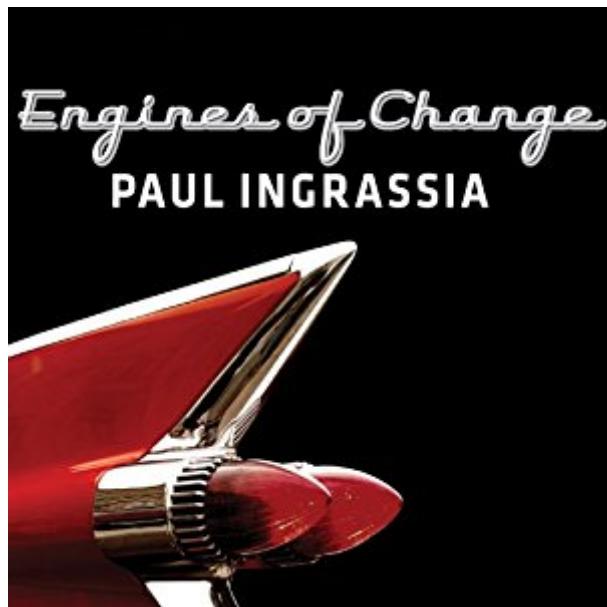


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Engines Of Change: A History Of The American Dream In Fifteen Cars



Synopsis

America was made manifest by its cars. From the assembly lines of Henry Ford to the open roads of Route 66 and Jack Kerouac, America's history is a vehicular history—an idea brought brilliantly to life in this major work by the acclaimed author of Crash Course: The American Automobile Industry's Road from Glory to Disaster. One of the nation's most eloquent and impassioned car nuts, Paul Ingrassia offers a wondrous epic in fifteen automobiles, including the VW Beetle, the Chevy Corvair, Robert McNamara and Lee Iacocca's Mustang, the Pontiac GTO, Honda's Accord, the BMW 3 Series, and the Jeep, among others. Through them, the author shows us much more than the car's ability to exhibit the particularly American tension between the lure of freedom and the obligations of utility; he takes us through the rise of American manufacturing, the suburbanization of the country, the birth of the Hippy and the Yuppy, the emancipation of women, and so much more, including the car's unintended consequences: trial lawyers, energy crises, and pollution. Narrative history of the highest caliber, Engines of Change is an entirely edifying new way to look at the American story.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This is the 3rd book by Paul Ingrassia after "The Comeback" and "The Crash Course" which dealt with politics, dynamics and history of automotive industry. "Engine of Change" is as usual very interesting and intriguing. Mr. Ingrassia is an automotive industry expert and shares his insight very candidly. What makes Engine of Change more interesting than the previous two works is the fact that it does not focus on the competitiveness or decline of a company or a group of

companies. Engine of Change is a narrative of fifteen most popular American cars or foreign cars adopted by Americans like VW microbus, Beatle and Hondas. The most interesting part of the book is the one-hundred year history of evolution of Ford pickup from model T in 1912 to F150 in 2012. Similarly, a significant part of book is devoted to appearance and disappearance of tailfins on American cars from late 50s to early 60s from Chrysler Belvedere to Cadillac El Dorado and everything in between. A reader will definitely enjoy additional information about the development of Dodge Charger, Pontiac GTO and above all DeLorean's DMC. Strangely a detailed account of Toyota as an Americanized automaker is missing in the book with the exception of a narrative about Toyota Prius. In short great story told in a very absorbing style.

Paul Ingrassia's latest book is engagingly written and highly entertaining. It moves along crisply and contains factual history, humor, and wit in equal measure. I found the chapters on VW, the Pontiac GTO, and the DeLorean to be the most enjoyable; the author's disdain for BMW and BMW drivers fairly drips off the page though. I just wish several errors hadn't crept in---proofreading by someone else knowledgeable in American automobile social history would have been beneficial. A couple of examples: the author wrote that the Mustang GT 390 in "Bullitt" driven by Steve McQueen (and others) was a Carroll Shelby car. It wasn't. He wrote that the '55 Chevy had a "toothy-grin grille." It didn't. Earlier Chevies did, and so did the Corvette in '55, but the standard '55 Chevy had a lovely eggcrate grille ripped off from Ferrari. "Bimmer" is not pronounced "beemer," either, as he condescendingly states. They are two different things entirely. Finally, Mr. Ingrassia tells us that the Delorean DMC-12 was a roadster with gull-wing doors. That's difficult to imagine, as roadsters don't have roofs to which gull-wing doors can be affixed. The Delorean was and remains a coupe, and roadsters have soft tops (or folding hard ones) so as to be able to be driven with the top down. The casual reader won't notice these things, and will be entertained by a good read. The more knowledgeable reader, though, might wish for a little more precision. Four stars for this one.

Why are books about automotive history so poor? Is it because their authors, so taken with the subject matter, go into mental overdrive, overlooking their own narrative lacunae? Or is it because there is no editor who has the background to vet what the author has written? Or is the author simply so captivated by what he thinks is his amusing style that he elevates form over content? I don't know the answers to these questions, but, whatever they are, they have all converged to make Engines of Change, a book that was well reviewed in the mutually back scratching media, a disappointing book. Paul Ingrassia deserves credit for his inspiration to write about how 15 different

cars influenced what he calls the American dream. But the book is so filled with outright error, with breathless mischaracterization, with irritating stylistic furbelows (all along the line of "Wow, am I funny!"), as to seriously reduce its merit. Shall I give you a few examples of slop? In very early pages we're warned about the author's carelessness when we come across "Austin-Healey" misspelled as "Austin-Healy." Minor? I think not in a book of this sort. If you can't get the car names right, what have you got? Bookending this egregious error, Ingrassia's acknowledgments thank "Csaba Cera," better, and correctly known in the actual world of his journalistic eminence as "Csaba Csere." Embarrassing? You bet. In between these startling miscues there is a continuous drone of misstatement and outright error. For example: the photograph of what purports to be Dodge's display at the 1957 Detroit Auto Show actually pictures 1955 Dodges. On page 116 Ingrassia chronicles Ed Cole's 1952 seconding to Chevrolet, to fix its manifold (OK, pun intended) problems. But he implies that one of Cole's first tasks was to redesign an existing Chevy V8 engine, whereas, in fact, Chevy did not have (its very ancient history excepted) a V8 available for its cars until 1955. Let me be clear: indeed the new V8 may have been redesigned under Cole's leadership before it was ultimately introduced in 1955. But an impressionable reader could reasonably conclude from Ingrassia's telling that Chevrolet already had a V8 in the model years between 1952 and 1955. This, of course, was not so, and I'm sure Mr. Ingrassia knows it was not so. But his writing is so fuzzy, so imprecise, so unimproved by a rigorous reading before publication, that he sows error by failure to be clear. Moreover, he says that the '55 Chevy, whose grille has often been likened to one of a contemporary Ferrari, i.e. simple mesh, had "a toothy front grille." It did not. Again, these may seem like small points, but they are unacceptable because, in fact, they distort the very history that the author is attempting to recount. There is more. Read about the 1979 government bailout of Chrysler and be completely mystified. Ingrassia presents it as a fait accompli, but never tells us how it, over a great deal of opposition, came about. And, sadly, there's more beyond what I've written here. But you get the picture. Mr. Ingrassia's writing ranges from serviceable to cutesy to pedestrian. All too often he falls for attaching adjectives like "anemic" to engines, or, when he needs another, he'll attach "tiny" and apply it to a 4-cylinder engine that in fact, at 2.2 liters, is only 0.3 liters from the size of the largest 4-cylinder engine yet practicable. The problem once again is imprecision: "tiny" in relation to what? As someone who has been deeply interested if not completely obsessed with cars from a time before I could read, now more than 65 years, I wish I could give potential readers better news. There is a lack of diligence that infects *Engines of Change*. It could have been a winner.

I came across this book as I was reading an excerpt of it in *Newsweek* magazine on my subway

ride home from work. I was honestly surprised to have enjoyed reading about cars because I don't even have a license. And my husband (we are newly weds) bought a muscle car with money that we received as presents from our wedding (I did agree to this in advance, he's a great negotiator haha). We live in NYC. As soon as I got home I purchased the book on my Kindle Fire and started reading it that night. Due to this book, I am now able to understand why so many people love cars so much, and their inter-connection to history and modern society. I work in HR so there were a few moments that made me smile when reading about the managerial practices in some of the factories. Lastly, I really appreciated the author's writing style: crisp, fast paced, and laced with quality humor here and there.

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