



BMW BEGINNINGS

IN THE LATE FIFTIES American architecture student Sid Horman was studying in Heidelberg, West Germany. One day while riding a bus near Braunschweig, he saw a skinny tire and a cycle fender sticking out of a very old haystack. Being a curious sort, Horman got off the bus in Braunschweig (the driver was not allowed to stop between towns) and walked back to ask the farmer "What was that sticking out of the hay?"

What was sticking out was the rear corner of a very old and very odd car, a BMW Dixi. The farmer turned out to be the son of the car's original owner, and was more interested in getting the haystack out of his field than in selling the car. He told Horman that if he moved the haystack

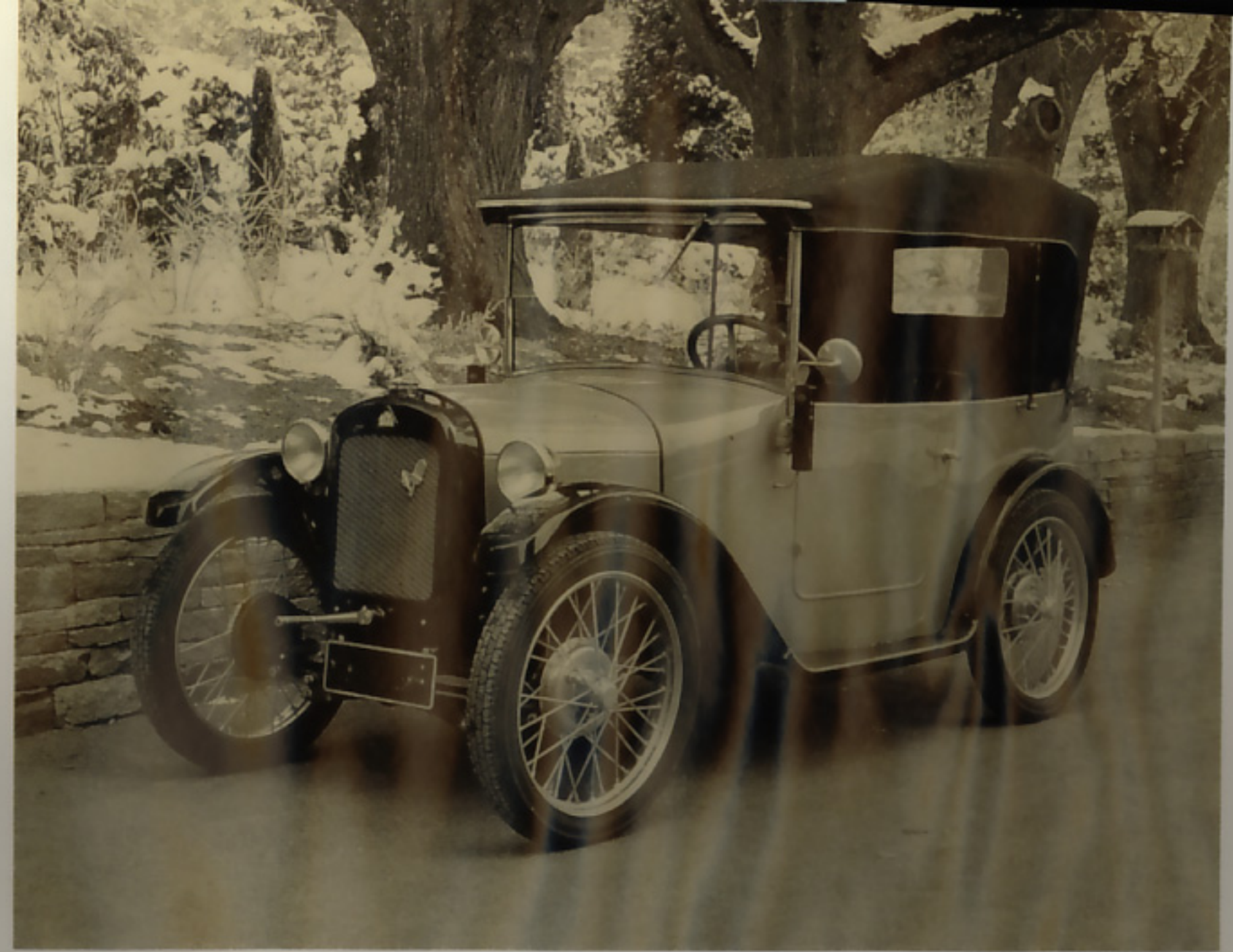
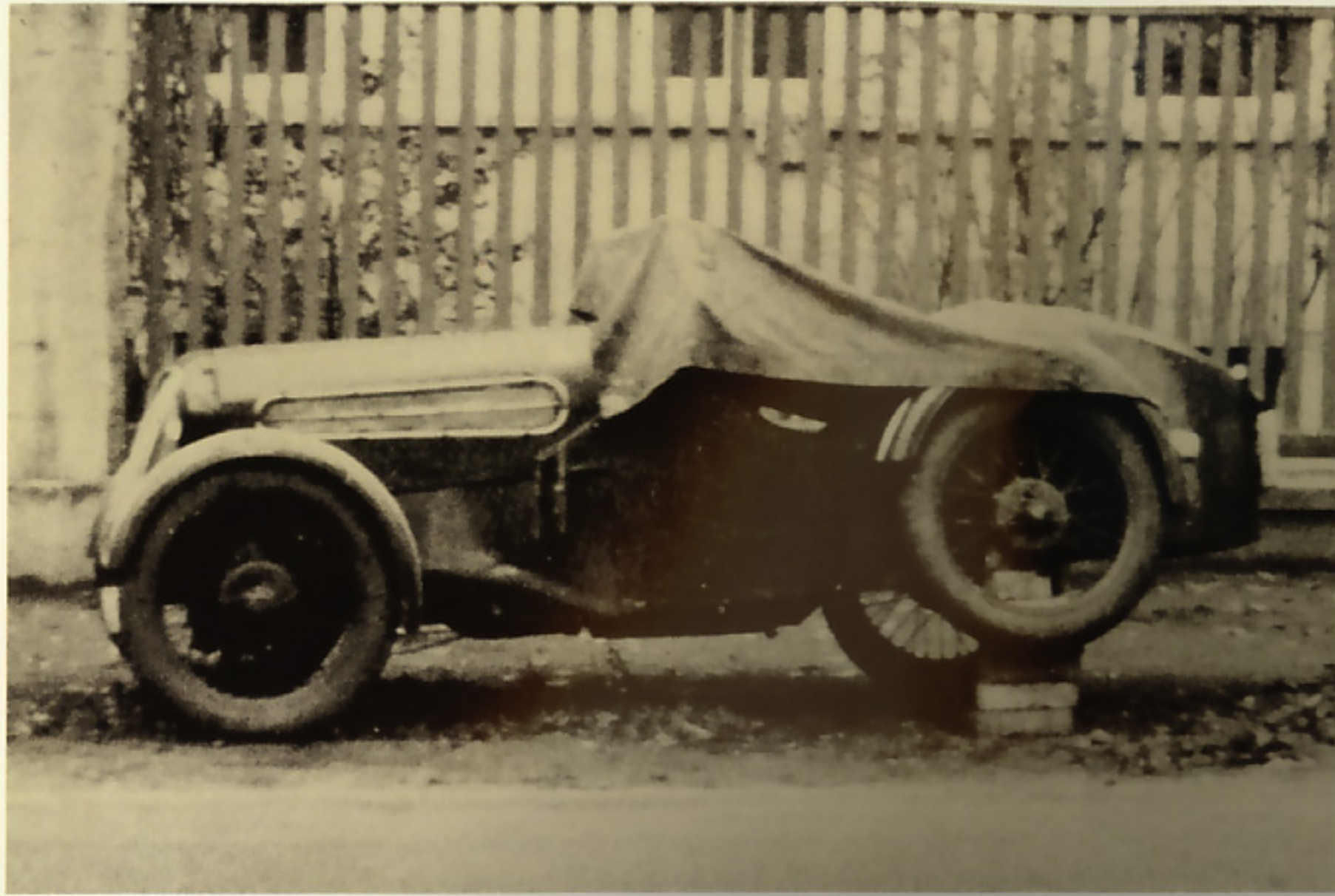


he could have what was inside for 150 American dollars. (In those days two people could eat a good meal in a nice German restaurant for just one Yankee dollar.)

Apparently the son was not as well off as his father had been, because his only means of transportation was a horse-drawn cart with wooden wheels. He had become discouraged two days earlier when he started to move the petrified haystack. Sid returned with two friends, and using picks, shovels, and the horse cart, spent a whole day dismantling the stack. Over the years the hay had turned to a plaster-like substance, sealing the car in a watertight tomb, and giving Sid and his friends a real workout. The car was put on a motorcycle trailer and was running within two days.

DIXIDA-1

BY DUANE CARLING • COLOR PHOTOGRAPHY BY ALAN YORGASON



Sid Horman (right) discovered his BMW Dixi under a haystack while he was an architectural student in Heidelberg, Germany. The tiny BMW Dixi (above) could be easily propped up for repairs and was once carried to the top steps of the Heidelberg City Hall. In 1929, BMW rebadged the DA-1, which was based loosely on the English Austin Seven, as a BMW 3/15 (above right).



THE BEST LAID PLANS...

In the fall of 1939, following the Nazi invasion of Poland and the start of World War II, the owner of the Dixi roadster had hidden his car and left to serve in Hitler's Army. Instead of stashing the car in the barn, which would have been the usual choice, he drove it to the middle of his fields, filled the engine completely with oil, and stacked the autumn harvest of hay around and on top of it, hoping to return soon and drive again in the lovely Bavarian countryside. He never made it back.

As Horman removed 20 years of grime, he discovered the odd little car had a BMW badge on its grill, and a model number of DA-1. The oil had turned to black goo inside the engine, but had done its job of protecting the insides. Four Michelin motorcycle tires just fit the rims, and with a few other touches the car became the hit of the Heidelberg campus.

One morning, Horman thought his car had been stolen until he found that his friends had carried the little sports car to the top of the steps to City Hall. Later that year he was drafted into the Korean War, and shipped his "toy car" back to the States where it sat in a warehouse. Then his contracting/development business and car and boat racing hobby took all of his energies, while the car languished once again, only this time in the warehouse rather than under a haystack.



THE DIXI BECOMES A BMW

BMW purchased the Dixi Werke Eisenach A.G., based in what was, until the end of 1990, East Germany, in 1929 and rebadged the DA-1 as a BMW 3/15 in 1929. The Dixi was based loosely on a license from the English Austin Seven sedan. Eisenach produced 42 of model number DA-1 during 1927, most of which were sedans with a very few cherry red roadsters. From 1927 through 1929; 4873 four-seat Touring Se-

dans, 1727 two-seat Touring Sedans, and 674 Sport Coupes were produced until BMW brought out a new model. Apparently no more roadsters were made after the first year.

The Dixi family still owns one of the few remaining examples. "Dixi" also means the beginning and the end in Latin, the last word in automotive excellence, which is what BMW hoped their new cars would be. "DA-1" implied it was the first of Dixi's licensed production versions of the Austin Seven; DA meaning Deutsche Ausführung or German Version.

BMW'S SURPRISE OFFER

The scene now shifts to 1983, and to Horman's semi-retirement project.

"I had no idea this was one of the first BMWs when I had it in Germany," Horman said. "I contacted the BMW Club of America when I started and gave them the serial number DA-1, looking for restoration information. They wrote me back and said I didn't have a DA-1, that it was probably a prototype, and never left the factory. I took some pictures

and sent them.

"A week later, on a Saturday, I got a call from the Salt Lake Airport. The President of the American BMW Club and the German BMW Club wanted to know if they could come over and look at the car. I said 'sure,' but it was partially disassembled and wasn't much to look at. They offered me any two BMWs currently being made if I would sell the car. I figured if it was so valuable, I'd keep it and restore it. I'm glad I did. It's been a lot of fun and I've submitted it for acceptance into the Monterey Concours."

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In restoring the DA-1, Horman sent the gauges (top) to VDO; the firm reconditioned them at no charge. The chassis plate (above) identified the car as a DA-1, but BMW Club officials didn't believe it at first, telling Horman he had a prototype.

RESTORATION CHALLENGES

In Horman's search for an authentic restoration he has had some interesting discoveries. The factory originally said there were no records left, "You Yanks destroyed them all." But, in reality, a German worker took many of them home during the air raids, and has just recently brought them to light.

Finding replacement electrical parts was particularly difficult. A new magneto cap was found at the Hershey Swap Meet. Apparently, the four-cylinder Indian motorcycle made between 1928 and 1942 used a Bosch magneto of the same model series. Horman's sharp eye spotted a suspicious

looking "New-Old-Stock" cap in an "odds and ends" display and bought it for his "Indian." It fit perfectly.

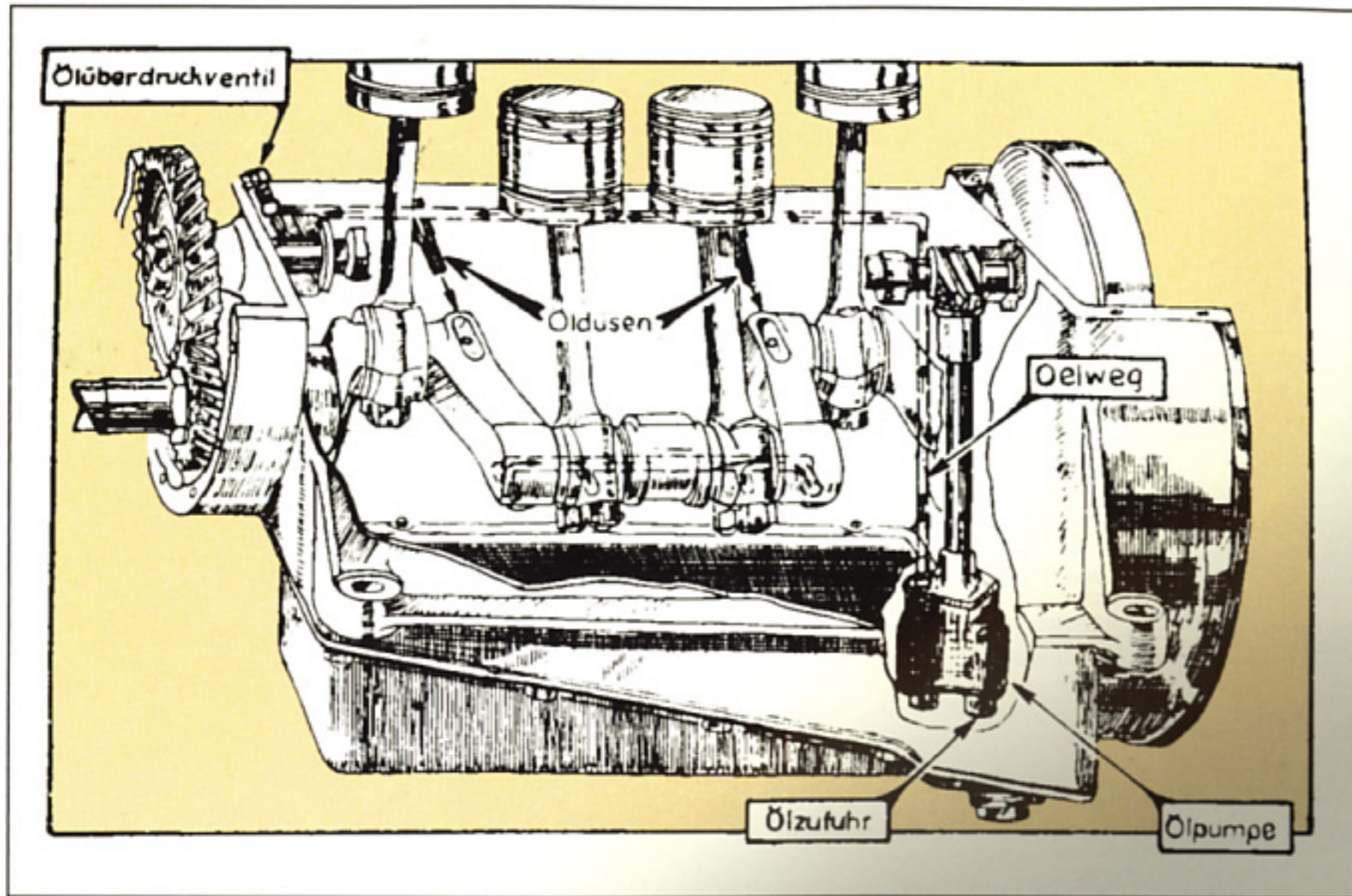
The dashboard gauges were sent to VDO in Germany, who restored them to perfect condition, then sent them back with the bill marked "no charge."

The wood on the dash proved to be English Rosewood, which was not commercially available, until a 100-year-old grove was found on the East Coast of the United States.

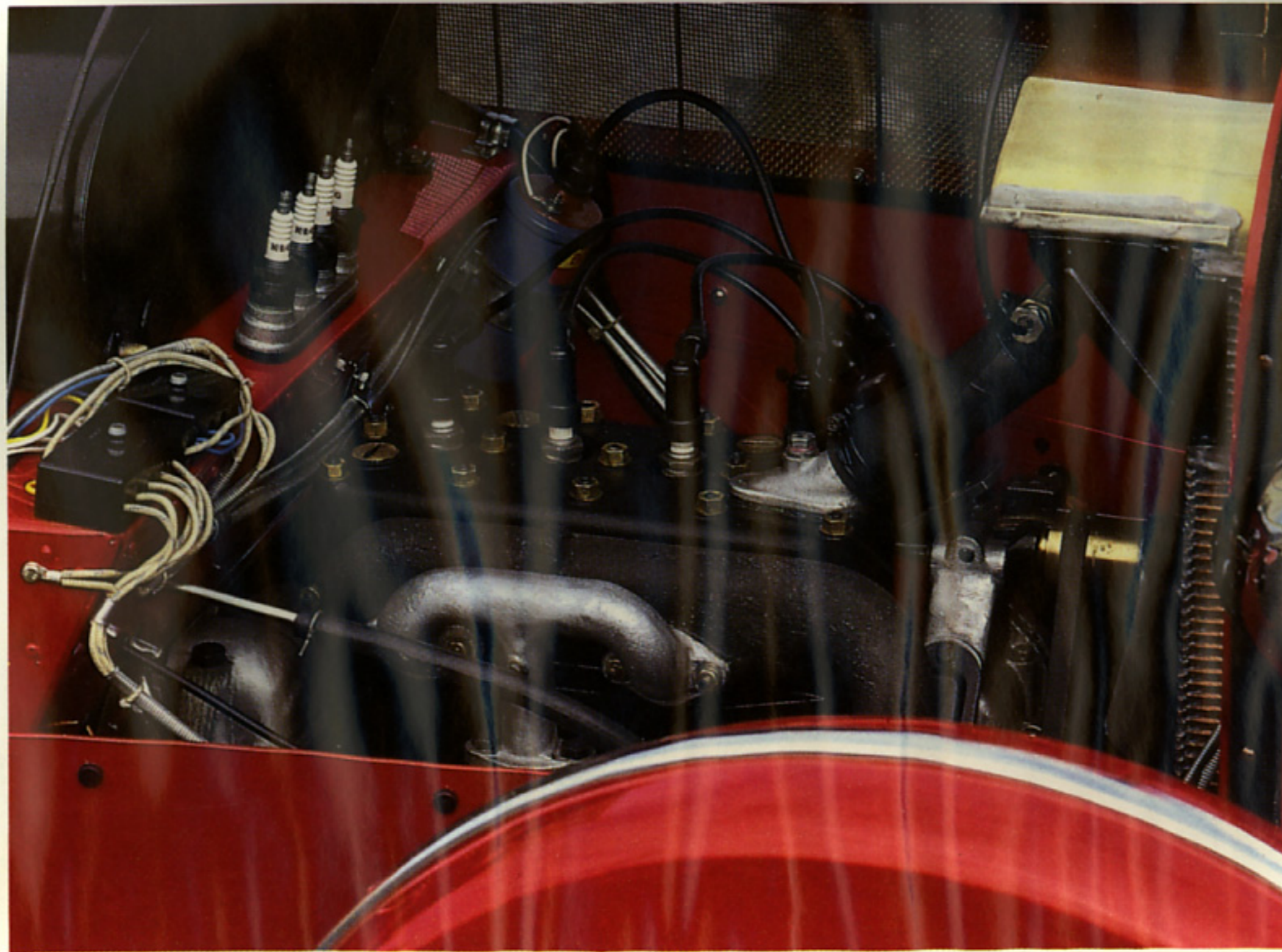
When the body was disassembled, Horman found it was riveted, not welded or seamed. The size and metallurgy of the rivets turned out to be almost exactly the same as the top portion of a common 16 penny construction nail.



GS-E 65



The side-valve engine (above and right) has an aluminum block and pistons, with an iron head. The generator was gear driven and the distributor was driven off the end of the engine. With a displacement of 743cc it generated 15 horsepower at 3000 rpm.



All of what appears to be chrome is actually highly polished nickel plating. The drop in the center section of the three-lug 19-inch wheels required that each spoke be measured and its location in the wheel marked before they were all sent to the plater. (There are about 20 different spoke lengths in each wheel assembly.)

The side valve engine displaces 743cc and produces 15hp at 3000 rpm, using a Solex or Zenith carburetor. The engine block and pistons are aluminum, with an iron head. A three-speed gearbox transfers the power from the front-mounted engine to the rear wheels. The generator is gear driven, and in turn drives the distributor, which has a mechanical advance (remember this was in 1926). The wheelbase is a diminutive 1900mm (74.8 inches) and the entire car weighs just 946 pounds. The listed top speed was 47 mph.

The brakes are mechanically actuated by

a cable in the front and two rods in the rear. Whether it was intentional or not, when the steering is turned to near full lock, the geometry of the cable pivot causes the inside front brake to drag, helping the car around the corner. The soft woven brake lining material is still available on special order, and was applied to the aluminum shoes by a local brake house. Aluminum was also used in the body trim, steering gear case, transmission housing, and some dashboard parts.

All of the grease seals for rotating or moving parts were felt, at a time when many car makers still used leather. The front shocks were hydraulic, while the rears used adjustable friction devices damped by a hard leather disc.

Considering that most of the men who built this car rode horses or walked to work, it is remarkably advanced. Plastic was used extensively in the passenger compartment; the translucence of the perfectly preserved original material is very warm and beautiful.

In addition, the Dixi had built-in semaphore-type turn signals (spelled *Winkers* and pronounced "Vinkers" in German) and a still-working cigarette lighter. Pressed fiberboard was used behind the leather panels to avoid the warping and cracking associated with wood.

THE HOPE OF THE FUTURE

This early BMW was the hope of the future for the fledging company's efforts, which included the BMW 326, 327, and 328. The Russians took over the original factory and until March 1991 built the Wartburg there, named for the castle overlooking Eisenach.

Although Wartburg production has ceased, Eisenach may soon host automotive activity again. Opel plans a new Corsa and Kadette plant. Bosch is reportedly considering a local facility. And new BMWs (motorcycles) may again roll out of Eisenach, although it is not known whether the old Dixi Factory will be used. Maybe the Nineties will tell the tale. ☼

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