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Book Reviews

Mercer Magic: Roebings, Kusers, The Mercer Automobile Company and America's First Sports Car

by Clifford W. Zink

Roebling Museum (Sep. 2015)

roeblingmuseum.org/ 609-499-7200

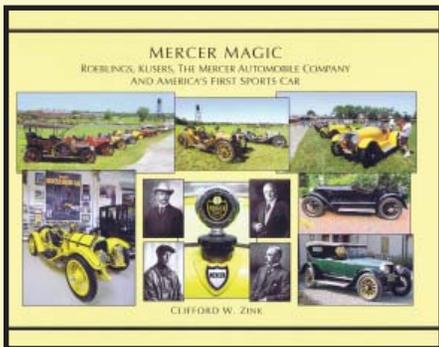
200 pages, 12" x 9" hardcover

265 b/w and 60 color images

Price: \$60.00

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ISBN-13: 978-0692542354



The sports car has traditionally been defined as a car suitable for personal transportation over public roads but that as delivered by the maker can enter competitive events and expect to be successful. Only a small number of makes and models have met this challenging criterion. France had its Bugatti and Italy its Alfa-Romeo, but in America perhaps only the Mercer Type 35 Raceabout is qualified for membership in such an elite group. Manufactured from 1911 through 1914 it dominated the light car class, with displacement limited to 300 cubic inches, and on occasion gained the winner's circle over other cars of up to twice its capacity. It was smaller and lighter than its competitors—as we have learned to expect in a sports car—at a time when most makers thought piling on the cubes was the surest road to success, but a cursory glance at its specifications gives little hint of its potential. Its racing successes and moderate price provided the basis for a sustainable enterprise.

This extraordinary book, claimed to be the first devoted to the full history of

the Mercer and its creators, gives as much background as can be found a hundred years after the last of these champions came to the road. We might have wished for more, but a bibliography with 150 entries, copies of factory literature, press releases, competition reports, financial statements and interviews with owners and restorers indicate that every corner has been searched. It is doubtful we will ever learn more.

Finley Robertson Porter, a young self-taught engineer, was responsible for Mercer's design. Its sophisticated if conventional chassis and power train featured precision tolerance machining, advanced metallurgy, engine power at high rpm and a suspension that kept the wheels in contact with the unpaved tracks of the time, providing a margin of speed over its competitors. Its brief reign in the winner's circle was brought to an end by the arrival in the final prewar years of

overhead camshaft Peugeots and Mercedes and later by the Duesenbergs and Millers they influenced. All were specialized racing machines. Mercer soldiered on for another decade but the concept of the dual-purpose sports car was no longer feasible. There seems to be some question as to how much daily attention was given to the firm by the members of the Kuser and Roebing families. They had other and more substantial business interests and sold the company in 1919. We give this book our highest level of recognition. If you have an interest in the outstanding examples of American automotive achievement, and who among does not, you will want to add it to your library. And if Mercer Magic works its spell, perhaps we will see you at the Mercer Automobile Reunion at the Roebling Museum, Roebing, New Jersey, July 22-23, 2016.

—Arthur W. Jones

James Garner's Motoring Life: Grand Prix the Movie, Baja, The Rockford Files and More

by Matt Stone

Car Tech, Inc. (Sep. 2014)

cartechbooks.com/ 800-551-4754

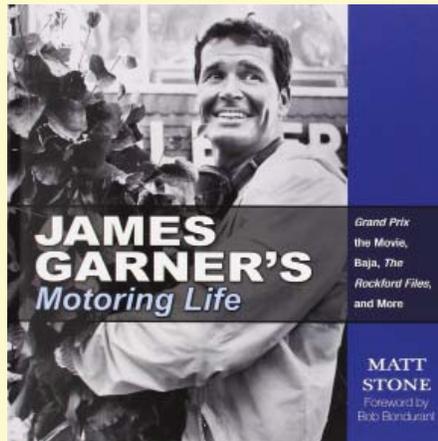
160 pages, 9" x 9" hardcover

88 b/w and 120 color images, indexed

Price: \$34.95

ISBN-10: 161325136X

ISBN-13: 978-1613251362



Your commentator grew up watching *Maverick* on television with her dad. We enjoyed every episode but somehow those in which brother Bret was featured were best. Bret was actor Jim Garner's character and thus, in concert with the script writers, his creation. So you could say that I've been "a fan" since practically the beginning.

Years later, discovering Garner was also a "car guy" was like that proverbial cake

frosting. Among James Garner's acting career credits—to name but a few; on the "small screen" *The Rockford Files* and movies *The Americanization of Emily*, *Victor Victoria*, *Murphy's Romance*, *The Great Escape* and, of course, *Grand Prix*. Car-guy Garner did his own stunt driving in both *Rockford Files* and *Grand Prix* and even became a professional racing team owner, establishing and running American International Racing team (AIR) from July 1967 to the last month of 1969.

Author Matt Stone chose to focus on Garner's involvement with cars in his new book *James Garner's Motoring Life*. But as your commentator was reading Stone's book, as well as the other that Stone commended to readers in his introduction with these words: "Every James Garner fan needs a copy of this *New York Times* Best Seller List book, James Garner's autobiography *The Garner Files*" (which was on the shelves of my local public library) some of life's strange ironies took place; namely the passing of two others prominent in the lore and legends surrounding Corvette, and each with a direct relationship to Garner too—car builder and racer extraordinaire Dick Guldstrand, who had been part of AIR, and Martin Milner, a fellow actor most remembered for *Route 66* and *Adam 12*.

Overall Stone's presentation and portrayal of Garner's *Motoring Life* is "spot on." But two "oopses" completely surprised me (true confession) as I've been acquainted with the author since the earliest days of his