

# 1921 WILLYS OVERLAND

1921 Willys Overland, Model 4, Touring Convertible

Previous owner: Geo. W. Jones ( no town or date); Bernie and Janice Taulborg Collection

Original cost: \$895

Number made: 126,926

Engine, etc.: 4 cyl.; 27 hp; 3 speed; 100 in. wheelbase

The first Overland was designed by Claude E. Cox who started the Overland Automobile Company in 1906. It was soon beset by financial troubles because of the economic downturn of 1907.

The unlikely savior of the company was J. N. Willys.

John North Willys sent Overland a \$10,000 deposit check for 500 cars and when the cars weren't forthcoming, he visited the company in Indianapolis. Though he did not know a great deal about what made cars go, he was a super-salesman.

When he arrived, he found only some partially assembled cars and a company that didn't have enough money to meet that week's payroll. It was going into receivership the next morning and needed \$350 cash to survive. It was virtually impossible to raise real money at an Indianapolis bank at that time – most dealings were carried out with promissory notes. Returning to his hotel, he wrote a check from his account in Pennsylvania and asked the hotel receptionist to cash it. If the money wasn't forthcoming from the bank, the receptionist was to commandeer every coin that was paid to the hotel, even to the extent of emptying the bar till. The plan succeeded: at midnight the hotel proprietor handed Willys a mountain of silver dollars, half dollars, quarters, dimes, and nickels, topped by a thick layer of one dollar bills and a few twos,

fives, and tens. The next morning the the money was paid into the Overland account and the company was saved.

Now a partner in the company, he reorganized it, built a new factory and by the end of 1908 the Overland Automobile Co. was selling cars as fast as they could make them. The company name was changed to Willys-Overland Motor Company in 1912.

From 1912 to 1918 Willys was the second largest producer of automobiles in the U. S., after Ford Motor Company.

After offering a number of models, the company in 1919 decided to settle on three cars including the low-priced Overland to compete with the Model T.

There were financial set-backs in 1919 and bankers brought in Walter P. Chrysler to sort things out. All assets of the Willys Corporation went on the auction block. (Walter Chrysler moved on to Maxwell-Chalmers and in 1925, the Maxwell car company became the Chrysler Corporation.)

John Willys was able to regain control of the company and sales soared – in 1921, from less than 50,000 cars, to over 200,000 in 1925.

In 1926 production of the Overland ceased and Mr. Willys introduced a new car, the Whippet. Production of the Whippet ceased in 1931.

John North Willys died in 1935.

The company moved into manufacturing of the Jeep during World War II. Engines used in Jeeps were direct ancestors of the ones used in the Willys Model 4.

Today it survives as Jeep Corp., a subsidiary of Chrysler Corp.

Sources and additional information: [Standard Catalog of American Cars, 1805-1942](#). Beverly Rae Kimes, et al. 3rd ed. Krause Publications, 1996.

<http://www.americanautohistory.com/Marques/Marque831.htm> (Willys Overland history, pt. 2, 1915 – 1925)

[http://www.wokr.org/gallery/ov\\_hist.htm](http://www.wokr.org/gallery/ov_hist.htm) (Willys Overland Knight Registry; history)

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willys-Overland>

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