

The Incredible Swigart Collection

America's oldest auto museum

BY BOB STEVENS ■ NESTLED INTO THE SCENIC AND PEACEFUL MOUNTAINS OF CENTRAL PENNSYLVANIA, JUST 80 MILES OR SO FROM THE TOWN MADE FAMOUS BY CHOCOLATE CANDY AND THE WORLD'S LARGEST ANTIQUE CAR EVENT — HERSHEY — THE SWIGART AUTOMOTIVE MUSEUM HOLDS SOME OF AUTOMOTIVE HISTORY'S MOST TREASURED ARTIFACTS, INCLUDING THREE RARE DUSENBERGS, PRESTON TUCKER'S PROTOTYPE, AND SEVERAL OBSCURE MAKES OF WHICH FEW PEOPLE HAVE EVER HEARD, LET ALONE SEEN.

Billed as the country's oldest automotive museum, the magnificent collection of W. Emmert Swigart first opened to the public 85 years ago, in 1920, when the "hot collectibles" weren't Model A Fords, Duesenbergs, DeSotos, Cords, Plymouths, or many other now famous cars, because they hadn't even been introduced yet. In fact, in that year, 1920, the first Duesenberg, the Model A, was unveiled. Other new cars which had their debut about the time Swigart opened his museum included the DuPont, Craig-Hunt, Hermes, Vogue, Cooper, Hollier, Cootie, Bowman, Collins Six, Breese, Highlander, Birmingham, R&V Knight, Samson, Texmobile, Hilton, Ambassador, Texan, Wharton, etc. All those makes are long gone now, but the museum has persevered.

W. Emmert Swigart passed on in 1949 and his son, William Swigart Jr., immediately assumed the reins. He groomed, expanded, and moved it to new larger facilities. Currently, there are some 200 cars in the collection, with 35 to 40 usually on display in the museum. William Jr. passed away in 2000 at age 85, but his wife, Pat, has continued the operation as her husband had envisioned it. Many of the cars in the collection are brass era buggies and true "horseless carriages," which the museum owes to its roots when "antique" cars were very early motorcars with one- and two-cylinder gas engines, plus steamers and electrics,

RIGHT: The Swigart Museum is housed in modern quarters in Huntingdon, PA, a town of some 8,500 in central Pennsylvania just 80 miles northwest of Hershey, PA.

