

The Absolute Final Factory-Produced Model-A Duesenberg

by Dr. John Baeke, Auburn Cord Duesenberg historian

The boutique motorcar companies of Fred & Augie Duesenberg and Enzo Ferrari (America and Italy respectively) enjoyed great success and had much in common. Both excelled in the emerging technologies of overhead cams and forced induction (supercharging & turbocharging). While their performance creds appealed to the sportsmen, their designer custom coachwork attracted those desiring only the latest haute couture.



#3062 1926 Duesenberg Model A Touring

On the racetrack, both auto makers dominated the competition. One thing which separated these two marques from all other manufacturers was the old mantra, "Win on Sunday, Sell on Monday" meaning We race to sell... simply did NOT apply. At Duesenberg and Ferrari, it was the exact opposite. They were not bashful in admitting they manufactured passenger cars purely to support their racing programs. While at Ford and the others, they only raced to support their auto manufacturing.

At Duesenberg dealerships, customers knew the very same (albeit detuned) overhead cam 8-cylinder engines the company ran at Indy were powering their Model-A passenger cars. At Ferrari, the same 12-cylinder 250GT power plant they won at Le Mans, powered their touring cars.

For Duesenberg, all of this took a dramatic change in 1926, when magnate E. L. Cord added Duesenberg Motor Cars to his portfolio. Cord's vision was to separate Duesenberg racing from the passenger car operation. Things changed overnight with cessation of production of the racy Model-A and development of what would become the mighty (just not racy) Model-J. As sophisticated as the Model-J motor was, its ghastly weight left no pretensions of future racetrack success.

Thus, the Model-A Duesenberg (produced from 1921-26) marked the end of an era when an average American (granted one with some wealth) could drive a truly race-bred passenger car.

Vehicle ID #3062 in the Shappy collection is truly special. According to the preeminent authority Fred Roe, first ACD Club Duesenberg Historian (ref. Duesenberg. The Pursuit of Perfection, F. Roe. Apdx-1, pg 277), it represents the absolute final factory-produced Model-A Duesenberg.

Appendix I

DUESENBERG SERIAL AND ENGINE NUMBERS, 1920-1937

<i>Year</i>	<i>Model</i>	<u><i>Serial Numbers</i></u>	<i>Engine Numbers</i>
1920-1925	Duesenberg Automobile and Motors Corp., Indianapolis, Ind. Serial number on plate on firewall. Engine number on cylinder block below No. 1 spark plug.		
1920-21	Prototypes	598 & 599	unknown
1922	Straight 8	600-748	1100-1148
1923		749-989	1149-1389
1924		990-1016	1390-1416

1925-1926	Duesenberg Motors Company, Indianapolis, Ind. Serial number on plate on firewall. A part of the production used Fedco safety numbering system. Engine number on cylinder block below No. 1 spark plug.		
1925		1017-1145	1417-1545
1926		1146-1202 D61A-D61Z D63A-D63-	1546-1602 1603-1649 est.
1926-7-8	'X'	D95A- D96A-	1950-

It is generally accepted that only 12 or 13 of these cars were built. Numbers on existing cars tend to bear this out. Production began before Duesenberg, Inc., was formed, but most were completed in 1927-28.

1926-1937	Duesenberg, Inc., Indianapolis, Indiana. Serial number on Model J and SJ cars stamped into aluminium firewall, engine side, high on left. Engine number stamped into left rear engine mounting leg.		
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1928-1937	J, SJ	2125-2614	J101-J588
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Extreme care must be exercised in identifying these cars as original. Many firewalls and engines have been exchanged, new firewalls have been manufactured, and numbers on firewalls and engine mountings have been re-stamped.

Serial numbering affirming this the final Model-A Duesenberg.

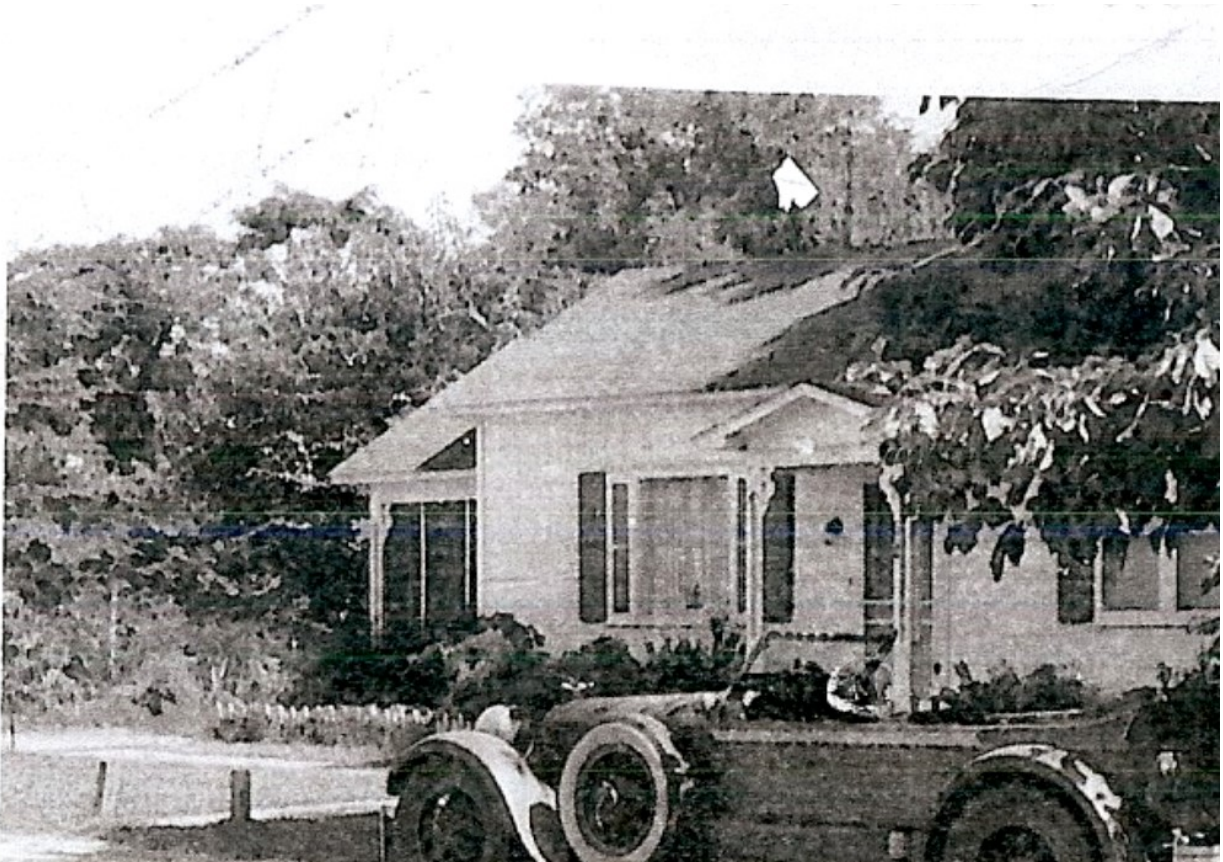


Original frame stamping serial number 1202.

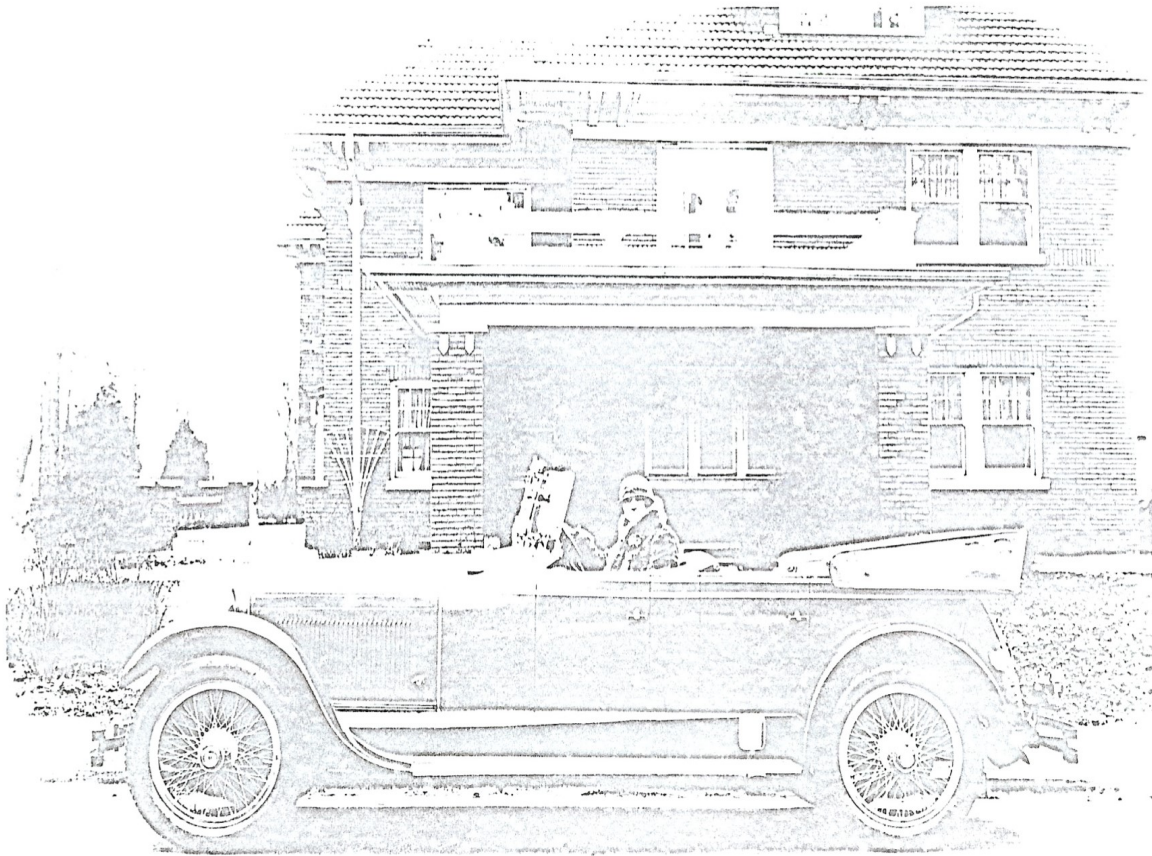
Car no. 1202/1594 was produced in 1926 at the Duesenberg factory in Indianapolis, Indiana. As was common for nearly all upper-crust motorcars of the 1920s, its body was designed and built by one of the custom coachbuilders of the day. In those days, Duesenberg was especially fond of Millspaugh & Irish, Rubay, Fleetwood, Locke, and Springfield. Though time has concealed this coachbuilder's identity, certainly 1202 has the common hallmarks of the others.

As the taste of the Roaring '20s elite became more sophisticated, coachbuilders began trimming and lowering the formerly boxy sedan and phaeton bodies and then dressed them up in colorful two-tones. This trend certainly is apparent with 1202 where its Touring (some might call it a Phaeton) body has been designed with a lower more racy profile. This snazzy design was popular with many, not the least of which was Mrs. Fred Duesenberg.

Poor copy from Fred Roe collection. Mrs. Fred Duesenberg in front of Indianapolis home.
Same or similar car to 1202.



In a photo dated 1926 and provided by Historian Roe, Mrs. Duesenberg (posing in front of her home) can be seen behind the wheel of either this very car (quite likely) or an identical car. More photographic research should confirm whether 1202 is her car. The sleek profile of 1202 was further accentuated by two tones of green with a yellow belt and the stylist's clever use of double front and rear bumpers.



Poor copy from Fred Roe collection. Mrs. Fred Duesenberg in front of Indianapolis home.
Same or similar car to 1202.

As of 2023, the ownership provenance of Duesenberg 1202 has been documented back 73+ years. In 1950 Robert H. Kines, Jr. (Milledgeville, GA) purchased the Duesenberg. In 1954, he sold it to Floyd W. McCall (Charlotte, NC) in running condition for \$25. Circa 1980, it was acquired by vintage car collector Royce Kershaw, Sr. (Montgomery, AL) and later inherited by his son Royce, Jr. (Montgomery, AL). In 2021, Duesenberg aficionado, Richard Shappy (Providence, RI) obtained the car and immediately began a meticulous preservation class restoration. She still is clothed in her original paint.



Circa 1940s or 1950s. The last Model-A Duesenberg serial number 1202.

The car has remained completely original and numbers matching; retaining its original chassis (s.n. 1202), motor (s.n. 1594), transmission, and body. This historic motorcar was 99% complete when acquired by Dick. His expert team has gone to great lengths to preserve this car's history, even locating vintage patinaed leather upholstery.

While today, 73 percent of all Model-J Duesenbergs survive, amazingly only about 6 percent of Model-A Duesenbergs survive. For this, the absolute final race-bred model-A Duesenberg ever built, with such unique and stunning coachwork to still exist is remarkable. Each of its prior owners appreciated the car for its beauty and originality while being seemingly unaware of its historical significance. Thank you Dick Shappy for rescuing and preserving this treasure.