



PHOTO: GERALD SCOTT

Although the TPLEX museum is closed for the winter, the facility will nonetheless be hosting a couple of events like a New Year's Eve wedding reception, according to Patricia Linklater, above.

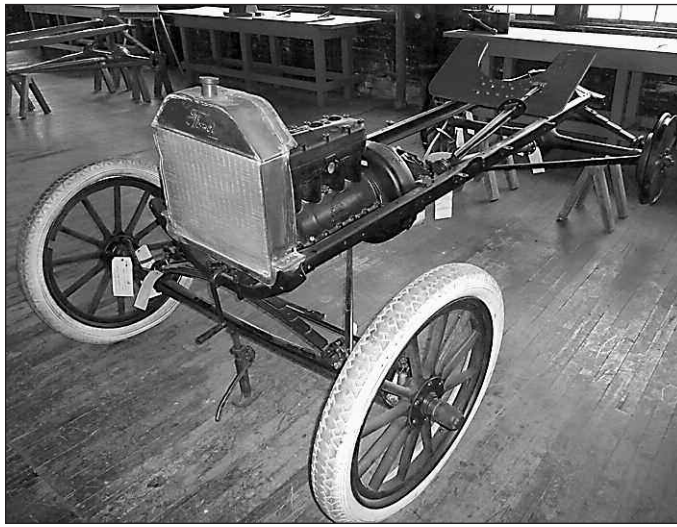


PHOTO: GERALD SCOTT

A vintage Ford Model T chassis on display at the Ford Piquette Plant in Detroit. The former auto plant, home to the Model T, is now a nonprofit museum called TPLEX. Organizers will be shutting the doors for the winter and it will reopen again in April.

Nonprofit TPLEX Museum Closes, Will Reopen in April

By Gerald Scott
Staff Reporter

The nonprofit Ford Piquette Plant – dubbed TPLEX – is doing just fine in terms of growing its collections and public awareness alike.

This is notable because TPLEX, at the corner of Piquette and Beaubien in Detroit, held its last official public tour for the year on Sunday, Nov. 21, and is now effectively buttoning up for the winter.

The facility doesn't have a legacy heating system, so organizers are mindful about how late in the year they're able to host paying visitors.

Patricia Linklater, director - Guest Services at the museum, said that the facility would now be closed until next April – with a couple of notable exceptions.

"We have a wedding reception New Year's Eve – that will be our fourth or fifth wedding this year. We're also doing a bridal show, some event planners contacted us and said, 'We'd like to do an interesting come back-to-Detroit event, a bridal show, Feb. 26.' They'll have VIP bridal attire for the whole family," Linklater said.

Otherwise, the TPLEX continues to grow its internal collections related to the original Model T Ford vehicles built at

the historic plant.

Mike Skinner of the TPLEX organization offered a recent tour of the facility, which included some Detroit history about how it came into being back in 1903 in the first place.

"Ford Motor Co. was Henry Ford's third company. He left the Edison Illuminating Company on Aug. 15 of 1899 to help start the Detroit Automobile Co. and failed within about six months. The second company that he was then the general manager of . . . the Henry Ford Co. The (executives) caught him designing a race car instead of a production car, fired him, brought a new general manager in, Henry Leland, and renamed it after the founder of Detroit, Antoine de la Mothe Cadillac, of course," Skinner said.

"Then Henry Ford met the largest coal dealer in the state of Michigan, Alexander Malcomson. He and Malcomson started a company called Ford and Malcomson in August of 1902 and it evolved into the Ford Motor Co., basically, by June 16 of 1903."

That's the larger history that leads to the Ford Piquette plant and its ongoing significance to Motor City automotive history.

Although Ford had rented an earlier facility on Mack

Ave. in Detroit, the Piquette plant was the first one purpose-built by the fledgling Ford Motor Co. to house its automotive operations early in the 20th century.

Added Skinner, "It went from Beaubien to Brush, back to the Michigan Central Railroad tracks to Piquette. They built the plant here. It's 402 feet long, 56 feet wide, 3 stories high, about 67,000 square feet.

"(There is now a 'Ford Piquette Plant' sign) in front. The front of the building is now completely restored through a grant from the Michigan Department of Transportation along with matching funds from us. This was finished in time for the Centennial of the Model T, in the fall of 2008."

Curiously, the original facility was large enough to house several support buildings as well as a small test track in what is now the TPLEX parking lot. The only remaining entity is the main building, however.

The Michigan Historical Site marker in front of the Piquette plant describes the facility's significance as follows: "Completed in 1904, the Piquette Avenue Plant was the first factory built by the Ford Motor Co.," it reads.

"The building was designed by the Detroit firm of Field,

Hinchman and Smith. (Ford car) models B, C, F, K, N, R, S and T were produced here between 1904 and 1910, when Ford became the world's largest producer of automobiles . . . Seeking more efficiency, Ford experimented with aspects of the moving assembly line at Piquette.

"New technology and demand for the Model T made the plant inadequate. In 1910, production moved to the much larger plant in Highland Park, where the moving assembly line was implemented.

"The Studebaker Corp. purchased the Piquette Avenue Plant in 1911."

There's no underestimating the Piquette plant's historic significance, most transportation historians agree. It's important to metro Detroit's history because the Milwaukee Junction was the first auto-industrial center of Detroit, while it's also important nationally as the home to the concept and original execution of the Model T – the car that put the world on wheels.

The Model T Automotive Heritage Complex, Inc., is now the nonprofit entity that oversees the growing museum and its car and related memorabilia collection. Visit the museum's Web site at www.tplex.org for more details.

For Faurecia, 'Clean Is A Reality' at L.A. Auto Show

For many years, the auto industry has pursued the goal of Clean, and now global supplier Faurecia is proclaiming that "Clean is a Reality" with the production-ready products it had on display at the 2010 LA Auto Show press days, held Nov. 17-18.

Faurecia innovations are focused sharply on helping vehicles become cleaner by making them lighter and therefore more fuel efficient, the supplier says.

This year, Faurecia – the world's sixth-largest auto supplier – brings lightweight engineering to new areas inside, outside and under the car and incorporates even more environmentally sustainable materials and natural fibers within their customer vehicles.

Faurecia's exhibit at the Los Angeles Convention Center, is expected to fuel interest in 20 new or next-generation products – along with several groundbreaking new concepts.

Most of the new products in Faurecia's exhibit involve innovations that can provide weight savings as high as 20 to 40 percent, and are expected to be integrated into American, European and Asian vehicles between 2011 and 2014.

The latest developments and new concepts that Faurecia will display include:

- SmartFit – an application that uses a smartphone to automatically adjust vehicle seats to each individual for the perfect seating experience.

SmartFit reduces the complexity of seat controls to optimize comfort and safety, interfacing via Bluetooth with traditional seat electronics. SmartFit takes advantage of a device that drivers already bring into their vehicles every day.

- A new generation of super-thin seatbacks and cushions that use new materials to replace traditional steel

and foam components with lighter and more easily recyclable materials.

- Exhaust-heat recovery technology for hybrid and plug-in electric vehicles that extracts heat quickly from the internal-combustion exhaust gases to reduce the amount of time that engines must run to sufficiently heat the cabin, improving fuel economy and lowering emissions.

- A thermoelectric generator that converts heat from exhaust gases to electricity to power vehicle systems, reducing demands on the alternator and improving fuel economy.

- Low-weight covering premium instrument panel skin, a cut-and-sew solution that offers the soft-touch feel of polyurethane covering material yet is much lighter in weight and more easily recycled than the traditional fabric.

"Once, some observers questioned whether the auto industry could be both successful and Clean. Now we know that it can be successful because it is Clean," said Faurecia North America President Michael Heneka.

"In advancing this success, Faurecia's Clean vision is to continue to develop new approaches, materials and devices, from the front end to the tailgate, from the front seat to the tailpipe, to make vehicles lighter, cleaner, safer and roomier."

Various new vehicle systems and approaches will be exhibited by each of Faurecia's four world-class business groups: Automotive Seating, Emissions Control Technologies, Interior Systems and Automotive Exteriors. Together, Faurecia said, these groups are helping to lay the groundwork for the future course of a global auto industry that will thrive with environmentally responsible and economical vehicles."

1939 Dodge Coupe Runs Well in 'Peking-to-Paris'

YAKIMA, Wash. (AP) – Four cars in the Peking to Paris Motor Challenge road rally carried at least one Yakima Valley resident; only one of them made it the whole 8,923 miles.

That car, a 1939 Dodge Business Coupe, was driven by Bill Shields with Danny Day navigating.

Together they endured an arduous 37-day trip over rough terrain – not just the mountains and desert, but uncertain socio-political situations as well – that included arguments, equipment breakdowns and, ultimately, redemption in the form of a finish line.

"We pulled in and Bill and I looked at each other and shook hands and said, 'Nice trip,'" Day said this week, recalling the trip that lasted from Sept. 10 until Oct. 16.

The two buddies, who have ridden motorcycles together for 20 years, never have been the type for commercial cruise vacations or lying on a beach somewhere.

So when Day, owner of Sunfair Marketing, and Shields, the semi-retired owner of Shields Bag and Printing, heard about the rally, a recreation of the famed 1907 Peking to Paris expedition, it sounded kind of interesting. It was only the third time the 1907 expedition had been recreated; the first was in 1997, and it was done again in 2007.

They figured they could use the trip as a fundraiser for the Pegasus Project, a local charity that provides therapeutic equestrian activities to people with special needs.

"Danny heard about (the rally) somewhere," Shields recalled. "And he happened to mention it to me. I said, 'I'm in.' And a couple of days later I bought a car."

Three cars, actually, all 1939 Dodges. Shields needed all three so he could pick and choose the best parts to essentially rebuild a new-seeming single car.

Aside from a few necessary fixes along the way, the most serious of which were a blown head gasket and a busted steering arm, the car

held up remarkably well, given the rough conditions.

The other Yakima Valley entrants were not so fortunate. Rand Elliot and Leslie Roy had so much trouble with their 1935 Ford that they ended up ditching it in Mongolia and picking up a Subaru in Almaty, Kazakhstan.

Doug MacKinnon and his fiancée, Anastasia Karavaeva, finished the rally in their 1939 Chevrolet Speedster but skipped large chunks of it while dealing with car trouble. Jim Kabrich of Yakima and his partner, Vilnis Husko of Latvia, sold their 1939 Dodge Deluxe in Mongolia and left the race.

Day and Shields were not only fortunate, though, they were dedicated to finishing. They slept in tents in wintry Russia, drove through motorcyclists surrounding their car in Iran and repaired a blown head gasket in Uzbekistan.

"It was one of those days where everything was going perfect," Day said. "We were going down a paved road, just outside a village, and – boom – it just died."

The rally organizers pulled them by truck to the Turkmenistan border, some 50 miles away, and with the help of rally mechanics, Day and Shields fixed the car while waiting in line to cross. Then they just kept going.

"Both of us have been around the world enough times to know if you're going to have fun, you've got to adapt to the way things are," Shields said.

That's how Day saw it, too. The whole point, he said, was to make it to the finish.

"It wasn't going to be a Carnival Cruise," he said. "You had to endure. You didn't want to get left behind."

Endure they did, raising about \$62,000 in donations for the Pegasus Project along the way. There were times when they could have stopped or could have skipped the more rigorous mountain time trials. But that's not how Day and Shields operate.

"We didn't come here for a haircut," Day remembered saying. "We came here to do a rally."

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