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MONEY, MUSIC, MOVIES

AND MACHINES

THE GOLDEN ERA

by David S. Shields, Inc.

**MONEY, MUSIC, MOVIES**

**AND MACHINES**

**THE GOLDEN ERA**

**by Patrick E. Reynolds Jnr.**

**This dissertation is submitted in accordance with the requirements  
of the B. Des/ B. Sc. in Industrial Design degree  
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100, Thomas Street, Dublin 8, Ireland.**

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**Researched, compiled, written and edited by Patrick E. Reynolds Jnr.**

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### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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## INTRODUCTION

Americans didn't suffer the two Great Wars, they were too late for such luxury. Admittedly, they chose never to tarnish their image of tardiness in the future, but prior to 1950 it was they who brought chocolate to combat. Not Europe.

Pubescent in years, one century and a half old, she had suffered only from capital catastrophe in the form of an economic, or cash, crash. From 1926 onward, the silver Dollar did little other than increase its international strength.

Slowly, as the first free coins began to rattle in the nations pockets, consumerism cast its light across the then forty-eight states. To even attempt unveiling the exact reasons for certain sectors of industry yielding higher returns is a subject suitable for another study. The concern here is with the automobile.

From the first horseless carriage by Frank Duryea in 1893 to the fantasy of the **1958 Cadillac Eldorado**, this dissertation traces a path. However, one must decide between skimmed milk and full-bodied double cream before sitting down to dinner. Thus, this study focuses both eyes on the pinnacle of Creation Mountain: the Golden Era - 1956-1961. A curious pen name for an age almost entirely sculptured in chrome.

There it stood, shivering like a terrified horse being led from a barn fire, burping irregularly and gradually straining itself with a hazy halitosis. Visible beneath were belts, connecting rods and valve gear, convulsing feebly like exposed intestines. A butcherous beginning of an aesthetic industry that would grow faster than any other for over seventy years.

The beginnings of such a study could assume many forms, be they statistical surveys of evolution; a direct plunge into the nineteen fifties with cross references and back-up data; or a simple transcription of names, dates, places and people. However, one could only retire from the reading of same with a slight twinge of indigestion.

The purpose of this essay is to encompass the single most important era (suggested by the writer) of American Industrial Design. A design borne of energy, vitality, vivacious lifestyle, and genuine fun - an era that my never be repeated again. 1950 to 1960 embodies a time span of innocent and unique approaches to design. A time devoid of rules or restraints. A time when design was truly free.

Through examination one must enquire for a reason for this apparent recklessness of approach to design beyond the recognition of its value. Thus the basis of the study is detailed. It is the belief of the writer that the car of this era was an industrial reflection of the society for which it was intended. In short, the politics, music and cinema of this era was the driving force behind the design of these cars.

Approaching the subject in reverse, this dissertation examines the background and uses it as a screen to float the product on. The initial pages discuss the politics, music and cinema against a pictorial rendition of the cars from the same era.

The intention is, therefore, to prove that the Golden Era was a mirror image of the glamour and excitement of America as she rose to lead the Western World.

## **MONEY, MUSIC, MOVIES**

## **AND MACHINES**

## **THE GOLDEN ERA**

Beginning in the early thirties, one finds a tall, quiet man preaching to the people. The cadence of his voice supporting his powerful oratory as he spoke of America's "New Deal"; how he would shape her future and strive forward, shaking loose the economic ashen shackles of war to place America atop once more. He would be the surging power that would streamline the nation into the 1950s and beyond. However, the task was a mammoth one. One that consumed that same man, Roosevelt, and controlled the greater part of his successor's presidency.

Yet, the long list of designing pioneers were to echo Roosevelt's sentiments through trains, ships, architecture, aircraft and automobiles. Bel Gedes, Teague, Loewy, Dreyfuss...exhibited unbounded concepts on the future of American, and ultimately, World Design.

The thousands of children that were to experience this injection of energy into life in America in the 1930s would unwittingly draw from the source when they became the men of the 1950s.

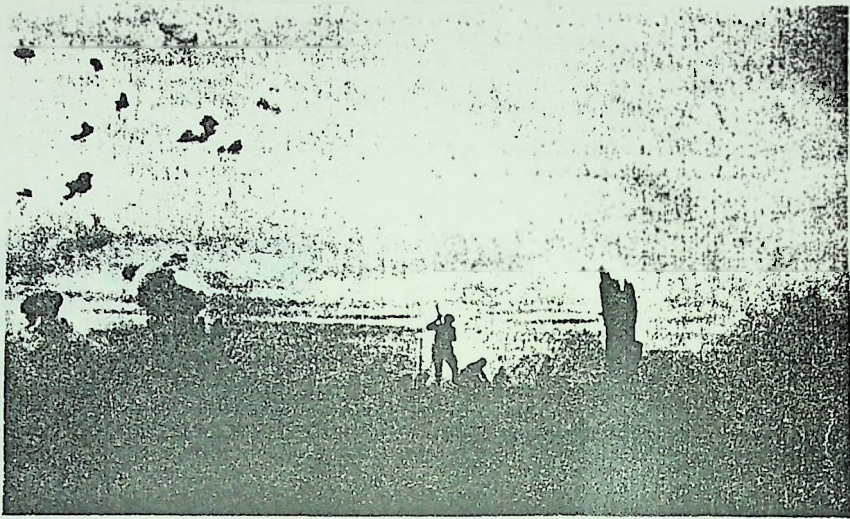
Against the political background of a European War, succeeded by the Korean and Suez disputes, the American people witnessed the essence of change. Unlike her European sisters, America had no roots in history. No ancestors from the crusades. No archives, no pacts signed in blood, nor any God-fearing religious endowments. She was a "new" and clean nation. One without the benefit of such an identity.

The Civil Wars and Boston Tea parties of the previous centuries could not nurture the hunger for history. America, above all else, wished to show the Western World that she deserved recognition. To call her approach innovative, is somewhat of an understatement, but the only solution was to create a "history", upon which she could build the future. Whether consciously or not, America chose to exploit her lacking through synthetic simulation.

*"Hell, if we don't have a history, let's build one".*

Like any child, if a tale is told, it would be exaggerated beyond the point of credibility. She would not focus attention on the past, but use her people to create this history. European eras and places would be replaced by the American Dream. The concept was that the individual would be this history in the space of a single life-span. Thus, the idea was born. America would produce more historical characters in a single century than Europe had in its thousand of years.

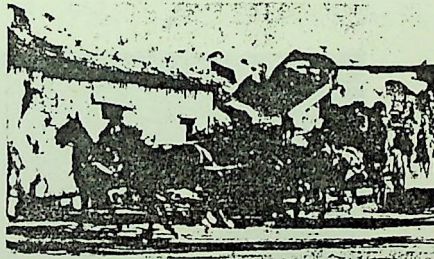




All Quiet on the Western Front (1930)



Fury (1936)



Stagecoach (1939)





Olivia De Havilland



Clark Gable



Lawrence Olivier and Vivien Leigh

However, this history needed a medium in order to convince the masses. In 1895/6, Armat, Jenkins and LeRoy perfected this medium through the invention of the moving picture. In 1903, the first film was shown to the American people, "*The Great Train Robbery*" - history was born.

Hardly a nation of conformity, a second historical medium was investigated and implemented: music. While Europe had its Bachs and Beethovens, America was lacking. Symphonic simulations were pointless in that they could never compete with the genius' of old. Never despairing, American musicians began experimenting with melody and rhythm in the hope of gaining European recognition in this area also.

Thus the scene was set. Two new mediums were available to create this lacking image of a neuter nation. As is human nature, the harder the task, the greater the conviction to succeed.

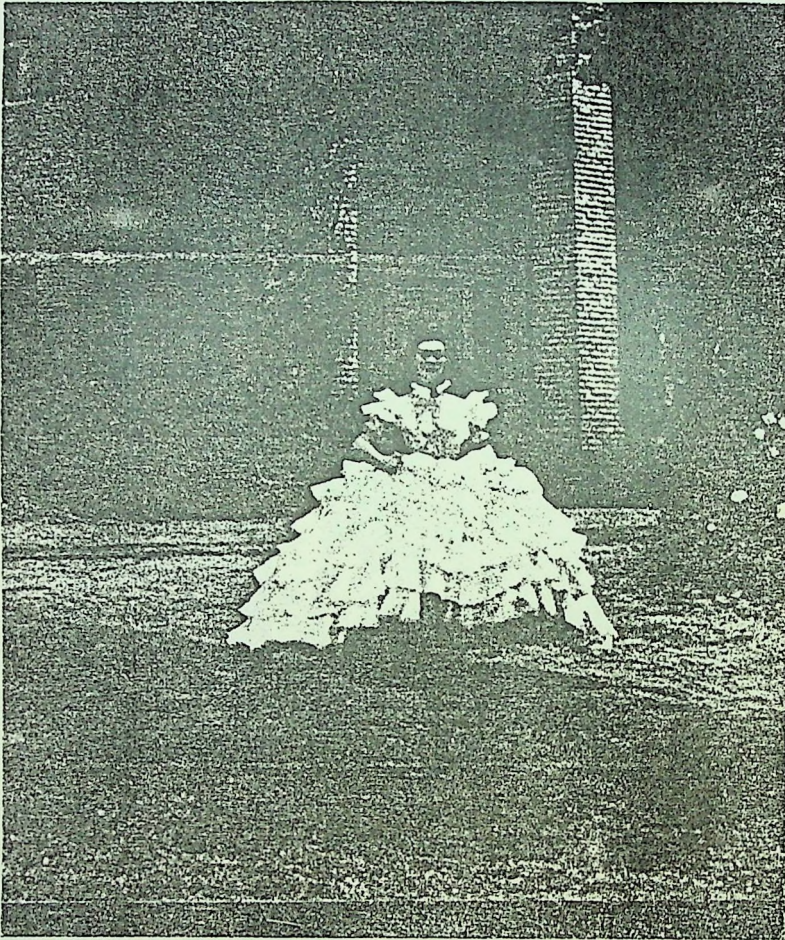
Moving swiftly into the 1930s, one notes the apparent speed with which the American effort began yielding powerful results.

"*All Quiet on the Western Front*" (1930); "*42nd Street*" and "*King Kong*" (1933); "*The Devil is a Woman*" (1935), "*Fury*" (1936); "*Stagecoach*" and "*Gone with the Wind*" (1939); all began making names like Marlene Dietrich, Lawrence Olivier, Olivia de Havilland, Clark Gable, Vivien Leigh, Claire Trevor and Gary Cooper international stars. America had begun its journey into stardom.

Similarly, yet a decade behind film, the musicians of America began sounding their presence through names such as Arthur "Big-Boy" Crudup, T-Bone Walker and Roy Brown. However, as it was the blacks that started the rock and roll craze in America, many states refused to play their music because of racism. By the early 1950s, this black-beat, adopted by whites, was taken gruffly by the collar and blasted across the nation, Music too had staked its claim.

Behind the scenes, the automobile industry drew energy from the aggressive progress of these two mediums and began its ascent into the public eye. From its humble beginnings as the horseless carriage in 1893, the automobile leapt and bounded through thirty years only a pace behind the cinema and music. Struggling desperately to compete with the surge forward in society, the industry produced car after car in search of the ideal form.





Gone With The Wind (1939)



Marlene Dietrich





Arthur "Big-boy" Crudup



T-Bone Walker

The **1941 Hudson** was most certainly a milestone and an indication of the path that lay ahead to the 1950s. Somehow, its bulky exterior managed to impress the concept of power and energy. Her windswept lines were breached by a whale-like hood and dentured grill. The slits for windows somehow forcing one to consider speed that would break a larger screen. Then, of course, one realises the true root of the machine - the evidence of almost excessive chromium.

James Dean, a true Giant of the 1950s, was to make this car an international symbol in the film *"Rebel Without a Cause"* (1955). This film which depicts a distressed youth desperately trying to prove himself to his parents and peers alike, is the focal point of the beginnings of the Golden Era. Like Dean, America was seeking to establish herself to her European parents and peers. The struggle so graphically portrayed as Dean races towards the cliff's edge was a cinematic representation of America's reckless surge to succeed. As the Hudson careered off the cliff's edge into the abyss below, an abyss of free, open space and limitless altitude, so too the automobile industry entered an age of vast freedom. An abyss of free expression.

Unlike Dean, America did not bail out of the car before it loomed over the cliff's edge, but chose to ride the demon in an effort to steer it across the empty space between functional transportation and the unimaginable dream machine of the late 50s and early 60s.

As the automobile progressed from the **1950 De Soto Fireflite**, through the **Firedome**, **Kaiser de Luxe**, **Willy's Aero Ace**, **Buick Special** and **Dodge Custom Royale**, into the **1956 Lincoln Premiere**, music too progressed to the stage of International recognition. The sweet melodies of Doris Day and Eddie Fisher took second symphony to the new age of rock and roll.

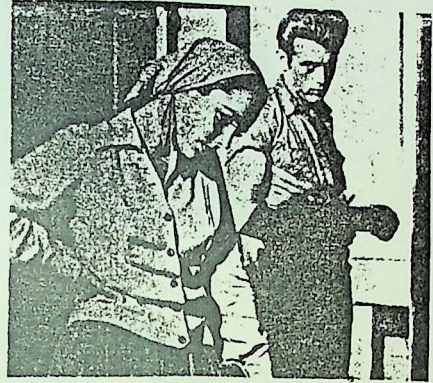
Almost overnight, Bill Haley hit the headlines with *"Rock around the Clock"* (1954). Teenagers coast to coast were bopping wildly with skirts swirling, arms waving and feet flying to the birth of beat. The clean image of Tuxedo Tunes was being replaced by short-sleeved shirts and swinging sexual songwriting. The closeting of black rhythm was a forgotten past as the Chuck Berries and Little Richards of Bee-bop hit the limelight. And then came Elvis.

Elvis would be the King. Whatever had kept music's progress secondary to cinema, Elvis bridged the gap. His negro voice and wild performing antics gave birth to a musical energy never before, or since, experienced. He

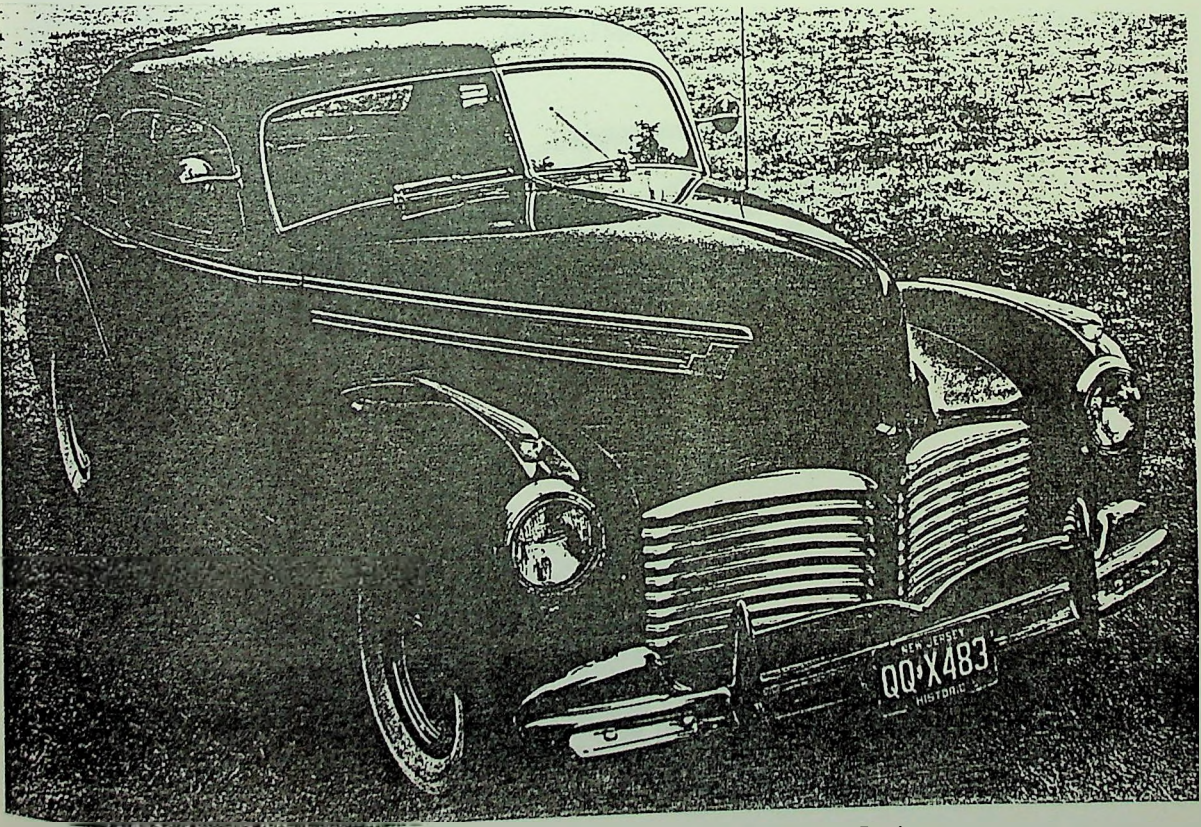




Roy Brown

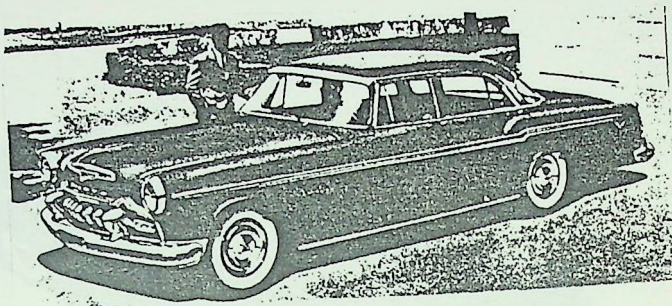


James Dean in "The Giant"

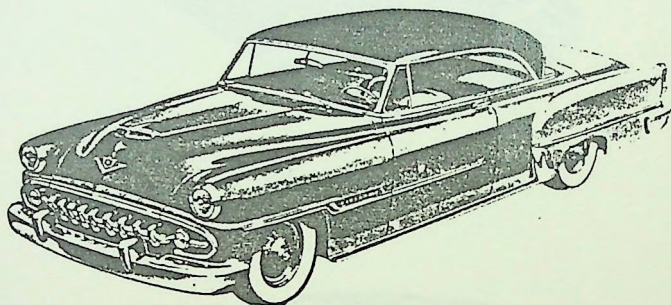


The 1941 Hudson, a milestone in US Automotive Design

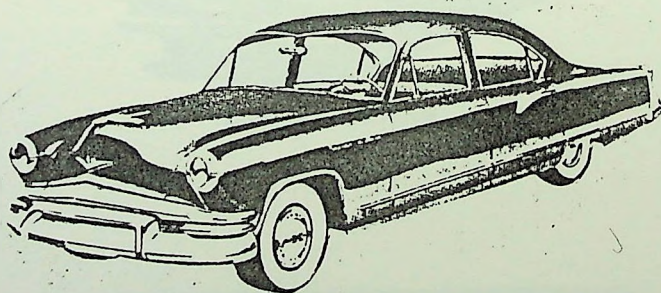




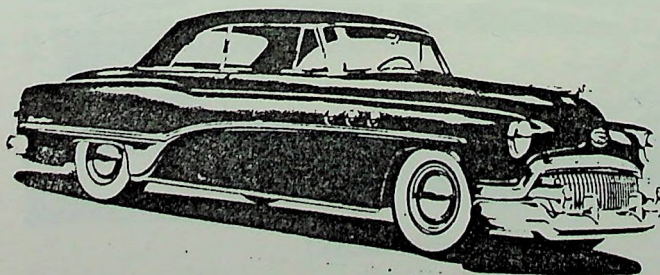
De Soto Firelite



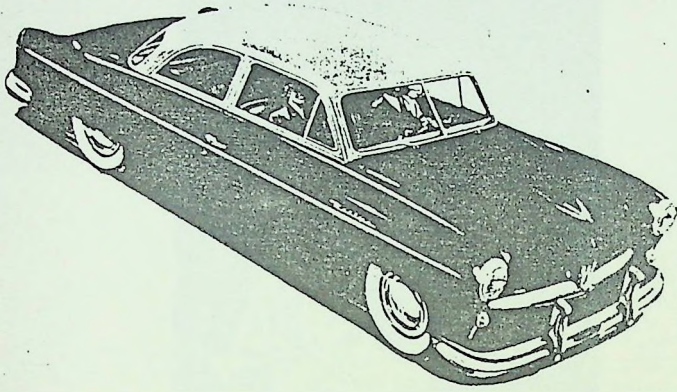
De Soto Firedome



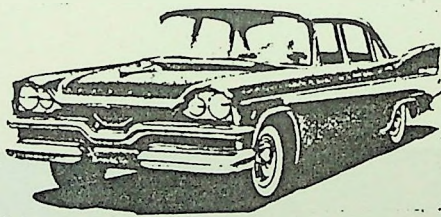
Kaiser De Luxe



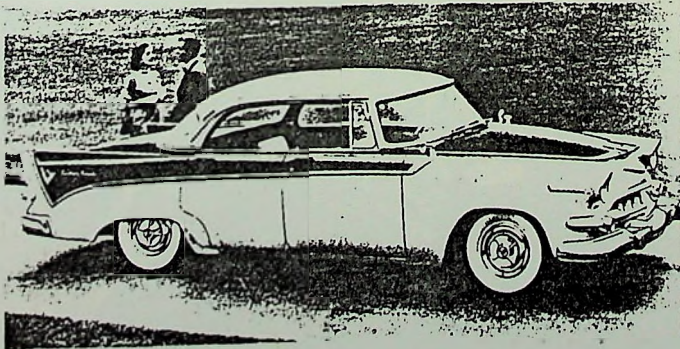
Buick Special



Willy's Aeroace

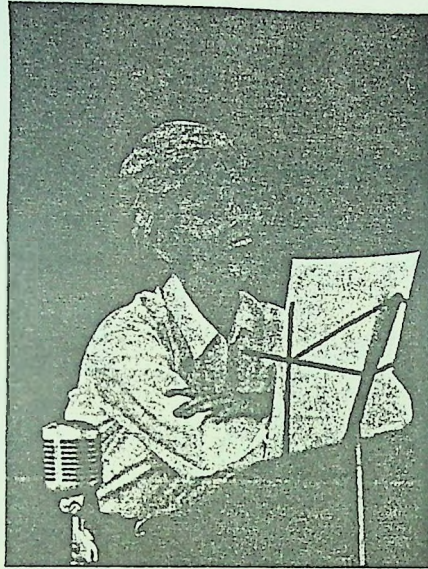


Dodge Custom Royal



Lincoln Premiere



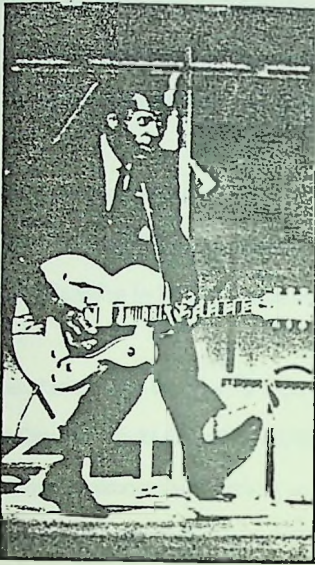


Doris Day



Eddie Fisher, seen here with Debbie Reynolds





Chuck Berry, seen here doing  
his famous Duck Walk



Little Richard Penniman



was young, white, intelligent and American. His music would literally "rock" the world. Finally it seemed America had earned her place and recognition in the West. By 1955, "*That's all Right*", "*Hound Dog*", "*Heartbreak Hotel*", "*Love Me Tender*" and "*Don't be Cruel*" were international hits.

Suddenly, there were megastars like Carl Perkins, Jerry Lee Lewis, Gene Vincent, Eddie Cochrane, Ricky Nelson to name but a few, being 'discovered' every week. Each new star promising to be bigger than his predecessor. It was this strive to be bigger that began spilling into film, into building and into cars.

Hollywood kicked into top gear in 1956 with blockbusters like "*War and Peace*", "*The 10 Commandments*" and "*The Day the World Ended*", each film more elaborate, more costly and more successful than the previous one. Occupying almost two-thirds of screen time in seventy countries world-wide, Hollywood was no longer creating movie stars but a new breed of gods.: Kirk Douglas, Paul Newman, Marlon Brando, Gregory Peck, Rock Hudson, Kathryn Hepburn, Rita Hayworth and Marilyn Monroe. Each bigger and more glamorous than the next. Tinsel town moguls born in a handful of decades that placed limitless dreams in the hearts of nations.

Yet there was more. The large cinerama screen (perfected in 1951) took mere people and flashed them over canvasses ten times bigger than the average person. The sheer size of these stars as they angered, outraged, sympathised, laughed and cried with audiences around the world gave America her unique identity. An identity that could show an innocent girl like Norma Jean, daughter of a working-class, single mother, and transform her into the goddess of Marilyn Monroe. America was a nation without class restrictions, where birth into affluence was not the exclusive entrance to wealth, to success. Finally, the American identity of true freedom became her hallmark, a nation of life, liberty and freedom of choice. The first amendment.

Then the inevitable songs and films began to focus attention on the everyday life of the everyday man and woman. Chuck Berry sang of "*Riding Along in (his) Automobile...*", films assumed grandiose names like "*A Street Car Named Desire*", the automobile industry had to meet the demands of the consumer and exceed them.

The automobile needed to be more than a form of transport, if it was to succeed. The car had to embody the "chaos" and excitement of the time. It had to become the doctrine of society, the road had to become the religion and the light had to be from the chrome and steel as one sped down highways doing fifty-five and feeling

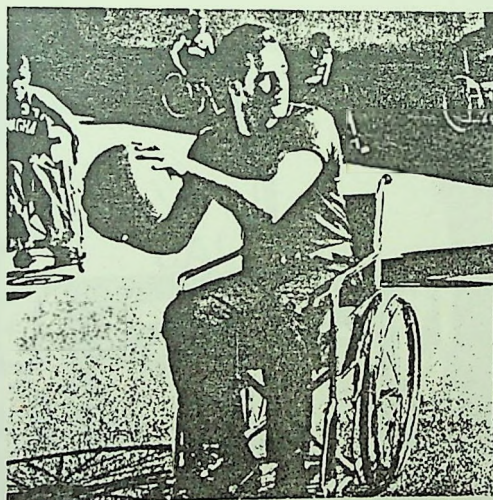


Ricky Nelson





Paul Newman, as Fast Eddie in "The Hustler"



Marlon Brando, in "A Streetcar Named Desire"



Gregory Peck



Rock Hudson, who needs no introduction





Elvis, seen here with one of his millions of followers

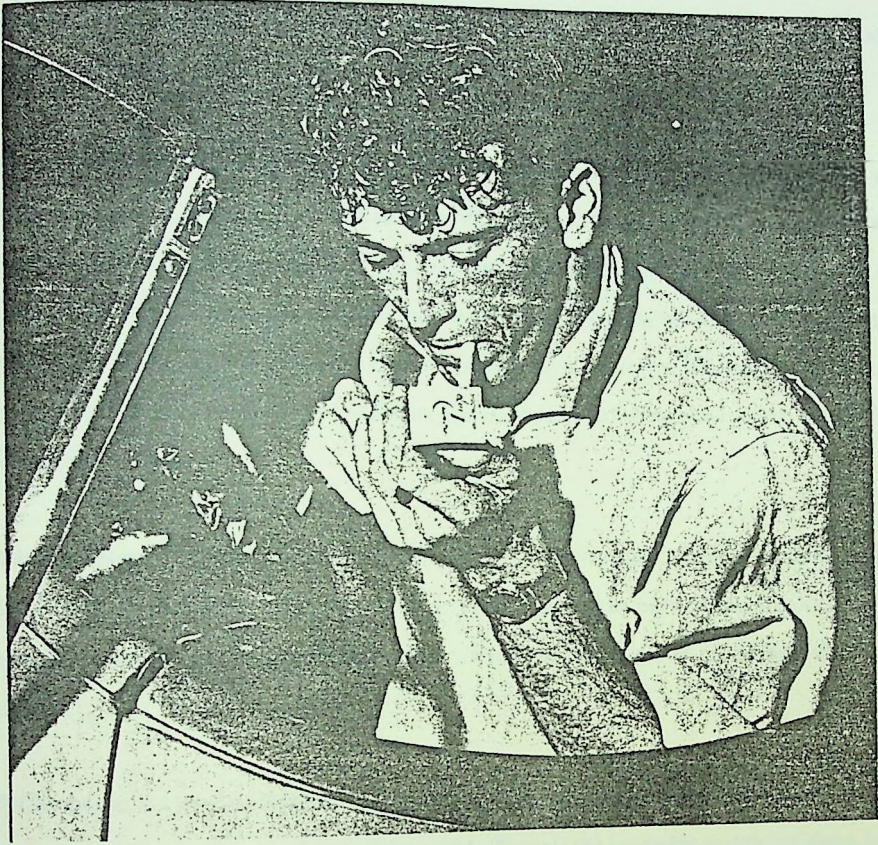


Carl Perkins

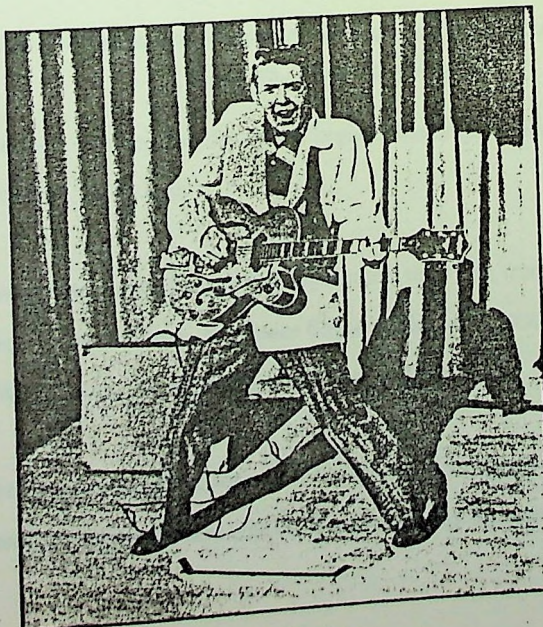


Jerry Lee Lewis





Gene Vincent



Eddie Cochran



heavenly. The car had to be everything at once: fashion, music, film, ostentation; but most of all it had to be uniquely American.

The source of inspiration found in Italy and other European countries was alien to America. As a nation it had no Romanesque or Gothic periods, no Renaissance artists or sculptors, no ancient roots in the arts or design. The absence of such a spring board would have appeared handicapping had it not been for the American imagination and sheer desire to succeed; but from where were these designers of the 1950s supposed to seek inspiration? There could only have been two possibilities: from Europe or from within. Somehow, looking to Porche, Mercedes and Fiat in Europe could not provide them with the uniqueness they sought. It had to come from within.

There was nature, aeronautical experience from the wars, and little else. Almost despairing, these men turned to the history created and being created by film. Film supported by music would furnish their needs. If one has ever seen the 1950s film *"Destination Moon"*, a parallel can be drawn to highlight the determination of America.

The film begins in a large auditorium. The top industrialists of America are all seated as three men discuss the importance of the moon for the future of the world. There is the inevitable scepticism aired, but then one of the audience stands:

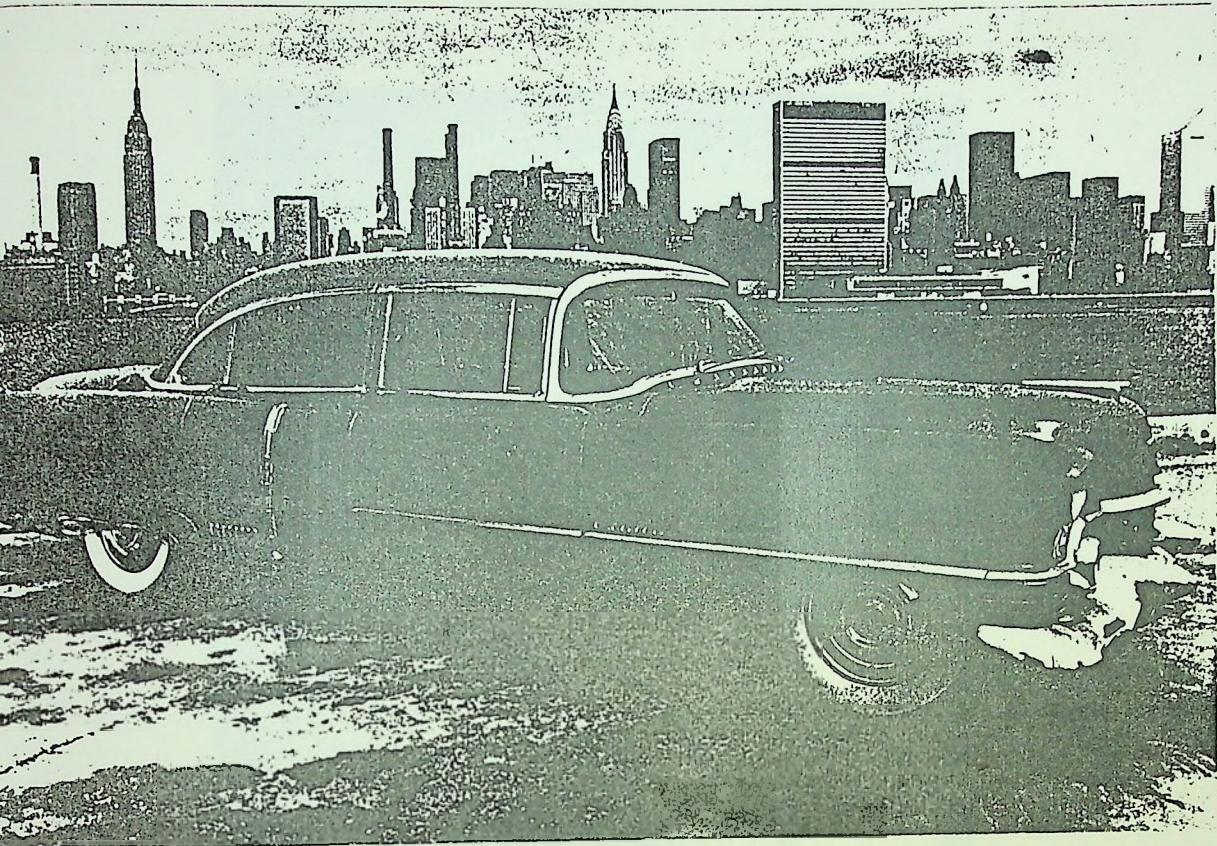
*"It is not the landing of men on the moon that is the issue, gentlemen.  
It is that we...America, will be first..."*

A chorus of agreement is sounded and the project begins. Similarly, the designers of America were not content to design but to lead. To be first.

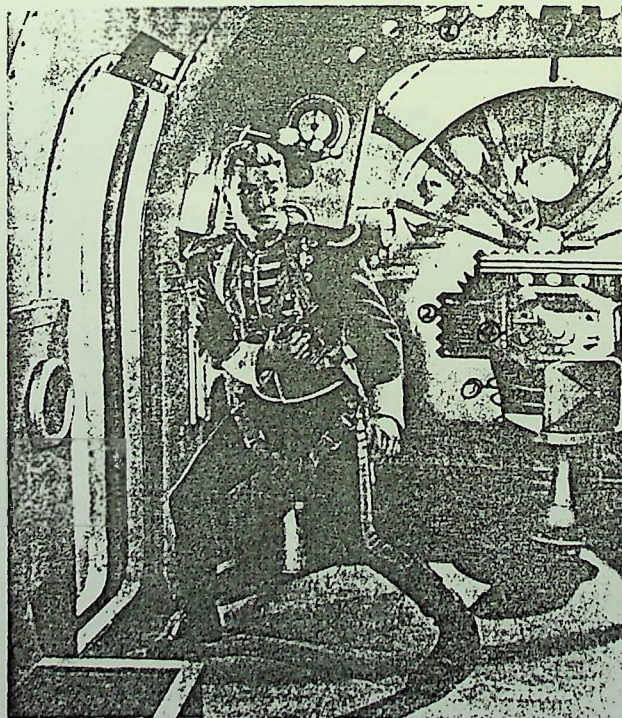
The men of 1950 sought inspiration from the history that was their own, from their own life-spans. Looking to their youth they drew inspiration from the science fiction movies of the 1930s. They drew inspiration from the aircraft of World War Two and finally they drew inspiration from nature.

Beginning with film, one can recognise some of these sources from films such as *Flash Gordon*. Examining Buster Crabbe aboard his ship, one can see the use of various design concepts such as perforated steel (1) cla-



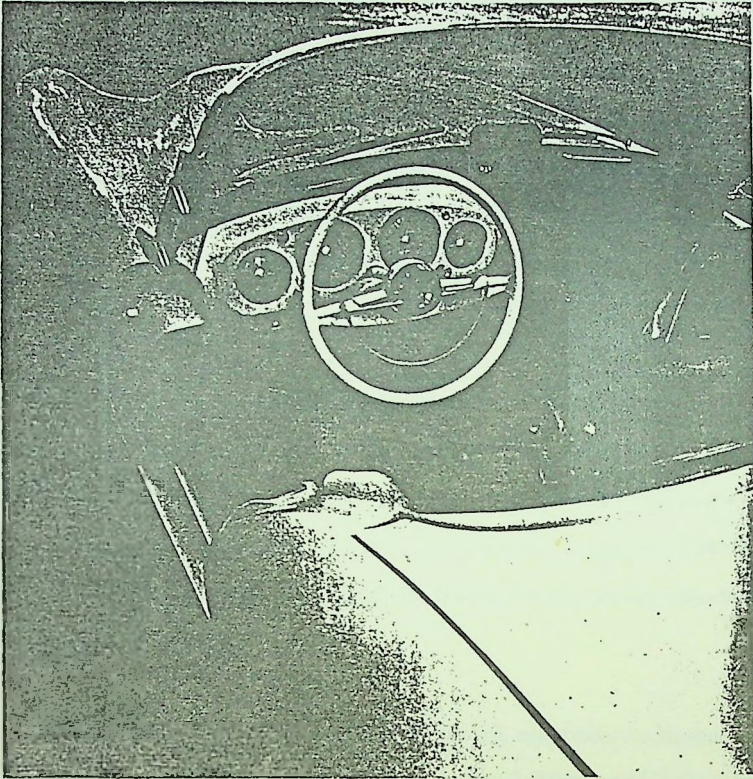


Cadillac 60 (1954)

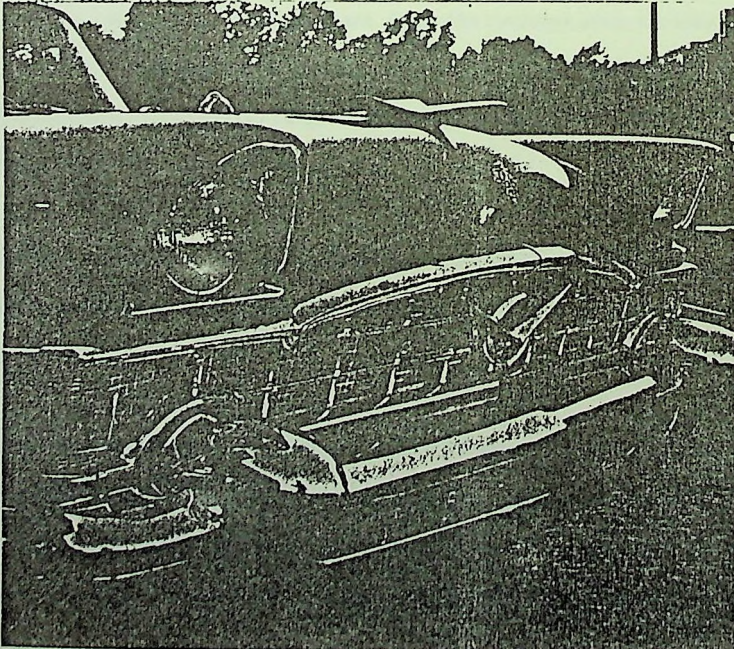


Buster Crabbe as Flash Gordon





Kaiser Darrin (1954)



Packard 400 (1956)



borate grills (2), exaggerated use of metal tubing (3) and the complexity of the ships control panels (4). Making a direct comparison to some of the earlier cars of the 1950s, one can observe the unnecessary chroming employed on the exterior of the **Cadillac 60** (1954); the array of four dials and sliding door concept (employed on Gordon's ship) of the **Kaiser Darrin** (1954); and the complexity of the grill on the front of the **Packard 400** (1956). All of these traits are updated adaptations of the efforts displayed inside the Flash Gordon ship from 1930.

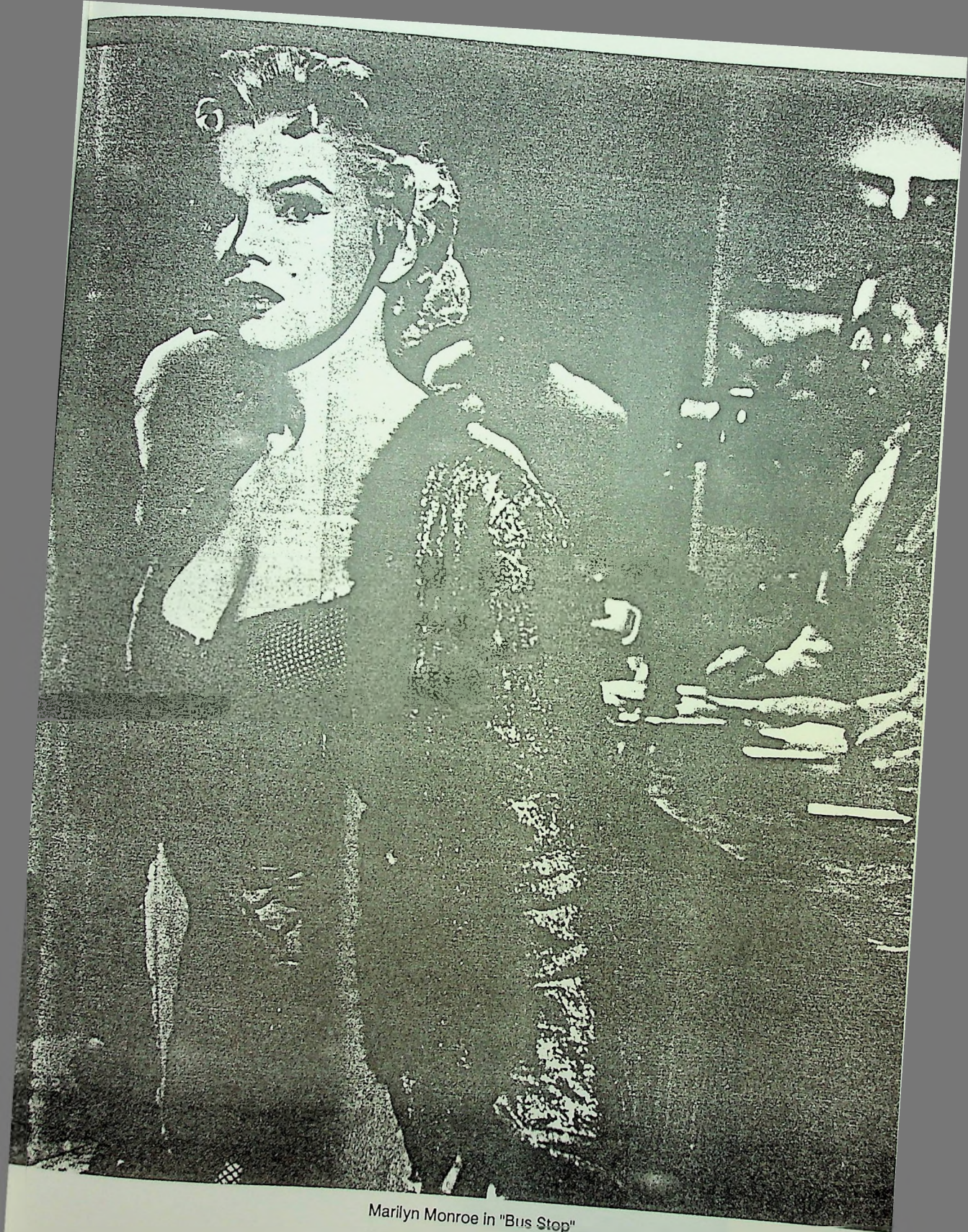
Moving to the exterior of Gordon's ship, one must remember the breast-like shape of the ship's nose. A shape similarly employed on the front of air-craft. Many cars in the early fifties took this torpedo-breast shape and placed them on their front fenders. These smooth chromium protrusions served no purpose whatsoever other than to style. The style being sought to emphasize speeds as the car cut through the air ahead of it. The car had to behave as though it were an aeroplane or space ship. Indeed, one may enquire why chromium was ever used on these cars. Again there are two reasons.

In many films concerned with science fiction from the 1930s onward, one notices the importance of light, special effect and shining metal. Perhaps the best example of all three is "*Metropolis*" (1926). Although a German film, it was the beginning of many American science-fiction dramas. In this film, the futuristic lady is constructed in a blinding silvery metal from outer-space. Pylon-like insulators adorn the laboratory from within which she is held as lightening cascades around her. The concept of light and bright metals providing the futuristic effects sought by its director (Fritz Lang) and later reshaped and tooled to fit the requirements of the American designer.

One other reason for excessive chromium, is directly related to rare metals. As shall be discussed later, the car quickly became a status symbol in society. The lavish use of an apparently precious metal, encouraged and confirmed the status of the car.

Moving deeper into nature, one immediately grasps the shark. First seen as the aggressive row of teeth, painted on the noses of spitfires during World War II, this animal played an important role in the design of American cars. The basic elements of the fish are of course fins, teeth, gills and aeronautical dynamics. The shark never rests, it must continually move in order to stay alive because of blood circulatory problems. As the fish whips





Marilyn Monroe in "Bus Stop"

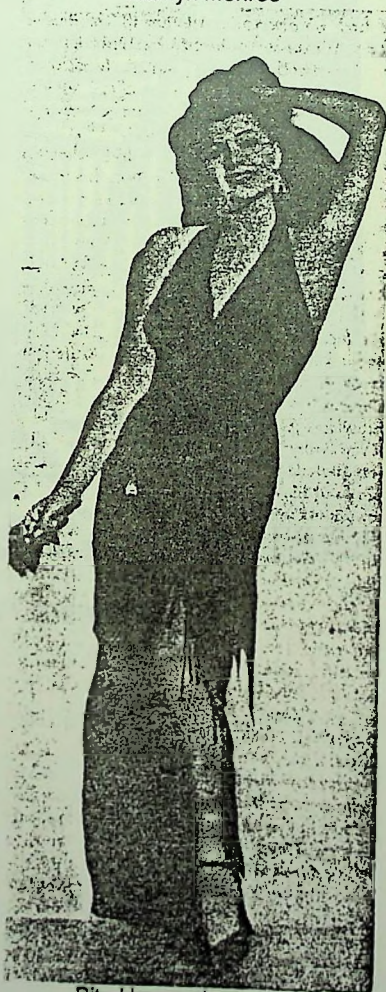




Kathryn Hepburn

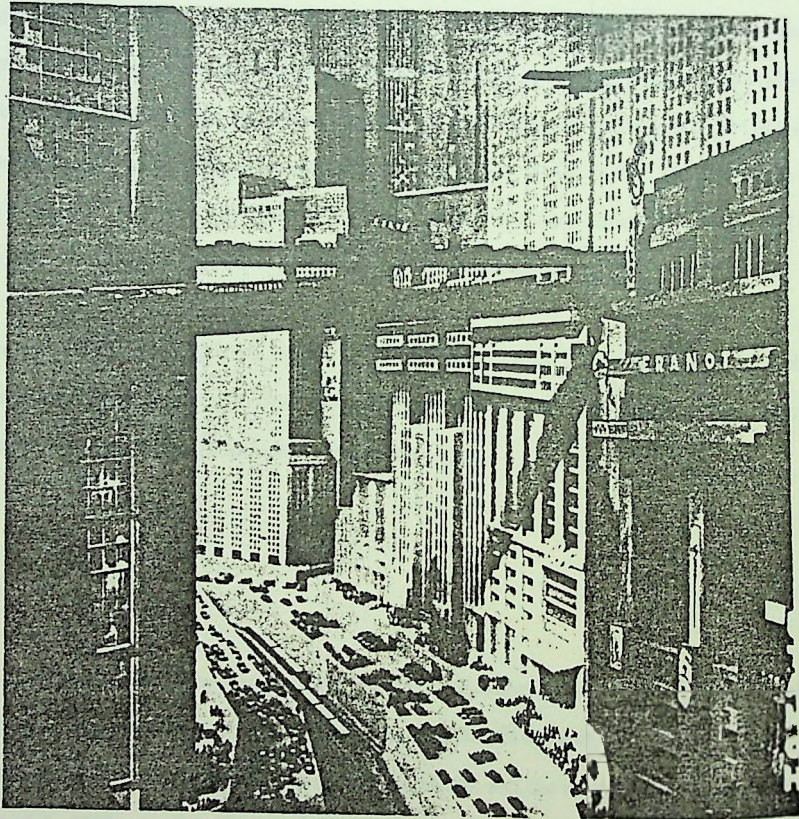


Marilyn Monroe



Rita Hayworth





Fritz Lang's "Metropolis"



its tail, languidly gliding through the depths of the underworld, one can only but bow to this creature's incredible power. Its jaws powerful enough to break plate steel over an inch thick, capable of speeds in excess of thirty knots, one can understand its immediate interest to designers. Comparing the two examples shown over leaf, to the two cars, the **Ford Thunderbird** (1955) and the **Meteor Rideau** (1957), one can immediately isolate the similarities. The Thunderbird employs the use of gills and sloping light covers, as a shark has gills and a sloping nose concealing the jaws. The Rideau uses more of the shark's linear movement through fins and grill emphasized by the two toning and chroming. Where the car has a white top and dark underside, the shark has a white underside and dark top. One of the finer examples available showing the jaws of a shark as the source of inspiration for a car grill, can be seen on the **1958 Chevrolet Corvette**. The fins found on the whale shark can be used to show the beginnings of the fins in early 1950s cars. However, even the tail fin of the thresher shark falls short of some of the later fins used towards the end of the 1950s.

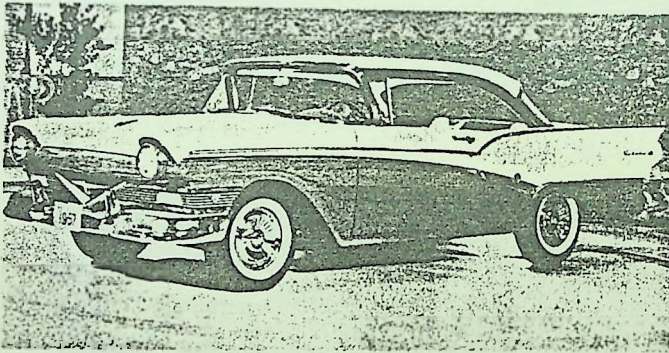
Thus one is left with the grinning teeth of the shark, the torpedo of the airplane and the blinding light of the films and movies from which to draw inspiration. Once the mood had been set, competition would slaughter it out until a new era was either sought or stumbled upon.

The early to mid-fifties saw many introductions of unnecessary adornments to the automobile. Most notably the dagmar which faded by 1957 (last seen on the **Cadillac Brogham**). The essence of the car that would rule the Golden Era was the excessive use of chrome, the fin and the shark-like grill toward the front of the car. Most of the 1956 cars differed only slightly from those of 1955, but the new fashion of the tail fin emerged to isolate these cars to a definitive period of their own.

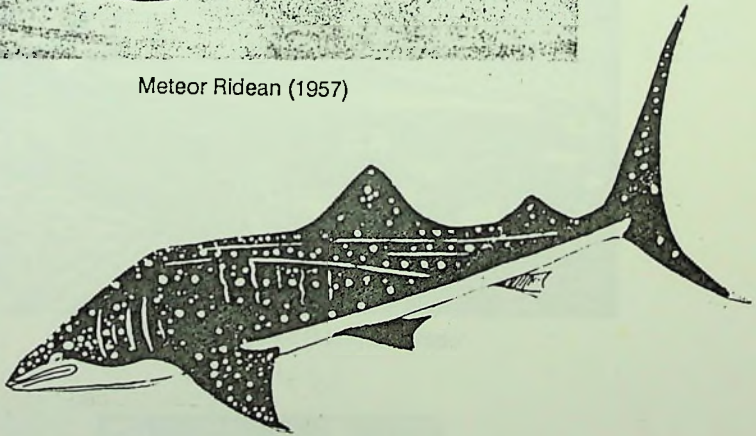
Enter 1956. James Dean confirming his position as one of Hollywood's all time greats in "*East of Eden*", against a background of riotous rhythm like "*Rip It Up*", ('Little Richard' - Penniman) and 'Screamin' Joe Hawkins "*Fever*". Enter the five years of flash, speed, dream and light.



Ford Thunderbird (1955)



Meteor Rideau (1957)

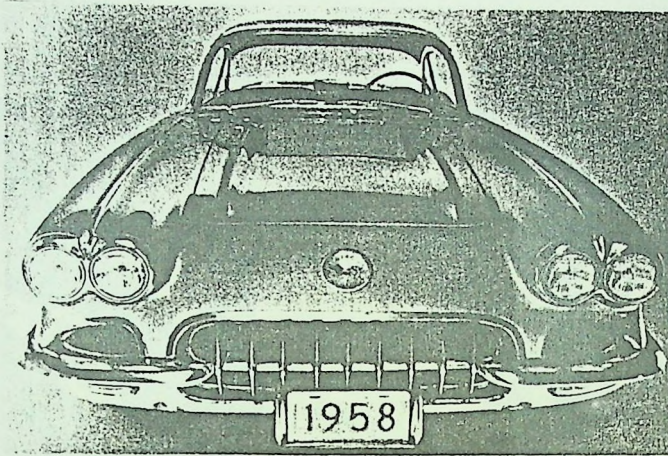


Whale Shark

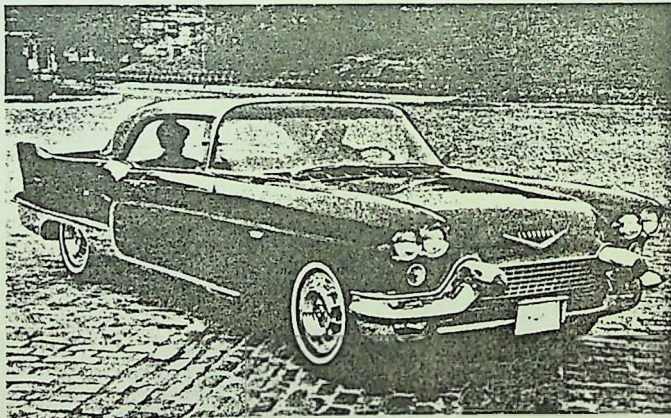


Thresher Shark





Chevrolet Corvette (1958)

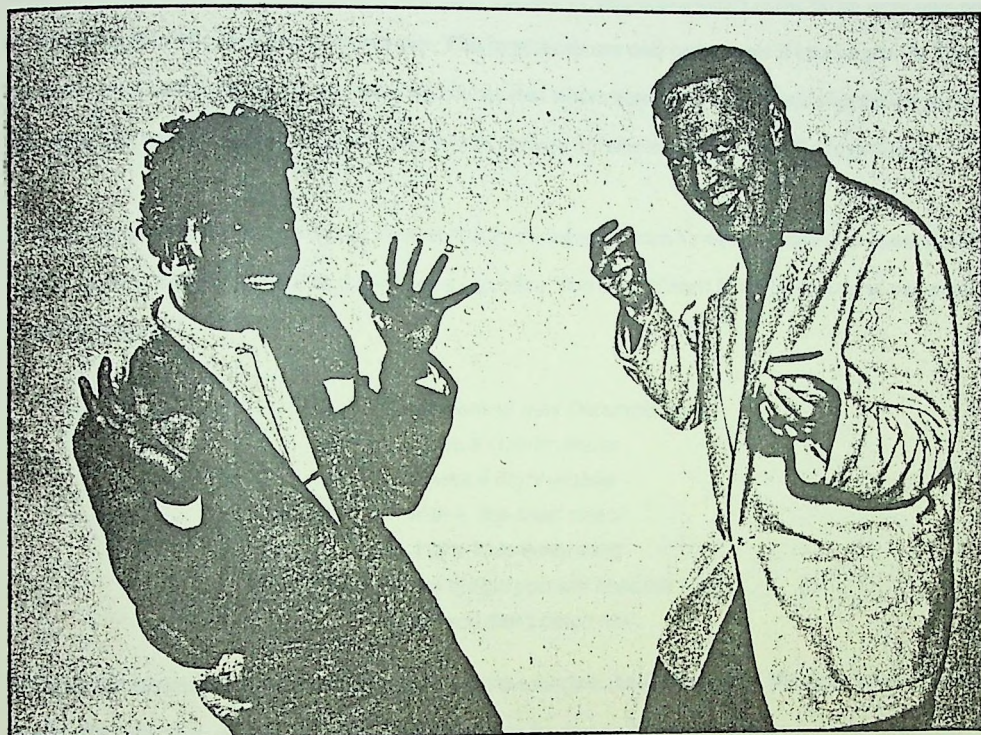


Cadillac Brougham (1957) Eldorado



ScreamIn' Hawkins





Little Richard with Bill Hayley



Fats Domino



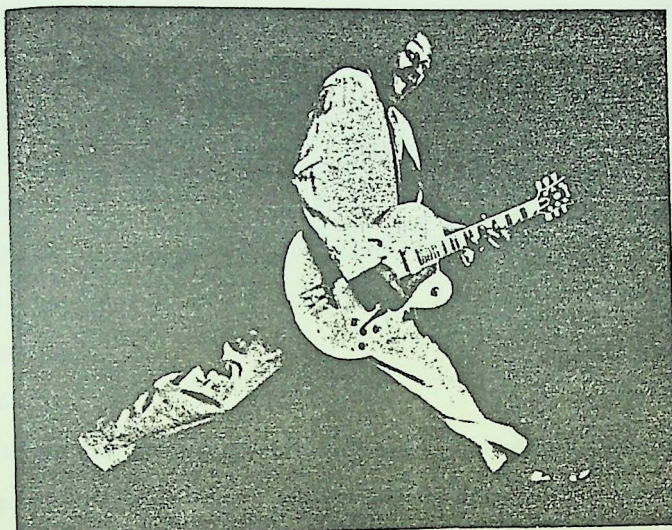
It could be argued that the Fats Dominos and Gene Vincent's ("Bee-bop-a-lula") of the fifties were only popular with teenagers who didn't buy cars anyway. This hypothesis can only carry water if one forgets the legal age for driving was seventeen. Also, one must remember that where music was the buttress supporting car sales - the musicians, or rather stars, along with film and its cortege of famous people, were the foundations.

Then of course there was Chuck Berry. Awe-struck by the image of cars he wrote many songs about these machines. More notably, in early 1956, he wrote a song called "You Can't Catch Me", the first verse contained the following words:

*"I bought a brand new Oldsmobile,  
Twas a custom made  
'Twas a flight mobile  
With a fire-filled motor  
And a hide away wing  
Pushin' on the button you will hear her sing,  
Now, you can't catch me".*

1957 saw the introduction of Chuck Berry's car onto the market: the **Oldsmobile Starfire** series. The car introduced many styling changes including sculptured rear fenders and twin strut three piece rear windows. With three dual carburettors it could develop 300 bhp or more. It most certainly had a firefilled motor.

Examining some of the finer automobiles of the era, we discover many cases where these various forms of inspiration are realised. In the process, why not follow the progression of both music and film as the Golden Era rolls by. The cross-linking of car and incidents, song and film slowly emerges as a single unit as one leafs through the years.



Chuck Berry "You Can't Catch Me" (1956)



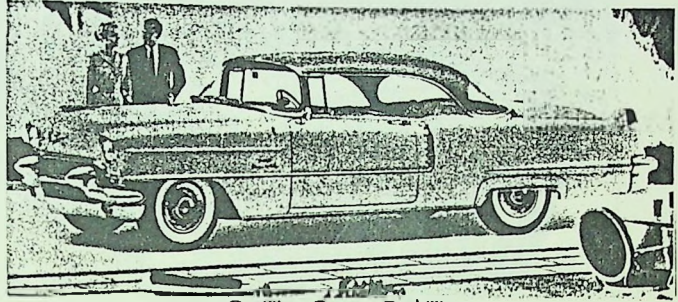
Oldsmobile Starfire (1957)



# 1956

To begin as this study intends to finish, the **Cadillac**. Pubescent fins coupled with aggressive grill and large dagmar

adorn this relatively bulky machine with covered rear wheel. Note also the parallel movement of chrome side striping and the ground. Displayed here as a family car with husband and wife posing alongside.



Cadillac Coupe De Ville



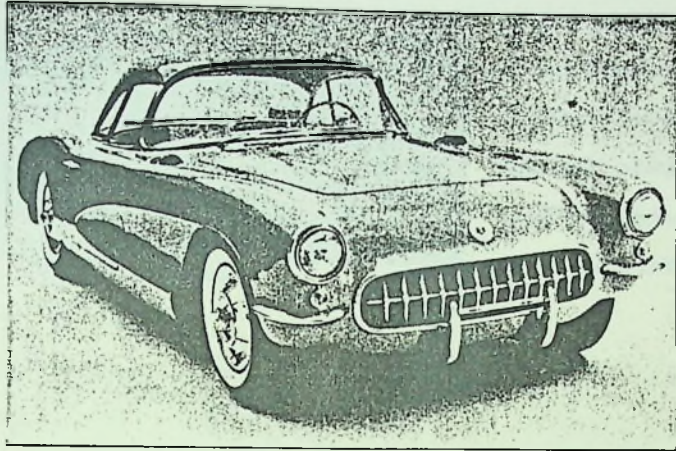
Carl Perkins

Carl Perkins released "*Blue Suede Shoes*" made famous by Elvis two years later. Perkins, a great lover of fast driving was laid up for nine months in 1956, having been involved in a serious car accident which claimed the life of his brother Jay. His career never recovered.



Without any evidence of fins, many believe his car was ahead of its time. The '56 Chevrolet Corvette.

It's side panels were moulded in plastic with a detachable hood also in plastic for winter driving. Made famous as late as 1986 by Prince with the song "Little Red Corvette".



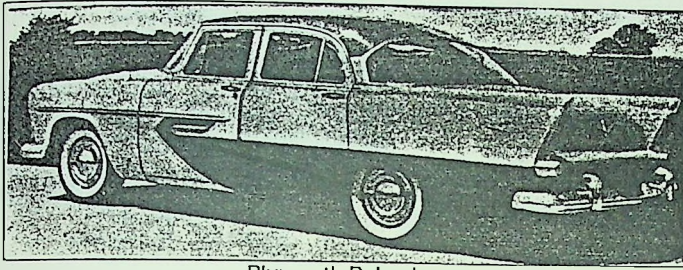
1956 Chevrolet Corvette

Screamin' Joe Hawkins, rock's first theatrical eccentric, recorded "*I Put a Spell on You*" (re-recorded by Fleetwood Mac in 1976) while drunk. Known to arrive on stage in the back of a De Soto Custom Hearse, Hawkins was the creator of shock rock.



Screamin' Jay Hawkins

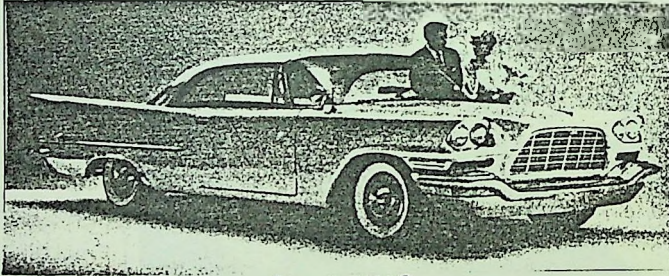




Plymouth Belvedere

Included here most certainly the most aggressively sharpened fins of the year, the **Plymouth Belvedere**. This was one of fifteen Plymouth models released in 1956.

## 1957



Chrysler 300C

Although text books insist '56 was the beginning of the Golden Era, it is the belief of this student that true evidence of the period was not confirmed until '57, as can be seen in the exaggerated fins and chroming of this,

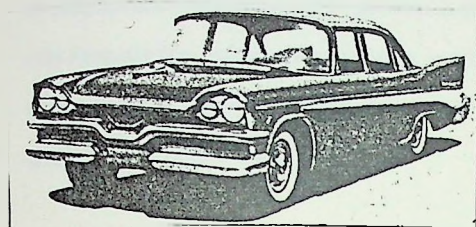
the **Chrysler 300C**. Again the husband and wife are shown with the car - note the hooded headlights running back in strong swift lines to similarly covered tail-lights.

As cars became more aggressive, so too music sped ahead. "Great Balls of Fire" raced across America in 1957, making *Jerry Lee Lewis* an instant star. Lewis whipped longing into an enticing, palpable tension. Where Elvis had merely suggested, Lewis instructed. One can only but see millions of Americans with windows rolled down, cruising the boulevard, while Lewis cascaded onto the ears of passers by.



Jerry Lee Lewis and the Band

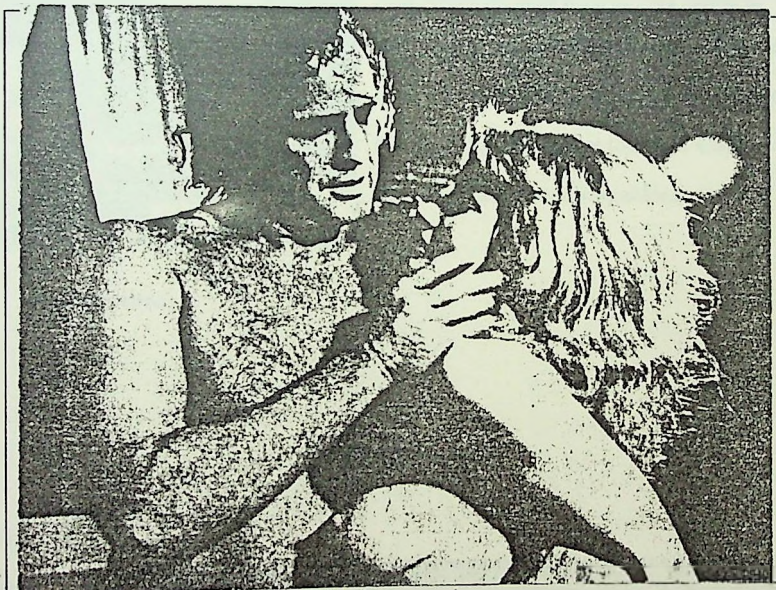




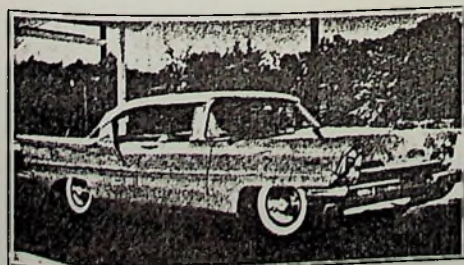
Dodge Custom Royal

A vicious grinning grill leads this **Dodge Royal** forward. Note the angling of the rear roof fins away from the body. The hooded headlights remain. An interesting parabolic arc is used to carry the roof of the car onto the sheer lines of the car's body.

The archetypal Brando image was born in the 1951 film "*A Streetcar Named Desire*". This linking of car and film star was utilised again in the "Easy Rider" film "*The Wild One*" (1954). Brando, a super hero of the fifties screen, was depicted as a rampaging but popular, mumbling slob.



Marlon Brando



Lincoln Premiere

Shown here, the **Lincoln Premiere Landau Pillarless** sedan. Lincoln also produced the luxurious Continentals which it supplied to the US Government for transporting high-ranking officials. As a company, it customised the continentals to suit the Government officials' requirements, with bullet-



proof glass and fold down roof for parades as standard fittings. It was a **Lincoln long-base Continental '62** that Kennedy was shot in while in Dallas, in 1963. Lincoln believed that by supplying their cars free gratis to the Government leaders, the American people would be led to believe the Lincoln make of car was an indication of success and/or leadership.

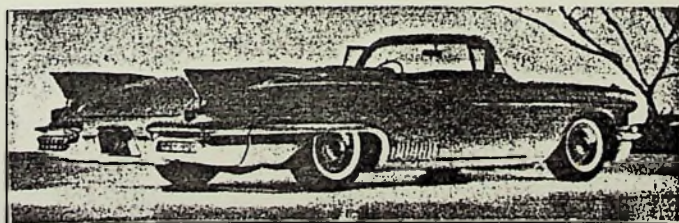


Paul Newman

Paul Newman, seen here as Fast Eddie in *"The Hustler"* (1961), collected cars as a past-time from 1954 to 1962. He claimed the reason for stopping was simply because his gas bills were too high. Curious statement for one of Hollywood's wealthiest stars.

## 1958

Possibly the pinnacle of the Golden Era, the **Cadillac Eldorado Biarritz Convertible**. Over eighteen and a half feet long, this car clearly employs all

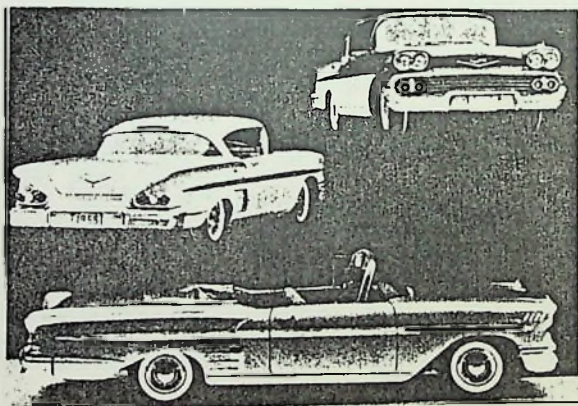


Cadillac Eldorado Biarritz Convertible

the shark signatures one can imagine from gills, fins, grill and fluid linear movement, from shielded headlight to pointed rear. The car was also intended to glide harmoniously as its inspiring relative the shark through the availability or air-assisted suspension. Note the almost eerie similarity of the lines and contours of a shark.

Again in this car, every available space is consumed in chrome. From this point onward the use of chromium faded to more sombre evidence.

This picture taken from "*Bus Stop*" (1956) ( see page ) is of Marilyn Monroe just before she was moulded into the perfect figure with blond hair, blue eyes and clear skin of 1959, when she made her most popular film "*Some Like it Hot*". Marilyn Monroe made the **Cadillac**, shown above, famous when she ordered one to be custom made for her in white with a pink interior. She arrived at Fox Studios many times, driving herself, in this same car.



Chevrolet Bel Air

Shown here, the **Chevrolet Bel Air**. So named after the district Bel Air, residential area for many of Hollywood's famous. This car shows a definite link between Hollywood and the thinking behind the designers of these 1950s automobiles. The consumer may never become a movie star, but at least they could feel like one if they chose to drive this car.

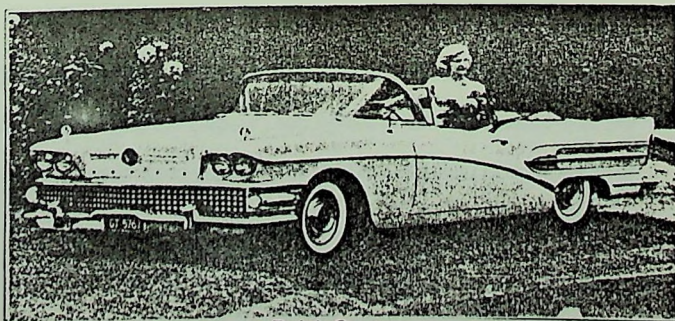
Buddy Holly( see picture overleaf), a prominent character in the development of music as we know it from the 1960s, died on February 3rd, 1959 in an air crash. Interestingly enough, a co-passenger Ritchie Valence (made famous recently by the film "*La Bamba*") was only accepted by his girl-friends parents when he arrived up to her house driving his own Buick.





Buddy Holly and the Hollys

The car Valance bought was this **Buick Century 1958**. On this model, the grill appears as a chequered applique against the surrounds of twin headlamps that are swept back by arching chrome to covered rear wheels. Note the flashing gills toward the rear of the car. Interestingly enough, Buick were the first to employ subtle sexism into the marketing of their cars. Later this approach became more brash as scantily-clad



Buick Century



feline creatures were draped over car hoods. Here we see a lonely wanton lady with flowers as she leans over the side door of this sports model.

## 1959

"C'mon Everybody" was Eddie Cochrane's temptuous lyricism in this year. And indeed everyone, car designers included, did just that; and not without a hint of recklessness. Cochrane's life was claimed by a car accident at the tender age of twenty-one.



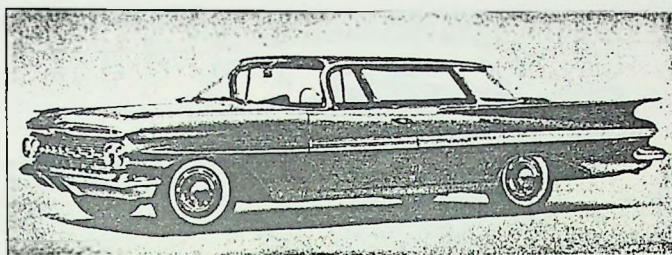
Eddie Cochrane

This year saw the most daring attempts in car design with the intro-

duc-

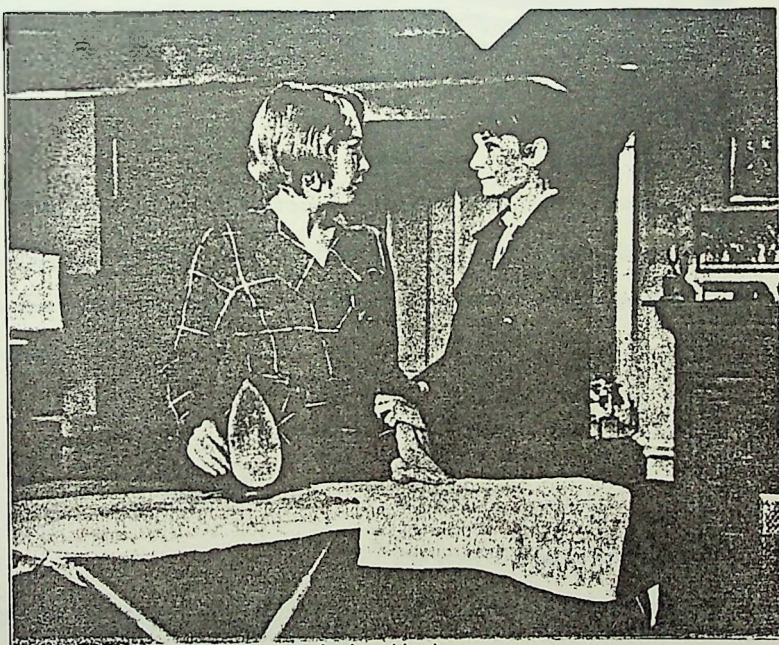
tion of outrageous fins and spikes. The Chevrolet Impala shown overleaf is most certainly an aggressive solution of popular demand. "Impala", possibly a word-play on "impale", had spikes of chrome located over the twin head-lamps and nothing short of dangerously sharpened rear-fins, with the low sleek lines of the main body still inducing the idea of speed.



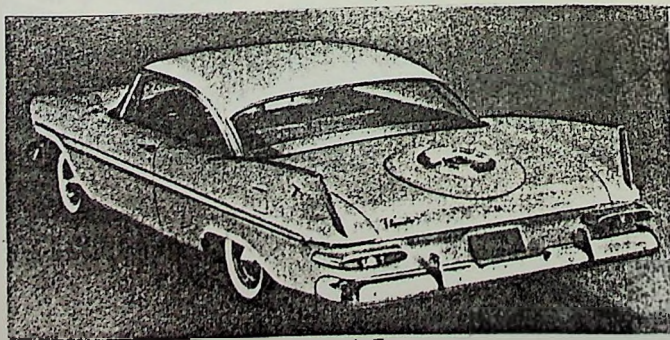


Chevrolet Impala

Star of many spy thrillers in the late fifties and early sixties, Audrey Hepburn was regularly seen aiding and abetting spies as the sassy broad in the sports car that would save them from near death. Examples of such films "*How to Steal a Million*", "*Wait Till Dark*", and "*Charade*" are but a few of the many.



Audrey Hepburn



Plymouth Fury

Named after, it is supposed, the Fritz Lang film of the same name, or Jay Hawkins' song, is this: the **Plymouth Fury**. Already, lines were less garishly decorated in chromium. However, the tail-fin remains evident in all its splendour. However, the grill

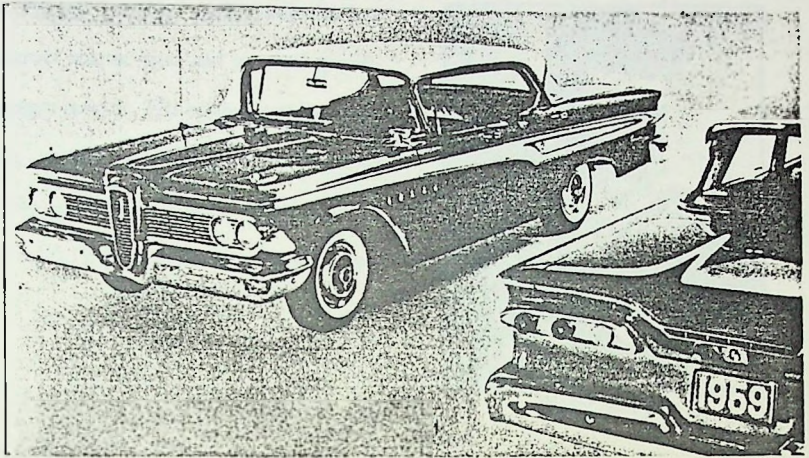


retains most, if not all, of its hallmarked aggression.

The bravado of 1959 was interpreted terribly wrongly by Ford. Naming his car after his son Edsel, he attempted to break the mould of fins and shark like grill and opt for a more feminine approach.

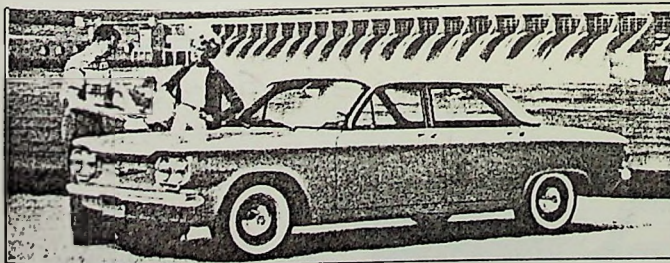
Unwittingly or not, he chose

a vagina to lead the front of the car's grill, while pushing the fins back from the body. The result was catastrophic. The car was released in the earlier part of 1959, but was retired quickly in early November of the same year. So bad was the car's reception that the slang for a mistake in America became "*an edsel*". It almost destroyed the Ford corporation as a whole.



Ford Edsel

## 1960



Chevrolet Corvair

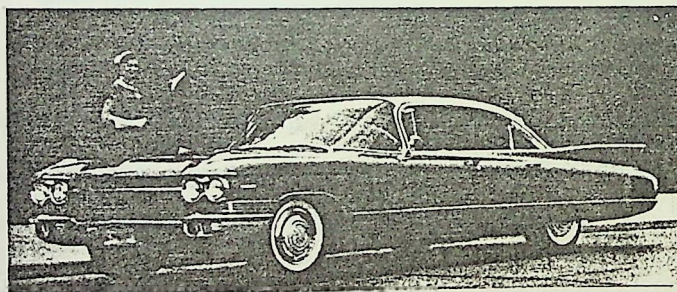
The word "compacts" was coined early in 1960 and with it came a newer, less aggressive type of car. Chevrolet led the way somewhat prematurely with this, the **Corvair**. However, the car could not compete with the German Volkswagen Beetle from 1958. The Golden Era was not entirely over yet.



As with cars, 1960 saw changes in music. Nelson was the first true 'video star'. His career was devised and planned specifically to capture the teenager market. His success was based on 'hype' and media buying - something he rejected quite strongly in 1972 with the song "Garden Party". Again, as with cars, no longer could one star or model hope to capture a complete market.



Ricky Nelson

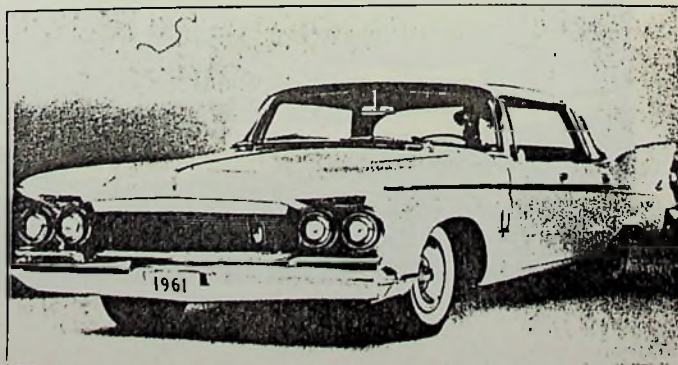


Cadillac 62 Sedan

From 1960 onward, markets would be segregated, dissected and labelled. The respective products, likewise, would also conform. Cadillac retained the fin and long lean lines of the 1950s, reducing only the evidence of chroming.

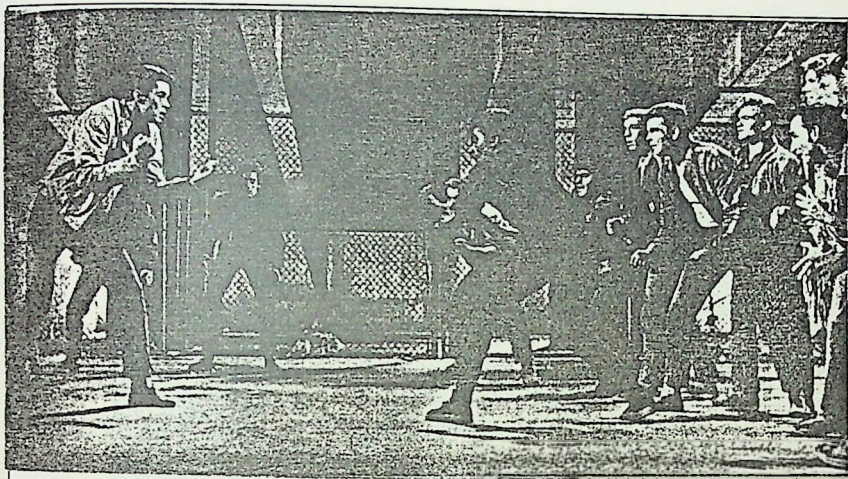
The leaning into the conservative sixties had begun and sadly, one can see the instigators: Cadillac, agreeing with the introduction of this sixties model.

Finding Golden Era cars from this year becomes increasingly difficult as grills and fins fade to an almost unrecognisable form. Shown here the sedate Imperial Crown. Now, ever



Imperial Crown

chroming was subsiding as a limpid fin clings desperately to the trunk of the car.



West Side Story

"West Side Story", "The Hustler" and "The Misfits" are all released this year. From this time onward, the emphasis would shift from youth and rebellion to the 'cold war' films. The good guy versus the bad guy, spy films, most of which were made on low budgets and with poor direction.

Without labouring the point, the Golden Era was gone.

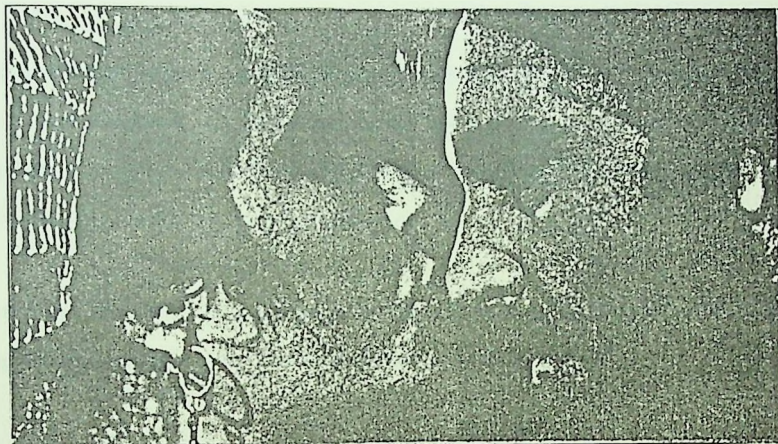
As suggested at the beginning of this pictorial examination of the Golden Era, one must start as one intends to finish: with the Cadillac shown here, the 1964 Cadillac Fleetwood Eldorado Convertible. On a personal note, this is far removed



Cadillac Fleetwood Eldorado Convertible



from the romanticism of its namesake, the Cadillac Eldorado Biarritz Convertible of 1958. It has been included here simply as the last car to display a fin - even if only faintly.



Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton

1963 was Hollywood's final effort at a blockbuster - "*Cleopatra*". On a budget of £13,000,000, the film was successful only to the point of regaining its cost. Hence the re-routing of efforts into more B Movies and low-budget spy thrillers.

The machine, music, movies and money of the Golden Era were one. Whether one considers Chuck Berry or James Dean, Ritchie Valance or Marilyn Monroe, the answer always leads to the car. The Oldsmobile, Hudson, Buick and Cadillac. The chrome, the fin, the grill, the speed. Cars began by following the stars but ended as the leader.

Chrysler, Ford, General Motors began in the early fifties desperately seeking form and expression. They drew on film and nature to supply this want, this need. Once the concept was born, the race was on. Each year the audacity of the big three was immeasurable. The glitter of Hollywood was suddenly streaming down the highways from coast to coast. The car was now a symbol of its own.

Nineteen fifty saw the beginnings of the status symbol in the form of the automobile. Through supporting Presidents, encouraging film stars and sponsoring musicians, the car became a creed.

Towards the end of the Golden Era, this aspect of the automobile came forward more prominently. In film and advertisement alike, the "nice" people drove the latest and most luxurious cars. In good guy-bad guy films, the bad guys rode around in black cars while the heroes rode in white, red or similar. Musicians and movies stars were soon seen only to arrive in long-base limousine Cadillacs or Lincolns. Success was measured purely by the car one was seen to drive. The wanton designers of old now toyed with the emotions of the eager and wanton consumer. The truth of the Golden Era, rooted in the cosmos of music and movies, introduced, explored, and sadly expended this energy.



## CONCLUSION

Standing isolated and despairing in the early 1960s, searching desperately for the romanticism of the 1950s, one is left alone. From hence, music became more complicated, more political, more monetary and mostly European, as the *Beatles* and the *Rolling Stones* invaded the air waves. The concentration in many studios was in producing low-budget movies, buck-spinners and luck winners. The dreams faded as dawn broke on a land of pure monetary gain, a second industrial revolution.

Finally, America had succeeded. Beyond her wildest dreams, has now led the Western World: but as with any great competitor, the joy is competing. Winning if often an anti-climax.

Sadly, with the passing of this electric decade, many moments of passion, glory and innocence were lost. Recently, an effort, through both film and music, has been made to recapture this era: "La Bamba", "Peggie Sue Got Married", "Back to the Future" and "Eddie and the Cruisers" to name but a few. Features on songs such as "La Bamba", "Twist and Shout" and "C'mon Everybody" were all re-charted in the past twelve months. With both film and song, tearful reminders of these dream-cars are flashed across screens as the audiences watch, awe-struck, at an era of such tremendous and limitless style. The very idea that such a time once existed is merely creation on celluloid - perhaps unbelievable to the naive onlooker. Sadly, the electric decade did occur, it will not occur again.

Thus one arrives at the end of an era and the end of this dissertation. With both empty stomach and empty pen, the final scribblings of tribute to this Golden Era flow across the page. Tracing movies and music, the cross-linking of automobile design has been outlined, highlighted and honoured. The very term Golden Era introduced as the title of this study, is oddly enough a concept employed in film and music. The Golden Oscar. The Golden Disc.

Hence to finish with one wish, that it may begin again.

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