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Frankly Speaking –

Where Did Car Names Come From?

by Frank Jordan

Why are our cars called names like Chevrolet, Honda, Cadillac and Buick? A new French word, “automobile” was patented by inventor Ransom E. Olds during the mid-1890s leading to Oldsmobile. Mercedes

Benz came from a 1926 merger between Karl Benz who designed the first internal combustion car engine and DMG, which had inspired Emil Jellinek to name his DMG racecars after his daughter Mercedes.

David Buick, invented the overhead valve engine and founded Buick Motor Car Co. in 1903. William C. Durant, the industrialist who founded GM, took over Buick and kept the Buick name and car for one of his company divisions. After financial trouble in 1904, Buick stayed on as a director, but left in 1908 and died in 1929, sadly unable to even afford one of his namesake cars.

Strangely enough, William C. Durant, who almost single handedly created General Motors, never sought to have a “Durant” car. Durant incorporated under the name International Motors Company in 1908, but legal counsel suggested General Motors Company to avoid conflict with similar names in use and lawsuits.

Durant brought Louis Chevrolet as a famous and fearless racecar driver into his company in 1911, but Swiss-born Chevrolet resigned two years later. But again, Durant liked and kept the name for his line of Chevrolet vehicles. Remember Dinah Shore belting out, “Drive your Chevrolet through the USA!”

Did you know Henry Ford was fired from an early auto company that had his name? The Henry Ford Company traded freely on Ford’s early fame as an inventor and racer, according to the Encyclopedia of American Business and Biography, but fired him in 1902, “because he was spending all his time developing a race car, not a passenger car.” Big mistake – HUGE mistake! After Ford departed, the company was renamed Cadillac after Antoine Laumet de la Mothe Cadillac, the French nobleman who founded Detroit in 1703. Cadillac eventually became another Durant model in General Motors’ car corral in 1909. After his firing, Ford formed his new firm, the Ford Motor Company in 1903. He introduced the firm’s highly popular low priced Model T and then Model A, making cars affordable to the general public and the Ford Motor Company a financial success.

A special auto was the Jordan Playboy, a gorgeous car sold from 1916-1931 when the depression killed off the high-end stylish car. In 1922, Ford bought Lincoln Motors, obviously named for Abraham Lincoln, out of bankruptcy. Ford used the former aircraft company to launch his luxury Lincoln car line. Word is Matthew McConaughey hasn’t hurt Lincoln sales either!

Surprisingly, the Ford Mustang was not named after a wild horse, but an airplane! John Nair, co-designer of the first Ford Mustang prototype in 1961, was a fan of the World War II P-51 Mustang fighter plane and is credited by Ford to have suggested the name. Yes – I know, the emblem on the car is a horse! Go figure. Toyota came from the Toyoda loom works in Kariya, Japan, which changed the “d” to a “t” because it appeared more elegant in Japanese script. Pontiac of course was a renowned Indian chief. Mechanic Soichiro Honda started producing motorized bicycles after World War II, later to produce popular Honda cars. Volkswagen, meaning “people’s car” in German, was inspired by Adolf Hitler’s desire in 1917 for a car for the common folk. The Bavarian Motor Works known as BMW, first made airplane engines with a logo design of a white propeller against a blue sky. That propeller logo today is unchanged, but now on high-dollar BMW cars.

The Jaguar name representing the sleek and fast jungle cat won out over other animal names in 1935. In 1939, Ford introduced the Mercury after the fleet-footed messenger of the gods. Frankly speaking, my favorite is still the stick-shift 1957 Chevy Impala, my first car, exemplifying true love between man and auto.

Hargrave named to Dean’s Honor Roll

ABILENE, TX - Emma Hargrave of Dayton has been named to the Fall 2025 Dean’s Honor Roll at Abilene Christian University. Hargrave is a junior

majoring in Finance. To qualify for the Dean’s Honor Roll, students must be registered for 12 or more credit hours and earn a GPA of 3.6 or higher.

Casey graduates from SMSU

CAPE GIRARDEAU, MO - Southeast Missouri State University celebrated December 2025 graduate McCoy Casey of Dayton.

All students who completed their degrees were honored during the fall commencement ceremonies held Saturday, December 13.

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Valorie Barton

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John Coleman, bailiff for Judge Wes Hinch’s Liberty County Court at Law #2, dropped by the GOP’s Candidate Meet & Greet last week, no doubt lured in by the abundance of tasty snacks and treats.

Liberty Gazette
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Liberty
Church of Christ



Bryant Perkins,
Minister

Join us this Sunday for Bible Classes for all ages at 9 a.m. and
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We meet Sunday night at 5 p.m. and Wednesdays at 6:30 p.m.

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We'd love to see you soon. We've saved you a seat!

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