

INSIDE

Cars For Sale • Restoration • Calendar Of Events

CAR COLLECTOR

October 1998

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For Serious Collectors & Hobbyists

FEATURED CARS

- **1963 Ford Galaxie 500**
- **1938 Studebaker Coupe Express Pickup**
- **1915 Packard Model 5-48 Touring**
- **1965 Lamborghini 350 GT**



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YOUR CAR
FOR WINTER**

1946 Buick Roadmaster
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1929 Pierce-Arrow

Model 133 Club Sedan

Text by Brooks T. Brierley, Photos by Robert Browning

The 1929 Pierce-Arrows are significant automobiles. They were formally introduced to the trade on the front page of the *Automotive Daily News* on the first business day of 1929. The January 2 headline read, "Pierce-Arrow Enters Eight Cylinder Field." Studebaker had purchased control of Pierce-Arrow in the summer of 1928 and thoroughly revised its motorcars from two lines of six-cylinder automobiles into two lines of straight-eights, one with a 133-inch wheelbase and one with a 143-inch wheelbase. The 72-inch high bodies were entirely new and it is said that designer Ray Dietrich had a hand in drawing their impressive lines. The first of the new cars was completed on December 19, 1928. The new style and up-to-date engineering combined to make one of the great automotive success stories of 1929; Pierce sales registrations rose 40 percent to a record 8,422 units.

The 366cid/125 horsepower L-type straight-eight with a bore and stroke of 3 $\frac{1}{2}$ x4 $\frac{1}{2}$ could propel the car to 85mph. Claiming the car could use ordinary fuels with its 5:1 compression ratio, today this car uses regular gas. The Pierce practice of over-engineering its motorcars continued with a cam shaft carried in six bronze-backed bearings and a crank shaft with nine bearings. (Enthusiasts like to point out the engine was so strong and reliable that it outlived Pierce-Arrow by 25 years, powering Seagrave fire engines into the 1960s. Parts were never a problem; a Pierce-Arrow service facility remained open on the west side of Manhattan into the early 1950s.)

Stopping chores were through four Bendix-Servo three-show type on 350-square-inch braking areas. Artillery wheels with 12 hickory spokes and steel fellos were standard equipment, with wire wheels optional. Niceties included a double windshield cleaner and built-in thermostatically controlled radiator shutters. The customer had the option

of choosing Pierce-Arrow's trademark fender-mounted headlights or having bracket-mounted ones at no extra charge (the fender-mounted headlights were not legal in all states).

The club sedan model has special meaning, too. In the late 1920s some new body styles were added to automotive vernacular—the close-coupled sedan

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Owner Ed Johnson of Vero Beach, Florida with his 1929 Pierce-Arrow that he purchased in 1991.

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among them. Close-coupled bodies are built on the shorter wheelbase and enclosing the rear window so that there are only two windows along the side of the car rather than three. Pierce-Arrow's 1929 version is visually shorter because of the wide front door but is the same body length as the five-passenger sedan. Pierce-Arrow chose to name its close-coupled style the club sedan, or club berline if there was a chauffeur's partition. The landau irons behind the rear door only suggest that the top, faced in fabric, would fold down as in a sedan-landaulet; indeed it does *not* fold. The overall effect is a bit sporty, with the blind rear quarter making a cozy interior, something most sedans cannot be. This made it a favorite with owners who drove their own cars. The silver-finished interior hardware was described at the time as "carefully designed to harmonize and embellish the ensemble." Which it does.

Collector Ed Johnson purchased this Pierce in 1991. The previous owner had restored it, but substantial additional work has been done since. The car is fitted with high-speed rear end gears that permit the engine to run with fewer revs (increasing engine life) at higher speeds. Pierce-Arrows, like many Full Classics, were originally geared to the low revs to minimize shifting in city driving.

What is it like to have a 1929 Pierce-Arrow? The Pierce-Arrow Society provides maintenance information in the form of periodic service bulletins (the Society is quickly reached on the Internet by searching the name on an index such as Alta Vista or Yahoo); individual Society members help with new parts and services. In addition, some of the multi-marque car clubs have marque specialist technicians available for technical advice. All this helps Pierce eights to be practical Classics. Ed and Robin Johnson of Vero Beach, Florida, use theirs that way—and delight in taking the car when going out for dinner at local restaurants or an afternoon's run up to the nearby 1920s hamlet of Fellsmere. The Johnsons try to avoid interstate roads on their trips. But, as expected, the Pierce goes easily there, too.

The car is a Classic Car Club of America Senior having taken first place primary and senior in CCCA national meets. It also participates in VMCCA and Pierce-Arrow Society meets and has taken second place at the 1994 Pierce-Arrow Society national meet.



A close-up of the front of the car shows off another Pierce-Arrow feature, the archer radiator cap.



The club sedan came with a trunk as standard equipment.



The interior is much more than a decorator's mix of fabrics and finishes.