



SACRED WINDOWS

A huge **THANK YOU** to all who generously contributed to Sacred Window's [annual appeal](#) last week! It was quite a success, and I am grateful.

Sunday – June 14, 2026

America's Rolls Royce Soared with the Angels

Dear Friends,

Have you ever experienced something so awe-inspiring that you shook your head, exhaled in amazement, and **called it a “doozy”**? Well, if not, get ready to do that when you see the cars below. They are “doozys” in a very *literal* sense.

The term expresses the overwhelming feeling you get when you contemplate not only the size of these unique American creations, but their precision engineering, their speed, and their majestic beauty. They are the ***Duesenbergs***.



Rise and Demise

In the post-war boom of the 1920s, the German-born Duesenberg brothers, Frederick (1876–1932) and August (1879–1955), took full advantage of the bustling entrepreneurial culture in America and **built a brand of car they termed “the world’s finest motorcar.”** And they weren’t bragging. Others just called their brand the American Rolls Royce.



Prior to 1920, the brothers exclusively built race cars, but when they **moved their shop to Indianapolis** (I think there’s a racecourse there, if I’m not mistaken), they kept building race cars and then expanded into *the luxury car business*.

(Left: August and Fred Duesenberg)

From 1920 to 1937, they literally hand-built close to 1200 automotive masterpieces

before they went out of business at the height of the Great Depression in 1937. It is estimated that **about half of these cars are still in existence** almost a century later. But the demise of the business is actually a very sad story.

The Roosevelt administration subsidized every other major car company in America during the Depression to keep cars rolling off the assembly lines, but they refused to help the Duesenbergs. Why? **The millionaire Roosevelt** didn’t want to be perceived as funding a project for the wealthy.

He must have forgotten that Duesenberg was **the largest employer in Indianapolis** at the time, and as a result, *hundreds of working men and women* lost their jobs there and in other locations at the time they needed work the most. Distorted ideologies create so much havoc in every age.

Fabulous Ingenuity

Yet, these cars are a sacred window of fantastic human genius and one of the hallmarks of the **Industrial Age of America**. The irony of Roosevelt’s decision is that Duesenberg cars became even more valuable once they became a piece of history.



Their rarity and superior quality now puts them in a class by themselves. They are the **celebrated granddaddy of all classic cars**.

This car, for example—the magnificent **1933 Duesenberg SJ Arlington Torpedo Coupe**—got the nickname “Twenty Grand” because that was its selling price in 1933. That would be **half a million dollars in today’s money**, but you couldn’t buy it now even for that hefty sum. It’s one of the most sought-after cars in the world, and its recent price tag at auction was \$2.5 million.



However, that seems like a discount compared to the 2018 sale of the 1935 Duesy roadster that was **owned by Gary Cooper**. It sold for \$22 million making it the most expensive car ever sold at auction anywhere! (You'll see an image of it below.)

An Angelic Analogy

It occurred to me that if God, in His mysterious Wisdom, ever wanted angels to come to earth and take the form of some human technology, they would probably appear as Duesenbergs. I know it's a crazy idea but stay with me here. Some of the characteristics have **undeniable resonances with angels**, particularly in the titles and attributes.

Various ranks of the angelic host, for example, are named Principalities, Powers, Virtues, and Dominations, and Duesenbergs bear all these likenesses. Let's take a look at them.

Princely

Well, this category hardly needs explanation. These amazing Duesenberg stars just **ooze with elegance**, the last of which is the above-named Torpedo in its appropriately regal setting:



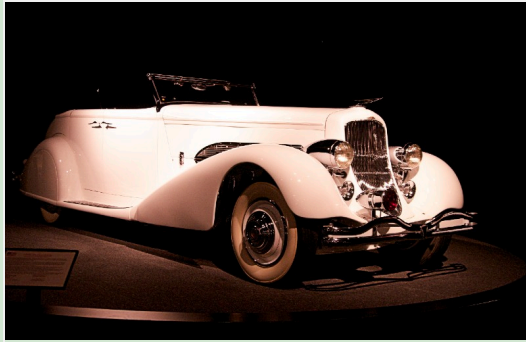
1931 Duesenberg Model J
Derham Tourster



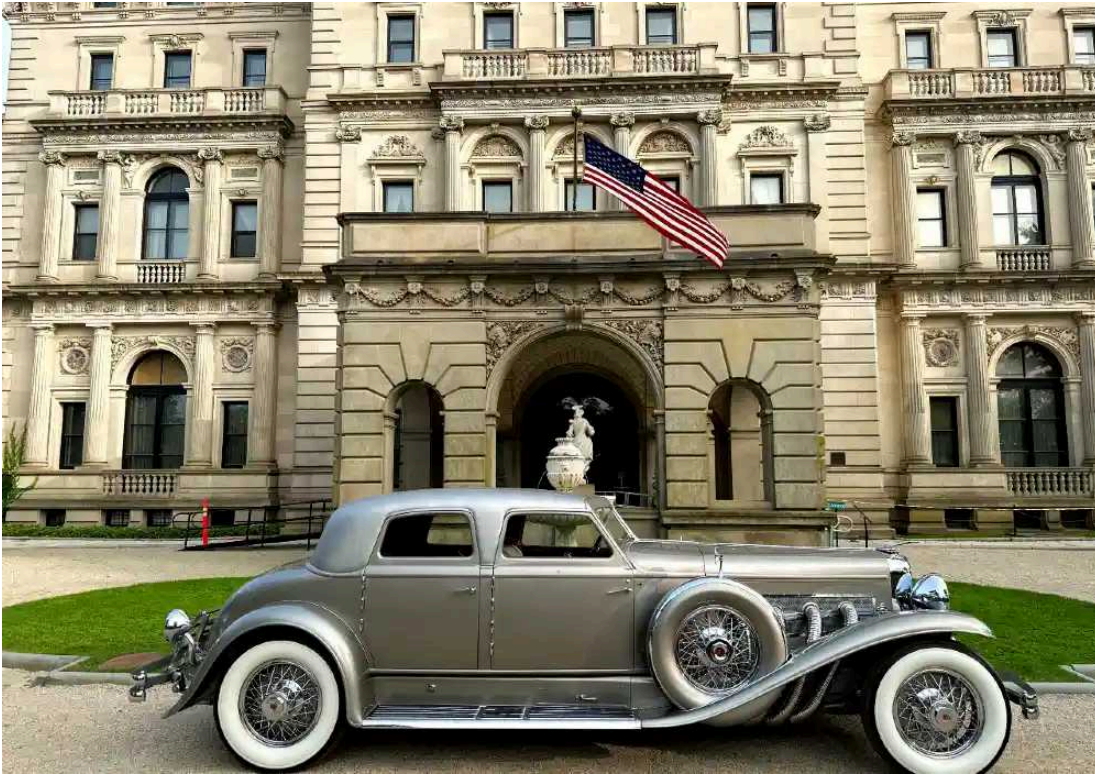
1932 Duesenberg Model SJ
Caramel and Cream



1930 Duesenberg Model J
Graber Cabriolet



1936 Deussen Model SJ
White Sedan



Virtuous

If the Virtue angels had anything to say about their technological garb, they would be absolutely **bursting with personality**. In fact, they might look like these doozys:



1934 Duesenberg Model J
LaGrande Dual Cowl Phaeton



1931 Two-Tone Duesenberg
Model J



1935 Duesenberg Model JN
Cabriolet



1935 Duesenberg Model SJ
Lagrande Dual-Cowl Phaeton



It's hard to appreciate one element of the cars that is not evident in these pictures but that bowls you over if you are standing next to them: *their length*. Each of these cars is **over 11 feet long**, some closer to 12!

Duesenbergs were the ultimate luxury car of the era. **One of their advertisements** at the time featured a drawing of an elegantly-dressed, high society lady who is being talked about by her friends at a party. The caption reads, "**She owns a Duesenberg.**" *Oooh la la.*

The marketing worked. Some of the Twenties- and Thirties-era celebrities who owned Duesenbergs were **Clark Gable, Howard Hughes, William Randolph Hearst, Greta Garbo, and Ginger Rogers**, among other lesser stars in the firmament of Hollywood's Golden Age. Even Al Capone owned one!

Continuing the celebrity trend, former *Tonight Show* host and classic car collector, **Jay Leno**, owns *four* of them today.

Sheer Power

The Power angels would not be disappointed either. These were hefty cars. They each weighed two-and-a-half tons but **could reach three tons** with all the accoutrements. They projected pure power, which was anything but a facade.

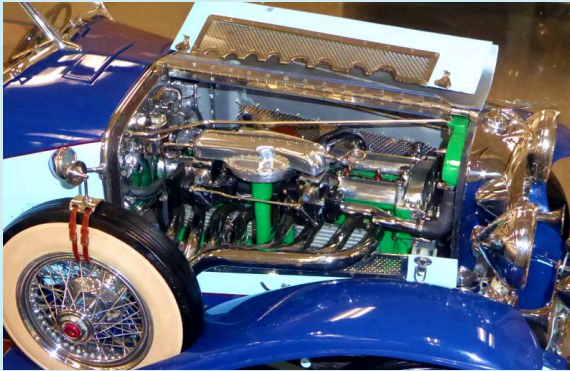
The first several iterations of luxury Duesenbergs boasted an 8-cylinder, 265 horsepower engine, which was a full 80 to 100 more equine strength than the nearest competitor. (The Cadillac, for example, had a 16-cylinder engine but was no match in power.)



1934 Duesenberg Model SJ
Convertible Coupe



1929 Duesenberg Model J Wolfington
Phaeton Royale



1932 Model SJ Duesenberg Engine by
Louis Chenot



1931 Duesenberg Model J Derham
Tourster

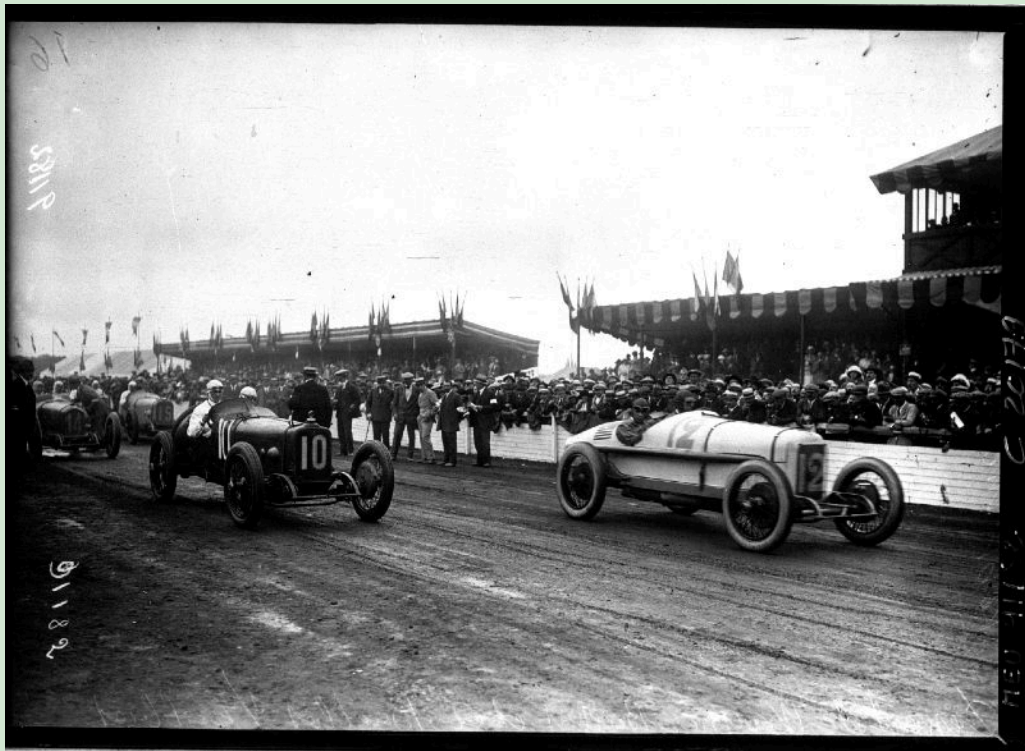
Later versions pushed the horsepower up to 320, then the two sold to Gary Cooper and Clark Gable towards the end of the era **boasted 400 horsepower** and could hit speeds of 140 mph.

One of their **marketing slogans** put it brilliantly, if a bit snootily: *"The only car that could pass a Duesenberg is another Duesenberg — and that is with the first owner's consent."* These brothers were not only clever mechanics but were marketing geniuses to boot.

Speed

Speaking of which, there's no question that horsepower equals speed, and in this category the Duesenbergs **absolutely dominated**, which may have gotten the notice of the Domination angels. Here's where the race car division proved its mettle in the early days of automotive speed racing.

In 1920, a Deussenberg broke the land speed record at Daytona Beach topping 156 mph. In 1921, Jimmy Murphy drove a Deusy to **win the French Grand Prix**, being the first American car to do so. Here's a picture of the victorious "Murphy Special" (white, #12) from the French National Archives:



And no other brand surpassed the Duesenbergs' unmatched record at **the Indy 500** in the '20s. In 1921, seven of the top ten finalists were Duesenbergs!

They won the grand prize in **1922 (the same "Murphy Special")**, **1924**, **1925**, and **1927**, and throughout the decade, even when they didn't come in first, they regularly placed in the top three. I'd say they gave the term "Roaring Twenties" new meaning.

It's not surprising then, that in the 1930s the "roadster" style version of Duesenberg became wildly popular. In addition to the **Gary Cooper model** (first image below), here are a few more roadsters, including the shapely yellow model aptly called the "Meteor" (which was actually a speed competition car):





A Better World

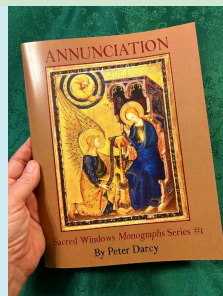
In another sad irony, Fred Duesenberg **died from the effects of a car crash in 1932**—he was only 55—and never saw some of the most brilliant creations of his company. His brother never quite got over the loss and struggled to keep the business afloat.

After its dissolution in 1937, Augie kept his hand in various aspects of the racing business, but the **luxury car business was gone**, never to return. His son, Fritz, tried to revive the brand in the 1960s, but without success.

The Duesenberg brothers gave the world a gift, and like so many gifts and talents, their precious contributions were time-limited and bound by circumstances. What makes the story so remarkable is that the brothers were immigrants to our “land of the free” who used their innate talents to create meaning and beauty for the betterment of their world while they were able to do so. *Wouldn't it be nice if everyone did that?*

Much more could be said about the Duesenberg history and accomplishments, but I think the raw imagery of their creations **tells the main story**.

I have this dream of going exploring in an old barn some day and coming across a vintage 1933 Duesenberg Riviera Phaeton SJ Coupe that's been sitting there **waiting to be discovered for sixty years**. Given all I've said about the angels, I imagine it would be a kind of spiritual experience.



The New Sacred
Windows *Monographs*

*“Evangelization Through
Beauty”*

Issue #1: “Annunciation”

Peter Darcy

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