

Early V-8s

By Jeff Kinzler, Newsletter Columnist

After Cadillac introduced its first V8, the type 51 in 1915, an interesting thing happened. Sister GM division Oldsmobile introduced its own V-8 engine the following year. Then in 1917, Chevrolet came out with an overhead valve V-8.

We know historically that the only V8 of these three to remain in production was the Cadillac. There was a recession at the end of WW I, so most people were probably content with the economical four and six cylinder engines of the day, leaving eight and twelve cylinder cars for luxury buyers.

The Olds V8 was offered until 1923, and, with the exception of the 1929-30 Viking, the next Olds V-8 arrived in 1949. Chevrolet's small block V8 appeared in 1955, some 38 years later. Coincidentally, this engine was designed by Ed Cole and the same GM engineering team that had developed Cadillac's high-compression V8 six years earlier, in 1949.



Circa 1915 Cadillac Touring Car

Cadillac's first V8 power plant displaced 314 cubic inches and had an output of 60-70 horsepower.



A Cadillac first- the mass-produced V8 Engine

The Olds engine was an L-head design that displaced 246 cubic inches and produced 40



1916 Oldsmobile Model 44 V8

horsepower. In its day it must have been considered quite powerful as it had twice the horsepower power rating of a Model T Ford.



Early Olds V8 might have looked like the one pictured above.

The Chevrolet V8 was an advanced design for its day. It displaced 288 cubic inches, had overhead valves and was rated



View of the 1917 Chevrolet V-8 at 55 horsepower. This engine was produced around the time that Chevrolet was acquired by General Motors. However, a luxurious, powerful eight-cylinder car was probably inconsistent with GM's plan to use Chevrolet to compete with Ford's Model T, so the V8 was dropped the following year.



1917 Chevrolet Model D V8

It certainly interesting to think of how V8 engine technology might have evolved if Chevrolet hadn't stopped producing V8 engines. However, you can't argue with success. Ford made only four-cylinder cars until 1932, but a four-cylinder Chevrolet outsold Ford in 1927, then Chevy introduced its famous overhead valve "stove bolt" six in 1929.

Please send your, letters and comments to:

Jeff Kinzler, Newsletter Columnist, Long Island Dreamboats Insider, P.O. Box 717, Levittown, New York 11756 e-mail: Jazmanesq@aol.com