

THE TIN LIZZIE



It shook, rattled, banged, and groaned. It wasn't pretty either. It looked like a black box sitting on high, skinny wheels. But it could do almost anything and go anywhere. And it was cheap. What was it? It was Henry Ford's Model T car-better known as the "Tin Lizzie." It was the king of the road for nearly 20 years. And it changed the American way of life forever.

How did it come about? The earliest cars that were made took a long time to build. They were so expensive that only very few people could afford them. Then a man named Henry Ford decided to go into the business. Henry Ford wanted to make a car that would be simple, tough, and cheap. He wanted everyone to be able to buy a car. So Ford came up with the Model T. The first ones came out in 1908.

It was quite a car. You had to crank it up to start it. There was no starter to turn the engine over. Once it got going, it jittered and clanked. But it ran-almost forever. The Tin Lizzie was light. It was only 100 inches long and could turn within a 12-foot circle. It was high enough off the ground to clear ruts, large stones, and even tree stumps. Because it was so light, it could pull itself out of sand and mud. (And that was important, in those days of dirt roads.) It was strong and built to last. A farmer could use his Model T engine to pump water, saw wood, and run machinery.

Hardly anything could go wrong with it. If something did, you could fix it with a few simple tools. The new parts were cheap. At the time, a new fender cost \$2.50. A new muffler was \$1.25. You could order a Model T part by part and put it together yourself. Many people did. The Model T was plain. It came in one color-black-and had few gadgets. But stores sold hundreds of gadgets and add-on options you could put on yourself.

People liked to make jokes about the Tin Lizzie. There was a story about an old lady who saved all her old tomato cans. She sent them to the Ford factory. Soon she got a letter from the factory. It said, "Your shipment arrived. We are making it up today and will send you one new Model T. We are also returning eight cans left over." Henry Ford loved such jokes. They helped advertise his car.



The Model T was gobbled up by the public. Eleven thousand Model Ts were sold in 1908. They cost \$850 each. Other cars cost almost three times more. Then Ford started the assembly-line system of making cars. Each car was put together as it moved along an overhead chain. Each worker did one special job on the car. This made it possible to turn out cars much faster and cheaper. In 1924 Ford turned out 1,600,000 Model Ts. That was more than half the new cars on the road. And you could buy one for less than \$300!

On June 4, 1924, the 10 millionth Model T rolled off the assembly line. There were big celebrations. The car was driven from New York to San Francisco. Brass bands welcomed the car in almost every town. And more than five million Model Ts would still be made.

What finally happened to the Model T? It went out of style. The Model T body style never changed. By 1926, the flashy-looking Chevrolet had outsold it. Then Ford shut down his factories. The next year, he came out with a new car-the fancier Model A.

But the Model T had done its job. Because of it, new concrete roads were built everywhere in the U.S. It became easier for farmers to visit towns and cities. City people were able to drive out to the country. The Model T had put America on wheels.

Today, there are still 300,000 Model Ts being used in all parts of the world. "It's still the best car going," one Ford Company official said.