

## Remembering the Edsel

Difficulty:



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### *Discussion activities to be done after completing this EA lesson*

Today's report was about the Ford Edsel. What was it like, and how did it get its name? How many years did Ford produce it? What were its special features? Did it have faults?

### *Extension discussion topics*

#### **A. Talking about and going over the specific topic / idea / issue in listening text**

*Introduction = The Ford Edsel.*

1. What can you remember about the Ford Edsel?
  - Several different versions were built over 3 years, from 1958 to 1960.
  - It looked very different from other cars, and its looks became controversial.
  - It had a horseshoe-shaped grill at the front.
  - It was very heavy and fuel-inefficient.
  - It was described as both a "colossal failure" and "a car ahead of its time".
  - It was the first Ford to have self-adjusting brakes.
  - It had protective rubber tips on the rear bumper.
  - It allowed power lubrication of the ball joints by mashing / pressing a button.
  - It had Teletouch Drive (5 buttons in the center of the steering wheel, for changing gear).
  - It was named after Edsel Ford (the only child of company founder Henry Ford).
  - It is now a collector's item, costing anywhere from a few hundred to tens of thousands of dollars.
  
2. Why wasn't it a success?
  - Many people thought it looked ugly - they didn't like the styling.
  - It was expensive to run at a time when Americans were beginning to question their values.
  - It came onto the market during a short but severe recession.
  
3. Which two people are interviewed in the report, and what do they say?
  - John Heitmann, history professor at University of Dayton, in Ohio, and vice president of the Society for Automotive Historians.
  - He lists the reasons why the Edsel was not a success. (see above)
  - "Shamrock" Shelly Cleaver, Edsel owner, public relations director of the Edsel Owners Club.
  - He lists the technological advances that the Edsel had. (see above)
  - He particularly liked the Teletouch Drive, because he could change gears and keep his arm around his girlfriend / wife (They went on their honeymoon in the Edsel).

## B. Expanding on (one of) the topics / ideas / issues in listening text

*Topic = Old cars.*

1. Have you ever seen a Ford Edsel? Where? When? Describe it. What other very old cars have you seen? Where? When? Have you ever been to a car museum? Describe your visit.
2. What are the different names given to old cars?  
Definitions vary, but  
veteran: built before the First World War.  
vintage: built between 1919 and 1930.  
classic: built between 1925 and 1948.  
antique: over 45 years old.  
old banger: old car in very bad condition!  
Do you agree with these definitions? Does the subject interest you? Why / Why not?
3. Do you think it's a good or a bad idea for people to drive very old cars on public roads? Give your reasons.  
(Good: interesting, colorful, amusing, of historical interest, important to see their evolution...  
Bad: they might drive slowly, cause traffic jams, cause accidents, don't have good lights, are not fuel-efficient, pollute more, do not protect their passengers...) What other comments can you think of?

*OR, Topic = An old car that caught my attention.*

Find a picture on the internet or in a book or magazine of an old car that you think is interesting in some way. Find out some information about the car, then describe it to your group or your teacher. Don't forget to take the picture with you to show them!

## C. Extending discussion of (one of) the topics / ideas / issues in listening text

*Topic = Collectors' items. (Collectables)*

1. Many different things are considered worth collecting, and good quality or interesting examples become collectors' items. Think of as many different examples as you can of things that people collect.  
(The list is almost infinite! see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_collectibles](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_collectibles) )
2. Do you collect anything in particular? Did you, in the past? Does a member of your family or a friend have a collection of something? Tell the group about it. Does the collection include any real collectors' items?
3. What is the most unusual collection that you have heard of?  
Look here and have some fun! This is just one of the sites that come up if you search for "unusual collection" <http://weburbanist.com/2010/08/27/13-most-weird-wonderful-collections-on-the-web/>
4. Why do people collect things?  
for memories (photos); as an investment (paintings); to develop their knowledge or help research (plants, fossils); to show one's support for a group (sports team or pop group memorabilia); for enjoyment (records / CDs); to feel important (children's cards & stickers); to meet other people; other reasons?  
<http://www.24hourmuseum.org.uk/downloads/mclass.pdf>  
<http://www.horizonlines.org/volume4/about/why/index.html> (includes psychological explanations)  
<http://www.rarityguide.com/articles/articles/4/1/Reasons-people-collect-stuff/Page1.html>

## Audioscript

This is the VOA Special English Technology Report.

ADVERTISEMENT ANNOUNCER: "They'll know you've arrived, when you drive up in the nineteen fifty-eight Edsel -- the car that's truly new, from nameplate to taillights."

The Ford Motor Company built several versions of the Edsel from 1958 (nineteen fifty-eight) to 1960 (nineteen sixty). Ford ended production of the car after just three model years because of weak sales.

The Edsel has been described as both a "colossal failure" and "a car ahead of its time."

John Heitmann is a history professor at the University of Dayton in Ohio and vice president of the Society for Automotive Historians.

"It was a car that was controversial in styling. Its horseshoe-shaped grill is still remembered today. The Edsel is kind of the example of the car that never caught on. It's known as the 'disaster from Dearborn.'"

Dearborn, Michigan is Ford's headquarters.

Professor Heitmann says the biggest problem was that the Edsel arrived around the same time as a recession. He says Americans were beginning to question their values.

"It's a really curious kind of economic episode. It was actually quite severe but also rather short. But it was at a time when many Americans were reacting to the dinosaur in the driveway. These very heavy, chrome-laden Buicks and other cars -- the fifty-eight Buick had fifty-eight pounds of chrome on it. The Edsel was also a very heavy, very fuel-inefficient vehicle."

Even so, some people say the Edsel's technology more than made up for what it lacked in looks and fuel efficiency.

"Shamrock" Shelly Cleaver is the public relations director for the Edsel Owners Club in the United States. Mr. Cleaver has been a member of the club since it formed in nineteen sixty-nine. He says the Edsel was the most modern car of its time.

"It was the first Ford product to have self-adjusting brakes on it. And then on the back and rear bumper it had little bumper tips, had a guard with rubber mounted in them so when you could push your car or something, you wouldn't skin up your bumper. And it had power lubrication where you could lubricate your ball joints and everything inside the car where you mashed a button."

Mr. Cleaver liked one feature especially. "The fifty-eight Edsel had five buttons in the center of the steering wheel to shift the gears, see. And that way you could shift the gears with your left hand and keep your arm around your girlfriend, or your wife, whatever and keep on driving. That was unique. It was Teletouch Drive."

"Shamrock" Shelly Cleaver made good use of that feature when he got married in nineteen fifty-eight. He went on his honeymoon in an Edsel, with one arm on the wheel and the other around his new wife.

The Edsel was named for Edsel Ford, the only child of company founder Henry Ford. Edsel was president of Ford Motor Company until he died in nineteen forty-three.

Today the cars are considered collector's items. They can cost anywhere from hundreds of dollars to tens of thousands of dollars.

And that's the VOA Special English Technology Report, written by June Simms. I'm Steve Ember.