

O REO

A Pretty Sharp Cookie

The beef I have with modern history is that as time marches on it tends to be either watered down or rearranged to suit some purpose. Take for example the legend of Henry Ford. Madison Avenue would have you believing that he invented the first successful automobile and was the first to apply assembly line technology to that

process, neither could be farther from the truth. It is true that after failing twice he was finally able to provide an affordable vehicle to the masses in 1908. Not to undermine Fords tremendous contribution to automobile development but in the interest of recognizing actual historic facts we must give a nod to Ransom Eli Olds.

As a young lad Ransom began experimenting with steam and gas engines. In 1897 he founded the Olds Motor Vehicle Company. By 1901 he had produced and sold an Electric, Steam and a Gasoline powered vehicle. A fire in 1901 burned the Olds Motor Works factory to the ground. Since the only vehicle saved was a Curved Dash Runabout and he already had a substantial orders for that car, he concentrated his efforts in that direction.

The little Olds sold for \$650 and by 1904 he had sold over seven thousand of them (an unheard of number for that time). In 1901 Ransom Olds patented the first stationary assembly line used in the manufacture of the automobile, it was not until 1913 that Henry came along and improved it. After selling and subsequently leaving the company in 1904, he formed the R. E. Olds Motor Car company. The name was changed to the REO Motor Car Company to avoid a lawsuit from the Olds Motor Works, his former company. REO was a major player in automobile production and in 1908 was third in sales behind Ford and Buick.

Ransom Olds would leave the company in 1915 to pursue other projects. He developed a rather large real estate interest outside of Tampa Bay Florida (Oldsmar) and developed the first gasoline powered lawnmower. In 1934 he received a patent for the Diesel engine to add to his growing portfolio. Olds returned to Reo in the early thirties in an effort to help save the company. That was difficult time for automobile manufacturers and would prompt the development of the Franklin Olympic, the air cooled Franklin engine in the REO body. Both Franklin and REO would cease auto production shortly thereafter. REO would go on to produce trucks eventually merging to produce the Diamond Reo trucks. Ransom Olds would pass in 1950 at the age of 86.



My Grandfather, Charles Goranflo sitting proudly on one of his agencies Oldsmobiles.

Sources: Horseless Carriage Gazette volume 83 number 5
R E Olds foundation.
Wikipedia
Barnes Family Archive.