

## A VENT WINDOW VIEW – Whats' In A Name?

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Duesenberg in 1920 produced a Model “A” nine years before Henry Ford built his. The point is that were it not for some originality in “model” names we might be hard pressed to keep track of the players. That is not to suggest that we couldn't tell which was which. It's a certainty that when you take a car built in a Ford plant and park it next to a Duesenberg the differences in quality will be apparent. But, when we begin comparing notes about cars in conversation or advertising in the classified section of a newspaper, it helps to have model names that are suggestive.

Car makers realized that long ago and, nowadays, hire a goodly staff of bright-minded folk whose solitary assignment is to come up with a name that makes a new model sound like the sexiest four-wheeler that ever rolled off an assembly line.

And, “sexy” is not the only image they want to convey; in some cases, “power” is the factor the brainiacs think will increase sales. That kind of thinking is what brings us such names as “Ram” the Chrysler Corporation's signature name for its Dodge pickups. Logically, one could expect another member of the “Big Three” to authorize the manufacture and sale of a vehicle titled “BULL.” Thank goodness there is a division in a car company that “vets” new-model name choices! I'm pretty sure that if a customer or a vice president at GM hears the word “Bull,” it is probable that both would remember the most frequent usage of “bull” comes after the words “That's a bunch of ....!”

And, while we are on the subject of vehicles with animal names, we must not overlook the tire-screaming performance machines, those with horsey badges such as Mustang or Charger or Fury. These particular machines were successful enough to lift many vice-presidents into an office that now has his (or her) name and title painted on its door. I'd guess that some of these execs grew up on a steady diet of Western movies in their youth, those Saturday specials that starred heroic males such as Hopalong, Straight Arrow, and Roy. (Their horses often got equal billing in the previews.) It seems logical that car names like “Wildcat” and “Cougar” would also have quite a lot of traction with these cowboy movie aficionados.

There are times, however, when performance is measured in other areas such as styling, economy, and load capacity, areas where the creative use of Mother Nature's wild creatures may not serve to enhance a maker's advertisements. Oddly enough, names promoting grace and style actually exceed those idealizing power. This is true even for cars remembered more for their high performance than for their remarkable styling as was the Bel Air, Chevrolet's premium model in 1957. The mid-fifty Chevys, along with Ford's 1955 Crown Victoria offered almost as many color combinations as the top of the line Dodge in 1956 that carried the longest title of the three—Custom Royal Lancer. The big three offered American drivers in the late Fifties more outrageous paint combinations than Jackson Pollock's painting **The Key**.

Some car companies named cars after famous cities to give their vehicles a hint of foreign mystique; names like Torino, Saratoga, and Parisienne took advantage of America's growing interest in world travel. Buyers will eventually figure out which car suits their needs, pocketbooks, and sense of style even if cars are simply numbered or lettered; the Ford's Model A did quite well, for example. Still, letters and numerals fail to carry the charisma and “romance” of a name although names must be sensible. Insect names are unlikely to become popular; the AMC “Hornet” and the Dodge “Super Bee” never caught on with car buyers. Reptiles, however—*well*, remember Shelby's Cobra?