



There's quite a story behind John Groendyke's 1916 Pierce Arrow.



DRAGWAY RETROSPECT

by Dewey Ketner

'16 Pierce Arrow Offered 825 Cu. In.; Largest Engine Ever Factory-Built

How big is too big? Ask a Texan and their reply might be, there is no such thing.

But – how about 825 cubic inches? Looking at and walking around a huge, 3-ton, 7-passenger touring car of Pierce Arrow, the 1916 Model 66-7A, “big” is as large as you want it to be.

If you've got the wallet, someone will build your heart's desire, automotively speaking, to make you feel proud and show off your wealth a bit.

With a custom body made from 1/8 cast aluminum paneling, this rolling boxcar is of supreme quality, workmanship and luxury accessories – it was and is an eye-catcher.

The very first Pierce Arrow of 1903, constructed to endure harsh treatment and built for lovers of unusual comfort, sure caught the public's attention at the turn of the century.

By winning the 1905 Glidden Trophy, an endurance race to Britton Woods, N.J., from New York City, Percy Pierce claimed the title for the most reliable car to date by beating out the rest of the 33 cars entered in that race.

In that era, people with \$8,000 to \$10,000 in spare cash bought this vehicle, giving notice of both their car purchase ability and their desire for comfort.

Also, a Pierce car was used in the 1921 Presidential Inauguration, where it carried Presidents Woodrow Wilson and Warren G. Harding to the political arena in Washington, D.C., for the swear-in process.

In its day, Pierce was one of the three “P's” of motordom, including the Peerless and the Packard, all very expensive and comfortable rides for the discriminating members of High Society.

The 1933 Pierce radically streamlines its look, but suddenly it's 1940 and in spite of being well-received by the motoring press, with a post-Depression price of \$10,000, only five were sold.

In 1936, a new V-12-powered sedan was introduced, considered to be the safest and most luxurious sedan of its time.

Note that the REO Grand Southern railroad converted five Pierce Arrows into motorized rail cars of sorts – bus/trucks on rail wheels, soon to be nicknamed the “Galloping Goose” based on their waddling motion and honking horn. It's said they all survive somewhere, too.

Next, Pierce-Arrow declared insolvency and closed its doors in 1938. The remaining property and 40 cars made in October of 1938 were sold on a Friday the 13th of that month, an ominous note if there ever was one.

The factory equipment used to make the Pierce Arrow V-12 was bought by Seagrave Fire Apparatus, which then used the same equipment to make engines for

firetrucks.

Fast forward to 2006, when a classic car enthusiast from Switzerland bought the rights to the Pierce Arrow brand, which was then applied to a 10L, 24-cylinder car designed by Luigi Colani. Read: Pierce Arrow, the Car.

All of this becomes relevant because I was able to interview the owner of the aforementioned 1916 Pierce Arrow, John Groendyke, with contact being made at the 2012 Concours d'Elegance car show in Plymouth earlier this year.

There was excitement in the air, 300-plus amazing vehicles, thousands of smiling, happy viewers, gracious car owners willing to answer one's questions, shade to sit in to think about all of this beautiful art on wheels, thinking about the thousands of hours spent teasing all of these parts into the great display of auto happiness at hand.

I sat in the shade pouring cold water over my arms – hot summer day – listening to the emcee announcing the vehicles lining up and parading past the viewing stand, announcing the class and category winners.

I had shot several photographs of the 1916 Pierce beforehand, but when he announced that this car had the largest engine ever installed in a U.S.-manufactured car at the factory, I came alive, my adrenaline pumped me to my feet and around the viewing stand, where my happy eyes watched this tremendous example of luxury class vehicle parade from north to south, the proud owner gliding his wheeled “child” slowly, all parts shining to the 9s.

He exhibited the 1916 Pierce Arrow with the pride of a new father. As we go to press, the owner of this Jazz Age/1916 Pierce Arrow – John Groendyke of Enid, Okla., who owns several Pierce Arrows and numerous other limited production classic-collectibles, including a Marmon V-16 Roadster – is currently participating in the prestigious Pebble Beach Concours in California.

In light of all of this, let's put the first run of the famous Pierce Arrow cars, their original ultra-creative engineers, and the talented factory workers, all to rest in peace in the historic sense. They can rest easy knowing they made the leading car of the early 20th century.

We thank them for all the time and effort in producing a beautiful and powerful vehicle, one that those of us around today can still drive and admire and enjoy.

And to you who are collecting, rebuilding and showcasing the existing Pierce Arrows first built in the Golden Era of auto experimentation, we thank you for keeping the dream alive for people now to enjoy and for future generations to come.

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