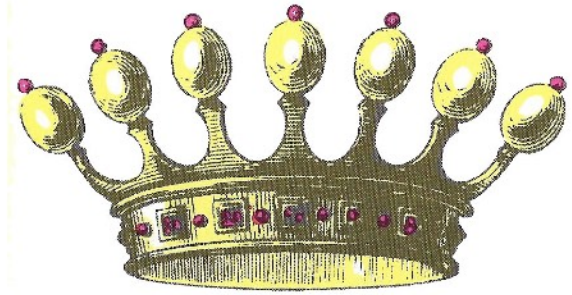


# THE BARON OF PARK AVENUE



BY  
KARL E.  
LUDVIGSEN

"He is the Duveen of the motor business," says a long-time observer of the import trade, "a great entrepreneur. He has tremendous vision, loves cars, and he's a fantastic salesman." Then there are a number of people who do not love him at all. About Max Edwin Hoffman there is no shortage of opinions, of points of view. But no one says that he is not interesting.

"He's the only surviving anachronism, in that there are no longer any other individuals importing cars," says one former auto importer. There are other individuals who import automobiles—Qvale, Chinetti, Grossman, — but only Max Hoffman remains among the many who once had big contracts with big companies to bring cars to America. Only Hoffman is still at the same stand on Park Avenue today, representing nationally a major European automaker. Is he in fact an anachronism in his trade? Considering the present pressures applied by the U.S. Government against the importation of cars, he probably is. That Max Hoffman has been able to survive as an independent car importer in America since 1946 is no small tribute to his tenacity, his skill and his appetite for sheer hard work.

Max Hoffman may be a man beyond his time in other ways. He has an Edwardian appreciation of elegance and correctness in every aspect of his life and business that is rare in these chaotic years. Few men of any age are given his knack, his *Fingerspitzengefühl*, for the detection of finesse or flaw in a line of coachwork, a decorative medallion, a wood-finished surface or an architec-

tural plan. This instinct has brought to life many great cars and also some memorable buildings.

A business magazine pinpointed another way in which time is out of joint for Max Hoffman, noting that "he is among the last of a dying breed of hearty individualists who pioneered in world trade with guts and determination. These were the men who blazed the trails of international commerce around the world, started businesses on shoe strings, got their hands dirty in grass-roots trading, and made and lost fortunes at the turn of a tariff." They were the creators who built the businesses that are run by managers today. Hoffman Motors Corporation is not only owned by and run by Max Hoffman; it *is* Max Hoffman.

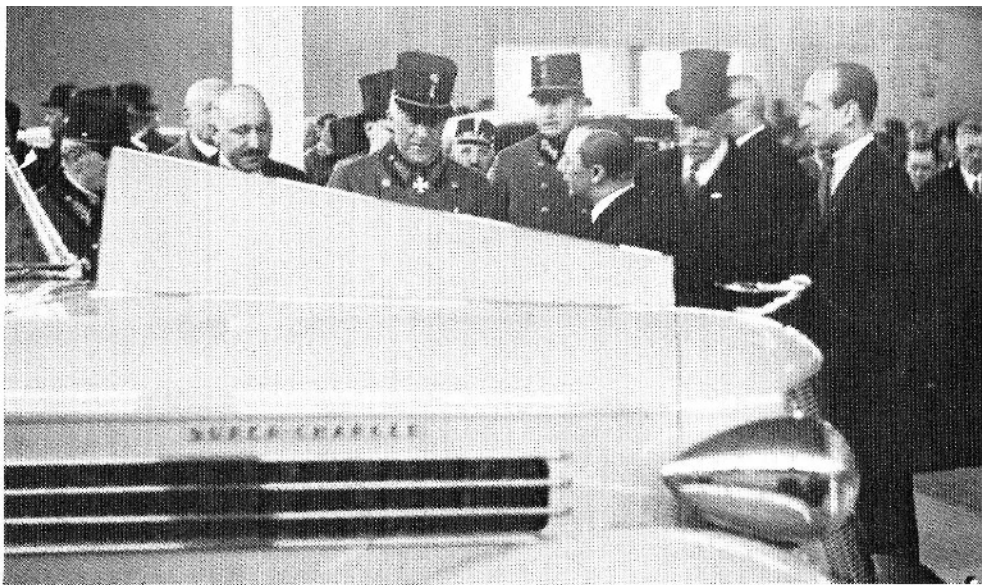
Today Hoffman is the importer of BMW cars. Since the last war he has been the instigator in the importation of such makes as Jaguar, Volkswagen, Porsche, Mercedes-Benz, Alfa Romeo, Lancia and Fiat, not to mention many of lesser significance and duration. Most of these makes achieved their first modern recognition in the United States through the efforts of Max Hoffman, and most also found themselves designing special models and options for the U.S. market to meet the requests of this persuasive present-day Emil Jellinek.

Yet Hoffman himself has received little recognition. He has not authored articles for motor show programs; he has promoted the cars he sells rather than himself, and he has not been a joiner in the many sports car club movements that have studded the postwar growth of interest in cars in America. He is not a man given to small talk, to the clubby conviviality of a press showing or a motor show opening. So harsh and intense is the concentrated blue light that Hoffman focuses on his affairs that many cannot stand the glare. "One afternoon with him," says an employee of an auto firm he deals with, "is like eight days of ordinary work." Such men are respected, but not loved, and so it is with Max Hoffman.

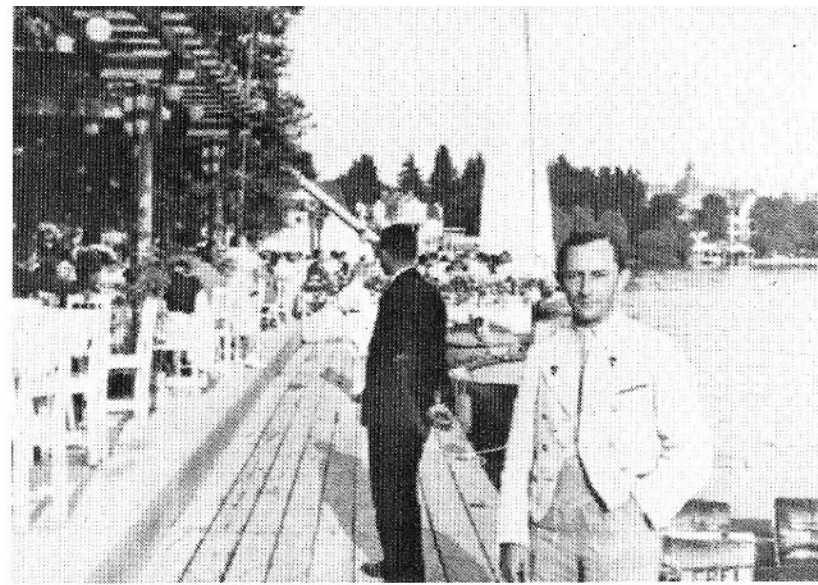
He is justly proud of the many people who have been with him for twenty years or more, close associates like Marcel Melamed, Thomas Kelly and Herman Kohler. He is also demanding. Of his secretary he says, "I ask a lot. She must be fast, *very* fast." Perfection in his affairs is not too much for Hoffman to require. "They say I am difficult," he muses. "I examine a thing very carefully before I agree to it. I look at it in great detail, at every aspect, and only then do I do it. I like to get a good deal. If that is being difficult . . . well, perhaps I am."



**"MAXIE"**



*Max shows a supercharged Auburn to Archduke Josef Franz, Budapest, 1935.*



*At Wörthersee, an Austrian resort, on vacation with friends, 1937.*

In business Max Hoffman has assistants, not co-workers. The amount of authority he delegates is strictly limited, and each employee knows that when he approaches that limit he cannot go farther without Mr. Hoffman's specific assent, no matter where in the world he may be. As in most European firms, conversations at the top are on a last-name-only basis. Personal approval from Mr. Hoffman is required for every check written by Hoffman Motors. The proprietor also negotiates face-to-face for services and office equipment items that would be the concern of a purchasing agent in most other companies. He does it because it is his money that is being spent, and also because he is spectacularly good at it.

Not for Max Hoffman are the big dealer meetings, the conventions that are so much a part of the ordinary auto-selling trade in America. He is at his superb best on a one-to-one basis, dealing with a single person. Hoffman might be selling that person a car, a dealership, or Max Hoffman as the U.S. importer for his automobiles. Whatever the sales challenge, Hoffman can meet it with the polished repertoire of the experienced negotiator, ranging from outraged indignation to polite persuasion. He may in fact be one of the most skilled and practiced negotiators operating in the world automotive industry today.

Because he is tough and razor-sharp in all his dealings, Max Hoffman is in no danger of running short of critics. Yet even those who speak most harshly of him are forced to admit that he is totally honest. The European motor industry is a close-knit club that has few secrets at his level. Max Hoffman has survived at the heart of this

business for forty years because he is completely open and candid, sometimes disarmingly and sometimes brutally. Such honesty does not always win new friends, but it does help keep old ones.

Hoffman is proud of the efficient spare parts service he provides to BMW owners today. And technical automotive problems, like spares and service, have ever been close to his heart. His main offices for sales and administration remain on Park Avenue in the Seagram Building, while parts and servicing are handled in New Jersey and California. He knows that they are critically important aspects of the importation and sale of cars, but they've never quite captured his enthusiasm and interest as have problems of auto design and sales.

"I am not a technician," Max Hoffman says, in an accent still redolent of his native Austria. He has, however, an intimate familiarity with automobiles of all kinds, as befits a man who was brought up around the excitement of engine-driven wheeled vehicles near Vienna when that city was still a fountainhead of new automotive designs. Born on November 12th, 1904, Max Hoffman was a child of his father's second marriage. A half-brother by the first marriage still dwells in Austria, while Max's own brother died at the age of thirty. He also has a sister who lives in New York today.

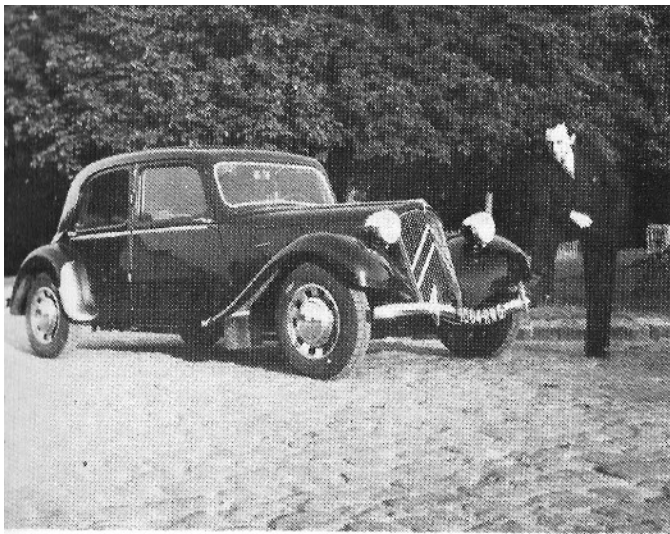
The Hoffmann (with two n's, as it was then) family was deeply involved in mechanical matters. Max's father had inherited a general store in their small town outside Vienna, and had progressed into the manufacture of sewing machines. Like the Opels before them, this led further to the production of bicycles. Max served his apprenticeship

in the bicycle shop, filling the frame tubes with sand and heating them to bend them evenly, and plating the parts in the steaming, smelly vats, first with a layer of copper, then one of satiny nickel.

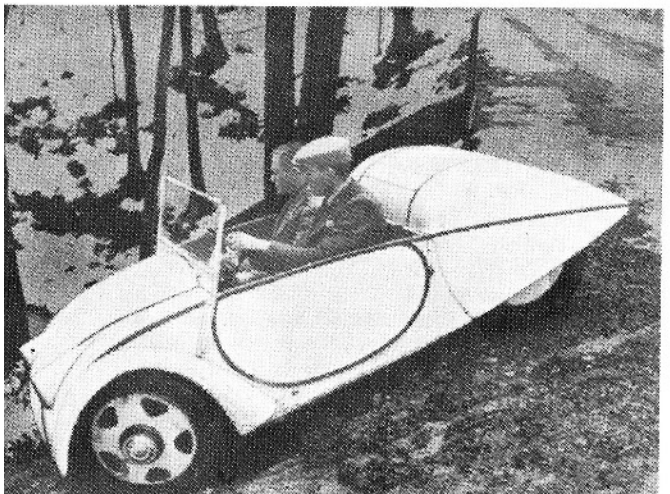
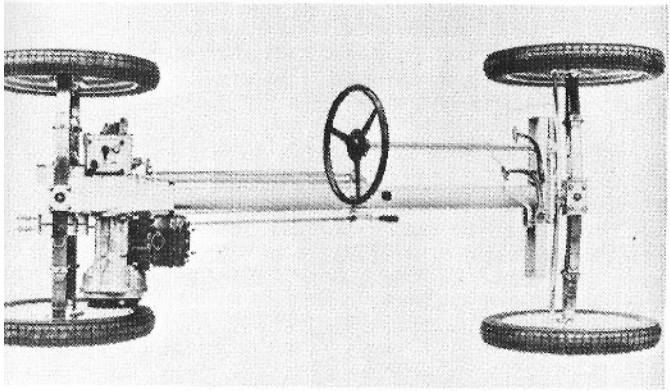
The senior Hoffmann also was among the first in the area to own a motor vehicle. Of the greatest interest to young Max was the little 122 cc single-cylinder two-stroke engine developed by DKW as booster power for bicycles. Soon after their appearance in 1920 one of these motors was powering Max's bicycle, mounted above the rear wheel and driving it through a belt. The original foot pedals remained in place, with good reason. They were needed on many a grade.

As early as 1920 Max Hoffmann was competing in club races on one of these two-wheelers, and then with one of the first "real" DKW motorcycles with the engine moved to the fore. After some successes in local events he graduated to one of the most potent motorcycles then on the market, the 350 cc AJS single. With this British overhead-valve racer he scored some significant wins, getting his first publicity in the Vienna papers. Short of stature and looking even younger than his seventeen years, Max was the butt of much kidding when he showed up with this hot machine to run against established stars like Leopold Diertl, Rupert Karner or Franz Gall at major events like the Seiberer Hillclimb. They laughed . . . until he sat in the saddle. Hoffmann at the handlebars was decisive, determined — and fast enough to win.

His next step was to automobiles. His father bought him a French Amilcar CS, followed later by a Gran Sport CGS model. Both were spidery,



Above: Max, during his Paris interlude, 1938-39, with the front wheel drive Citroën he then owned. Below: The remarkable little Ganz, in many ways ahead of its time, which might have been put into production, had not World War II intervened.



lively side-valve fours, excellent wheels for a young amateur competitor. "Amilcar," recalls Max. "That was a good engine — very good." Feeling the same way, the firm of Grosse & Friedmann in Atzgersdorf, near Vienna, took out a license to produce Amilcars under the name "Grofri," a contraction of the names of the two partners.

During the lifetime of the Grofri, 1922 through 1927, Max Hoffmann became a factory driver of the firm's supercharged sports models and then a dealer in Grofri cars. He continued to compete in different makes until 1934 when, at the age of twenty-eight, he decided he was too old to race cars, and retired. He broke this vow in 1936 to take part in the Semmering Hillclimb with a Lancia, his last competitive entry before the war.

As an increasingly prominent figure in Viennese motor circles in the Thirties, Max Hoffmann soon had his fingers in several automotive pies. He became associated with the firm of Smoliner & Kratky, which marketed Auburn, Cord, Duesenberg, Lancia, Pontiac and Vauxhall cars in Austria, as well as several lines of aircraft. With a partner he also formed his own firm, Hoffmann & Huppert, to import other makes. They put together an impressive range of offerings.

Hoffmann had soon signed on as the Middle European representative of such august marques as Rolls-Royce, Bentley, Alfa Romeo, Talbot, Delahaye, Volvo (the first importer in Europe) and Hotchkiss. Mercedes-Benz was not included. "Before the war, Mercedes was a heavy car," Hoffman recalls. "And the BMW then was like a little race horse, very sporty. But others were handling it then, and I didn't want to take it away. I don't like it if others do that to me . . ." For a while Max drove an AJS car, a short-lived product of the English cycle maker. "It was a lovely car. But they lost a lot of money on it."

Late in the Thirties the atmosphere in the German-controlled countries became distinctly uncomfortable. This encouraged him to move his base of operations to Paris for several years. There he maintained contact with Delahaye, drove a Citroën, and came to know the firm that was then making Rosengart cars under license from firms like Austin, Adler and Citroën. The young entrepreneur from Austria had yet another design for them.

Josef Ganz was a Hungarian-born engineer with German citizenship and an interest in simple, functional cars that was far in advance of his time. In 1934 Hitler's racial policies encouraged Ganz to desert the editorship of his lively monthly *Motor*

*Kritik* to take up residence in Switzerland. There by 1938 he had developed the prototype of a tiny open two-seater car. Dubbed "Erfiag," the tough little car had a single-cylinder 350 cc M.A.G. engine in the rear.

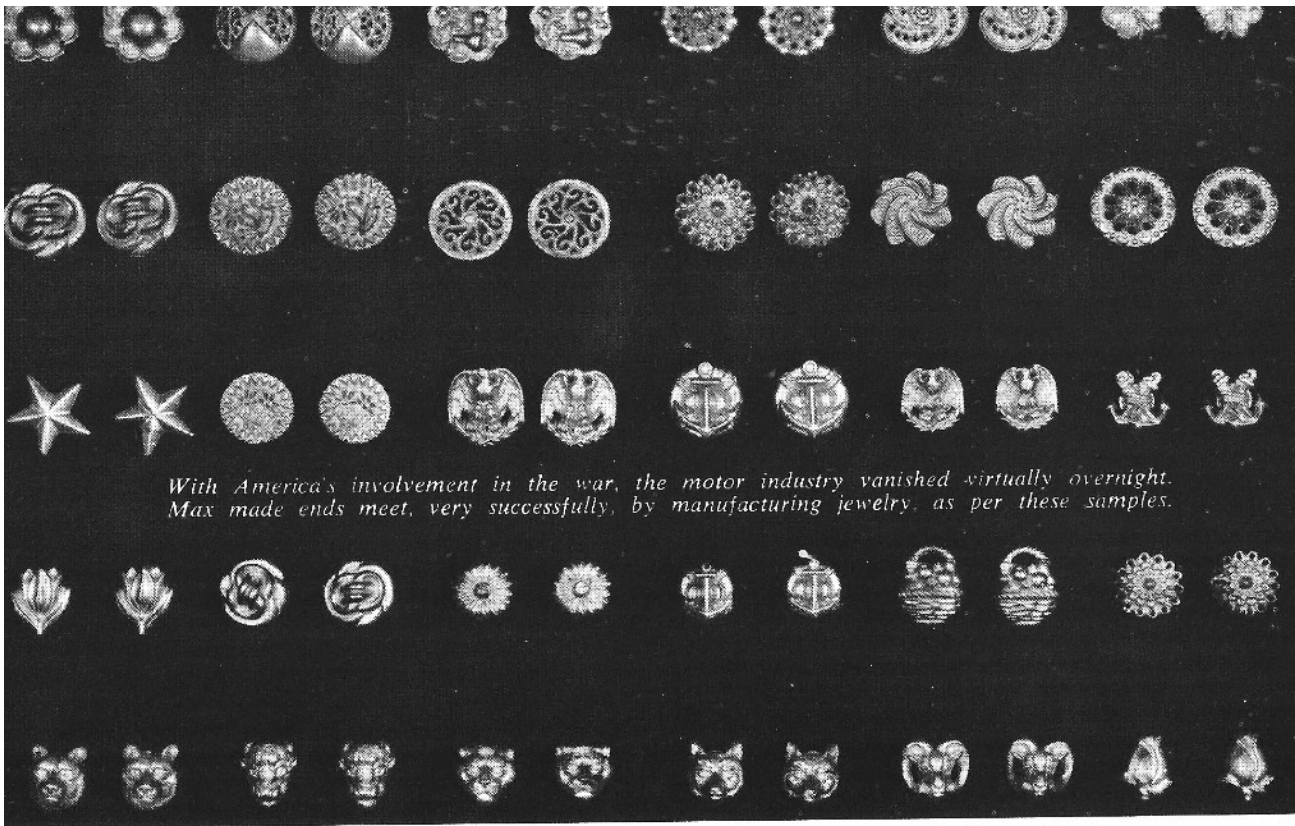
Max Hoffmann had enjoyed Ganz's magazine and had come to know the editor. With associates, he made arrangements for the Erfiag prototype to be brought from Zürich to Paris to be demonstrated by Hoffmann for Rosengart as a possible future production model. There he put it through its paces, which included a session on the tank-testing ground at Vincennes. Rosengart liked what it saw and bought, through Hoffmann, a license to manufacture the Ganz design. But just two weeks later, there was no thought of building Rosengarts, or any other cars, for France and Germany were at war.

From that point on there were few opportunities for a skilled automobile merchandiser in Paris. Max Hoffmann decided to embark for America, but found it difficult to book passage. He finally found space on a Portuguese ship that took eleven days to make the Atlantic crossing. "They cooked the same kind of fish every day. It was terrible," he recalls with distaste. "I stayed in a deck chair for ten days!" He arrived in New York on June 21st, 1941.

Max Hoffmann came to the New World with the intention of importing the automobiles made in the Old World. During the Depression years of the Thirties this had become something of a lost art. Lord Montagu of Beaulieu records that "though one or two of the oldest established concerns, like Mercedes-Benz, retained showrooms in New York, the rest had given the United States up as a dead loss, and the foreign-car dealers had retired to fifth-floor warehouses on the East Side."

But one or two obstacles remained in Hoffmann's way. One was the problem of language: "My English was practically zero at that time, just school English." Another concerned business arrangements. Hoffmann had arrived with a contact at the Automobile Manufacturers Association and a tentative deal for a truck shipment to Egypt, but the times were tough for completing such commitments; months passed without success. "I was really a little desperate for money at that point."

Then at the beginning of December America too was in the war. This seemed to be the final blow for the budding business career of the thirty-seven-year-old immigrant from Austria. Scanning the newspapers after the war was under way, he noted that the use of metals would be restricted to essential defense needs. Later he learned from a friend



*With America's involvement in the war, the motor industry vanished virtually overnight. Max made ends meet, very successfully, by manufacturing jewelry, as per these samples.*

that women were expected to be making much more money during the war years, but would have little in the way of luxuries to spend it on. These thoughts combined in an inspiration: "I got the idea to make costume jewelry out of plastic, and metalize it. I knew of the idea already, but I had to work it out here."

From a friend Max Hoffman borrowed \$300 to get his enterprise going. He made up samples of earrings and other items, and bought an impressive jewelry showcase for them. In one week's round of stores he had booked \$5000 worth of orders and put himself very much in the metal-plated plastic business. It was a trade that he did not particularly enjoy but it proved highly profitable to the newcomer to New York, who poured some of his earnings back into more molding and plating equipment.

By war's end Hoffman had accumulated enough capital to be able to return to his first love: fine automobiles. For several years after the war he kept the plastics business going in the hope that it would survive, but with the return of metals to the market the interest in plastic plummeted. "People saw in it only a substitute," Hoffman recalls. "I finally sold all my machinery and equip-

ment for practically nothing."

"My friends said I was crazy," he remembers, "to give up this business and go into cars. They said I would lose all the money I made in plastics." For his new venture in America he eliminated the last "n" from his surname and adopted, occasionally, the given name Maximilian as being more fitting, in New York, for a purveyor of exotic motorcars. He's proud of the name Max in its European frame of reference, yet recognizes that it carries little charisma when it's pronounced in American-accented English.

In the context of those first postwar years, Max's friends were right: Car-hungry Americans weren't very interested in imported models. "I didn't have much money for advertising," Hoffman remembers, "so I decided to open a showroom right on Park Avenue. It was the best thing I could have done." The high-ceilinged showroom of the Hoffman Motor Car Company at Park Avenue and 59th Street was opened for business early in 1947 with a single car on the floor, a Delahaye with a four-passenger coupé body by Figoni et Falaschi. It was not exactly the way Hoffman had planned to make his New York debut.

Max Hoffman had gone to Europe in the summer of 1946 to shop for automotive merchandise. His first port of call was London, where he found conditions "unbelievably bad." He obtained the Allard agency, and went to Coventry to call on Jaguar, where a fuzzy-cheeked export manager advised him they weren't yet ready to export to America. Moving on to the Hotel California in Paris, Hoffman bought a spectacular show-model Delahaye at the Paris show before continuing to Italy to renew his old friendships there.

In Turin he ordered some Lancia cars, and in Milan he bought and paid for an initial shipment of Alfa Romeos. He then signed a representation contract with Alfa, only to have the prices of the cars jump up "while the ink was still wet." Returning to Paris on his way home, Hoffman found that his Delahaye had since been sold by Figoni et Falaschi to another customer, Aly Khan. He placed yet another order, which eventually brought forth the single car he had on hand at his opening. The Alfas he had paid for were never delivered.

Hoffman smiles now at this joke on himself: "On Saturdays the people were lined up to get in — to see our one car! They asked only two questions: How much is it, and what is the wheelbase? There were so many people there all the time that I didn't pay much attention when a young man who worked in the same building came in and told me that a Maharaja would be coming to buy some cars. 'Big mouth,' I thought. But it turned out that his father was a political advisor to General MacArthur. The Maharaja of Indore did come, and ordered three or four cars and paid for them. It was my first sale."

Hoffman received only a few of the early postwar Lancias, which were very costly for their small size. He had ordered some Hotchkiss cars, always a favorite of his, but had never received any, and had given up on Alfa for the time being. He imported some of the early L-type Allards, and turned more to such British makes as H.R.G., Lea-Francis, Healey, Lagonda, Daimler and Lanchester for sources of supply. Some of the early Cisitalias also arrived from Italy, as did Simcas from France.

The going was anything but easy. His Park Avenue salesman asked him, "Why don't you put some used American cars in the showroom? You could sell one or two of them a day and make the overhead." Hoffman, determined to build a reputation for European cars in America, refused. And gradually the interest in his cars increased.

"I had several tricks — if you can call them tricks — that helped me succeed," Hoffman relates. Before the war other importers repurchased European cars only reluctantly and at bargain-basement prices, thereby undermining confidence in them as investments. Instead, Hoffman would buy back at high price levels low-mileage imports which he had previously sold, sometimes for more than he'd paid for them originally. "With this I broke the ice," he says. "People talked about this, about what a high resale value imported cars had. And that I also gave very good value for money," Hoffman adds, citing the low prices at which he later introduced the Mercedes-Benz 190SL and 300SL as well as the BMW Bavaria to the U.S. market.

One of Max Hoffman's best and most unusual customers came to him referred by another dealer because he wanted to sell his Armstrong-Siddeley. He was an unassuming-looking man who waited patiently until Hoffman had dealt with the agonizingly detailed queries of a couple who wanted to arrange overseas delivery — in those days an almost unknown art. The patient visitor introduced himself as Charlie Bedford, a New Jersey resident. He turned out to be one of the Standard Oil Bedfords.

"He bought from us many, many cars," Hoffman recalls. "He was a real enthusiast, and a good guy." Bedford would motor happily in his newly-purchased import until the odometer drew near the 1000-mile mark. At that point he would begin to judge his distances very carefully, taking a few extra laps of a nearby park if necessary, to time his arrival in his own garage so that the last zero in the even 1000 miles would just roll into place as he came to a stop. And there he would leave the car, never to drive it again.

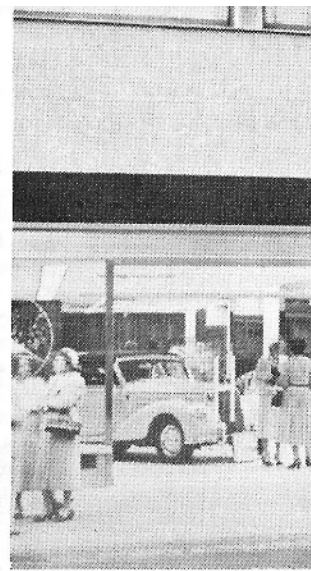
Hoffman soon began to name dealers to handle his car lines in other cities. The first such dealer was Ray Clark's Foreign Motors in Boston. "When I appointed a dealer in those days," Hoffman reminds us, "he was a European car dealer, not a dealer in some specific make. There were not yet such things as service manuals and spare parts, as there are today." Nor were contracts with manufacturers considered very important. Hoffman: "We had a contract with Donald Healey, but we gave it up when he went into the Austin project. Later on, we became more interested in contracts."

The first important contract in the modern sense to come to the Hoffman Motor Car Co. was one — after all — with Jaguar of Coventry. Joe Ferguson Sr. of Ferguson Motors had been the first



*Above: Where it all began—Max's first showroom in the U.S. for imported cars, at 487 Park Avenue. Below: Photo taken on the occasion of the first public showing of the Volkswagen in the United States, July 17th, 1950. Though Max had tremendous confidence in the car, in those days it just wouldn't sell.*





The Broadway showroom, with Jaguar display, which opened in 1951.

Later on an amazing variety of cars could be found there.

to bring Jaguars to America after the war; Hoffman had been with him at dockside when the first shipment of "Mark IV" sedans was offloaded in January, 1947. Later that year Bert Henly, Jaguar's very successful British sales agent, came to the U.S. to look things over on behalf of William Lyons of Jaguar. After visiting all the prospective agents, Henly asked Max how it came to be that he didn't have the Jaguar agency, and told Hoffman he'd recommend that he get the contract. "Just a lot of conversation," Hoffman thought at the time.

In 1948, after he'd all but forgotten about the Henly visit, Max Hoffman received a wire from William Lyons asking why he hadn't answered Lyons' letter. Advised that his letter hadn't been received, Lyons cabled Hoffman his offer of the Jaguar distributorship for the eastern United States, which was accepted. A year later Charles Hornburg took it on for the West. Together they did very well by Jaguar Cars. At a time when total car imports amounted to 20,000 a year, they gave Jaguar twenty percent of the market.

Lyons was frankly amazed at the American appetite for Jaguars, and for Mark IV convertibles in particular. Hoffman took all the factory could supply, and thereafter the Mark V and the XK-120 entered the pipeline. These were the first cars that brought real profits to the Park Avenue operation: "I made a lot of money with the XK-120." But the personal price was almost too high.

Hoffman shakes his head, remembering: "After the rich people bought a Mark IV, they never bought again another foreign car." Mechanical failures were legion; they were replacing spare

parts faster than they could get them from the factory. Until then Hoffman had a listed telephone, but that had to be changed: "People called me up at two in the morning to tell me their troubles. That never happened before."

Hoffman had his hands full in other areas too. He was trying to introduce the American public to an unheralded car from a very recent enemy: the German Volkswagen. The first VW passenger cars to come to the U.S. were shown at Rockefeller Center in New York in 1949 as part of an exhibit of German goods arranged by the American Military Government to encourage trade with West Germany. Hoffman, who knew much more than most in America about the background of the car and the men who had designed it, was intensely interested in the VW's potential.

The possibilities of this car were otherwise unrecognized. Admits one man who was then active with an importing firm: "It was my firm opinion that the Volkswagen would *not* sell in the United States." Adds a former importer: "In 1951-52 if somebody offered me Volkswagen I also would have laughed." It's well-known that the British authorities were anxious to dispose of the VW factory. On a trip to the U.S. in 1949, Heinz Nordhoff had suggested that the firm would be available to Hoffman for \$2 million. Hoffman had the wherewithal but declined. Apart from other considerations, the border to East Germany had just been shifted into perilous proximity to the VW plant.

Max didn't want the company but he did want the cars. At first, when it had seemed that he might not be able to get them directly, Nordhoff

tried to arrange shipments through the VW importer in Holland, Ben Pon. Then approval of the British authorities (in whose zone VW was located) cleared the way for direct importation. On Monday, July 10th, 1950, twenty Volkswagens marked for the Hoffman Motor Car Co. were unloaded at a Brooklyn pier. One week later the Park Avenue showroom floor was cleared for these cars, for a 5:00 p.m. cocktail party "on the occasion of the American premiere of the famous 'Volkswagen' popular-priced West German car," as the official invitation read.

Max Hoffman then announced that he intended "soon" to import 1000 cars a month, and ultimately to reach a rate of 3000 cars monthly. But only 157 cars came in during 1950, and 390 in 1951. Through 1953, his last year with VW, importation never reached 1000 a year. These were the original Beetles, with "Wehrmacht green" paint, mechanical brakes, non-synchro transmissions and 25-horsepower engines. Hoffman could sell them to his dealers, but they in turn had little luck in passing them along to the public. "I tried, and I tried hard," Hoffman says, "but I just could not do it." In '54 VW started setting up its own importer-distributors. "Giving up on VW — I think it was his only mistake," says one of Hoffman's closest associates.

One of the longest Hoffman affiliations went back to his days in Austria and his acquaintance with the Porsche and Piëch families. When the first Porsche sports car was completed in 1948, Hoffman received photos of it at once. Max was mightily impressed, and informed Porsche's representative that he would be most interested in



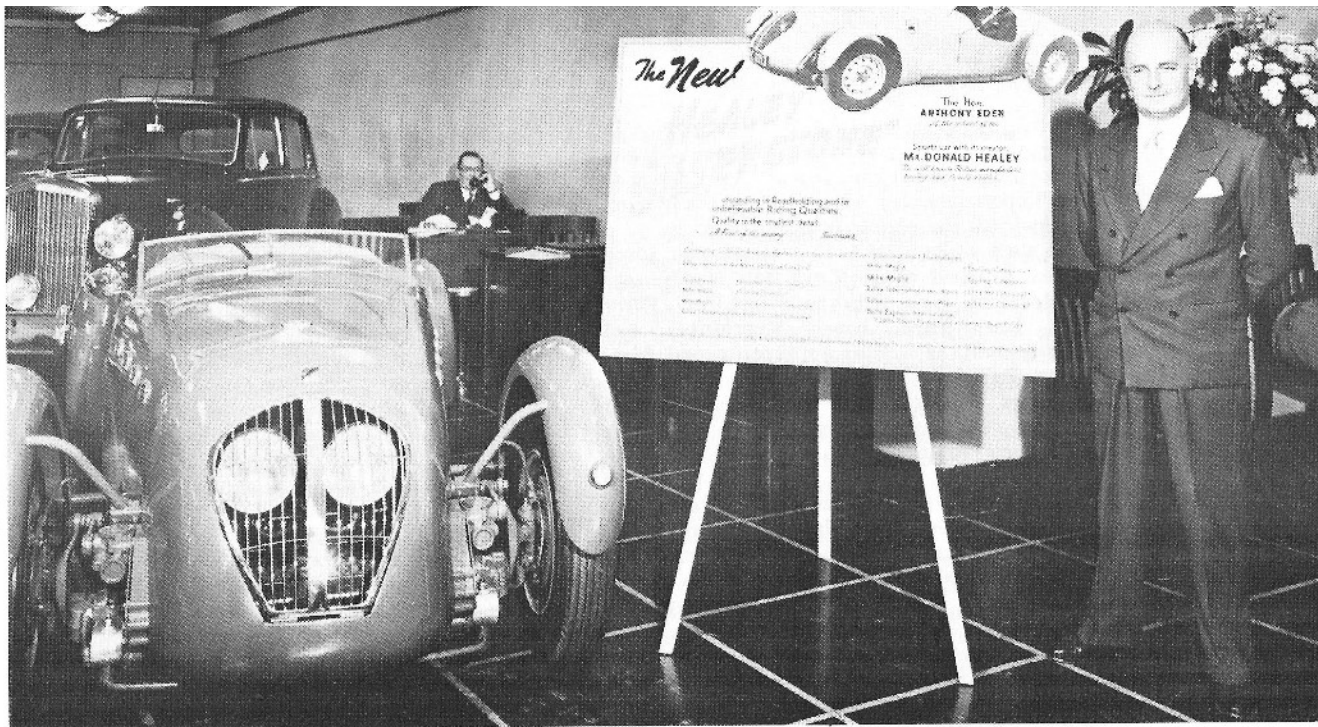
The striking Park Avenue premises for Mercedes-Benz, 1953.

importing these intriguing new cars into the United States.

In 1950, when serious production began, Porsche felt the world market for its cars was no more than some 500 units. Ferry Porsche told Hoffman he hoped he'd be able to sell five Porsches a year in America; Max replied that if he couldn't sell at least five a week he wouldn't be interested at all. During 1950 the first three Porsches were imported by Hoffman; such was the naiveté of the makers at that time that they sent some spare parts free of charge with the cars.

From the beginning of Porsche car manufacturing the role of Hoffman and the American market was central to the make's success. "For many years," Max notes, "we sold seventy percent of their production." He enjoyed his close association with all the members of the small Porsche team and especially with Ferry Porsche and Prof. Albert Prinzing, who then was the general manager. Making its bow in 1954, the famous Porsche Speedster was a Hoffman-Prinzing brainstorm. "You might have a time when sales go down," Hoffman admits, "and you have to do something." In this case it was a simplified roadster that could be priced well under other Porsches at \$3000, to spark the market. It was born in a New York meeting between Hoffman and Prinzing.

Early in the Fifties Max Hoffman altered the destiny of Porsche in quite a different way. He was well acquainted with Richard A. Hutchinson, Studebaker vice-president and president of Studebaker Export Corporation, and one day suggested to Hutchinson that Studebaker had done well enough in its postwar return to carmaking but



Above: Donald Healey came over for the Park Avenue introduction of the new Healey Silverstone. Below: Party for the press in the recently opened West Coast Mercedes showroom in Los Angeles.





would probably have to plot a different course in the future, one that would avoid a direct collision with the bigger American firms. "You have to make a Volkswagen for America," Max told him, and he had just the people in mind to do it.

In the early months of 1952 a meeting in South Bend was arranged by Hoffman and Hutchinson. The delegation from Stuttgart included Ferry Porsche, Karl Rabe, Erwin Kommenda and Leopold Schmid, as well as an experimental four-passenger Porsche car. The visit started badly. They arrived in South Bend on a Sunday, which meant that you couldn't buy a drink. Then on Monday their first call was at the Studebaker Proving Grounds, where the four-passenger Porsche was put through its paces. Studebaker top brass sat in the back while Max was at the wheel: "It was a terrible car. It went bang-bang-bang like a machine-gun even on smooth roads, and I thought to myself, well, it's all up with this deal."

Things looked better after lunch, however. During the afternoon an agreement was worked out for Porsche to design a small car for Studebaker. Initially a VW-type car was envisioned but with a displacement of 1800 cc, since Porsche's contract with Volkswagen barred it from designing cars for other companies of less than 1600 cc. By the time a formal agreement was signed on May 16th, 1952, the more conservative engineering elements at Studebaker had forced on the Porsche designers a number of proprietary components that limited them to a conventional car layout, though still air cooled.

The engine became an air-cooled front-mounted

in-line six of more than three liters, growth that wasn't resisted by Ferry Porsche since it took him farther away from a possible conflict with Volkswagen. In September of '52 a supplementary agreement authorized Porsche to design a liquid-cooled engine also. Under these contracts Porsche built three experimental cars for Studebaker in exchange for approximately half a million dollars — a lot of money for the small firm in those days, money that went directly into major expansion of the Porsche car production facilities.

Max Hoffman's liking for the people of Porsche was equaled by his enthusiasm for the car itself. It was small, light, easy to handle and very much a sports car, like the Amilcars and Lancias he'd known before the war. And Porsches brought Hoffman back into active racing. He'd competed in a modest way in the early postwar years. With a Lancia Aprilia he was third overall in the Motor Sports Club of New York's Mohansic Lake Hillclimb in March, 1947. He entered other events with an L-type Allard, and showed remarkable speed with a stock Porsche convertible at Mount Equinox in 1951, the same year he entered the special Jowett that George Weaver drove to win the Queen Catherine Cup Race at Watkins Glen.

Bitten hard by the racing bug again, Hoffman imported a 1500 cc Glöckler-Porsche at the end of 1951. This was the sports-racing car that had been backed by Walter Glöckler, the Frankfurt VW agent, and designed and built by his works manager, Hermann Ramelow. It had the engine ahead of the rear wheels on a simple tubular frame with the driver centrally seated in a low, all-enveloping body. Power was by a modified push-

rod Porsche engine.

At Palm Beach Shores on December 8th, 1951, the Hoffman/Glöckler combination hit American sports car racing hard. John Fitch reported: "Max Hoffman's Porsche created an atmosphere of its own, spiked with castor oil. Its low, fully streamlined form, sharp exhaust note and very impressive performance, combined with the obvious efficiency of his German mechanics, suggested an atmosphere of almost Grand Prix flavor." In its two-hour race the car ran away from everything else with ease until it was halted by valve gear trouble after fifty-three minutes.

Max and the silver Glöckler with the blue stripe across its nose were frequent competitors during the 1952 season. It started off well with a class win and second overall in the one-hour race at Florida's Vero Beach. A win was also scored at Connecticut's Thompson Raceway. In the fall, an entry was filed for the Mecox Trophy Race at Bridgehampton. Hoffman headed the twenty-five-car field without strain in this important twenty-five-lap event until lap 14, when he went wide on the gravelly School House Corner and shunted the left front corner on the haybales. "I was perhaps going too fast," Hoffman confesses. "Also, this car was very difficult. On the corners all four wheels went away at once."

Hoffman maintains that he never lost his lead during the few seconds it took to get the Glöckler out of the bales and back on the track, that the official scoring that showed him in second place at the end of the race was in error. He was advised at the time not to roil the placid waters of the SCCA with a protest, and he obliged, for while he was

*Max charges over the finish line at Mount Equinox with the Porsche in 1951.*



*With the legendary Glöckler-Porsche at Bridgehampton in 1952.*



racing seriously, as he does everything seriously, he was taking part for the sake of the sport. "Apart from my time with Grofri," he explains, "I was never a professional driver."

For 1953 Hoffman bought a second Glöckler-Porsche, this one with its engine behind the rear wheels, but he was never happy with it and soon sold the car. He'd also bought and tried a 1000 cc J.A.P.-engined single-seater Cooper, finding it not at all to his liking and never racing it. Max supported racing in other ways. He had provided a trophy for the Palm Beach Shores events, and also for the fastest Jaguar at Bridgehampton in 1953. That year at the Bridge he also offered a cup to the person driving the greatest distance to the race in a Volkswagen.

Hoffman was also the key member of a corporation formed in the early Fifties to build a race track in New York's Dutchess County. John Fitch headed the group which was quietly obtaining options on 700 acres of magnificent rolling country just off the Taconic Parkway at Fishkill. They were planning to go to Wall Street for financial backing until one member of the group, who was also active in the SCCA, fell into such disrepute that there was no hope of carrying the enterprise further. "We were ahead of our time," sighs Fitch.

His racing activity in 1951 and 1952 scored points for Max Hoffman with another European firm he hoped to represent in the eastern United States: Daimler-Benz. Max had good contacts with the Untertürkheim firm, including his friendship with its Austrian-born racing manager, Alfred Neubauer. Hoffman explored the U.S. export possibilities with the head of Daimler-Benz,

Wilhelm Haspel, who was reluctant to start such an effort with only the humble 170V to offer.

After the new 220 six-cylinder model was launched at the Frankfurt Show in 1951, Haspel assented to an American campaign. Hoffman was invited to Stuttgart to discuss the final details. As a courtesy, he paid a call at Coventry first to tell William Lyons of Jaguar that he intended to accept the Mercedes-Benz franchise. Anything but pleased at this news, Lyons spent the better part of a day trying to talk Hoffman out of this alliance with the Germans, who were still healthily hated in England. Hoffman continued his journey, however, and concluded an agreement with Daimler-Benz for the sales of its products in the eastern United States.

Hoffman set up a separate firm, Mercedes-Benz Distributors, Inc., to handle the new line, and for several years continued to represent Jaguar in the East also. But the two did not mix too well. It all came to a head in a shouting match in a New York hotel during a Lyons visit in 1954. Thereafter the lawyers reached a settlement that ended the Hoffman/Jaguar association, with Max receiving a flat fee for every Jaguar imported during the following year. (Figures publicly bandied about have ranged from \$100 per car for two years to \$50 a car for ten years.)

In the meantime Hoffman had expanded westward at the request of Daimler-Benz. The firm's export manager had asked him to go to California to assess the status of the Los Angeles importer. Before this 1953 trip, Max says, "I had never been to the West Coast, not even as a tourist." He found the importer there to be in

serious financial difficulty, noting, in a telling phrase, "He was a car enthusiast and not a businessman, you know what I mean?" At the behest of Daimler-Benz, Hoffman took over the Los Angeles market, and then the other territories in San Francisco and Texas. For the first time he was selling cars coast to coast.

Even august Daimler-Benz soon began to feel the impact of the distinctive Hoffman awareness of the features that help sell cars. When he took over the line, Max recalls, "they had only dark colors: dark green, dark blue, dark red, dark brown and dark black — and you could not tell one from another. And they had this interior cloth, a felt, in grey and tan, that left spots after you sat on it for a while."

"I asked for some lighter colors," Hoffman relates, "and they said that was really out of the question." Eventually they relented to the extent of having several cars painted in light colors and upholstered in leather. These were put on show in a courtyard and reviewed by the Daimler-Benz executives and Hoffman: "Eventually they said, 'Fine, we'll do it, but of course only for the American market.' Now they sell mostly light-colored cars—with leather upholstery."

Hoffman also pressed the venerable Stuttgart firm for a small sports car to help spark sales in America. He was invited to present his case before the Daimler-Benz management committee. Its chairman, Fritz Koenecke, allowed Max to speak his piece and then invited comments from the other committee members. One of the first to respond was the engineering director, Fritz Nallinger, who said that such a car should be

*With Alfred Momo at the Glen, 1952.*

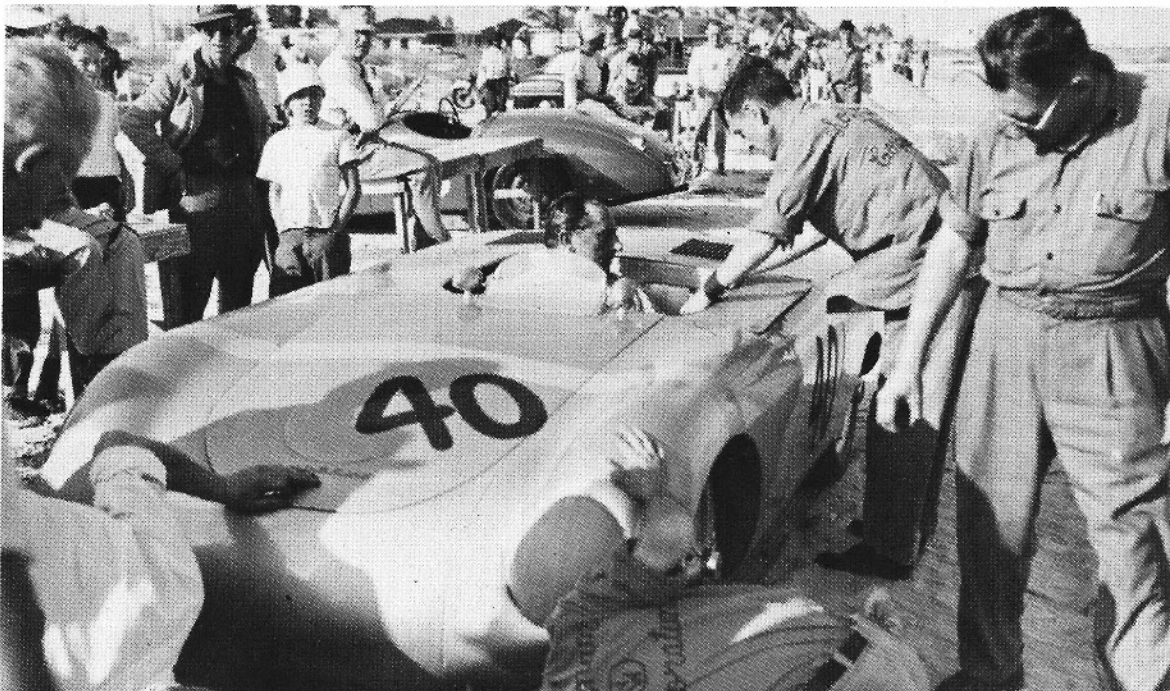


*Max with Sir William Lyons, managing director of Jaguar, and a new C-Type at the same event.*





*At Palm Beach Shores in December of 1951: above, with friends Momo and Briggs Cunningham before the race, and below, with a highly professional-looking pit crew. Max led quite easily until the d.n.f.*



built on the platform frame that was then being used for the 180 sedan. Almost instantly Hoffman spoke up: "*Das wird nichts*" — "Nothing will come of that."

A rustle of uneasiness circled the table at this open and frank challenge to the veteran Nallinger, who was then regarded as the uncrowned king of Daimler-Benz. "I didn't really think before I said it," Hoffman admits. Koenecke carried the meeting ahead smoothly, overlooking this indiscretion. Hoffman was given a chance for a more formal reply, in which he said that a modified sedan chassis would be too long and too heavy for the power available. "But I lost," he remembers, "and the 190SL was the result."

Nevertheless Max Hoffman had helped bring a Mercedes-Benz sports car to life. He emphasizes that it was the 190SL that was important to him, not the much more famous 300SL that was also developed into a production model with Max's encouragement. "Without the smaller car," Max says, "the 300SL would not have come along." In fact Hoffman, a lover of small, light and pleasant sports cars, did not care for the 300SL.

In the mid-Fifties Hoffman found himself welcoming an emissary from Daimler-Benz, a smooth-talking promoter who had only his own interests in mind — as other firms, such as American Motors and Mack Trucks, would later learn through bitter experience. This individual had come to the U.S. to speak to makers of aircraft engines, for which Daimler-Benz was acquiring production licenses. One of his ports of call was New Jersey's Curtiss-Wright, where the subject of conversation turned from planes to cars.

The discovery by this emissary that Curtiss-Wright had a management contract with Studebaker-Packard led to the suggestion that there might be a way to sell Mercedes-Benz cars through Studebaker dealers. He proposed to Max Hoffman that the redesigned 220 model be offered through Studebaker outlets, Hoffman to receive \$200 for each one imported. "I agreed to this," Max recalls, "as I would still be able to sell all the Mercedes models, including the 220, to my own dealers."

Details of this arrangement were discussed during a trip to Germany. A month later, however, word came from Stuttgart that they wanted Hoffman to give up the entire franchise in favor of Studebaker. In 1957 he finally capitulated, giving up the franchise for a flat payment of \$2 million.

Let that settlement be considered large, it might be pointed out that it later cost Daimler-Benz \$18 million to buy back those sales rights

and the spare parts from Studebaker-Packard. And he gave up the line with great reluctance: "I liked Mercedes very much, and I was very, very sorry that it happened. But I also had five other agencies then." Hoffman was, in fact, at the dawn of what might be called his Italian Period.

After his unsatisfactory first postwar contact with Alfa Romeo, Hoffman had been reluctant to consider their products again. The Alfa importer in Germany had urged Max to take on the line, since this would (he maintained) increase Alfa production and help lower the cost of the car in Germany. Then Alfa Romeo representatives met with Max in Stuttgart, asking him to consider selling their cars in America.

Again rebuffed, the Alfa Romeo men cornered Hoffman once more, armed now with details of the planned new 1300 cc Giulietta model. This was followed by another meeting in which the Milan firm's sales manager invited him to Italy to see the new car. After a stopover in Lugano Hoffman went to Milan, where he was shown the Bertone-styled Giulietta coupé. Still unimpressed, he pointed out that Americans markedly preferred convertible sports cars to coupés.

Battered but not beaten, the Alfa Romeo men came to New York to woo this elusive Austrian. They didn't want to make an open car, they said, because they didn't need it for the Italian market, but they would consider building one just for Hoffman, if he would only take on the line. "I was a little weak to take it then," recalls Max, referring to the already heavy demands on his time and money. In 1955, however, he became the Alfa Romeo importer.

Work had already been started on a Giulietta roadster under engineer Rudy Hruschka, whom Hoffman knew. Together they reviewed proposals from Pininfarina and other coachbuilders, and then had a meeting in Milan to evaluate the proposed design. "It looked like a Nash-Healey," remembers Max, using a phrase that sums up many of the things he doesn't like about a car. Its sides were flat and its nose was blunt; more rounded sides and a downsloping nose gave the production version a more rakish, lively look, at Hoffman's suggestion. Another requirement from the outset was that it should have wind-up windows, a feature much desired but relatively unknown on roadsters up to then. "I sold a lot of the Giulietta Spiders, as many as they could make," Hoffman recalls.

During one of his visits to Alfa Romeo in the fall of 1956, Max Hoffman obtained an introduction from them to the house of Fiat. This

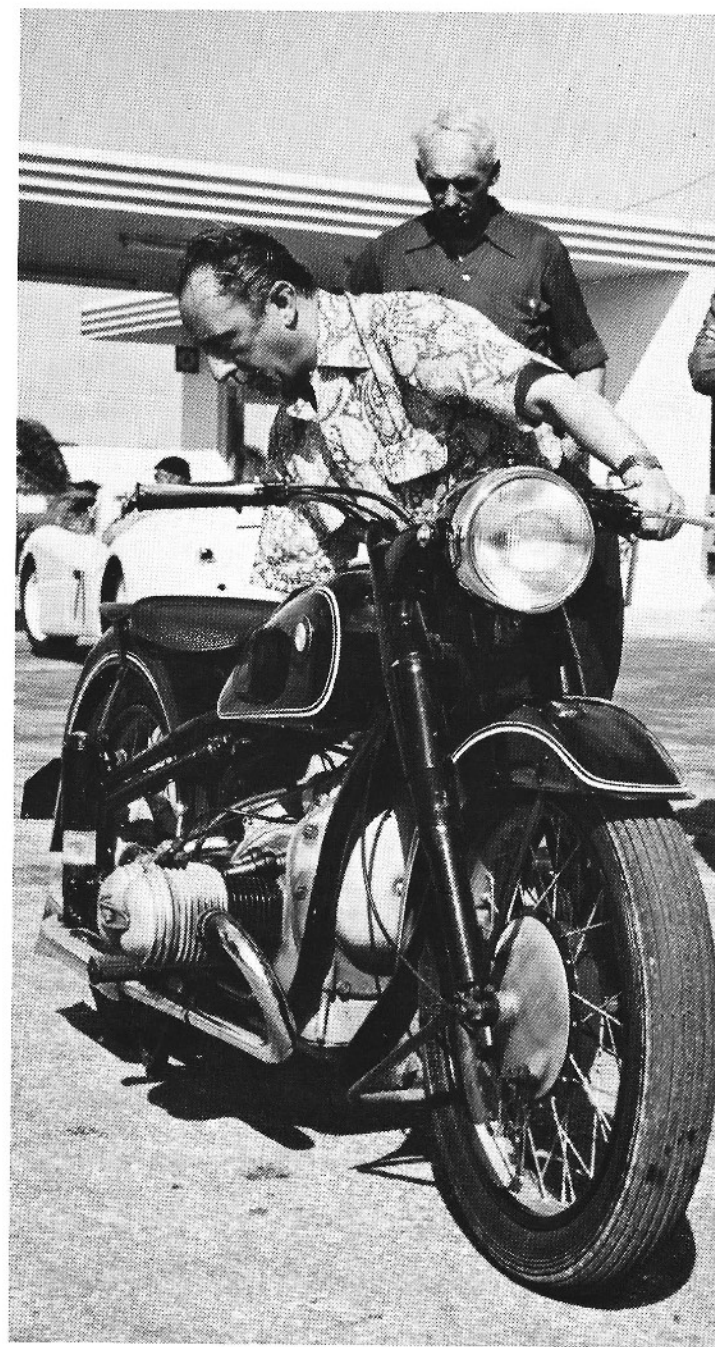
great Turin company had never shown much interest in the American market, but they started to view it differently after a sales pitch by the intense and persuasive Hoffman. By 1957 Fiat was well and truly in the American picture, with sales representation through Hoffman Motor Car Co.

Rounding out his capture of all the Italian marques with significant production, Hoffman added Lancia to his list in 1958. France's Facel-Vega came under his wing in 1957, giving him a top-of-the-line luxury model. It was quite an array of cars for a single importer, impressive enough for Hoffman to consider going public in 1959 with a stock offering by the Hoffman Motors Corporation. This did not come to pass, however, and he remains the sole owner of his enterprise.

During the early years of the Sixties, Hoffman gradually relinquished his sales rights to these cars. Facel-Vega went after 1962, Alfa Romeo after 1963, Lancia after 1964 (with the last two of which he had enjoyed, in Europe and America, a cordial and successful relationship for over thirty years) and Fiat, in a staged withdrawal, after 1965. He was least happy about his 1964 separation from Porsche, by far his longest association in America. "Ferry Porsche approached me about it," Max recalls. "He said he wanted to have his own company in the United States. He said it was for tax reasons. We had a good contract, so there were no problems." Under the settlement, Hoffman received a sum for every Porsche imported during the five subsequent years.

These lines were given up because Max Hoffman had found a new love — BMW — in which he sensed a brilliant future and upon which he decided to concentrate his talents exclusively. On his first postwar trip to Europe he had visited BMW in Munich, before the Bavarian firm was properly back on its feet. He kept in touch with them, and early in the Fifties imported thirty of the unlovely V-8-powered 502 sedans, in a single shipment. "I sold them all right," he remembers, "but the dealers did not. The time was not yet right for BMW."

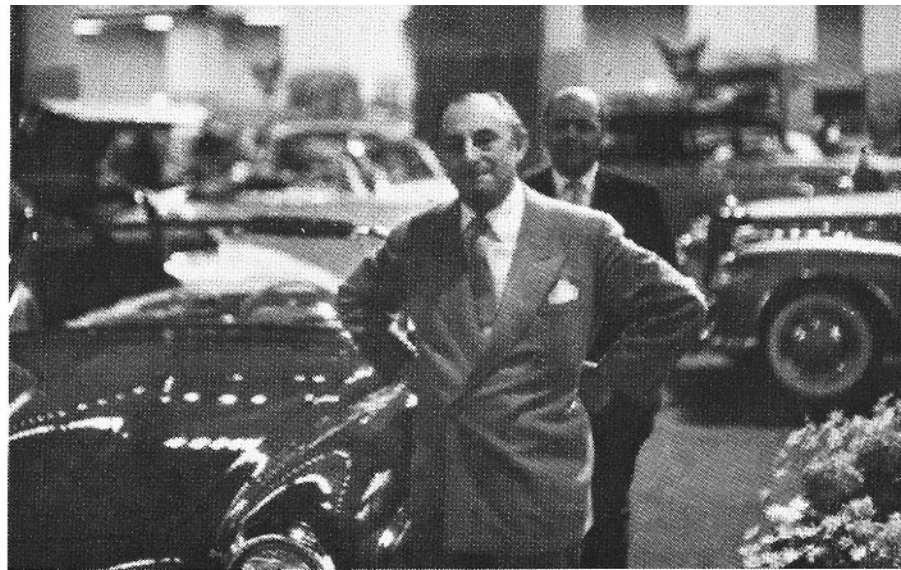
During a Hoffman stopover in Munich in 1954 the BMW engineering director, Fritz Fiedler, told him, "I have a sports car for you," knowing well Max's fondness for sporting two-seaters and his success with them in America. Hoffman was driven to the Bauer coachworks in Stuttgart, where he was shown a prototype they'd built on the 502 V-8 chassis. With its flat dashboard and unappealing lines, Max remembers, "It looked terrible. I told them, 'You never can sell this; it's too ugly.' They took it to a concours, and it disap-



*Max began racing with motorcycles, and still enjoys them.*



With Frank Lloyd Wright at the New York show, 1955.



Same venue, with Marcel Melamed, Max's sales manager.



With Alice and Rudi Caracciolo

peared after that.

"I was planning to go to Italy," Hoffman continues, "and I told them I would see some coach-builders there to get better designs, but I was so busy that I had no time to do it." Back in New York, Hoffman ran into a friend, stylist Albrecht Goertz. Max suggested that he and Goertz make some sketches of designs that might be more suitable. Ten days or so after Hoffman had sent them to Germany, he received a phone call from BMW asking if Goertz could come to Munich to discuss the project further. With Hoffman's approval Goertz made the journey and came to an agreement with BMW that he would consult on the design of a new sports model.

After Goertz's first visit the resident BMW stylists tried to incorporate his ideas in a 1:5 scale model, which was then boxed and shipped to New York for the approval of the client, Max Hoffman. "It was not right at all. It was too high and too square. It looked like a Thunderbird! Nothing like my original idea. So we did our own model here in New York," Hoffman continues, "Goertz and I worked on it. That was the final design, and it was accepted."

From the time of Goertz's first trip in November, 1954, work went ahead so quickly that BMW was able to unveil the first of these new cars, the famous and lovely 507, at the Frankfurt Show in September, 1955. But the complete project, unlike the car, failed to come up to Max Hoffman's expectations. He'd hoped that it could be made in large enough volume to allow a retail price in the U.S. of less than \$5000. "I placed an order for 5000 cars," he reflects, "but they

couldn't build them. They had no factory at that time; they didn't tool up for them."

At the end of the decade, BMW had new leadership and fresh financial backing. The company's new sales director, Paul Hahnemann, made a visit to the U.S. and found in Max Hoffman a sympathetic ally. From 1960 onward Hoffman Motors has been the exclusive U.S. importer of BMW cars. The relationship first started to bear fruit in 1962, when improved models of the 1500 four-door sedan were available for export. Hoffman saw in the BMW line his best chance for the future, an opportunity to build from the ground up a strong alliance with an exciting company.

Releasing the other import franchises left Hoffman Motors with total concentration upon BMW for its sales after 1965 — a time when Max was still losing money on BMW at a rate of about half a million dollars a year. "I gave up on the other car lines too early," he admits today. "I didn't keep Porsche and the others because I thought with only one car I could take it easy, and work only two or three hours a day. Now I am working harder than ever!" Not until 1968 did the BMW line, in which Hoffman says he has invested some \$30 million, become profitable to him.

Max encouraged BMW to build the very successful TI high-performance version of the 1800 sedan, a car that helped establish the marque's distinctively sporting image. But he confesses he was not at all sanguine about the chances of the BMW idea of a smaller car, the 1600. He was unwilling to believe that a shrunken version of a larger car could be a solid hit, which the two-door 1600 very definitely was and is.

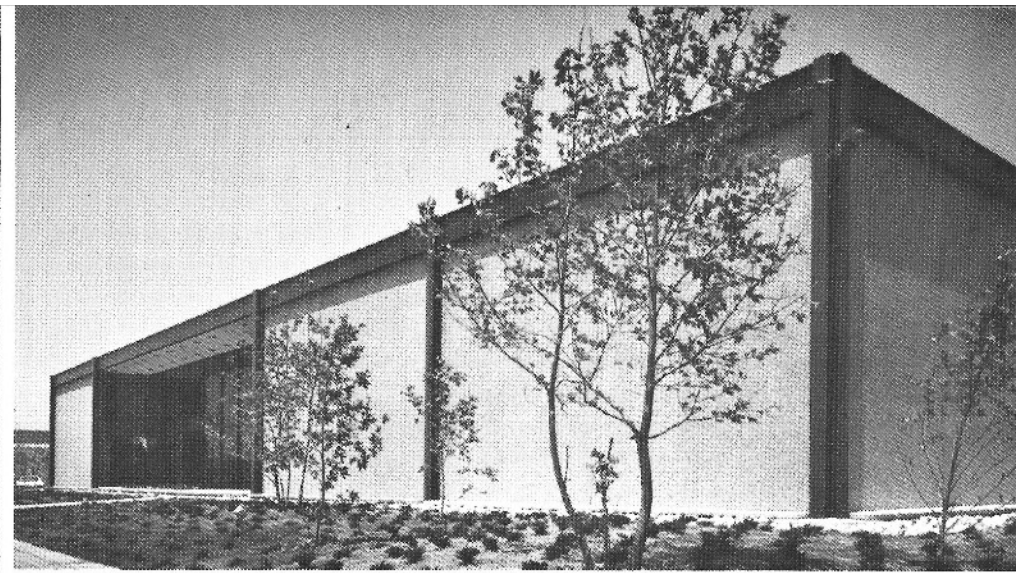
The 2002 edition of the 1600 is a Hoffman creation, however. He was convinced that a larger two-liter version of the 1600 engine could and should be tried in the small two-door car. The BMW engineering director was equally adamant that this "big" engine wouldn't fit in the car, to which Hoffman replied that it certainly would fit and if BMW wouldn't do it he'd take a car to their Munich distributor, Schorsch Meier, and have him install the engine. This threat brought action. BMW made the installation, and it was excellent: Enter the highly popular 2002, available *only* in the U.S. for its first production year.

Other Hoffman touches are evident on BMW cars: the toolbox in the trunk on the sixes, the generous yet tasteful use of chrome, the exceptional value represented by the Bavaria model. Spending some six months of the year at his house near Munich, Hoffman confers frequently with BMW executives both there and at the factory. In fact, notes one employee of the firm, "Mr. Hoffman is the *eminence grise* of BMW. His views are very important."

The Hoffman residence on the Tegernsee in Bavaria is one of several architectural monuments to his imagination, his fanaticism for fine detail, and his wealth. The first-time visitor is apt to be bemused by its thatched-chalet exterior into overlooking the fact that it rests on a niche carved out of a hillside and is served by its own small bridge. It has a roomy and spotless garage, a heating plant that could serve a hotel, handsome guest quarters, a wine cellar, several offices, bars upstairs and down and an elevator to pass from one to the other. Yet it preserves an intimacy in its



and Mrs. Ernst Henne, wife of the famous German motorcycle racer.



Hoffman Motors' magnificent new \$3.5 million distribution center outside Los Angeles.

detailing that understates its total size.

Completed in 1965, the villa at Tegernsee was Max Hoffman's third major venture in home-building. The first one was his house in Rye, New York, begun in 1956 — the year of his marriage. Max had been going with the lovely girl from Connecticut for several years before he and Marion took the vows in 1956. She is a charming and intelligent woman, unavoidably dominated by her husband's intensity when they're together but blossoming when she's on her own.

The search for a designer for the Rye house began with an old friend, critic-turned-architect Philip Johnson. Max looked at some of Johnson's glass houses and found them too cold for his tastes, so Johnson suggested he see Frank Lloyd Wright. "We got along very well," says Hoffman, "though many people were speaking against Wright — people who didn't know him." For the Hoffmans Wright designed an elegant and richly-detailed home of tailored opulence that ended up costing some five times the initial estimate of \$100,000.

Ornamented by the offerings of Daimler-Benz, a superb new showroom was opened by Hoffman between 56th and 57th Streets on Park Avenue in 1953, designed by Edward Barnes. On the same lucky Avenue he sought separate quarters for Jaguar and Porsche. In a building across the street the facing had been stripped away, leaving a forest of steel columns on the ground floor. Hoffman invited Wright to view this challenge. Judging it an "impossible" situation, Wright nevertheless managed to design into that corner an uniquely handsome salon with a spiraling display ramp. It

had been scheduled for a grand opening featuring Jaguar cars — until the blowup with Lyons ruled that out. Instead Porsche, BMW and Alfa cars were the stars. Today at the showroom you will find Mercedes-Benz displaying their latest offerings.

Max Hoffman's first Los Angeles showroom on Sunset Boulevard set a similar high standard. This was followed by another in Beverly Hills, where the Hoffmans also had a residence for some time and still own valuable downtown property. Then in 1970 Hoffman Motors opened a new western headquarters designed by yet another distinguished architect, Bill Ficker, whose record as a yachtsman is also good. He skipped the *Intrepid* to victory in the 1970 America's Cup races.

Living and working in these environments of his own creation is a remarkable man. Sheathed in double-breasted grey or Bavarian Alpine green, his short frame has taken on extra heft in the last dozen years that suggests the beer and good cooking of Munich — though he distinctly prefers Coke to anything more alcoholic than wine. And he finds he can't eat anything that flies, not even eggs: "I have an aversion to that."

Max Hoffman's passion for precision and neatness is compulsive, at home or on the job. His gestures are commanding, including the bold whirl of the arm with which he sweeps off his reading glasses to make a point, revealing serpentine eyelids and irises of hazel ringed with blue. The face and eyes are often etched with the evidence of late hours and hard work.

"I don't need more money," Max says. "I can only eat one lunch, one dinner. I work all day and at night because I get a big kick out of it. This is a

very enjoyable business. But sometimes it is difficult." Love it though he does, Hoffman would have lived these last twenty years of his life differently if he had them to do over again. He would have become a builder of cars.

He was first inspired to think of making a car of his own in 1938. He would have used the Delahaye chassis, replacing its relatively fussy European-style engine with a smoother, more flexible American unit, a supercharged Graham six. Plans had actually been laid to build such a car and have it bodied by Figoni et Falaschi when the clouds of war cast a shadow over the scheme.

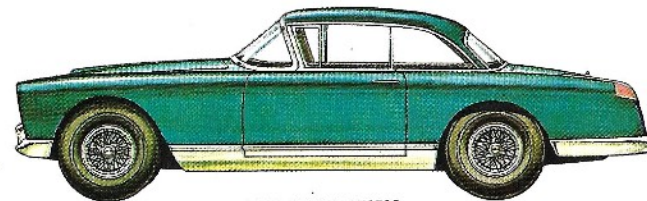
Another opportunity arose after the war. Alex von Falkenhausen, a former BMW engineer, had been building his own AFM racing cars in Munich and had also produced an Opel-powered prototype of a possible production sporting car. He hoped to set up a small firm in the style of Porsche and Cisitalia to produce cars in Germany and, at one of the first Frankfurt Shows, solicited Hoffman's financial help.

Today von Falkenhausen is one of the top BMW engineers, deeply respected by Hoffman for his fine engine designs. "But at that time I did not know so well what he could do," Max remembers, and the initial AFM prototype was not too convincing. He passed up that chance to become a motorcar maker. His ideas have since been incorporated in many cars, but never one bearing his own name. "If I were twenty years younger," he says, "I would try it."

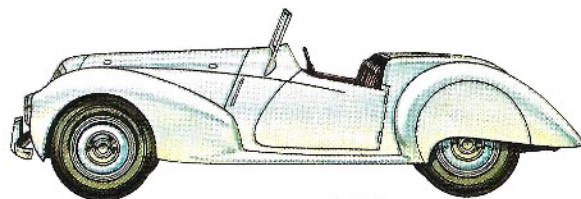
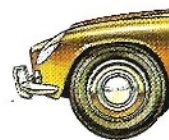
The only surviving anachronism? Max Hoffman has not only survived but prospered. And the automotive world is all the richer for that. ☐

HERE ARE A FEW — AND ONLY A FEW — OF THE REMARKABLE RANGE OF CARS IMPORTED INTO THE U.S. BY MAX HOFFMAN, BEFORE HE BECAME THE EXCLUSIVE IMPORTER OF BMW. YOU WON'T FIND A DULL ONE AMONG THEM.

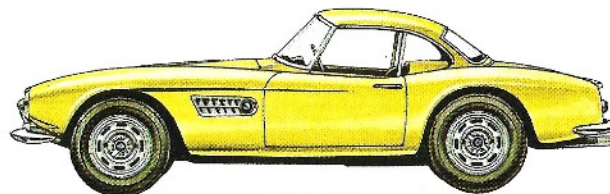
DRAWINGS BY THOMAS E. FORNANDER



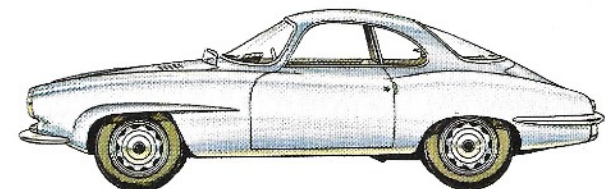
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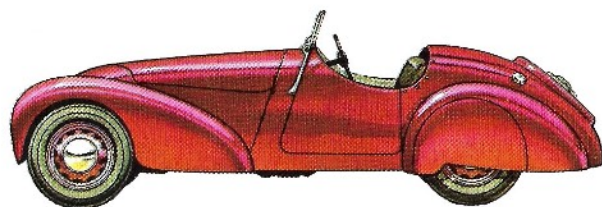
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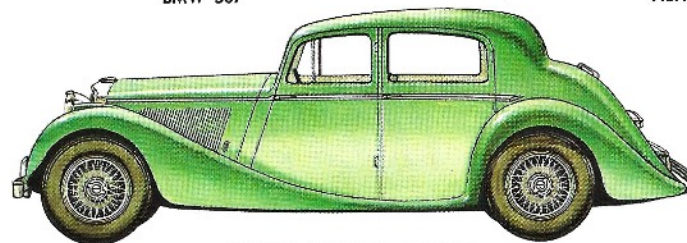
BMW 507



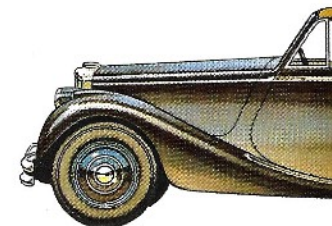
ALFA ROMEO GIULIETTA SPRINT SPECIALE



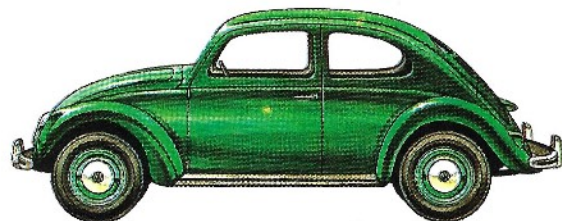
ALLARD L-TYPE



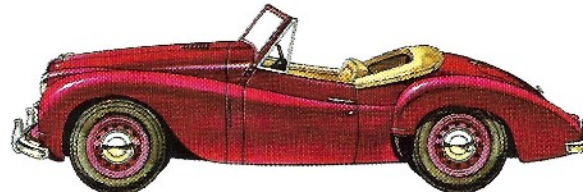
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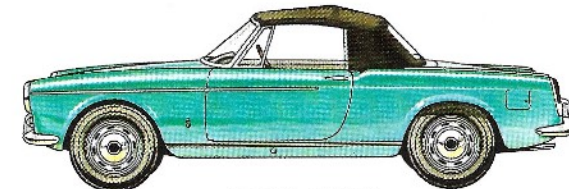
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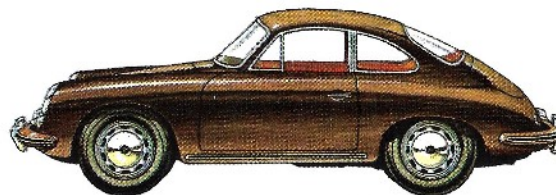
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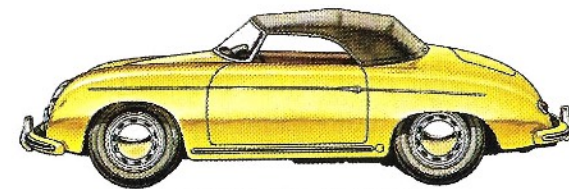
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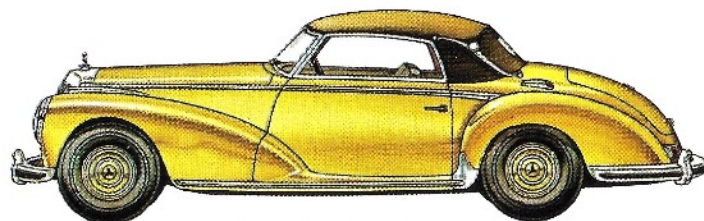
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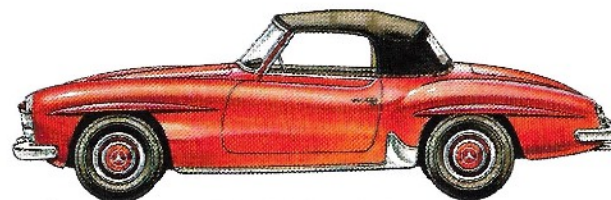
PORSCHE 356C COUPE



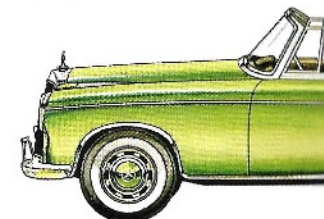
PORSCHE 356A SPEEDSTER



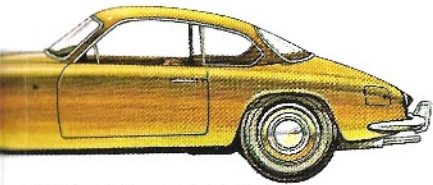
MERCEDES-BENZ 300S



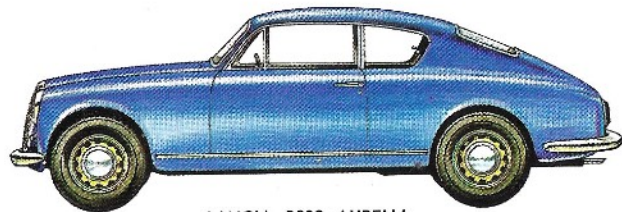
MERCEDES-BENZ 190SL



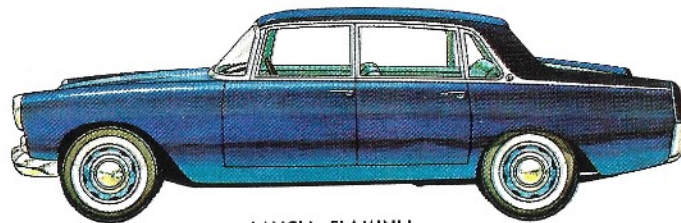
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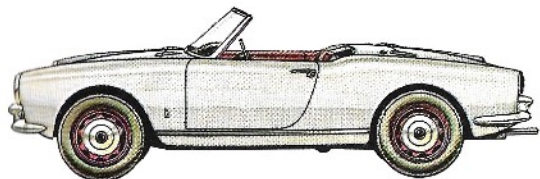
LANCIA APPIA GTE ZAGATO



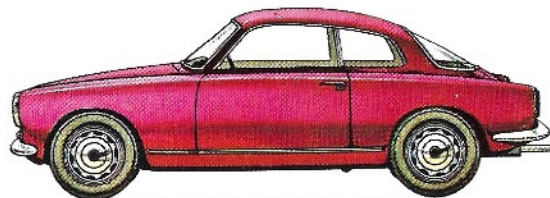
LANCIA B20S AURELIA



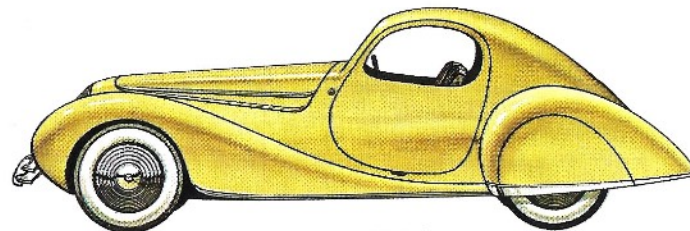
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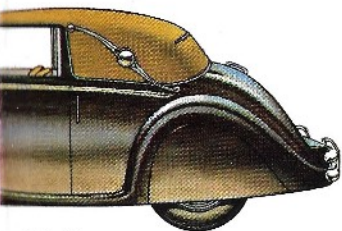
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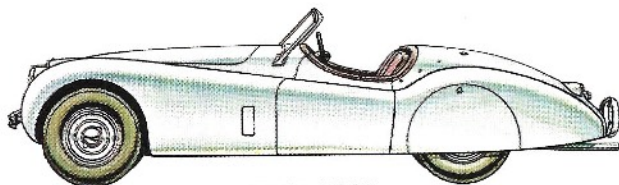
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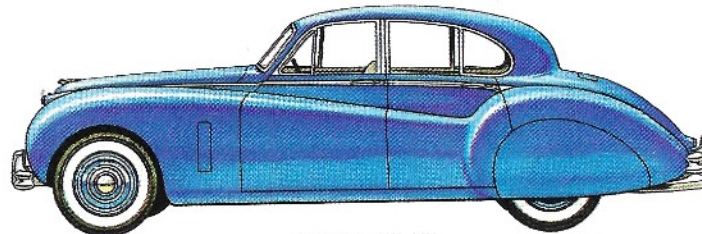
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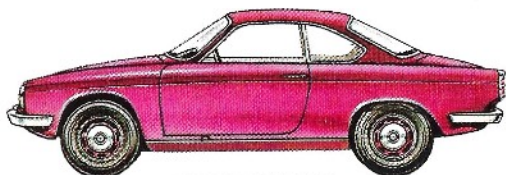
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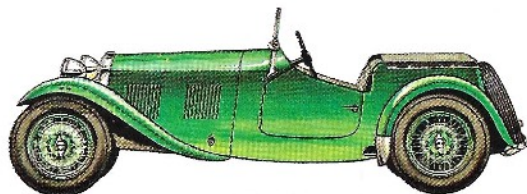
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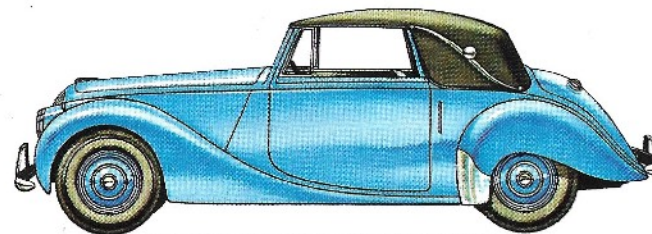
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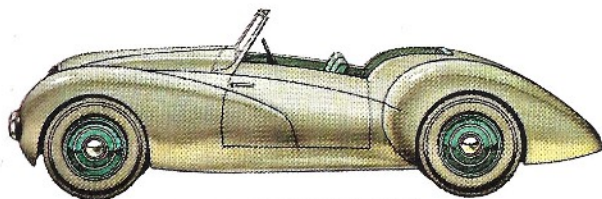
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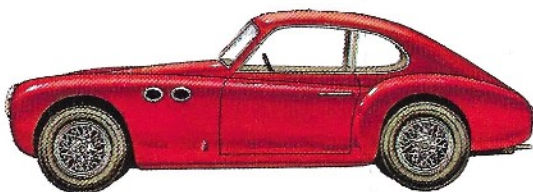
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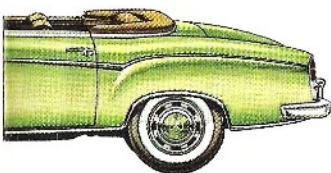
LAGONDA 2 1/2-LITRE DROPHEAD COUPE



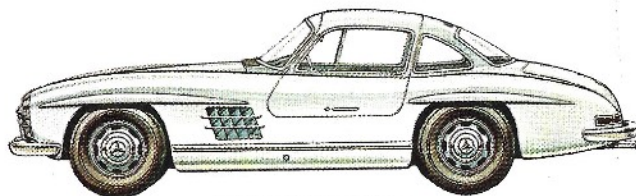
HEALEY 2.4-LITRE ROADSTER



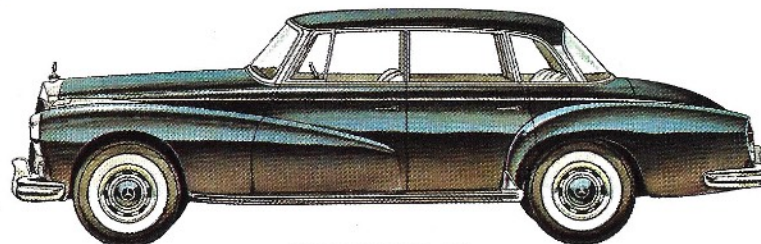
CISITALIA FARINA COUPE



BENZ 220A



MERCEDES-BENZ 300SL



MERCEDES-BENZ 300



