

Sleek machines, elegant clothes roll back the clock

By LOUISE OKRUTSKY

These cars were made by men in love with machines.

Sunday afternoon at Meadow Brook Hall, men still in love with the sleek lines and gleaming chrome brought their prized autos to compete in the hall's Concours d'Elegance.

The competition emphasized beauty and craftsmanship instead of speed and performance.

Cars exhibited at Meadow Brook were expected to be in good enough working condition to make the short hop from the hall's front door to the golf course. Other than that, they were expected to be beautiful.

Most of the cars assembled for Sunday's event had been painstakingly restored by their owners.

Setting off the craftsmanship of the autos were gowns from the Matilda Wilson collection.

In 1926, Mrs. Wilson wore a tiered black lace gown accented by beadwork along the hem and seams. The hankerchief point gown was worn over the weekend by Mrs. Catherine Light of Rochester as she stood next to a 1932 Chrysler Imperial Four-Door Convertible.

Mrs. Light admitted to a minor reconstruction of Mrs. Wilson's formal gown. The black slip which set off the lace was missing from the dress, so Mrs. Light added her own.

THE OWNER of the car, Frank Kleptz of Terre Haute, Ind., completed a major reconstruction project.

When he purchased the green and white convertible in the early '70s, it

resembled a heap of burned rubble. Destroyed by fire, the car, nonetheless, enchanted Kleptz, who paid \$4,000 for the remains.

Admitting that it was several years before he told his wife the price of his prize, Kleptz transported the Chrysler from St. Petersburg, Fla., to Indiana and embarked on a restoration project that cost him another \$8,500 and 4½ years.

"I did all the work myself. Now, it's worth 10 times that amount," he said.

Even the tires of the Chrysler had been burned off the car. Kleptz contacted fellow antique car buffs and borrowed parts so he could copy them for his auto. He took photos and measurements of remaining Chrysler Imperials. Of the 43 originally made, there are about 12 of the convertibles left.

Kleptz visited the Chrysler archives to research data for his project.

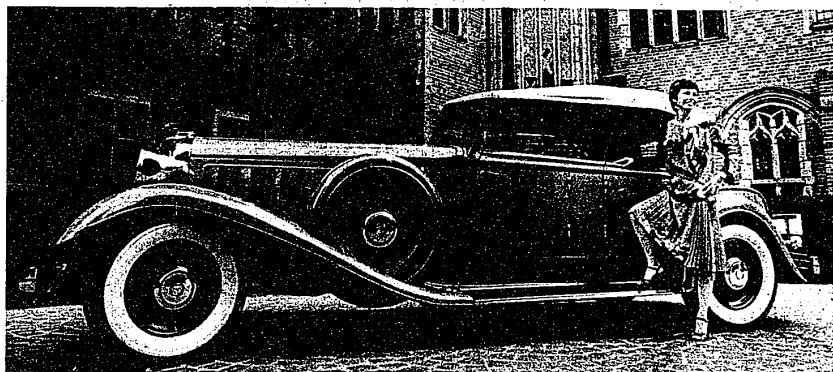
"I was devoted to it," he admitted.

Finally, he began to paint the reconstructed car which features maple interior finishes and leather upholstery. There are compartments in the back which hold thermos bottles and maps. Each compartment is done in leather.

WHEN KLEPTZ painted his car, he did each piece individually, then he assembled the vehicle.

"To get it to look like a new car," he said.

When it really was a new car, it averaged 10 miles to the gallon and cost \$3,595 at the dealership. New owners had their choice of colors. It was an option open to buyers who chose to spend more than the \$500 price tag attached to a Ford or Plymouth.



The car is a 1933 Chrysler Imperial. Joyce Wartinbee is wearing an embroidered dress from 1928. (Staff photos by Mindy Saunders)

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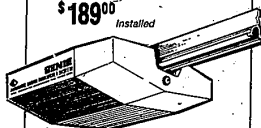
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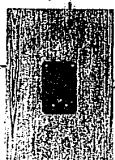


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