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Simplex Featured at 2013 Pebble Beach Concours

July 9, 2013 by [Sports Car Digest](#) – [Leave a Comment](#)

The Brass Era Cars of Simplex will be among the featured classes at the 2013 Pebble Beach Concours d'Elegance, scheduled for Sunday, August 18th on the grounds of the Pebble Beach Golf Links in California.

The 900-mile journey to Southern California from Idaho was going as planned until the World War I Liberty dump truck met the winding, steep and frosty grade known as "The Grapevine"—the primary passage up and over the Tehachapi Mountains into the Los Angeles basin. There, the three-ton



1914 Simplex 50 HP Holbrook 7-Passenger Touring

behemoth came growling to a halt, and for a time it appeared the truck and its precious cargo, a 1914 Simplex 50 HP Holbrook-bodied Toy Tonneau Tourabout, were stranded only 40 miles short of their goal.

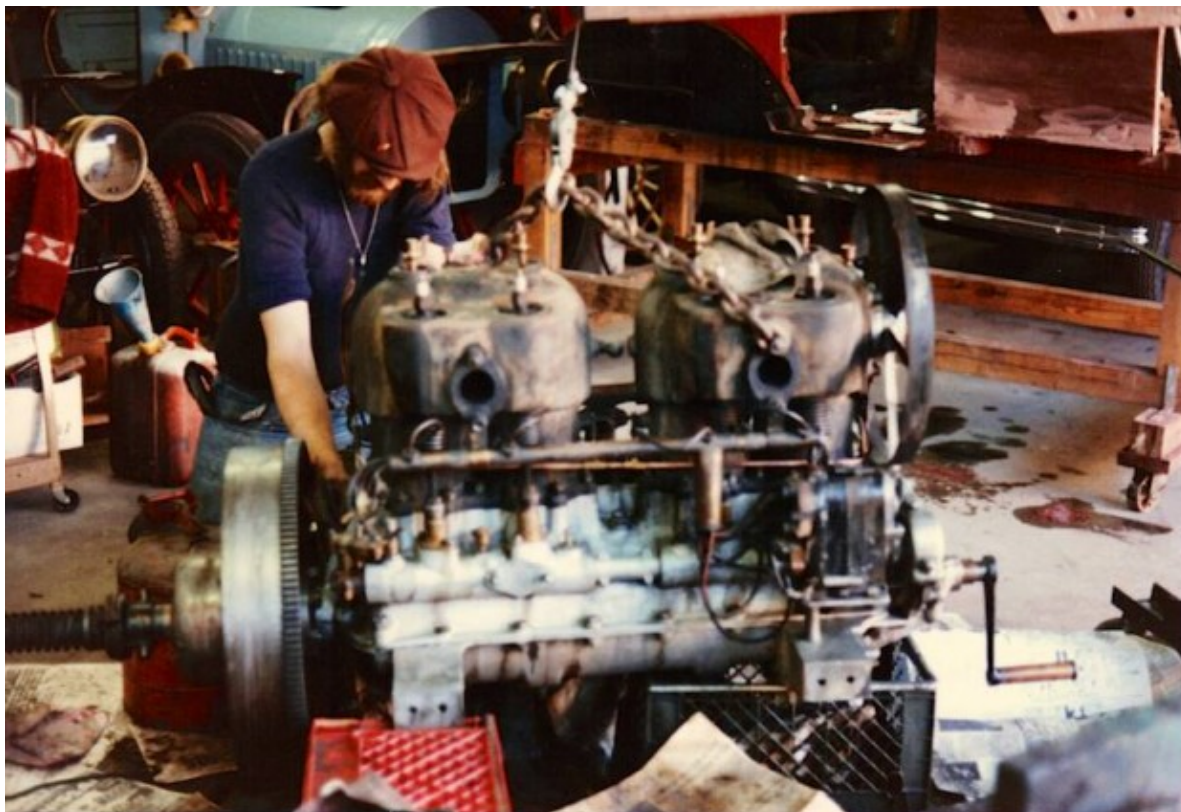
It was the late 1940s and Art Austria, a pioneer among early car collectors, had just purchased the rare antique and was hauling it home to Venice Beach. His good friend Thomas L. Powels was along for the ride.

The two men exchanged a glance in the growing darkness. The Simplex was decades from its prime and not yet tested. Could the aging relic conquer the Grapevine, or should they hitch a ride with a passing motorist?

Austria lowered the tailgate, fired up the Simplex and backed the car onto the pavement. Even then, Powels thought they would just try to drive the Simplex home—with fingers crossed. But to his amazement, Austria hooked a chain from the rear of the beautiful Tourabout's frame to the truck's front bumper. The car's massive 598-cubic-inch square engine, with a bore and stroke of 5.75 inches, soon proved its worth. The Simplex pulled the truck safely over the mountain pass and home to Austria's garage.

Powels recounted this adventure often over the years, and in 1973, through a series of trades, he acquired the car for his own collection. It remains with the Powels family to this day and will be shown proudly on the 18th fairway of Pebble Beach Golf Links by Powels's son Leland at the 2013 Pebble Beach Concours d'Elegance, where Simplex will be a featured marque.

"At high speed the Simplex will out steer, out accelerate and out stop—it was the ultimate race car of the period," says Leland Powels. "But it was also the ultimate status symbol, much like the Ferrari is today. It was the height of technology, and in those days that also meant that it would be able to get from point A to point B."



Leland Powels restoring his 1914 Simplex 50 HP Holbrook-bodied Toy Tonneau Tourabout in the 1980s.

Intended for only the most prestigious clients, a Simplex chassis alone might sell for the outrageous price of \$5,000, and they were bodied by all of the best coachbuilders of the day.

“If you owned a Simplex, people knew you were one of two things: you were either very wealthy or a real daredevil—or both!” said Warren G. Kraft of the Simplex Automobile Club. “These cars were more than a luxury, they were fine performers with speed and power to spare.” Simplex participated in the first Vanderbilt Cup Race in 1904 and the first Indianapolis 500 in 1911, and recorded resounding victories at Brighton Beach and elsewhere.

It is estimated that just over 1,600 Simplex automobiles were built before the company merged with Crane in 1915, but only 46 are known to survive. The cars on the Pebble Beach Concours show field will range from sporting models such as the 75 HP Speedster to road-going vehicles such as the 1914 Simplex 50 HP Holbrook Seven Passenger Touring.



1913 Simplex 75 HP Speedster at the 1993 Pebble Beach Concours

Thomas and Leland, together with Leland's close friend and motorcycle stuntman Bud Ekins, restored their Simplex back in the 1980s, doing everything themselves from mechanical to metal work, and even the upholstery.

Leland knew he was destined to be a car guy from birth; he was named for the creator of Lincoln. "There was no way out for me," he explains. "My father was always under the hood of a car. So I just got under the hood with him, and instead of playing baseball or football, I just listened to him and did what he said."

Since the death of his father in 2007, Leland has made it his goal to increase his family's collection of Lincolns and early antiques: "It's quite a big thing to be able to carry on my dad's legacy. It's a responsibility. There is no way I could ever step into his shoes. But I've dedicated my entire life to this hobby, learning what he taught me in order to be worthy of being in charge of this collection."

In addition to Simplex, the 2013 Pebble Beach Concours d'Elegance at Pebble Beach Resorts will feature Lincoln Custom Coachwork, Vanvooren Coachwork, Aston Martin, Lamborghini, Porsche 911, BMW 507 and French Motorcycles.

For more information and tickets, visit www.pebblebeachconcours.net.

[Source: Pebble Beach Concours; photos: Leland Powels; Gary Goeringer]

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