

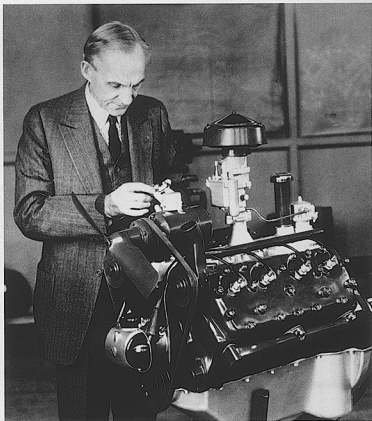
attesting to the V-8's superior speed and handling. Barrow and accomplice Bonnie Parker were shot to death in a Ford V-8, adding illicit glamour to a vehicle with impeccable real-world performance credentials. The '32 Ford also became the vehicle of choice for returning World War II servicemen looking to build the first hot rods, further cementing its place, and the place of the V-8, in the American story.

After the war, a new generation of overhead-valve V-8s appeared from the likes of Oldsmobile, Buick, Studebaker, and Cadillac, but those marques all carried a significant price premium. Chevrolet, Ford's most frequent antagonist for the annual-sales crown, didn't offer a modern V-8 until 1955. To put it mildly, it was worth the wait.

Ed Cole, Chevrolet's newly promoted chief engineer on the project, had ambitious goals for what came to be known as the "Mighty Mouse" engine. His personal motto was "Kick the hell out of the status quo," and the Chevrolet small-block did just that. It weighed less than the Blue Flame inline-six that preceded it but made considerably more power. Just as important, it was designed to be capable of growing from its original displacement of 265 cubic inches (4.3 liters) all the way to 428 cubic inches (7.0 liters) in the 2000s. It was an overhead-valve design, with two valves per cylinder operated by a single cam nestled in the vee of its cast-iron block, and it benefited from every innovation, and every lesson, that General Motors had learned during the design and production of its upscale siblings.

Ford had actually beaten Chevrolet to market with its Y-block overhead-valve V-8, but it was quickly apparent that it couldn't cut the mustard against Cole's brilliant effort. The Y-block's replacement, the 1961 Windsor V-8, made a much better case for itself, particularly in the new Mustang that appeared three years later. In the decades to come, the small-block Ford V-8 would become synonymous with the Mustang brand, from the original Shelby GT350 to the Boss 302 all the way to the infamous "five-point-oh" Mustangs of the Eighties and Nineties.

By 1963, every major American manufacturer had at least one modern V-8 design, with some fielding both a small-block for general-purpose use and a big-block for full-size cars and trucks. Most of these engines, like the small-block Chevrolet, were designed with considerable room between the cylinder bores to accommodate increases in displacement. When John Z. DeLorean found a way to circumvent an internal GM policy



Henry Ford mass-produced the flathead V-8 in 1932 from a single casting.

limiting cars to 10 pounds per cubic inch, the result was the 389-cubic-inch 1964 Pontiac GTO and the beginning of the muscle-car era.

Postwar economic struggles kept European and Japanese drivers from universally embracing the V-8, but that didn't stop a few automakers from designing, or borrowing, some thrilling examples of the type. Rolls-Royce fielded a massive, overhead-valve engine displacing 6.25 liters (technically 6230 cc). It first appeared in 1959 models but survives today, appropriately refined and aggressively turbocharged, in the modern Bentley Mulsanne.

Nissan and Toyota both introduced overhead-valve V-8s for their premier luxury cars in the mid-Sixties. At the same time, Mercedes-Benz released the massive, overhead-cam M100 engine for its 600 Grosser limousine. The Germans were unable to resist the temptation of putting it in Mercedes's flagship sedan as well, creating the iconic 300 SEL 6.3 and, later, the 450 SEL 6.9. The Italians only dabbled with production V-8s in the Fifties and Sixties, but the lasting impact of Ferrari's 1974 Dino 308 GT4 and its successors made up for their tardiness.

Perhaps the most interesting overseas V-8, however, was one with American origins. In 1960, Buick released a small, light, all-aluminum V-8 engine for use in compact and mid-size cars. It wasn't a big hit, so the company decided to cancel the

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