

THE ANALYSIS

THE SOUND OF VIOLINS

**DOWNSIZING AND FORCED INDUCTION BE DAMNED.
LONG LIVE THE V-8.**

BY JACK BARUTH | PHOTOGRAPHY BY MATTHEW LITTLE

IT STARTS WITH THE SOUND. You can't mistake a V-8 at wide-open throttle for anything else, and once that sound gets into you, nothing else will satisfy. The internal-combustion engine offers a veritable symphony of exhaust notes, from the boxer blat of a flat-six to what is often called the "ripping canvas" sound of a V-12, but the bent-eight is the violin of the orchestra, the concertmaster's choice. It is simultaneously exotic and democratic, appearing in quarter-million-dollar supercars and everyday work trucks. You hear its song in the Lotus 49 and the Ford Crown Victoria. The V-8 logo has proudly adorned the fenders of Ford Mustangs and AMG-powered Mercedes-Benzes. It is the archetypal American performance engine, but it was also the logical choice for the first Lexus LS 400. Some people say it is the only engine that matters.

Of course, some people also say that the Clash is the only band that matters—and by "some people," I mean CBS Records, which coined the phrase for use in their promotional material. Forty years later, punk-rock fans are still saying it, and not without justification. The Clash didn't invent punk, but they made it available and accessible.

Henry Ford didn't invent the V-8, but he made it available and accessible. In 1932, Ford put a "flathead" V-8 in his Model 18 after a short, troubled, and somewhat incomplete design and development process. The flat-head design, which placed the exhaust and intake valves in the block next to the cylinder instead of above it, was already old tech at the time. At 65 hp, the flathead's output was more than 50 percent higher than the four-cylinder in the Model A but wasn't significantly more powerful than Chevrolet's inline-six.

Ford's advantage was curb weight. The Model 18 was a couple hundred pounds lighter than the competition, making it perhaps the first American muscle car. The price was right, too: \$460 for the roadster. The

flathead wasn't without teething problems in early production, but nobody seemed to care. Production barely kept up with demand. And just like that, the V-8 established itself—in the United States, anyway.

Strictly speaking, the notion of connecting two inline-four engines to make an eight-cylinder wasn't even an American idea; French engineer Léon Levassieur filed the first patent for a V-8 in 1902, and in 1905, Henry Royce designed one for the Legalimit, a model so named because its engine—powerful enough to go 26 mph—was governed not to exceed the 20-mph British restriction of the time. As with pizza and swiss cheese, however, the new world lost little time in adopting the idea for its own purposes. In 1914, Cadillac became the first automaker to put the V-8 into volume production, capturing the imagination of the American public and setting the stage for Ford to democratize the concept 18 short years later.

The Ford Model 18 became known simply as the "Ford V-8" almost immediately after its introduction. Ford gleefully announced he had received letters that claimed to be from famous bank robbers Clyde Barrow and John Dillinger,

