



Marvels in Automotive Design

1937 Cord - 812

Cord was the brand name of an American luxury automobile company from Connersville, Indiana, manufactured by the Auburn Automobile Company from 1929 to 1932 (Model L-29) and again in 1936 and 1937 (Models 810 / 812). The Cord Corporation was founded and run by E.L. Cord as a holding company for his many transportation interests, including Auburn and Duesenberg automobiles, Lycoming engines, Stinson aircraft, and even Checker taxicabs.

The Cord Corporation, as with many companies, succumbed to the Great Depression, and on New Year's Eve 1931 production of the L-29 Model stopped. Not to be deterred, Mr. Cord returned four years later with possibly the most recognizable car in American history – the Gordon Buehrig-designed Cord 810. With its long, upright hood and horizontal band of trim, the car soon earned the nickname "coffin-nose," to which it is still referred today. While other American cars had externally-mounted door hinges, Buehrig included concealed hinges in the new design, and full-face wheel covers with holes cut out to aid in cooling the brakes. The headlights, an industry first, were concealed in the fenders, and said to have been Stinson aircraft landing lights. They are raised by way of a pair of small cranks, one at either end of the dashboard.

This Cord 812 sports a 125 horse-powered Lycoming V8 engine mated to a four-speed transmission, which is operated by pressing a European-style Bendix Electric Hand Shifter switch on the steering column. In 1937, Cord offered an optional super charged engine producing 170hp.

At the heart of the Cord was its front-wheel-drive system, pioneered by Harry Miller on the American champ car race circuit. It was the first American-designed front wheel drive car with an independent front suspension. This was revolutionary technology at the time. Because there was no drive shaft under the passenger compartment it enabled the car to sit so low that running boards were unnecessary, and leaving them off was an innovative look at the time.

The original cost of this 1937 Cord was around \$2,560, expensive compared to most entry-level vehicles cost of \$500 - \$1,000. After producing just 3,000 Cords, production of these beautiful innovative front-wheel drive cars ceased due to bankruptcy. Interestingly, the next two American cars to use a front-wheel drive layout were the 1966 Oldsmobile Toronado and the 1967 Cadillac Eldorado, which also had hidden headlights.

"The Single Most Beautiful American Car." – American Heritage Magazine 1996