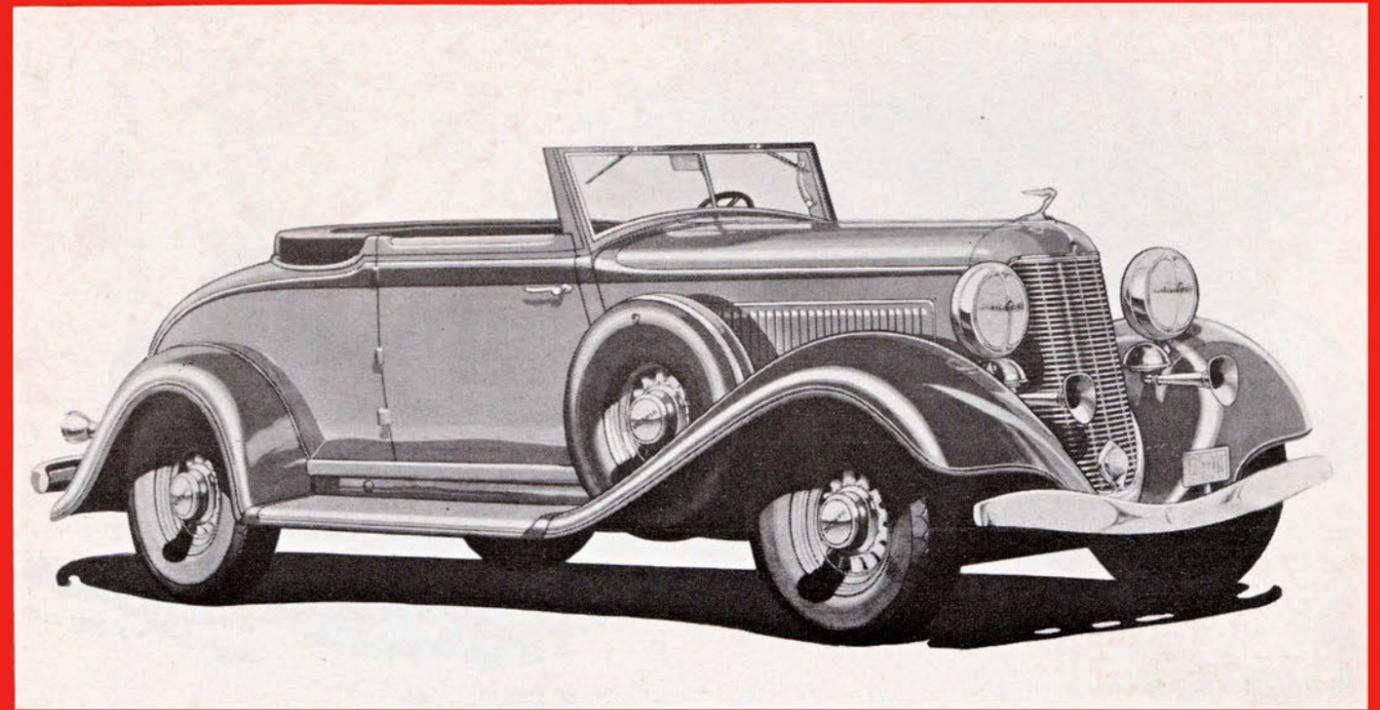
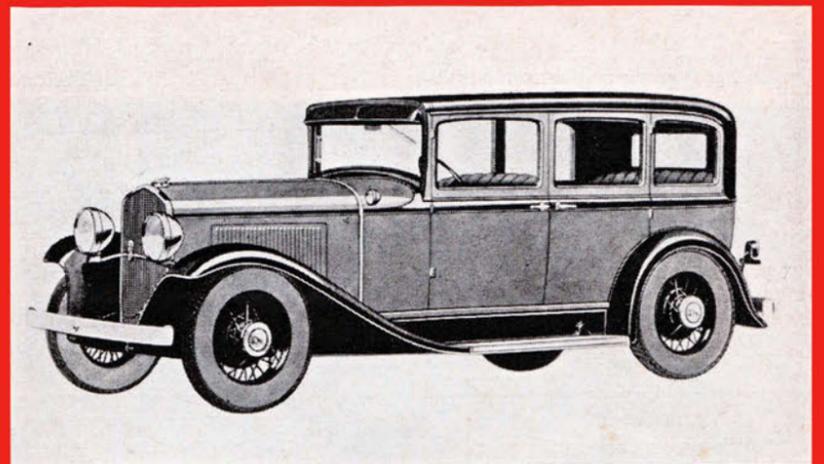


The first DeSoto had a price tag of \$845 in 1928.

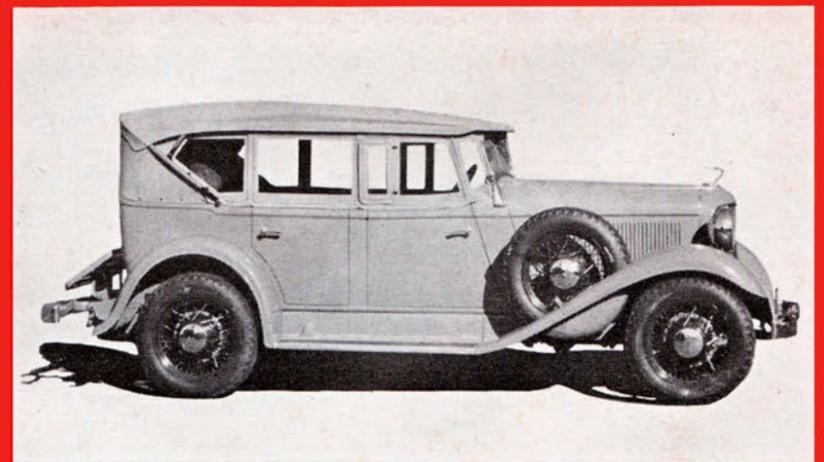


By 1933, balloon tires and free wheeling were offered.

World's lowest-priced 8 was part of 1930 line.



1932 was heyday of this Eliot Ness-model phaeton.



EPITAPH FOR DE SOTO

THE RELEASE FROM CHRYSLER CORPORATION had all the crispness of a military field order:

"Effective immediately, the Plymouth-DeSoto-Valiant Division will be known as the Plymouth Division. Dealers currently selling DeSoto automobiles are being advised that production of DeSoto cars is being discontinued."

And thus it was that, on November 18, 1960, a make that for thirty years had been an integral part of the American automotive scene slid beneath the surface almost without a ripple.

The passing of the marque was noticed more in some quarters than in others, of course. Among those most concerned were the DeSoto-Plymouth dealers; some 1649 of them. DeSoto sales had been off for at least three years, and no doubt some of the dealers were glad to trade the "cool" (sales-wise) DeSoto for the apparently "hotter" Valiant.

It was not always thus—at one time, the DeSoto dealers were rabid in their enthusiasm—in fact, that's the way it was from the very beginning. Before seeing even the proto-

type of the very first DeSoto, some 500 intrepid entrepreneurs took options on franchises shortly after the DeSoto group was formed in March 1928. July of the same year saw 95% of them take up their options upon viewing the first DeSoto car (and this after paying their own expenses to Detroit for the unveiling).

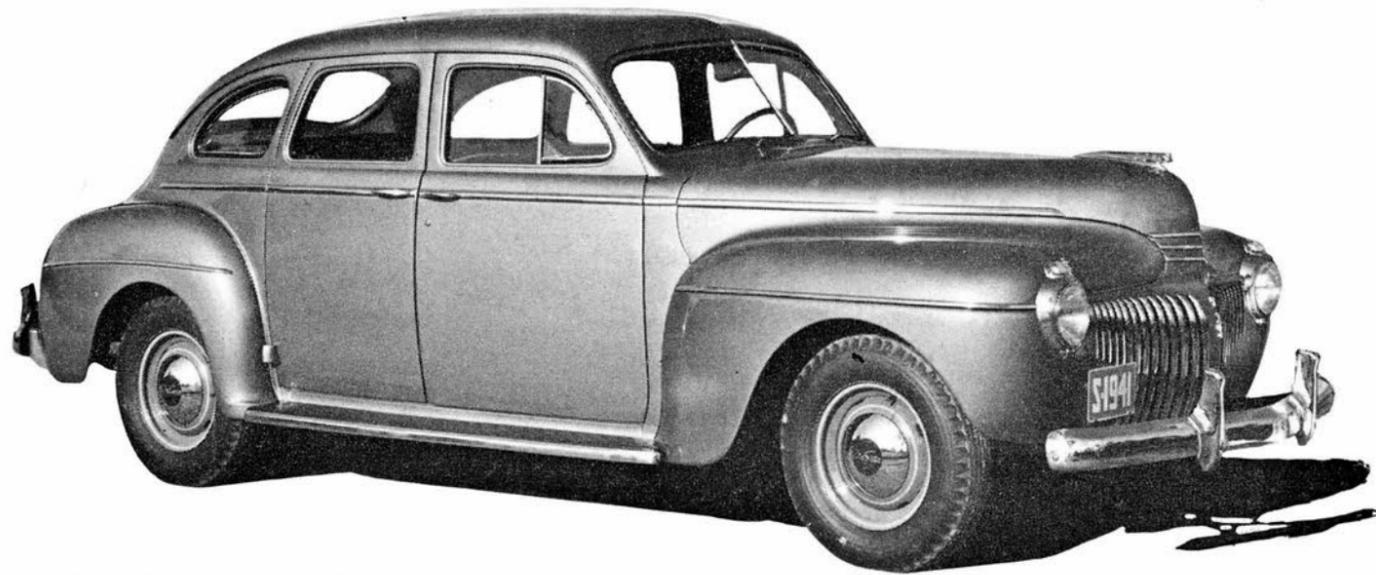
Official introduction date of the initial seven-car '29 line was August 4, 1928—in an era where annual sales of 3 million cars were split up among 35 different makes of car. How much the new arrival's regal-sounding name had to do with its acceptance is problematical, but the fact remains that it set a record for first-year sales that was still intact thirty years later when the end came.

The car's identifying emblem was the crest of the prominent DeSoto family of Spain's Andalusia province. Their family tree's most noteworthy branch was Hernando DeSoto, who ranged far afield from his native land to discover our Mississippi river in the 16th century. Led by Walter P. Chrysler, the makers of the DeSoto car selected Hernando's family as their namesake because of the connotation of "travel, pioneering, and

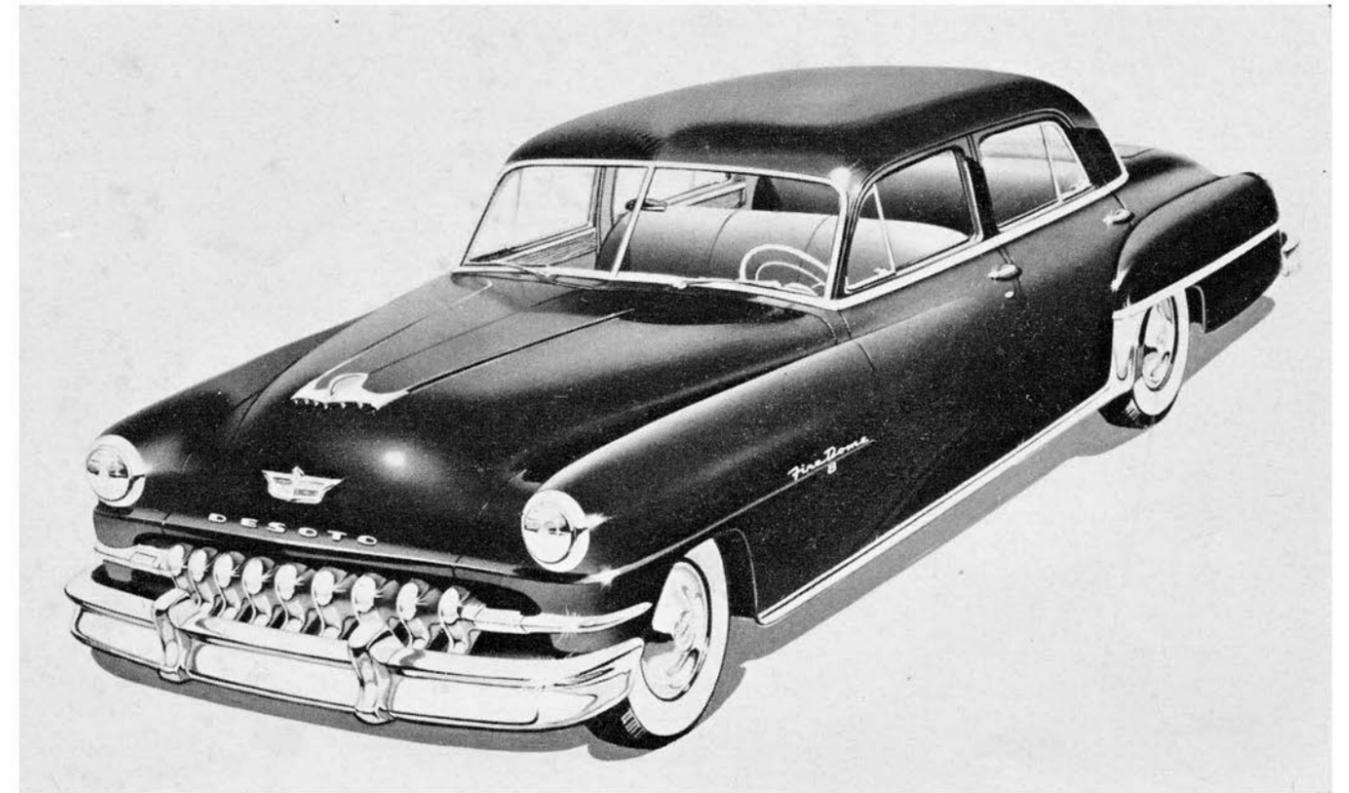
adventure." It was hoped that some of this glamor would rub off on the car, since even in those days it was felt that people bought cars more on the basis of appeal than practicality. Yet DeSoto management was always noted for its conservatism.

They never gave up on trying to give the car-buying public a glamorous image of the DeSoto car. In spite of such gambits as actually having a model called "The Adventurer," people continued to regard the DeSoto as "the maiden aunt's special." How much this may or may not have had to do with the ultimate demise of the marque will never be known, but it certainly will be argued by future students of marketing and merchandising.

Regardless of the strength, or lack of it, in the public's "product image" of the DeSoto, there's no doubt that beneath that somewhat plebeian exterior reposed a heart that attempted to make up in stamina what it lacked in spectacularity. The oft-cited example of the New York City DeSoto cabs that ran a million miles or more apiece during World War II is illustration enough. ■



First fluid drive DeSoto emerged in 1941.



Power steering was offered on 1953 models.

Torsion bar front suspension came in '57.

Unitized body-frame structure in '60.

Last year ('61) saw four-door hardtops only.



Much-maligned 1934 model was ugly Airflow; unitized construction.

Column shift came in 1939.

Push-button shifting was used on '56.

