

Little Known Facts about Pontiacs – Number 2

by Bill McIntosh

Do you know what the first Pontiac motor car was? Every diehard Pontiac devotee would likely say: “Of course, the 1926 Pontiac.” Well the answer is not necessarily so. The 1926 Pontiac was the first Pontiac to be offered by General Motors as a sister car to the Oakland. As it turns out, the first commercially sold Pontiac motor car was the 1908 model produced by the Pontiac Motor Vehicle Company, a division of the Pontiac Spring and Wagon Works.



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Wheels
38-in. front
40-in. rear

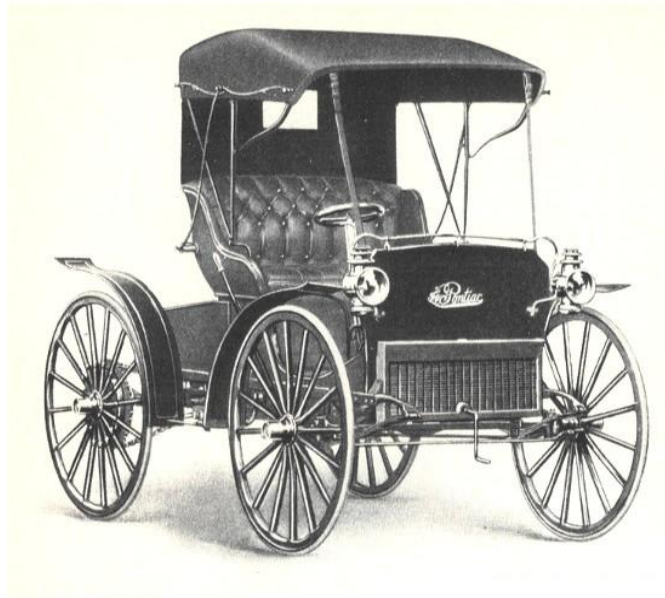
Advertisement for the 1908 Pontiac

Not to be confused with the Pontiac Buggy Company (incorporated by Edward Murphy in 1893 and ultimately morphed into the Oakland Motor Company), the first Pontiac was produced by the Pontiac Spring and Wagon Works (incorporated in July 1899 by Albert G. North and Harry G. Hamilton). Reportedly (but not confirmed in my research) by 1905 Pontiac Spring and Wagon Works had taken over the manufacturing of the Rapid Truck from the Rapid Motor Vehicle Company having been introduced two years earlier. In 1907, they decided to produce an automobile.

The first Pontiac Spring and Wagon Works automobile, simply named "The Pontiac," was introduced that fall. It was a high-wheeler weighing 1,000 pounds and powered by a two-cylinder water-cooled 12 h.p. engine. A prototype was displayed in October 1907 at an exhibition sponsored by the Carriage Dealers' Association in New York City's Grand Central Palace. In December of the same year, several of the new Pontiacs were exhibited at the Chicago Automobile Show. The new Pontiac was well received by the press. The car featured final drive by double chain and a friction transmission. The wheelbase was 70 inches, front wheels 38 inches, with 40-inch wheels in the rear, and solid rubber tires. The first deliveries were apparently made in early 1908.

An early Pontiac advertisement claimed that this automobile was "The Car That's Built to Get There". The Pontiac Spring and Wagon Works announced that they would build buggy-type automobiles in three models: a runabout (shown below), a surrey and a vehicle design especially for farmers' use. These automobiles were to be placed on the market for the 1908 season. The price was set at \$650 with a roof and \$600 without.

Estimates have been made that between 40 and 50 1908 Pontiacs were built but certainly less than 100 in total.



The 1908 Pontiac – Runabout Model

So, you may be wondering, whatever happened to The Pontiac Motor Vehicle Company? As it turns out, sometime during the inaugural year of the new car, the owners of the Pontiac Spring and Wagon Works sold the company to the Motorcar Company of Detroit, the maker of the Cartercar. The Motorcar Company of Detroit subsequently moved its operations to Pontiac into the old Pontiac Spring and Wagon Works facilities and renamed the company The Cartercar Company. While the Cartercar Company announced it would continue to build the Pontiac motor car, they did not. And, about a year later in November 1909, General Motors bought The Cartercar Company for \$350,000.00.



A Restored 1908 Pontiac – Note that the original high wheels have been replaced.