

# 1932 AUSTIN AMERICAN COUPE

1932 American Austin Coupe, 2-door coupe

Owner: Bernie and Janice Taulborg Collection

Original cost: \$395

Number made: Approx. 3,846 (1932)

Engine: 4 cyl., 15 hp, 45 cu. in.; 75" wheelbase; 105" length; 1,050 lbs. approx.

The American Austin was based on the British Austin 7 design and powered by a two-main-bearing L-head four. The car was designed in hopes of creating a market for small car-enthusiasts in the U. S.

The American Austin Car Company, started by Sir Herbert Austin, was incorporated in 1929 in Delaware with a factory located in Butler, Pennsylvania. It was an early attempt at tariff-busting via local assembly. Butler was chosen because it was close enough to the East Coast to make importing parts from England easier and it had a ready and willing workforce.

The first American Austins were 1930 models with coachwork described as "adorable". They were 16 inches narrower and 28 inches shorter than any other car in America (16" shorter than a VW Beetle, a real mini-car even by today's standards.) Bodies were designed by Alexis de Sakhnoffsky and made at the Hayes Body Company of Detroit. They may also have been the first U. S. production car to have the battery under the hood.

At an average of \$445, the car cost \$5 more than the Model A Ford. It guaranteed 40 miles per gallon of gasoline (not important then). Over 8,000 were sold during the company's first year – its best year.

They gained attention from the likes of Al Jolson, Buster Keaton, and Ernest Hemingway who each bought one and with cartoonists and radio

comedians. Instead of being regarded as a viable motorcar, it became something of a joke.

Less than 10,000 cars were built in its first two years. By 1933 sales were so poor that prices for the business coupe were dropped to only \$275 and the roadster to \$315. Sales suffered because of the Depression and production was suspended in 1934. The car had a low purchase price and low operating costs but it was underpowered and braking was not robust.

The company went into receivership in 1932 and was restarted in 1934, with bodies now made in-house. However, production stopped again and it filed for bankruptcy that year.

Roy Evans, who helped the company survive its last two years, bought out the bankrupt company for a mere five thousand dollars. He obtained a \$250 million loan from the Reconstruction Finance Corporation, reorganized under a new name, and opened the American Bantam Car Company in 1937. This company built the first successful Jeep for the U. S. Army in 1940, though Willys and Ford later won large lucrative military contracts and fame in building Jeeps.

Sources: Standard Catalog of American Cars, 1805 – 1942. Beverly Ray Kimes, et al. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Krause Publications, 1996.

[https://auto.howstuffworks.com/american-austin-cars.htm?srch\\_tag=4cjr3bjqm3c2jsxmwww7oajnnjj2sxs](https://auto.howstuffworks.com/american-austin-cars.htm?srch_tag=4cjr3bjqm3c2jsxmwww7oajnnjj2sxs)

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American\\_Austin\\_Car\\_Company](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_Austin_Car_Company)

<https://wmspear.com/bill/Bantam//history.html> (Includes both American Austin and American Bantam)