

The RESTORATION

of a 1936 Packard Model 1404 Super Eight Convertible Coupe

BY PAUL WHITNEY

Nineteen thirty-six was a pivotal year for the Packard Motor Car Company. After enduring four years of record losses at the outset of the Great Depression, profitability was finally restored. The highly successful introduction of the affordably priced Model 120 generated much needed cash flow. Without the 120, the legendary Senior line, and perhaps the entire company might not have survived the Great Depression. Fortunately, sufficient capital was available to redesign the Senior models in 1935 and 1936. The new body styles marked Packard's transition from Art Deco of the late 1920s and early '30s to Streamline Moderne in the mid- and late-'30s.



name unknown, from a Boston-based Packard dealer. In 1953, he sold it to the second owner, also name unknown, who, in turn, sold it to an Owen Fraking in Schenectady, New York. In 1959, Dennis Ricker of College Station, Pennsylvania purchased the car. Ricker was a metallurgist associated with the Applied Materials Laboratory of Penn State University. Upon his death, his son sold the car to CCCA member Ron Wertz, a collector living in Bedford Heights, Ohio.

The car was in poor condition at the time Ricker acquired it. Over the 45 years of his ownership, extensive restoration work was done. Particular attention was paid to maintaining authenticity. Bob Turnquist's renowned Hibernia Auto Restoration did the bodywork and paint from 1975 through 1977 and several East Coast machine shops specializing in Pre-War Classics overhauled and rebuilt the engine and drivetrain components. As evidenced in the historical records, Ricker was very fond of the car, devoting >>>

In 2017, my wife and I decided to acquire a mid-1930s Packard open car to complement our 1930 LaSalle Phaeton: Art Deco vs. Streamline Moderne. Our search led us to a dealer in Ohio who had advertised a 1936 Super Eight Convertible Coupe, Model 1404 in Hemmings Motor News. It looked exactly like what we wanted. In June 2017 my Ohio-born-and-raised neighbor and I flew to his hometown, Cleveland, to inspect and test drive the car.

As they say in the real estate business, the car had "good bones." The body looked sound; no evidence of sheet metal damage or rust in the under carriage. The paint, however, showed its age with crazing and cracking evident on the fender surfaces. Chrome pieces were not pitted and in good overall condition. The leather upholstery and top material were acceptable for touring but would need to be replaced if the car were to be shown. The wood artillery wheels were in very good condition, but looked too old fashioned for a roadster style body. Under the hood, mechanical components were clean and period correct. During our test drive, the engine was smooth and quiet, and the transmission shifted effortlessly. Handling was excellent: no shimmy or drift, and the brakes were effective. Our overall impression of the car was very good. With our fingers crossed, we didn't anticipate any major mechanical or cosmetic issues during restoration.

According to both the Kimes and Turnquist Packard books, Super Eight production for 1936 was 1,330 units, the Coupe-Roadster body style designated #959, priced at \$3,070. Our car was first purchased in late 1936 by a military officer,

1936 PACKARD SUPER 8 MODEL 1404 COUPE ROADSTER BY DIETRICH FOR SALE OR TRADE

HERE IS YOUR OPPORTUNITY TO OBTAIN A VERY RARE AND OUTSTANDING CLASSIC. CHECK THESE FEATURES:

- TRANSMISSION:** 2 speed transmission in excellent condition in excellent original condition. Clutch is in terrific shape in driving suggesting a new clutch shoe might be needed.
- ENGINE:** In excellent condition. Had new valve job just before I obtained it. It does not smoke excessively and does not use oil. Valve assembly, push rods and the mechanical push rods have all been replaced. The good hot parts, fan belt and other accessories.
- BODY:** Body is in almost perfect shape. All body work has been completed and all minor dents corrected. There is some minor surface rust that has occurred since paint was removed by rust. Front, fender, running boards and fenders have been removed for restoration.
- CHASSIS:** Chassis has been cleaned and some cleaning needed. All work is in good condition except the rear suspension which is in poor condition. The rear axle is in almost perfect original condition and will not have to be refinished. New original rubber shoe which is not in working condition.
- INSTRUMENTS:** Dash is in good original condition but should be refinished for nice restoration. All instruments work except clock and have been built in region of instrument panel. It is in almost perfect original condition and will not have to be refinished. New original rubber shoe which is not in working condition.
- TOP:** Old top is there but needs to be replaced. Show all chrome and brass and only the front wood. No paint is lost and needs replacing. Something is there and this should involve no problem in replacing.
- TIRES:** Four brand new Dunlop whitewall 8 ply tires and tubes. Last year 200 miles on them. This represents just a \$200 investment. Two spare tire hold but hold on. If needed I will furnish a small steel tire and all car without new tires.
- CHROME:** All chrome seems to be solid. Naturally all of it should be refinished. Possibly window frames and some minor work will be done in original shape. There is no body rust at all parts or deep pitted areas. All broken pieces such as chrome chrome all have been replaced. The radiator shrouds are in good working condition.
- UPHOLSTERY:** Handicraft upholstery with original leather on them. Front seats have been recovered and are in good shape. The springs are in fine shape and all seats and side panels should be recovered.
- MECHANICAL:** Brake are good although I haven't checked them. Power booster works fine. There is no gas in rear and although engine and top are fine and should be replaced. Car handles so easily and it is in 1936 and it is completely other driving this year that it has many years of service left if properly taken care of.
- GENERAL:** This one Packard was made in 1936. It was produced in very high 1936 when the top super 8 engine, four tube system, side control and the flying body rubber suspension. The major expense is labor, that is body work, motor work, new tires, and search for missing or damaged parts. I have refinished everything needed to complete the restoration with the exception of a few items like chrome hand levers, fenders, hood, hood ornament, but all haven't occurred. Thus this one Packard car will be in good condition with a minimum amount of effort and not too great expense. It should be shown elsewhere.

*SINCE I HAVE ACQUIRED A RARE CHRYSLER LEBARON CONVERTIBLE I WANT TO GET A 1932-36 PACKARD CONVERTIBLE (SEDAN, PRALTON, VICTORIA OR 3 PASSENGER COUPE) WILL TRADE UP ON RESTORED OR ORIGINAL CAR OR WILL TRADE EVEN OR DOWN.

WILL SELL VERY REASONABLY — WRITE — WIRE — TELEPHONE

Photos This Page > FROM TOP:
 > The Packard at the time of purchase.
 > 1959 advertisement for the car (No Ebay or digital ads in those days!)
 > 1936 Packard brochure.

Photo Opposite Page:
 > After 16 months work, the final product.

Packard

presents for 1936 a new and finer version of the cars that were chosen by nearly half of America's fine-car buyers in 1935.

+
THE PACKARD
 Twelve
 Super Eight
 Eight



The RESTORATION

Premet: Home of the flapper

November 21, 2016 | Randy Bryan Bigham

Forgotten 1920s fashion label was led by series of female designers



Barely remembered today, Premet, 8 Place Vendome, was among the most innovative Paris couture houses of its time, spanning the late belle epoch to the jazz age. Best known for "La Garconne" (or "The Flapper"), a black dress with a white collar and cuffs introduced in 1923, Premet was unique in that its inspiration didn't depend on a single personality, but maintained a tremendous reputation through a succession of creative designers, all of them women.

Despite their number and variety, these *couturieres* managed a cohesive style that appealed equally to their exclusive clientele and to mainstream consumers who purchased retail copies of Premet designs.



a great deal of time and expense restoring and maintaining it. After Wertz bought the car from Ricker's son, the pistons, rods, and rod bearings were replaced and overdrive installed. The car was no trailer queen during Wertz's ownership. He drove the car on many CCCA CARavans and participated in several Glidden tours.

Initially, we planned to do only body work and repaint the car. Mike Adams, owner of Bowden's Auto Body in Escondido, California, started work in December 2017. All exterior paint was removed to bare sheet metal. No rust was found but three fenders had deep pits that required filling and one needed a large patch. After about four months of bodywork, the car was ready for the paint booth. We selected Premet Dark Tan for the body color, which was a Packard factory color offered in 1935 and 1936. Interestingly, "Premet" was derived from the name of a famous women's fashion house: "Premet of Paris" — which existed from 1914 to the late 1920s. It was famous for designing the "Little Black Dress" in 1922 which ushered in the Flapper era of women's fashion.

Once we saw the results of the paint and bodywork, everything else about the car looked dowdy. As in remodeling a house, one thing led to another. So after 16 months, the car was completed with

not only new paint and body work, but also with all chrome parts re-plated, new top and leather upholstery, refurbished gauges, restored original Philco radio, rewired electrical system, re-cored radiator, water pump and carburetor rebuilt, new tires, window glass replaced, wiper motors rebuilt and engine bay detailed — all just in time for the car's debut at the 2019 San Marino Motor Classic this past June. And as testimony to Mike Adams and his crew, the car finished first in its class and received a special award for best paint and finish.

At least twice a month, we take the car out for a 15-mile drive around Westlake Lake and, on occasion, to dinner at the Four Seasons Hotel near us. It's always fun to see the valet park the Packard alongside modern Bentleys, Rolls-Royces, Cadillacs and others. To our way of thinking, nothing shames modern luxury cars more than a grand Classic! ●

Photos This Page > FROM TOP:

- > Receiving a San Marino Motor Classic award
- > Engine block and head repainted; engine bay detailed and all mechanical components period correct.
- > Mike Adams and his talented crew.

Photos Opposite Page > FROM TOP LEFT:

- > Off to the paint booth!
- > Final coat applied
- > Article on the origin of the name "Premet"
- > New leather upholstery and convertible top installed