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SEPT/OCT 2005 • US\$9.00 • CANADA\$11.00

AUTO Aficionado

The Journal For Fine Automobile Collectors & Enthusiasts



1932 LINCOLN KB BOATTAIL ROADSTER



GARY WITZENBURG finds our story

Greg and Sandra Bilpuch were enjoying a beautiful August day at the 1999 Pebble Beach Concours when Greg's beeper went off. Not his trusty business beeper, but the one the judges had given him to let him know if his car had been chosen for an award. Wow!!!

He ran to his car, jumped in and cranked the starter. R-r-r-r. R-r-r-r-r. R-R-R-R-R! Oh, no! He had just five minutes to drive it to the stage...or forfeit the award.

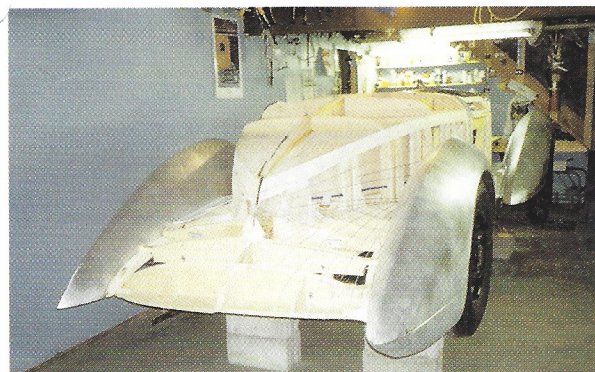
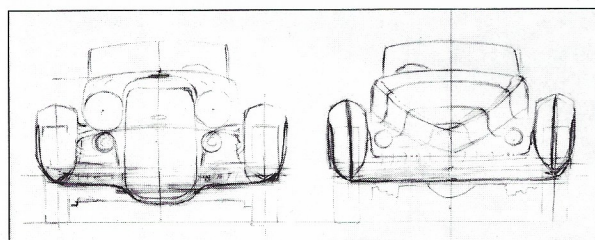
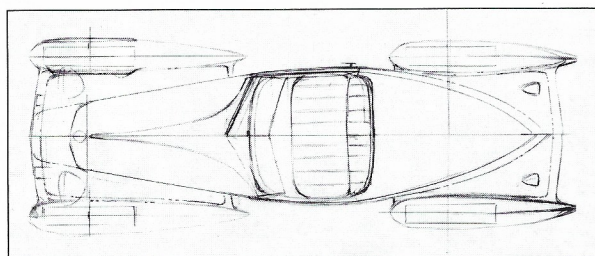
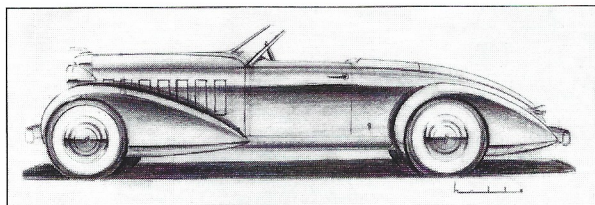
Bilpuch's entry was a one-off, custom-designed and hand-built 1932 Lincoln KB Boattail Speedster, looking so gorgeous and right in the California seaside sun that it could easily have been a beautifully restored custom-coachwork original. But Lincoln built only 2210 V-12 Model KBs in 1932 and 1933, on long 136- and monster 145-in. wheelbas-

es, and while 115 '32s and 37 '33s were convertible roadsters, not one was a boattail...nor looked quite this fabulous.

The brainchild of Bilpuch, it was penned by retired GM designer and historian Dave Holls as a tribute to Edsel Ford, the Lincoln luxury marque's guiding light at the time, and to the '30s-era trademarks of cutting-edge American stylists Hibbard and Darrin – most notably long hoods, sweeping windshields, pontoon fenders and disk wheels. And the stunning new body – including all-new ash framework and hand-formed metal panels pounded into shape over custom-built wooden forms – was hand-crafted from scratch over three and one half years using authentic coachbuilding techniques and processes.

As the Detroit-area businessman and collector tells the story: "I wanted a car different from any other Lincoln and had the idea to build a boattail. In 1995, I found a 136-in.

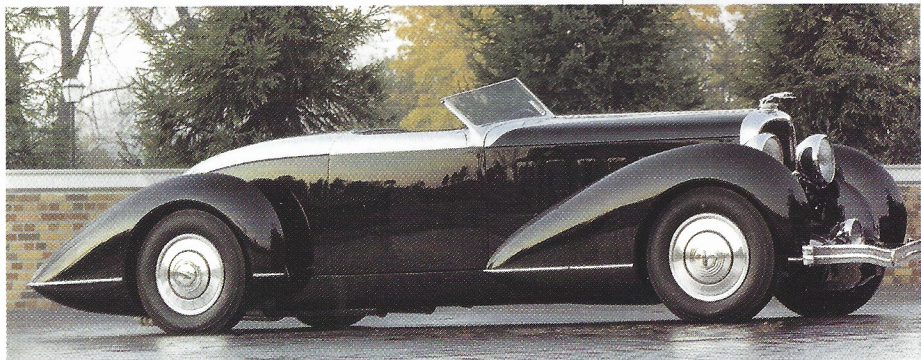




KA chassis that had been converted into a tow truck. Then I found the V-12 KB engine and fitted it to the chassis. I owned an automotive engineering company at the time and was trying to sketch the car, but I have no styling skills. Everything I came up with still looked like a tow truck.

"I had arranged to meet Dave Hollis at a nearby restaurant to exchange some photographs. I talked with him about my idea, and he sketched the car right there on a napkin in about 30 seconds. I didn't think it was a viable sketch because it was so streamlined. I assumed the proportions were wrong. But I took it to work, blew it up on a copier and superimposed it over a side view of a 136-in.

Lincoln...and the proportions were perfect! The size of the wheels, the height and size of the grille and headlights, the front axle's location relative to the grille, all were exact -- which was amazing to me. He accomplished the stream-



lined effect by making the car very long behind the rear wheels. He had an unbelievable talent!

"We met again and he established how things would be; that styling ruled, period! That was his end. He also picked the color, black. I had no say relative to the color and for most of the project was not even aware of his plan. We thought to ourselves, "If Edsel Ford had done a boattail speedster, like the Duesenbergs and Packards of the era, how would he have done it?"

"It is also a tribute to the craftsmanship that still exists today. I had the skills to be able to build the body buck. It was sent to Marcel Delay at Metal Masters in Anaheim, California who did the metal shaping; machining was done by Kevin Mackenzie in Washington, Michigan, and Brian Joseph in Troy, Michigan at Classic Auto did the motor and paint. Other Michigan companies, including Johns Custom Upholstery in Battle Creek did the interior and Don Summers' American Arrow in Troy did the castings. Those disk wheels were done by Lmarr Disk in Glen Ellen, California."

Bilpuch and Brian Joseph, of Classic Auto, frantically ripped off their coats and ties and tore into assessing the problem. The engine had fire but no fuel. Turned out a plunger in the fuel pump was stuck and a small spring needed to be extracted...with a special tool they didn't have. They appealed to the gathering crowd of spectators for a pair of tweezers. No response. Suddenly a nurse stepped forward with a pair of hemostats. Perfect!

With time running out, they removed the spring and plunger and reassembled the pump and the big Lincoln V-12 rumbled to life in time to accept the award, a second in "Rebodied" class. It had tied for first but was awarded the runner-up trophy since (due to commitments to Ford Motor Company) it had not participated in the previous day's tour.

Bilpuch's beautiful boattail Lincoln has won numerous other awards since then, and it has run reliably as needed, though he rarely drives it on public roads. Somewhere Dave Hollis must be smiling broadly. ▶

Dave Hollis' perfectly proportioned early sketches simplified Greg Bilpuch's construction of the underbody framework (this page). The completed car is a vision of powerful elegance (far left and above).