

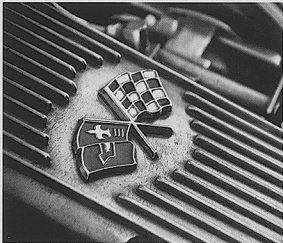
The Beach Boys' "little deuce coupe with a flathead mill" was "stroked and bored," and their "409" was, of course, the big-block Chevy engine. Chuck Berry's "Maybellene" is about a race between two V-8s—an early Coupe de Ville and a V-8 Ford, most likely a flathead since it appears to have that design's tendency to overheat at high speed.

Nor can you even begin to consider the automobile's relationship to the silver screen without seeing the outside star power of the bent-eight. The list includes everything from *Mad Max* to *Vanishing Point* to *The Blues Brothers*. The Bandit's Trans Am? V-8, of course—but you might not know that the Firebirds used in *The Rockford Files* also had the

program. A few enterprising fellows at U.K. automaker Rover convinced GM to sell them the tooling. In 1967, the Rover V-8 made its debut in the P5B luxury sedan; three years later, it was used as the power unit in a brand-new off-road vehicle called, simply, Range Rover. The Rover V-8 became the engine of choice for a variety of English small-batch sports-car manufacturers, including Morgan, TVR, and even MG, in its MGB GT V8 coupe from 1973 to 1976.

The V-8, then, is a global superstar. But what makes it so good, so desirable, so widely adopted for both street and competition cars? There are several answers to that question. The first is that the V-8, in its traditional overhead-valve, 90-degree bank-angle form, tends to be light, compact, simple, and smooth. It's light because the block is considerably smaller than the block of an equivalent inline engine. It's compact because it is the same length as an inline-four of half the displacement, without being twice as wide. It's simple because it has a single short camshaft to serve eight cylinders and 16 valves. And it's smooth because most V-8s have a 90-degree crankshaft that balances the firing order, reduces vibration, and spaces out the power pulses.

The 90-degree crankshaft also gives the V-8 the unique burble that has threaded its way into the popular consciousness over the past 80 years. It's the stock soundtrack for every action movie and television show, so much so that *Back to the Future* used a Porsche 928's engine noise instead of the actual sound of the DeLorean's V-6. But the V-8's cultural impact goes deeper than an exhaust note.



*When the fuel crisis of the Seventies hit, the V-8 acquired a new name and a new reputation: gas-guzzler.*

Pontiac 400 under the hood. Starsky and Hutch had a V-8; so did Bo and Luke Duke. *Two-Lane Blacktop* is the story of a battle between a big-block Chevy-powered '55 and a 455 Pontiac GTO. Last but not least, there's that Mustang GT 390 driven by Frank Bullitt, evading a 440 R/T Charger on the hills of San Francisco. It's about as basic as a Mustang can get, except for the motor—but did you think that Steve McQueen would have been caught dead driving the Thriftpower inline-six that came standard?

When the fuel crisis of the Seventies hit, the V-8 acquired a new name and a new reputation: gas-guzzler. It didn't help that newly mandated emissions equipment and the unleaded fuel required by the catalytic converter stole a lot of its power and prestige. But even in the darkest days of the energy crisis, when the speed limit was a dismal double-nickel and Jimmy Carter was on television telling us to turn our thermostats down to an equally depressing 55 degrees at night, the romance of the V-8 continued. *Mad Max* drove a V-8 Interceptor in 1979's idea