

THE UNBELIEVABLE SUCCESS OF HENRY FORD

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Henry Ford was the American founder of the Ford Motor Company and father of modern assembly lines used in mass production. He was a prolific inventor and was awarded 161 U.S. patents. As owner of the Ford Company he became one of the richest and best-known people in the world

Ford was born July 30, 1863, on a farm next to a rural town west of Detroit, Michigan. In 1879, he left home for the nearby city of Detroit to work as an apprentice machinist, first with James F. Flower & Bros., and later with the Detroit Dry Dock Co. In 1882, he returned to Dearborn to work on the family farm and became adept at operating the Westinghouse portable steam engine. He was later hired by Westinghouse company to service their steam engines.

In 1891, Ford became an engineer with the Edison Illuminating Company, and after his promotion to Chief Engineer in 1893, he had enough time and money to devote attention to his personal experiments on gasoline engines. These experiments culminated in 1896 with the completion of his own self-propelled vehicle named the Ford Quadricycle, which he test-drove on June 4

Ford went to work building a racer. With the help of C. Harold Wills, he designed, built, and successfully raced a 26HP automobile in October 1901. With that success, Murphy and other stockholders in the Detroit Automobile Company formed the Henry Ford Company on November 30, 1901, with Ford as chief engineer.

On June 16, 1903, Ford & Malcomson was reincorporated as the Ford Motor Company, with \$28,000 capital.

Ford astonished the world in 1914 by offering a \$5 per day wage, which more than doubled the rate of most of his workers. The move proved extremely profitable; instead of constant turnover of employees, the best mechanics in Detroit flocked to Ford, bringing in their human capital and expertise, raising productivity, and lowering training costs. It also set a new, reduced workweek, although the details vary in different accounts. Ford and Crowther in 1922 described it as six 8-hour days, giving a 48-hour week, while in 1926 they described it as five 8-hour days, giving a 40-hour week.

The Model T was introduced on October 1, 1908. The entire engine and transmission were enclosed; the four cylinders were cast in a solid block; the suspension used two semi-elliptic springs. It had many important innovations—such as the steering wheel on the left, which every other company soon copied. The car was very simple to drive, and—more importantly—easy and cheap to

repair. It was so cheap at \$825 in 1908 (the price fell every year) that by the 1920s a majority of American drivers learned to drive on the Model T.

Ford was always eager to sell to farmers, who looked on the vehicle as a commercial device to help their business. Sales skyrocketed—several years posted 100% gains on the previous year. Always on the hunt for more efficiency and lower costs, in 1913 Ford introduced the moving assembly belts into his plants, which enabled an enormous increase in production.

Ford's philosophy was one of economic independence for the United States. His River Rouge Plant became the world's largest industrial complex, even able to produce its own steel. Ford's goal was to produce a vehicle from scratch without reliance on foreign trade. He believed in the global expansion of his company. He believed that international trade and cooperation led to international peace, and he used the assembly line process and production of the Model T to demonstrate it. He opened Ford assembly plants in Britain and Canada in 1911, and soon became the biggest automotive producer in those countries.

Sales passed 250,000 in 1914. By 1916, as the price dropped to \$360 for the basic touring car, sales reached 472,000. The final total production was 15,007,034. This record stood for the next 45 years.

Ford, like other automobile companies, entered the aviation business during World War I, building Liberty engines. After the war, it returned to auto manufacturing until 1925, when Henry Ford acquired the Stout Metal Airplane Company.

In 1918, President Woodrow Wilson personally asked Ford to run for the United States Senate from Michigan as a Democrat. Although the nation was at war, Ford ran as a peace candidate and a strong supporter of the proposed League of Nations.

By the mid-1920s, sales of the Model T began to decline due to rising competition. Henry pursued the project with a great deal of technical expertise in design of the engine, chassis, and other mechanical necessities, while leaving the body design to his son. The result was the successful Ford Model A, introduced in December 1927 and produced through 1931, with a total output of more than 4 million.

When Edsel, president of Ford Motor Company, died of cancer in May 1943, the elderly and ailing Henry Ford decided to assume the presidency.

He died in 1947 at age 83 in Fair Lane, his Dearborn estate, and he is buried in the Ford Cemetery in Detroit.

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