

EXCALIBUR AUTOMOBILE CORP.

*Original Home of the Excalibur
Presents*

CAMELOT CLASSIC CARS, INC.

Excalibur Story

The Excalibur Story (Part 2)

The early days of the young firm were difficult ones and the brothers made two initial, important decisions: firstly that the cars would be built slowly and with the greatest care and attention, secondly that they would manufacture as many components as possible themselves to avoid dependence on outside suppliers. David decided to use the Chevrolet V-8 327 cu. inch 300hp engine and to make the body panels from glass fibre rather than aluminum. The radiator grilles would be aluminum castings rather than copper as on the prototype. Meanwhile, Steve Stevens was organizing chassis production in the family workshop in Mequon, Wisconsin. In the first year of production the chassis were transported by truck to Milwaukee, where the bodywork was fabricated and the Excaliburs were assembled. In January of 1966 the firm moved to the West Allis Industrial zone.

The Excalibur SI was initially available only in a two-seater Roadster version as designed by Brooks Stevens. But by mid 1966 the company had built 56 automobiles and introduced two more models: an elaborated Roadster with longer mudguards and running boards, and a convertible four-seater known as the Phaeton. Excalibur built exactly 90 cars during 1966 and production didn't reach 100 units in a year until 1969 - the same year that SI production was stopped.

By 1970, Excalibur were well established but had engendered the birth of numerous imitators who were helping satisfy the demands of a market that the limited Excalibur production alone could not. The Stevens brothers didn't want to increase their production rate for fear it would adversely affect the impeccable build quality that they wanted the public to enjoy. So they launched the Excalibur Series II, an all new car despite the fact that it perpetuated the S1 styling. As the old Studebaker Lark chassis was no longer built, David designed a new ladder chassis which had a 2 inch longer wheelbase. The suspension components were borrowed from the Corvette, as was the four-disc braking system. Tire size went up and the rubbers were mounted on wheels especially designed for the car. The 327 cu. inch (5400 cc) V-8 engine

It was the Excalibur Series III, introduced in 1975, that really caused the production figures to shoot up and the selling price also. This was fundamentally a Series II car that had been modified to conform with new homologation requirements and thus it retained the traditional style but featured more enveloping fenders/wings.

The chassis was a new one, although still a ladder-type affair, reinforced by a central 'X'-shaped member and featuring a removable bolt-on front section. Wheelbase had once more been stretched to 112 inches and the whole new chassis assembly housed an equally new engine...a Chevy Mk IV 454 cu. inch (7500 cc) big-block V8 which, despite its generous cylinder capacity, produced only a humble 215 hp SAE due to the stifling anti-pollution equipment fitted. The "Phaeton" version continued to sell in greater numbers than the "Roadster", as had indeed been the case since 1969, and even though production did remain restricted (even by a specialist manufacturer's standards) Excalibur broke a new sales record in 1977 with 237 units, followed by an encouraging increase of from 263 cars in 1978 to 367 in 1979. This impressive figure related to a production rate of more than one automobile per working day and Steve Stevens remembers this stage of production in these terms: *"We were building one car every six hours on average, and at such a rate we couldn't maintain the standards of build quality that we wanted to. We had to abandon this infernal production rate and come back to a more reasonable figure of 4.5 cars per week."*

1980 saw the arrival of the Excalibur Series IV, the car that brought about the first real change in appearance of the marque's products. It was also the first Excalibur to have glass side windows, a trunk/boot integrated within the bodywork and an electrically operated soft-top for Roadster as well as Phaeton models. The chassis, especially unchanged relative to the SIII's, was nonetheless (and yet again) stretched, this time by 13 inches; now the Roadster had become a four-seater with rear electrically operated rumble-seat. The styling had also

bowed down to the new 350 cu. inch (5700 cc) unit which, with its anti-pollution equipment still managed to develop a healthy 300 hp. The "Muncie" four-speed manual transmission became standard, with a Turbo-Hydramatic three-speed unit available as an option.

From a price of \$6000-\$7250 for the S1, the Excalibur SII went up to \$12,000 -\$13,000 but justified that extra cost with its supplementary equipment. This included air conditioning, variable ratio power steering, adjustable steering column, servoed brakes, "Positraction" differential, chromed wire wheels, stereo radio, two spare tires mounted in the front fenders, driving lamps, air horns and constant level rear shock absorbers.

Despite the added mass of this luxurious equipment, the Excalibur Series II was capable of really sporting performance: 0-60 mph in under 7 seconds and a top speed of 149 mph! Unfortunately the production figures showed a steep decline at first with only 37 cars in 1970 and none whatsoever in 1971. What happened next is quite inexplicable, for from a production of zero in 1971, the figure rose to 122 the next year. Today the Excalibur Series II remains the rarest of all Excaliburs, with a total production number of only 342 against the Series I's 359.

The reason; David and Steve decided to retool the chassis and install a new engine. The first few series II cars built in 1970 had a box type rear frame section with a Chevrolet Camero front frame stub bolted on. Then in 1972 the chassis was a new one, although still a ladder-type affair, reinforced by a central 'X'-shaped member and featuring a removable bolt-on front section. Wheelbase had once more been stretched to 112 inches and the whole new chassis assembly housed an equally new engine...a Chevy Mk IV 454 cu. inch (7500 cc) big-block V8 which, were being used in the corvettes at the time. They offered the power to go with the looks. This was used through 1974.

Starting in 1975 despite its generous cylinder capacity, the 454 was essentially now a truck engine and produced only a humble 215 hp SAE due to the stifling anti-pollution equipment fitted. Cruise control was now standard.

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evolved a little. It still undeniably evoked vintage Mercedes, but this time emulated the 500/540K series rather than the SS/SSK. The series IV was obliged (by even more rigorous anti-pollution regulators) to take on yet another engine, a GM 5.0-liter (305 cu. in.) equipped with automatic transmission and a locking torque converter. Once more the performance suffered, although the buying public seemed to be resigned to this and appeared more concerned with comfort and appointments than out-and-out dynamics.

David Stevens remarked, *"With the galloping inflation that was right at the start of the 80's, we had got to the point where we were building seven cars a week but not showing any profits for it. There are only two solutions available to such a problem, and the first is that you either make more automobiles and sell them for the same price, or you sell the same number of cars, but at a higher price. If you sell the car for a higher price then there has to be something apparent on the car to justify the increase to the public. Although your costs per unit mustn't go up. We took the latter path and upped the price and the spec.- the new Series IV equipment now comprised electric windows, central locking, cruise control, electrically operated front seats, Blaupunkt AM/FM stereo radio/cassettes and a removable hardtop.*

To celebrate its 20th birthday, Excalibur built a limited edition Series IV of which 50 examples were built. Painted white and grey, these cars have a chromed waistline trim strip which separates the two colors, a small plaque bearing the Stevens brother's signatures, and the Series number of the car. The interior is harmonized with the bodywork colors and these are the first Excalibur models to be trimmed with Connolly hide.

In order to respect the tradition of changing models every five years, Excalibur introduced its Series V in 1985, a yet more luxurious vehicle offering a choice of more powerful engines for the European market, the most potent one developing over 300hp SAE. They only managed to sell 78 cars in that year and 37 in 1986 (the year of our visit), although four Excalibur Royales were also completed as well as the new fixed-head coupe- the first (and last) fixed roof Excalibur. A sign of the times maybe...or just an ill-omen?

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