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GRAND ARMY
OF THE REPUBLIC
HIGHWAY

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Always in the shadow of Detroit, Indiana still boasts an incredibly rich automotive heritage.

BY ROB SASS >> PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOE VAUGHN



INDIANA LIVES LITERALLY AND FIGURATIVELY IN THE SHADOW OF its much larger neighbor to the north. While Michigan is the alpha and the omega of the U.S. auto industry, few people know how deeply ingrained the automotive culture and industry are in Indiana. Over the course of a fall weekend, we visited several Hoosier State museums that rank among the best anywhere.

◆ **AUBURN CORD DUESENBERG AUTOMOBILE MUSEUM, AUBURN, INDIANA**

At first light, I pull out of the automotive-themed Auburn Inn. Always booked solid during the Auburn Cord Duesenberg Festival (acdfestival.org), it's practically empty today. The Auburn Inn is a small hotel with tidy rooms, lots of dark wood and vintage ACD prints in the lobby. At just \$52 a night, it is also a screaming deal — but don't expect this rate during auction weekends.

After meeting photographer Joe Vaughn and his assistant, Randy, for breakfast, we head off to the Auburn Cord Duesenberg Museum. In a lovely 1920s-era residential section of Auburn, Vaughn does a hard right into a parking lot next to what appears to be a vintage gas station with a black Jaguar XK150 coupe parked in front.

The 1929 Sinclair filling station had been lovingly restored by Oscar Roberts and his wife, Bonita. Although not open to the public, the affable Mr. Roberts invites us in to see the fantastic space that houses his collection of vintage Maseratis (most unexpected in Auburn, Indiana).



Auburn is home to the Auburn-Cord-Duesenberg Museum (top left), which hosts a superb Art Deco showroom (above left and right) filled with ACD products. Also in Auburn, Oscar Roberts' black Jaguar XK150 coupe (upper right and looking somewhat out of place in Auburn) in front of his restored Sinclair gas station.

Next we continue on to the ACD Museum, which is housed in the former headquarters of the Auburn Automobile Company. Carefully restored, the ornate ceilings, light fixtures, banisters and terrazzo floors — all in the machine-era Art Deco style — have earned it a place on the National Register of Historic Places.

In addition to a fine collection of the ACD marques, there is a wonderful display of other Indiana-built makes from American to Zimmerman. Particularly interesting is Gordon Buehrig's re-created design office, complete with clay models of '37 Cords. It's also a serious research



center and one of the few automotive museums fully accredited by the American Association of Museums. Directly behind the ACD Museum is the National Automotive and Truck Museum (NATMUS). In addition to the museums, Auburn is also home to Auctions America by RM (located on the site of the former Kruse auction park) and The Worldwide Group.

◆ **STUDEBAKER NATIONAL MUSEUM, SOUTH BEND, INDIANA**

A short jaunt back up I-69 North to Indiana State Route 6 West takes us toward the Studebaker National Museum in South Bend. As we approach Nappanee in the heart of Indiana Amish country, traffic slows for horse-drawn buggies. As the buggies pass each other, drivers wave much like Porsche 356 drivers did back in the day.

We arrive at Amish Acres — a sort of pre-Industrial Revolution lifestyle theme park, complete with hotel — around lunchtime. The motto is “embrace the pace” (loosely translated, it means “we’re slow, deal with it”). For lunch, we all opt for the “Threshers Dinner,” consisting of all-you-can-eat servings of chicken, beef and egg noodles, green beans, mashed potatoes, dressing and dessert all served in a turn-of-the-century Amish barn. Vaughn remarks that



The Studebaker museum (above and upper left) is a highlight of gritty South Bend. The smiley-faced water tank is interesting juxtaposed with howitzers in Hudson, Indiana (upper right). Ruins of the Studebaker factory remain visible in South Bend (center right), while Amish carriages are common on the streets of Nappanee.



“the Amish eat like this to have the energy to raise barns and actually thresh stuff.” After downing a Red Bull to counteract the soporific effect of the giant Threshers Dinner, we continue our trip west to South Bend, arriving about 40 minutes later.

As we drive down Michigan Street and approach the area around Lafayette Blvd., Western Ave. and Sample Street in South Bend, the detritus of the former Studebaker automotive empire comes into full view. The design building, foundry and parts of the factory complex remain with the distinctive Studebaker “S” visible. Although I didn’t see it, I understand that the old proving grounds still have a stand of evergreen trees that spell out “Studebaker” visible from the air.

While Detroit has its share of ruins, they’re tempered by the continued existence of an auto industry. South Bend, or at least this part of it, doesn’t appear to have recovered from the December 1963 day when Studebaker ceased operations there. My time at the museum was affected by this sad metaphor for post-industrial decline, as well as my genuine affinity for the stylish Studebakers of the 1950s and 1960s and thoughts of what might have been.

There was no better illustration of Studebaker’s style of leadership than the 1953 Starlight coupe, the 1957 Golden Hawk and the 1963 Avanti on display. The Starlight is so simple, unadorned and sublime from every angle that it could have come from one of several Italian styling houses. The Hawk, with its engine-



The Kokomo Automotive Museum (top left) is one of the most eclectic of Indiana's auto museums. The Hall of Fame Museum at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway (above right) is where you'll find the 1911 Indy 500-winning Marmon Wasp (left) and a re-creation of a pit garage (opposite). An old billboard (above) still advertises the Auburn Cord Duesenberg Museum.

RESOURCES

Amish Acres Farm & Heritage Center

1600 W. Market Street
Nappanee, Indiana 46550
574-773-4188; amishacres.com

Auburn Cord Duesenberg Automobile Museum

1600 S. Wayne Street
Auburn, Indiana 46706
260-925-1444; automobiliumuseum.org

Kokomo Automotive Museum

1500 N. Reed Road (US 31)
Kokomo, Indiana 46901
765-454-9999;
automotiveheritagemuseum.com

IMS Hall of Fame Museum

4790 W. 16th Street
Indianapolis Indiana 46222
317-481-8500; brickyard.com or indianapolismotorspeedway.com

Studebaker National Museum

201 S. Chapin Street
South Bend, Indiana 46601
574-235-9714; studebakermuseum.org

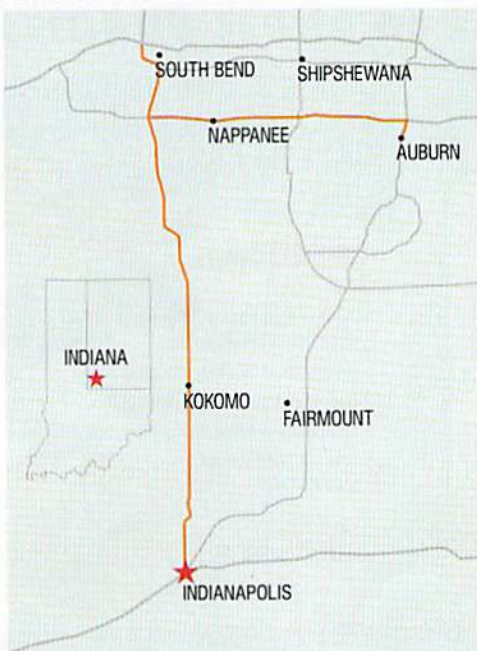
OTHER SITES OF INTEREST

Hostetler's Hudson Museum

760 S. Van Buren Street
Shipshewana, Indiana 46565
260-768-3021; hostetlershudsons.com

James Dean Gallery

425 N. Main Street
Fairmount, Indiana 46928
765-948-3326; jamesdeangallery.com



turned dash, round Stewart Warner gauges, manual transmission on the floor and supercharger was appealing in a brawnier way, as was the sheer audacity of the Avanti. None of the Big Three offered anything remotely as interesting at the time.

The museum's first floor contains displays of horse-drawn Studebaker buggies and pre-war Studebakers, including several examples of the low-priced "Rockne," named for the beloved Notre Dame football coach. All of the docents we encountered were genuinely enthusiastic Studebaker ex-employees.

After leaving the museum we head to Kokomo, about an hour and 40 minutes south, where we settle in for the night at the Hampton Inn.

THE KOKOMO AUTOMOTIVE MUSEUM, KOKOMO, INDIANA

Our first stop the next morning is to one of the odder car museums I've visited. The Kokomo Automotive Museum is located in what appears to be



a 1980s-era grocery store building. Instead of the K-cars you'd expect, it houses a compact but compelling collection of cars and automobiles spanning the 1890s to the 1970s. Haynes automobiles — built in Kokomo around the turn of the century until the 1920s — are well represented. And while it is of the velvet-ropes-and-creepy-mannequin school of automotive museums, it has an undeniable charm. There were numerous well-preserved unrestored cars, such as a 1937 Hupmobile and a 1953 Chevy Bel Air, both with fewer than 10,000 miles.

THE INDIANAPOLIS MOTOR SPEEDWAY HALL OF FAME MUSEUM

A short drive down State Route 31 takes us to the Indianapolis Motor Speedway Hall of Fame Museum. The museum derives its impact the old-fashioned way — by displaying copious amounts of actual history.

Particularly striking was the transition from the big, brawny front-engine roadsters to the delicate rear-engine Formula 1-inspired cars. A.J. Foyt's 1964 Sheraton-Thompson Special was the last front-engine winner, and it hasn't been touched since it appeared in the winner's circle. The exhibits also serve as reminders that the Indy 500 was once a technology incubator, with innovative cars like the front-drive Miller Specials of the 1920s, the 1950 supercharged Cummins Diesel Special and the 1967-68 four-wheel-drive STP turbine cars.

From the end of the 19th century until Studebaker closed in 1963, Indiana was home to 153 automakers. Most were obscure and appeared only briefly in the automotive fossil record, but many were great marques like Marmon, Haynes, Apperson, Duesenberg, Stutz, Auburn, Cord and American Simplex. All have left their mark on the Hoosier State, and one need go no further than its engaging automotive museums to discover it.

Hostetler's Hudson Museum in Shipshewana is one of Indiana's premier auto museums. To read more about it, go to hagerty.com/hostetlermuseum.

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