



Edsel Bryant Ford

Edsel Bryant Ford was born Nov. 6, 1893, in Detroit, the only child of Clara (Bryant) and Henry Ford. As a young boy, Edsel was interested in the styling and making of automobiles. It is no accident that his first design sketches were created in 1903, the year Ford Motor Company was founded.

During his years at Detroit University School, Edsel wrote essays on automobiles and automobile manufacturing. After hours, he visited Ford's Highland Park assembly plant where he helped out in the main office and in the mailroom, and learned how cars were made.

At the age of 12, Edsel had his own Model N runabout. The design of these early cars did not satisfy his imagination or meet his standards for styling. He started out to civilize automobiles with comfort, grace and beauty, which he expressed in a series of personally designed cars. One of these became the famous Model T torpedo runabout.

After completing his studies at Detroit University School in 1912, Edsel joined Ford Motor Company. In 1915, he was elected secretary of the company, and in 1917, vice president. From the beginning, he assumed responsibility for the business side of the company, such as sales, purchasing, advertising, and the numerous details of the daily routine.

In 1916, Edsel married Eleanor Lowthian Clay. Together they had four children, Henry II (1917), Benson (1919), Josephine Clay (1923) and William Clay (1925).

Henry Ford resigned as president of Ford Motor Company in 1918, amid a clash with the other stockholders over global expansion. Edsel was elected president in January 1919, and he began negotiations for the purchase of all shares of minority stock in the company. By July of the same year, the Ford family were sole owners of Ford Motor Company and plans for a rapid global expansion moved forward.



On Feb. 4, 1922, Ford Motor Company purchased The Lincoln Motor Company. Edsel Ford became the president of Lincoln shortly thereafter. Henry Ford had made the Model T the most popular car in the world, but Edsel wanted to make the best car in the world and design and build cars that were as stylish as they were useful.

From the 1923 Lincoln and the 1928 Model A, Edsel Ford was responsible for all design at Ford and Lincoln. He established the first design department in March 1935 and selected Eugene T. Gregorie to lead it. The partnership between the two men was fruitful, resulting in some of the greatest cars of the era.

The streamlined 1938 Lincoln Zephyr, with its iconic grille and sloped hood, upended the industry, with other manufacturers copying it. The first Lincoln Continental, designed by Gregorie, is still widely regarded as one of the most elegant automobiles ever made. Architect Frank Lloyd Wright considered it "the most beautiful car in the world" and bought two.

Edsel's product influence did not end with Lincoln. Changes in later Model Ts included curved surfaces, smoother lines, and the availability of colors other than black. He was responsible for the color, style and trim of the Model A, introduced in 1927.

He is also credited with the installation

of hydraulic brakes on Ford cars, and later, with convincing his father to build a six-cylinder engine to sell alongside the V8. Edsel brought about the development of safety glass in 1926, which became a feature of the Model A in 1927. His recognition that the medium-priced market was largely untapped by Ford Motor Company led to the creation of the Mercury division in 1938.

Edsel's interests outside automobiles also influenced his work at the company. He was interested in aircraft travel. He purchased Stout Metal Aircraft Company to produce the Ford Tri-Motor airplane, and directed the creation of a conveyor system for mass production of bombers for World War II. He also gave financial support to Admiral Richard Byrd's pioneering flights over the North Pole in 1926 and the South Pole in 1929.

A supporter of the Detroit Institute of Arts and member of its board of trustees, Edsel commissioned Diego Rivera to create murals for the courtyard of the museum. Though originally mired in controversy, the resulting Detroit Industry fresco panels are thought to be the best work of the artist's career. Edsel and Eleanor Ford also donated many priceless works of art from around the world to the Detroit Institute of Arts, and supported the museum through financial donations.

Edsel Ford died of stomach cancer at the age of 49, in May 1943, at Gaukler Point, with his wife Eleanor by his side. Henry Ford ordered all of Ford Motor Company to shut down and observe a moment of respectful silence the day his only child was laid to rest at Woodlawn Cemetery in Detroit.





Eugene T. Gregorie (Bob)

Eugene “Bob” Gregorie was born in New York on Oct. 12, 1908. His East Coast upbringing fueled a love of ship and yacht design, a passion he followed immediately upon finishing school. Even though the Great Depression stalled the yacht industry, forcing Gregorie to seek work in Detroit, his admiration for the elegant lines and modern styling of watercrafts remained and would inspire his automotive designs.

Gregorie arrived in Detroit in 1929 and was hired by Edsel Ford in 1931 at the young age of 22, and the two quickly became partners. One of Gregorie’s first assignments was to design a car for the Ford market in Europe. He designed the Model Y, which was well received by the English, French and Germans.

When he was asked to modify the Lincoln-Zephyr created by Briggs Manufacturing, he moved the engine to the front, creating an elongated and pointed front aesthetic, akin to the prow of a ship. The result was considered a dramatic improvement. The 1938 Zephyr design was patented and applauded by the Museum of Modern Art and became an iconic streamlined car.

Gregorie’s relationship with Edsel Ford, along with his own visionary creative design ability, led to his becoming the chief of Ford’s new design department in 1935. With Edsel’s guidance, he would oversee the design of every Ford, Mercury, Lincoln and Ford truck produced for the next decade. Some of Gregorie’s best known creations were the 1936 Lincoln Zephyr, the 1939 Lincoln Continental and the 1949 Mercury, the latter made famous by James Dean in “Rebel Without a Cause.”

Gregorie left Ford Motor Company soon after Edsel Ford’s passing in 1943. He returned a year later, at Henry Ford



Il’s request, leaving again two years later. He moved to Florida and returned to his first love of yacht design. He did not work in the auto industry again.

In 2002, Gregorie died at the age of 94 in Florida with his wife Evelyn by his side.



William Clay Ford Sr.

William Clay Ford Sr., the youngest son of Edsel Ford and grandson of founder Henry Ford, was born on March 14, 1925.

When he was 17, William enlisted as a naval aviation cadet for service in World War II. Later, he graduated from Yale University. He was elected to the board of directors on June 4, 1948, and joined Ford Motor Company in 1949 in the sales and advertising department. He served the company for 57 years, helping steer Ford Motor Company into the modern era and helping solidify Lincoln as a leading luxury brand.

In 1952, William Clay Ford Sr. took on the challenging role to bring back the car his father, Edsel Ford, had made famous — the Lincoln Continental. The nameplate lay dormant after it was discontinued in 1948 until Ford began his project. After two years of creative design, a team led by Ford revealed the prototype of the Mark II the day before Christmas in 1954. Ford then drove it to his parents' house Christmas day to show his mother, Eleanor Ford, the car he had developed in memory of his father. The project was a success, and the Mark II was considered an instant design classic just as Edsel's original had been in 1939.

In 1957, he was elected chairman of the design committee, a post he held for 32 years. Throughout his tenure as chairman of design, he had influence on Lincoln, Mercury and Ford vehicle lines. He was instrumental in setting the company's design direction, overseeing the development of a number of classic vehicles, including the famed 1961 Lincoln Continental with the distinctive coach doors.

In 1978, Ford was elected chairman of the executive committee and appointed a member of the office



of the chief executive. He was elected vice chairman of the board in 1980 and chairman of the finance committee in 1987. He retired from his post as vice chairman in 1989 and as chairman of the finance committee in 1995. He retired from the board and was named

director emeritus on May 12, 2005.

Ford was married to Martha Firestone Ford for 66 years. They had four children — Martha Ford Morse, Sheila Ford Hamp, Elizabeth Ford Kontulis and William Clay Ford Jr.

