

# Cars Today Make First Chevy Designer Shudder

By LESLIE ERNENWEIN

A frustrated artist who waited 48 years to express his desire to paint helped design the first Chevrolet automobile in 1911 and the first Dodge in 1913.

Victor Gauvreau, a native of France, wanted to be an artist. But his parents insisted that he become an engineer.

"I did some work in pastels as a boy of 12," he recalled, "then no more painting until I retired at 60."

Gauvreau came to the United States in 1908 after graduating from Ecole Nationale des Arts et Metiers, (National School of Arts and Trades.) His first job was as a mechanical engineer with the Mercer Automobile Co.

Three years later he helped design the first Chevrolet at Detroit. "It was named after my very good friend, Louis Chevrolet, a famous race driver of that period," he said.

In 1912 the entire force of the Chevrolet Motor Co. consisted of about 75 men. The company moved to Flint that year and Gauvreau quit because he didn't want to leave Detroit.

Why didn't he want to leave Detroit?

"Because the girl who was to become my wife lived there."

After marriage in 1913 and a honeymoon trip to Europe, Gauvreau took a job as assistant chief engineer and helped design the first Dodge car—a four-cylinder job with an odd-size bore.

"The bore for the first engine was giving us trouble," he said. "The boring mill operator came to me and wanted instructions. The bore was supposed to be 3 3/4 inches, but it didn't clean up."

"That was on a Saturday afternoon and the cylinder was supposed to be ready for assembly Monday morning. I told him to keep boring until it cleaned up. That's why the Dodge had an off-size bore, three and thirteen-sixteenths, from 1914 to 1927."

A thin, energetic man of 72 years, Gauvreau speaks good English with a decided French accent. Late in 1915 he went to work for Louis Chevrolet and

designed the Frontenac racing car which won many races at Indianapolis, Omaha and Sheepshead Bay.

After that he introduced and taught automotive engineering at the University of Minnesota.

In 1923, with Joseph Nelson, Gauvreau opened a consulting and design engineering firm in Detroit—the Govro-Nelson Co. By 1942 the firm had grown from two employes to 120. During World War II the company built the prototype of the fuel injector used in the B29.

"We were working within eight-millionths of an inch to-

naturally, is painting, and he expresses the long latent desire which spanned the years since he was a boy. Landscapes are his forte, but he also paints nudes.

"Nothing in nature has anything more beautiful than the female form," Gauvreau said. "Our Arizona sunsets come next."

Any regrets?

"Well, not especially. But I sold my stock in the original Chevrolet company for \$500 profit. Thought I was being astute. But the stock would now be worth about 2 1/2 million dollars."

Gauvreau, who lives at 5535 Camino Real, takes a dim view of modern art, television and best sellers.

"I think our modern art should be placed in a museum to show future generations how low we've sunk, artwise," he said. "It has reached a point where they merely dump a can of paint on a canvas and they call the result a picture."

His favorite artist is Rembrandt, which sounds like "Rawbraw" when he pronounces it.

As for television: "It's mostly trash."

He doesn't read best sellers, but is an avid reader of biographies.

He has not gone back to France since the 1913 honeymoon.

"The France I knew before World War I no longer exists," he said. "I have no desire to go there."

What does he think of De Gaulle?

"He is a strong man, and that's what France needs."

Gauvreau's wife died last year. He has a son, David, who is a lieutenant colonel in the U. S. Army, and a daughter, Mrs. Orvil Aronson of Grosse Pointe, Mich.

At 72, what of the future?

"I have my painting, which means much to me," Gauvreau said. "And I'm living in the finest place in the world."



—Citizen Photo

## VICTOR GAUVREAU

erance and it was difficult to find men who could work with such precision at that time," Gauvreau recalled.

What does he think of today's automobiles?

"They are mechanical monsters in appearance," he said. "What are flaring fenders and fishtails good for?"

How about the small, compact cars?

"They are fine, but I wish they'd go in for quality instead of price."

Gauvreau retired in 1948 and came to Tucson. His hobby,