

## Tom Marshall's Weekly News, July 21, 2008

**Special Bodies on Expensive Cars:** By the late 1920s, most automobile manufacturers were building their own bodies or owned a major body company. General Motors owned Fisher and Fleetwood, and Chrysler owned Briggs. On the most expensive cars in their lines, however, there was pressure to sell high-end chassis to special body builders for an exotic effect. In my minority opinion, these bodies were seldom well coordinated with the lines of the chassis, and many very expensive end products were spoiled by an off-the-wall body. Some of the well-known American specialty body builders were Derham (Rosemont, Pennsylvania), Darrin, LeBaron, and most notably Dietrich. In the past 25 years, more cars have shown up with Dietrich bodies than Dietrich ever built originally.

Exotic American makes such as Duesenberg and DuPont often had special bodies, although the chassis manufacturers seemed to have good control over the bodies that were used so that they complemented the outstanding lines of the overall design. Less than 500 cars of each make were produced, but, like the Stanleys, their fame far outpaced their production numbers.

On the many Packard cars that passed through Auburn Heights when my father was a dealer (1922 to 1940), none had special bodies, and I don't recall seeing any around Wilmington. In the collecting years, however, Herb Norton of Talleyville had a 1940 Packard 120 LeBaron that incorporated a much lower and sleeker hood and a two-passenger body. I have to admit it was a very attractive car. My father bought a 1934 Packard Twelve seven-passenger touring from John Russell, an orange grower in Orlando, Florida, that came to us with a Dietrich body. The body was somewhat similar to a Packard body, but it had a wider front cowl with no ventilator, and the overhang of the back seat was so much that the trunk rack could not be folded up. This lack of coordination didn't seem to matter; a purchaser would pay a large premium to have a car with a Dietrich body. In 1970, I needed to sell either that car or our present 1932 Twin Six Dual Cowl Phaeton, and although the '34 was in better mechanical condition with lower mileage, I opted to keep the '32. I always liked Packard bodies, as the whole car was properly coordinated.

Many years earlier, the Stanley Motor Carriage Company shipped several chassis to its dealer in the British Isles, and English bodies were attached to make complete cars. I have a catalog from the dealer in London (or possibly Newcastle-on-Tyne) showing several body styles being offered about 1912. It's possible to detect that they are Stanleys from the round hood (coffin nose), but everything else looks very strange to those of us used to American Stanleys.