



# SALISBURY CONCOURS d'ELEGANCE

A Celebration of the Art & Design of the Automobile

## The “DESIGNER” Side of Studebaker

THE SALISBURY CONCOURS D'ELEGANCE IS PRESENTING THE EVOLUTION OF STUDEBAKER DESIGN WITH SPECIAL EMPHASIS ON THE WORK OF THOSE DESIGNERS WHO WORKED WITH RAYMOND LOEWY.



Celebrating the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Avanti design. As the Studebaker ad for the Avanti stated 50 years ago, “A Star is Born”

In 1936, noted 20<sup>th</sup> Century industrial designer Raymond Loewy added a new dimension to the corporate vision of the Studebaker Corporation. Studebaker hired Loewy’s independent design firm to bring a design emphasis that would lift the company out of its financial turmoil brought on by the Great Depression. The result in 1939 was the new Virgil Exner-designed Studebaker “Champion”. Sales soared to 30,000 units and helped the company recover from its earlier bankruptcy filing in 1933.



Brook Steven’s “would have been - could have been” 1964-65 Studebaker luxury sedan—if Studebaker had not ceased U. S. operations in 1963. This concept was his design for a luxury sedan. Note the Mercedes design influences likely influenced by the fact that Studebaker was the U. S. distributor for Mercedes Benz from 1958-1963. Photo: Courtesy of Collectible Automobile® magazine.

The list of automotive designers that worked on Studebaker designs thereafter reveals a virtual “Who’s Who of Automotive Design”, until the company ceased operation in 1966. In addition to the work of Exner, who moved over to Chrysler and designed the late ‘50’s forward looking finned cars, there was Dick Caleal, who later worked with Ford—and maybe saved that company; Auburn Cord Duesenberg’s Gordon Buehrig, considered by many to be the top automotive designer of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century; Brooks

Stevens, an organizer of the “Industrial Designers Society of America” and designer of Studebaker’s Gran Turismo and Excalibur, as well as Harley Davidson motorcycles; and Robert Bourke, who later started his own design firm.

While the Loewy name is most often associated with Studebaker design, research reveals Loewy was more likely a great project manager and salesman who recognized good car design when he saw it and was able to move the design through to successful product launch. He also was able to attract up-and-coming designers like Exner and Buehrig to his staff, and clients like Studebaker, Coca Cola and Shell to his firm. According to his long-term friend, employee and associate, noted automotive designer Robert Bourke (designer of the award winning 1953 Studebaker Starliner under Loewy), Loewy was a great graphic designer, but when it came to drawing cars, “... he couldn’t draw automobiles - -not at all. He was just ridiculous as far as cars were concerned, and he knew it.”

Working *for*, working *with*, working *at times in secrecy*, and in some cases, working *for other manufacturers*, the designers associated with Loewy produced many firsts in automotive design, along with some of the 20<sup>th</sup> century’s most attractive - and successful - designs.



Many of these Studebaker design achievements will be presented on the beautiful grounds and gardens of the Salisbury House... with its design inspired by the 13<sup>th</sup> century King’s House in Salisbury, England, and historic English flintwork architecture. The Salisbury House has been featured on A&E channel’s “America’s Castles” and provides a unique setting to celebrate Art and Design.

The Concours presentation will be organized to show the generational design influence and evolution of Studebaker. Examples expected for presentation in “The Designer Side of Studebaker Class” include:

- **1913 Studebaker SA Touring Car.** This first generation represents the design ideas of John M. Studebaker, the “always give more than they expect” President of the new corporation. With a new six-cylinder engine, these models were the first to employ the important advancement of a monobloc, or single engine, casting which became associated with a production-driven economy in the years of World War I. Studebaker designers of this new engine went on to form the nucleus of Chrysler engineering. This beautifully restored example spent 12 years on display at the Studebaker Museum in South Bend, Indiana.
- **1930 President FE Seven.** This 100 point President represents the 1929-33 President Series design for Studebaker. This automobile, recognized as a classic by the Classic Car Club of America, was designed and engineered under the direction of Albert Erskine, President of Studebaker. During this time period, Erskine had taken over the elegantly designed Pierce Arrow (1928-1933) company and initiated the design of another car with his name on it—the Erskine (1928-1930). In 1933, in the depths of the Depression and with prospects of losing control of Studebaker, Albert Erskine committed suicide.
- **1939 Champion.** The first Virgil Exner design, under the direction of Raymond Loewy. In addition to Exner, Loewy hired Gordon Buehrig and Robert Bourke to complete the design work associated with his firm’s initial contract with Studebaker.

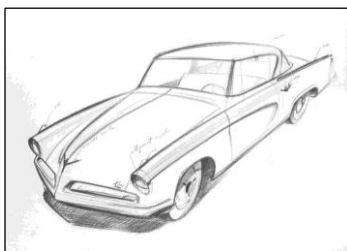


**1947 Champion.** Designed under the direction of Loewy by the talented team of Exner, Buehrig, Bourke and Richard Caleal. Studebaker's ad tagged this as "First by Far with a Post War Car". This very successful design, with the newly designed "wraparound, green-house" rear window on the coupes, was the first modern post-World War II car put into production, beating the big three by two full years.

*Loewy Fires Exner.* Loewy and Exner's working relationship was deteriorating because Exner didn't think he was getting enough attention for his designs. Concerned about their relationship and the on-going development of the post-war 1947 design, Ray Cole, Engineering Vice President of Studebaker, suggested Exner work on the design at home (a curious parallel to today's e-commerce work-from-home trend). When Loewy found out Exner was working on the design at home, he fired Exner. But Exner was rehired by Studebaker and is listed as the sole inventor of the design patent for the 1947 Champion.

- **1951 Champion Regal Deluxe.** This "bullet nosed" automobile was designed by Robert Bourke under the direction of Loewy. The 1950 Champion Starlight Coupe, the famous "coming or going" Studebaker, also with the bullet nose, is probably the most beloved by Studebaker buffs.

*The Studebaker/Ford Connection* In 1948 Richard Caleal was laid off from Studebaker. Studebaker's post-war design work was being noticed by the big three, and after being laid off, Caleal was contacted by Ford. In a confidential private relationship, Caleal was asked to prepare and present designs for Ford's post-war 1949 car. Caleal's Studebaker-inspired designs were selected by Ford executives over their in-house design team's work and extensively incorporated into their very successful 1949 Ford "shoebox, slab side design". Historians have concluded the success of this Studebaker-inspired design was very important factor in Ford overcoming its post-war financial slump. Caleal's design became the 1949 Ford, and the in-house 1949 Ford design became the 1949 Mercury. It is interesting to note the very similar "bullet nosed spinner grills", among the many other design similarities of the 1949-1951 Fords and 1950-1951 Studebakers.



Designer Robert Bourke's initial ideas for the award winning 1953 Starliner  
Drawing courtesy of the Studebaker Museum.

**1953 Starliner.** Michael Lamm, former editor of Special Interest Autos, called the Starliner "the best looking U.S. production car of the 1950's". The 1953-1956 Starliners and Starlights were designed by Robert Bourke under the direction of Raymond Loewy. A Commander Starliner was included in the prestigious 1953 New York Museum of Modern Art show, "Ten Automobiles".



**1959 Silver Hawk.** Designed by Bourke, the 1957 to 1961 Silver and Golden Hawks incorporated the fins of the fifties, popular during this era of automobile design. Raymond Loewy's initial contract with Studebaker ended in 1957.

- **1961 Lark.** Primarily the design work of Bob Doehler, under the direction of Chief Stylist Duncan McRae, this popular *first of the compact car class*, designed and introduced in 1959, was a huge success. It took another year for Ford, Chrysler and General Motors to bring their

compacts to market. In 1962 Brook Stevens redesigned the Lark, incorporating a Mercedes look-a-like grill, among other borrowed Mercedes design features.



**1962 Gran Turismo Hawk.** The 1962 Gran Turismo was designed by Brooks Stevens to be a high styled personal car in the nature of the Thunderbird, Riviera, and Toronado. Stevens removed the dated tail fins, added a Thunderbird-like roof, and applied a Continental-like belt molding.

- **1963 Avanti**—celebrating its 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. Lowey’s firm was rehired in 1961 to create a design for the Avanti. Lowey brought together a hand-picked team of designers, including young Tom Kellogg and seasoned veterans Bob Andrews and John Ebstein. To avoid distractions and interference from Studebaker executives, Lowey sequestered his highly talented designer team in a rented desert ranch house near Palm Springs, California. The team had little guidance: Lowey simply told them he wanted a “Coke bottle” body design with no grill in the front. Sherwood Egbert, President of Studebaker, sent a brochure for the new Jaguar XKE for inspiration. The team knew the car was urgent business, so they worked 16 hours daily for weeks, and the car was introduced at the 1962 New York Auto Show under a banner reading “A new star is born”. To Studebaker’s delight, the public was crazy about the Avanti, which drew many people to Studebaker showrooms.



Avanti designers Ebstein, Andrews and Kellogg’s 1-8 scale clay model design of the Avanti being transferred to a full sized clay model design in April of 1961. With a next to impossible timetable, Sherwood Egbert, President of Studebaker told Raymond Lowey he needed a “halo car” for the April 1962 New York Auto Show to bring customers back into his Studebaker dealer’s show rooms.

*The Studebaker/Mercedes Connection.* In the late 1950’s Mercedes sales were declining in the U. S. Because of their extensive dealer network, Studebaker dealers were chosen to be the distributor for the Mercedes Brand from 1958 to 1963. The relationship ended when Studebaker USA ceased operations in 1963. At that time, many Studebaker dealers became Mercedes Dealers

Text by Jerry Manning, Co-Chair: “The Studebakers” Class

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