



St Mary's Rod & Classic Newsletter

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The Incomparable Henry J:

The **Henry J** was an American automobile built by the Kaiser-Frazer Corporation and named after its chairman, Henry J. Kaiser. Production of six-cylinder models began in July 1950, and four-cylinder production started shortly after Labor Day, 1950. Official public introduction was September 28, 1950. The car was marketed through 1954.



1951 Kaiser Henry J Front view & Rear view Custom Henry J (custom paint, with aftermarket wheels and mirrors)

Wheel Base 100 inches

Length 17.5 inches

Width 70 inches

Weight 2341 lb.

The Henry J was the idea of Henry J. Kaiser, who sought to increase sales of his Kaiser automotive line by adding a car that could be built inexpensively and thus affordable for the average American in the same vein thatHenry Ford produced the Model T. The goal was to attract "less affluent buyers who could only afford a used car and the attempt became a pioneering American compact car.

To finance the project, the Kaiser-Frazer Corporation received a federal government loan in 1949. This financing specified various particulars of the vehicle. Kaiser-Frazer would commit to design a vehicle that base formretailed (including federal tax and retail delivery preparation charge) for no more than \$1,300.00 (US\$12,786 in 2016 dollars). It was to seat at least five adults, be capable of going at least 50 miles per hour (80 km/h) for sustained periods of time, and available for retail sale no later than September 30, 1950.

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To accomplish this, the Henry J was designed to carry the fewest possible components, and built from the fewest number of parts. To save body stamping costs, early Henry Js did not have rear trunk lids; owners had to access the trunk by folding down the rear seat. Another cost-saving measure was to offer the car only as a two-door sedan with fixed rear windows. Also lacking in the basic version were glove compartment, armrests, passenger-side inside sun visor and flow-through ventilation.

Power for the Henry J was delivered by a 134.2 cu in (2.2 L) four-cylinder 68 hp (51 kW; 69 PS) engine.^[2] Later models were available with a 161 cu in (2.6 L) L-head six-cylinder engine producing 80 hp (60 kW; 81 PS) The engines were supplied by Willys-Overland; the four-cylinder engine was the same engine used in the CJ-3A series Jeeps, with only slight modifications to component parts; the block and internal components were interchangeable with the CJ-3A engine. The Henry J production provided a substantial revenue source for Willys-Overland. This standard engine could achieve up to 35 mpg_{us} (6.7 L/100 km; 42 mpg_{imp}) when driven conservatively.¹

Before the Henry J was released to the market, the first production models were taken to Arkansas and driven over roads that experts computed that each 100 miles (161 km) of the roughest roads would equal 5,000 miles (8,047 km) of normal driving.

While the Henry J was priced low, a Chevrolet 150 model could be bought for a few dollars more, and Chevy included operating rear windows and a trunk lid. The standard Chevrolet, Ford, Plymouth, and other low priced competitors were also larger cars, offering more interior room. Kaiser-Frazer started offering the deck lid as part of an "Accessory Group" (preferred equipment group) during the 1951 model year, as well as a variety of other dress-up items. However, advertising for the Henry J still focused on operating costs at a time when the rationing of gasoline by the War Production Board ended and fuel sold for about 27 cents per gallon. The car could achieve 25 mpg_{us} (9.4 L/100 km; 30 mpg_{imp}) and in 1953, a Henry J won the Mobil Economy Run.

The Henry J proved to be a sales disappointment for Kaiser. Leftover 1951 models were modified with an outside Continental Tire and an upgraded interior, to be marketed as the 1952 Henry J "Vagabond" versions Available in either four- or six-cylinder engines, a total of 7,017 were sold.

In 1952, Kaiser began selling rebadged Henry Js through Sears, under the nameplate of Allstate. Allstates were nearly identical to Henry Js but they carried a unique grille, hood ornament, hubcaps, identification badges and interior trim, and Allstate-brand tires and batteries. After two years of disappointing sales, Sears dropped the car.

Henry J was also available in Japan from 1951 to 1954, through a licensing deal with East Japan Heavy-Industries, part of the Mitsubishi group.

In 1952, the Henry J Corsair (four-cylinder) and Corsair Deluxe (six-cylinder) models were introduced featuringimproved styling and workmanship, as well as higher prices. The front end had a full-width grille while the tail lamps were incorporated into the rear fender fins..

The 1953 Henry J Corsair had few styling changes and featured the smaller L-head four-cylinder engine. Kaiser's advertising promoted it as "the easiest car on the road to drive, handle, park, service, run, maintain, and of course the easiest to pay for.

....For 1954, the four-cylinder Corsair price was reduced to \$1,286 with the six-cylinder Corsair Deluxe listed for \$1,437, or \$124 lower than the previous year. New safety features included padded dashboard and the windshield was mounted so it would pop-out on impact, as well as a "Penny-Minder" carburetor that was claimed to achieve 30 mpg_{us} (7.8 L/100 km; 36 mpg_{imp}).

Sales declined each year the car was marketed. In 1950 it had 1.35% of the market while in 1954 it achieved only 0.02%. While the Henry J was inexpensive for consumers, its manufacturing and labor costs were high. Henry J. Kaiser had hoped to make a profit through volume; however, the cars' slow sales negated his plan. The automobile market was competitive and challenging the U.S. "Big Three" — General Motors, Ford, and Chrysler proved difficult as price wars began that had a devastating impact on small domestic automakers.¹

Concurrently, sales of Nash's compact Rambler were successful, in part because Nash introduced it in 1950 as a high-value convertible-only model and marketed the small car with numerous standard features to avoid consumers seeing it as inferior or substandard. By 1953, it was reviewed in *Kiplinger's Personal Finance* as "well-equipped and stylish, the little Rambler is economical and easy to drive" in either convertible, station wagon, or hardtop (no "B-pillar") body styles. On the other hand, the Henry J was a plainly trimmed two-door sedan model; consumers understood the difference between "inexpensive" and "cheap" and they perceived the Henry J in a negative fashion. By September 1953, the Henry J was described in a small car comparison by *Kiplinger's Personal Finance* as "in trouble ... the closest thing to a "basic transportation" car on the road today, and as such, does not appeal to today's car buyers ... In trade-in value, it ranks among the lowest."¹

End of the car

Kaiser's effort to boost sales in the low-priced market segment by adding a small car to its product offer came at a time when consumers were demanding big cars. With the acquisition of Willys-Overland's vehicle operations in early 1953 by the Kaiser Manufacturing Company division of Kaiser-Frazer (the division changed its name at that time to Willys Motors, Incorporated), management decided to discontinue the car at the end of the 1953 model year. Kaiser also leased the Willow Run factory to General Motors (a fire had destroyed its automatic transmission plant in Livonia) and Kaiser's vehicle assembly was consolidated at Jeep's Toledo Complex. However, production of the Henry J was not moved from Michigan to the Ohio factory. The Willys Aero was a similar vehicle that continued to be made in Toledo. Efforts to sell off remaining vehicles resulted in an abbreviated run of Henry J automobiles as 1954 models that used up leftover or incomplete 1953 cars. They can be distinguished from the 1953 version only by their "54" prefix in the serial number.

Henry J Cont'd from pg 3

Billy Higgs Henry J Restoration



The body shell freshly painted off the trailer

On chassis with fully electronic 350 cubic inch Chevy Small Block



Updates to follow.....

Up coming events;

Sunday April 10th The Southern Nights present The 20th Annual "Coming Out Show" 8:30 AM 3:00 PM 29946 Three Notch Road Charlotte H

Saturday April 23rd Sping Heat Car,Truck & Bike Show 9:00 AM – 3:00 PM 11765 St. Linus Drive Waldorf, Md.

Sunday April 24th The St. Mary's Rod & Classic 31st Annual "Spring Fling Car Truck Show" On the Square in Leonardtown MD 8:00 AM- 4:00 PM

UpComing Events Cont'd fromPg4

Saturday April 30th "The Asphalt Angels " Spring Car, Truck, & Bike Show" 9:00 AM-3:00 PM
16401 Heritage Boulevard Bowie MD.

Sunday May 1st "The East Coast Drifters Car & Truck Show 9:00AM-3:00 PM" 27636
Mechanicsville Road (at the Moose Lodge) Mechanicsville MD.

"Wheels n' Spokes"

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