

Midwest-built cars help fill 'Pioneer' collection

Story and photos by Gerald Perschbacher

Murdo, S.D., is as good a place as any to discuss cars built in the Midwest, outside of Michigan, and Dave Geisler, of the Pioneer Auto Show, may be better than most to be in that discussion.

"The Pioneer Auto Show was started in 1954 by my dad, A.J. 'Dick' Geisler and his family," Geisler said. In 1945, the family moved to Murdo and opened a John Deere and Chevrolet dealership, followed later by a Phillips 66 gas station.

Eventually, when the car collection started building, A.J.'s sons, John and Dave, joined in finding some wonderful examples of America's motoring past. Many cars came to the collection through tips and classified ads.



The 1918 Briggs & Stratton Flyer was hardly more than boards on wheels, powered by a small motor. It was made in Milwaukee.

"We'd make calls all around, and many of our cars in the early years of operation came from the upper Midwest," Geisler said. This led to the discussion of Midwest-built cars without Detroit's pedigree.

Velie

"The Velie comes first to mind," Geisler said. He pointed out some display items and clippings about the 1911 Velie speedster being a consistently successful contender in the Great American Race.

The car was made in Illinois by William Velie, grandson of John Deere, Geisler said.

"The Velie was known for its good quality at a low price. In 1922, the U.S. Navy tested 76 foreign and domestic cars to select the best features for the adaptation to the aircraft," Geisler said. "Velie was one of the eight chosen."

The car in the Pioneer collection has crossed the country several times and has clocked more than 30,000 miles.

"That Velie keeps running, even in temperatures around 110 degrees," Geisler said. "It's bulletproof."

Auburn, Cole, Moon etc.

Geisler said other Midwestern cars have made their mark on history, and he mentioned Indiana's Auburn (a 1929 model graces the collection), and from St. Louis, Moon (1921), Windsor (1929) and Gardner (no longer in collection).

Geisler said a 1922 Stephens that's no longer in the collection was built with the cooperation of Illinois' Moline Plow Co.

And just north of the border:

"There was a Cole made in Racine. Those Coles are very much in demand — there aren't many of



A 1902 Jewel made in Ohio is one of the ancient vehicles that came from the Midwest.



The Pioneer Auto Show is just that — a year-round show for vintage cars and paraphernalia unlike any other site in the world. It is the passion of one family.



The 1914 Henderson was a cyclecar made in Indiana.



In 1921, St. Louis-built Moon offered quality cars in the medium-price field, such as this.

them," Geisler said. A 1921 Cole also was once a part of the collection.

"Midwestern cars were good cars, well built, nicely styled," said Geisler. "They offered buyers good value for the money. I like them."

Geisler said Moon started out building buggies that were popular among Quakers.

"They were craftsmen. They wouldn't put their name on anything if it wasn't good quality," Geisler said. "The Moon name and its quality was well established. It meant much to St. Louis."

As for Windsor, Geisler said the upscale brand was launched by Moon toward the end of Moon's production history, but without permission from the British Royal Family to use the name and symbol.

The Pioneer Auto Show is home to some Packards (originally built in

Warren, Ohio, before locating to Detroit). But our concentration was on cars made outside of Michigan.

And the rest ...

Geisler pointed out some items in the collection, like the 1919 Apperson Jackrabbit (Indiana), 1914 Henderson cyclecar (Indianapolis), 1918 Briggs & Stratton (Milwaukee), 1928 Peerless (Ohio), 1935 Nash and 1926 Ajax (both Wisconsin), and several Studebakers including a 1929 Erskine (Indiana).

As visitors were milling by, many were awed by the variety of vehicles on display.

"Never heard of these cars," said one middle-age man. "Heard of many others, but not these."

For more information on the Pioneer Auto Show, log onto www.pioneerautoshow.com.



Dave Geisler stands beside the 1937 Indiana made in Fort Wayne, Ind.



Dave and son David flank a rare 1949 Nash wrecker. The men represent the second and third generations of the Murdo attraction.



Dave Geisler proudly displays a 1934 Auburn at Murdo.



Few, if any, other Windsor sedans from 1929 exist. One is at Pioneer Auto Show.