the post World War II Packard. It came out in 1948 and its virtues were four sound chassis for different models (compared to seven in 1936); three different engines: 130, 145 and 160 horsepower; and sound engineering. Its drawbacks were: lack of a real luxury line; a tight price spread—from \$2,125 to \$5,000, with most production squeezed into lower priced lines.

And, of course, the worst design since the swayback mule!

Nance calls this car the "pregnant elephant." It was also dubbed the "waddling beetle" and several other things that won't bear repeating. But none of the names were complimentary.

Packard salesman reported: "You can't give the darn things away."

Packard continued to skid. It lost its traditional share of the market, dropping in 1948-49 to a mere 2 per cent of total industry sales.

Then last year Nance arrived on the scene.

How does an auto company move back to the top spot after living in the shadow of greatness for nearly 20 years? Well, it's not easy. It tries to find out what is wrong, keeps looking prosperous while working hard to make ends meet, sells every minute of the day and night without appearing to sell and, generally, hopes its competition has no small troubles. It also advertises and promotes.

Packard's executive group knows as well as Nance that it's impossible to estimate accurately how much money will be put aside for advertising and promotion. But conservatively, Packard plans to put \$15,000,000 to \$18,000,000 into ads and merchandising over the next seven to ten years.

There are some other minor obstacles to be overcome before Packard is top man on the totem pole—not enough money in the kitty to allow it to gamble on a wrong guess in car style; the need for a thoroughly revamped dealer and sales program; and the little matter of Cadillac, Chrysler and Lincoln.

But if ideas are dollars and rumors are cents Packard is going to hit the jackpot pretty soon now. This regenerated oldster of the automobile business has more rumors flying around it than the proverbial mutt has fleas. Even Packard's public relations department, headed by Pat Monaghan, is having trouble separating the rumors they start from the ones someone else dreams up.

To sample a few: It is rumored that Packard will go heavily into the low-priced car market—a rumor that brings a shudder to the not very slender frame of Nance.

It is also rumored that Packard doesn't

yet fully know where it is going. That is fairly true but only in the sense of detail. Packard knows it is going to the top—or else.

Yet, despite the rumors and counter-rumors, some things are known for sure.

Packard will, this year, bring out a Coupe de Ville body in its line. It will be a forerunner of other custom cars.

An elegant town car, limousine and town car-limousine are also set for limited production soon. It depends on the cost and the quantities of materials Packard can get. The town car and limousine combination, explains Nance, is for those "discriminating" people tired of being driven around in the same old fish-tailed Cadillac. The basic difference between the three types is that the town car is self driven, the limousine is fixed up with a front leather seat for the chauffeur, and the combination can be driven either by chauffeur or owner (no leather seat, but a disappearing partition).

Also on the drawing boards is a super-chromed razzle-dazzle type convertible with which Packard hopes to knock the stuffings out of Cadillac's El Dorado and Chrysler's XK 310. It won't be too long before the model moves from the drawing boards into production—maybe less than a year.

Packard's programs, of necessity, have to be tempered by limited supplies of money—limited for the automobile industry, that is. This confines experimentation to avenues of research that can be applied to current problems.

"That's the main reason why Packard will not bring out any gadget-ridden car of the future," Nance says. But he adds, smiling wryly, "Who knows what can be brought out tomorrow that will be practical in a very short time."

Nance was referring, possibly, to Packard's 1954-55 plans for a new car. Certainly those models will contain Packard's famed Ultramatic drive, power steering and the rest. Also, it is more than likely the 1955 models will have a V-8 engine, drastic changes in window and door treatment, as well as other design changes—most of which have not yet been set. Nance, ex-head of Hotpoint, never turned out a drah package there. He's not going to start at Packard.

By 1960 Packard hopes to have cars entered in every price line except the low-priced one. It will sell cars at prices slightly higher than the Buick Special, a move intended to take away part of the Buick market. Part of the sales ammunition will be such phrases as "You get much more for a little more." Buick, of course, won't be sleeping it and when this happens.

Packard's 1953 models are an improvement. Interiors are jazzed up, colors match inside and out and real chrome is used on the Packard Patrician; not the chrome plate used on less expensive cars. In other words, it had a bit of a face lifting.

The only disappointment was the engine, a straight eight type. All of its competition has V-8s under the hood. The answer to this, again from Nance: "The car is a sweet performer with this engine, so why change it for some quick-built job? Why not wait until you've got



"Comrade, today you have been given honorable privilege of establishing new world record."

1953 DESIGN ROUNDUP

by richard arbitt

As the 1953 models come into view, it becomes increasingly apparent that, with few exceptions, no real New World philosophy of car styling is forthcoming on this side of the ocean. I watch the trend toward European influence in the styling of American automobiles with the feeling that here is an unalterable march into the sea.

A small dose of the "greener pastures" theory should suffice. But the growing pattern of follow-the-leader seems to have stunted the real growth of the American automotive stylist.

Working with chassis of advanced design based on new conceptions of frame, suspension and floor construction or utilizing advanced unit-type structures, the designers of this country could outstyle and outbuild their European competitors on every count. But, instead we seem to copy the worst features of Farina, Ghia, Vignale and a host of other Mediterranean craftsmen. And usually we are too big and too late. Blind copying of Continental features, often times just as they become obsolete on far shores, will eventually rack up a fine goose egg for this country

on the international scoreboard of car design.

Specifically, on the 1953 Dodge, the sculpturing of the fanned area of the rear fenders is pleasingly subtle. Yet, on the same car we find trim parts which are neither new nor well-adapted to the forms on which they are found. Similarly a lack of styling direction can be found in the progress of the Ford front end which has digressed from a single spinner motif in 1950, to double spinners in 1951, to triple spinners in 1952 and then back again to the single spinner in 1953. It is also disturbing that in an industry which spends millions of dollars annually on styling and tooling, three cars—Pontiac, Willys and Dodge—must wind up with very similar rear fender fin shapes.

Or, take the aircoop ornament on the Hudson. Is this misplaced, applied decoration any improvement over DeSoto's aircoop unit? This would seem to be more than coincidence and more than the result of designers meeting in the nearest bar. It reflects a concentrated lack of a "theory for tomorrow"—a need for an approach to the future in which styling programs are based on long-term gains.

The only original feature of Cadillac's El Dorado, presented as "a new trend in design of American motor cars," is its wrap-around windshield. As for Cadillac's 1953 front end, I hope that the addition of those protruding guards, which are completely out of scale with the rest of the body and poorly related to the grille proper, are not an indication of America's design trend.

A welcome exception to heavy-handed trend is Studebaker's

lower-silhouette model in which clean sculptural lines have been embodied with taste and restraint. Particularly deserving of praise is the concave sculptured line extending through fender and door panels, even though the backward slope and matching window lines are reminiscent of certain Lancia styling by Farina. The overall dimensions of this car, with a height of 56 inches, make for a light and fleet feeling. And the minimum of chrome makes for a better chrome-versus-paint ratio.

If there is to be a revival of originality in American car styling, engineers must provide new and exciting chassis specifications—not just reworks of the common frame year after year, but basic and creative versions of all the components of chassis design.

The stylists must also be given the opportunity to create experimental cars each year, the prototypes of which should be built in this country and exhibited at automobile shows here and in Europe.

In order to create these special cars, the custom body building industry must be rejuvenated and subsidized by the manufacturers. There are many firms here that can produce body work equal to any found overseas. And their function is important as specialists unhampered by production limitations.

No great harm would be done if we relegated European achievements to comparative-research files and really started to cultivate a genuine American school of automobile design. Let's cast aside our overseas rear-view sales mirrors and take a good look at the road leading to American design prestige.

the best around, and then put it in?"

That's Nance's philosophy—part of his program to make Packard the most coveted car in the United States. He has other plans, one of which is already on the market. This is the splitting of the Packard into two distinct lines of cars: the Packard, for the highest-price market; and the Packard Clipper, for the upper-medium-price market, around the top of the Buick Special price range. The name Packard may be dropped from the Clipper line, but it will still be a Packard car.

Some of Nance's fire has caught hold out at the Packard plant. In the short time he's been there he's cut deeply into production waste that was building up in the past seven years. He has the workers so fired up that I heard one saying to another: "You know, I might even buy a Packard this year, myself."

What are Packard's actual chances for cracking the Cadillac domination of its field? Not so good for the next year or two. But more than 50-50 over the long pull.

For one thing, Packard has Cadillac on its side—at least for the time being. Don Ahrens, general manager of Cadillac, would hellow from here to the China Sea if anyone were to tell him he was helping Packard. But the fact is that Cadillac is all too popular for its own good. What has happened since the end of the war is that Cadillac found more buyers than it ever dreamed existed for a car of its price. The result: every time Cadillac turns out a full year's production it ends up with a year's backlog of orders it can't hope to fill until the following year.

This makes Packard happy indeed. For these customers for Cadillacs who are unable to get delivery constitute a big market—nearly 100,000 prospects.

Nance is out for 5 to 6 per cent of the total car market—a market he figures will average about 5,000,000 passenger cars a year over the next ten years. This means production of about 200,000 to 250,000 cars a year, or about double the current rate of 120,000 a year. The 120,000 a year figure, incidentally, repre-

sents a 70 per cent jump in production demanded by Nance. Packard employment right now is at an all-time high.

Where do they go from here? The answer is as far as they can go without getting hurt. It wouldn't surprise anyone to see Nance offer Packard limousines with two weeks' free use of a chauffeur. The sky's the limit so far as selling is concerned, and Packard's effort may well crack the sales sound barrier.

It is Nance's dream to first make Packard the most desired car in the United States, then the world. After that, he might be going after the rest of the solar system.

Nance puts it his own way:

"I'll be damned if I'm going to be in a horse race and get left at the quarter pole. Let's either get in or get out. If we are going to make a quality car, then let's get in the race. And if we are going to abandon the field, then let's do it with honor, not by default."

He wasn't just talking. *