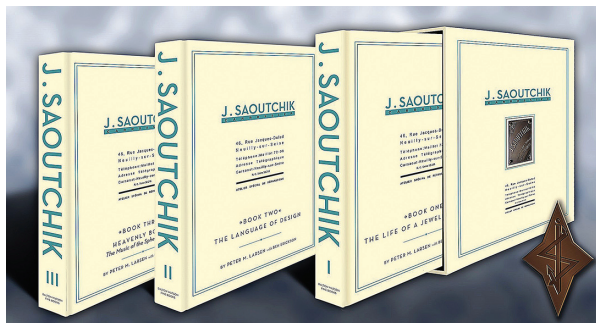


“Jacques Saoutchik – Maître Carrossier” by Peter M. Larsen with Ben Erickson. Published by Dalton Watson Fine Books, 1730 Christopher Drive, Deerfield IL 60015 USA. Hardcover 12½ x 9 ins. 1164 pages in three volumes with dust jackets in a slipcase. 1933 colour and b & w illustrations.

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Maître Carrossier translates to Master Coachbuilder and it is a fact that Saoutchik's flamboyantly styled creations make any car they grace amongst the most sought after by collectors today. Impractical, perhaps even excessively ostentatious, they are certainly eye-catching with their swooping curves highlighted by chrome details to catch the light and accentuate the artistic lines visualised by Jacques or, latterly, his son, Pierre in the studios at 46, Rue Jacques-Dulud, Neuilly-sur-Seine, a suburb to the north-west of Paris near the Bois de Boulogne and close by other famous coachbuilders, where the Saoutchik had located his atelier.

This meticulously researched work, divided into three volumes, starts at Volume I subtitled 'The Life of a Jeweler in Steel', a highly detailed biography of Jacques Saoutchik from 1880 to 1957 beginning in Russia where he was born Iakov Savtchuk into a Jewish family in White Russia. He was driven by anti-Semitic prejudice to abandon his family and set out to flee Russia with his brother, Boris. They separated in Prussia and Boris made his way to New York while Iakov went to Paris where he decided to find work. The brothers did not meet again until 1927 when Jacques visited the USA financed by the ailing Pierce-Arrow Motor Car Company of Buffalo, New York where, despite taking a one fifth scale model of his 'transformable body' with wind up windows, it seems that Jacques contributed only details to the styling of the 1928 Pierce-Arrows although the company made use of his name in their advertising. Perhaps the most important part of the visit was meeting his brother again after nearly 30 years and there is a wonderfully poignant full page photograph of the two men together at Niagara Falls. They never met again.

Having jumped ahead, it is time to return to Iakov's arrival in Paris in the winter of 1899. He spoke little French and had but loose change in his pocket but, undaunted, he changed his name to a more French sounding version while keeping secret his Jewish background and found work in a carpenter's

workshop. The authors cover not just his life but the history that moulded it in great detail including the influences of the *Expositions Universelle* and the Art Nouveau movement but amongst these the most important influence was the automobile. Within a year he had moved on to working in a small workshop making bodies for horse drawn carriages and the ageing proprietor soon left Jacques to run the business where, in two years, he learned his trade. Progress from there was rapid but 1903 saw a setback; he was working in the racing department at Renault under Marcel, one of the three Renault brothers who founded the company, and, modelling himself on his employer, Jacques became a 'Frenchman' but, just as he seemed to have found his feet, Marcel was killed in the infamous Paris-Madrid race. Perhaps the first Saoutchik legacy to motoring world was Renault's coal 'scuttle bonnet' designed for the 1903 racing cars. It may be that Marcel's death provided the impetus that resulted in Jacques leaving Renault and setting up on his own as a carrossier in the rue Jacques-Dulud. His early work was mainly interior accessories for other coachbuilders including picnic sets, vanity cases and extending to complete interiors. By 1906 the business had a name, 'Carrosserie de Luxe, J. Saoutchik' and there was a trickle of orders for complete bodies and, most importantly, a stand at the *Salon de l'Automobile de Paris* where Saoutchik would have a stand, except for the war years when it was not held, every year until bankruptcy intervened in 1954.

The vicissitudes of Jacques's life almost make a story in themselves and both World Wars had a huge effect on him and his business culminating, after the second conflict, in him being arrested, tried as a collaborator and convicted which, despite his being pardoned later, left him almost a broken man. Returning from running a private car as an ambulance in 1918, his workshops derelict and abandoned, Jacques had to start again almost from scratch but it is, perhaps, a measure of the man that the carrosserie was soon back in business and growing with the rich and famous soon knocking at his door to clothe luxury chassis from Rolls Royce, Hispano Suiza, Mercedes, Delage, Packard and Minervs amongst others. Many were fitted with his newly patented *transformable*, a convertible that had all the appearance of a *faux cabriolet* but could be folded down completely flat with the body. By the early 1920s life was good and Jacques was accepted amongst the kind of society from which his clients came; he was also making money and that enabled him to support his 'official' family with his wife, Beatrix, while starting a second family with a younger mistress, Raymonde, who bore him a child, Jacquemine, and was loyal to him until the end of her days.

Volume I is a very complete and totally absorbing biography that tells the reader much about European history in the first half of the twentieth century and is thoroughly illustrated with over 800 photographs and reproductions but Volume II, 'The Language of Design' covers the brochures and design drawings from the 'Carrosserie de Luxe, J. Saoutchik' with the illustrations from the brochures beautifully reproduced and accompanied by a detailed analysis of each design. In the 1913 catalogue the designs, enclosed in a very conservative, brown cover, range from a very elegant Rolls Royce Silver Ghost Torpédo to a rather quirky Hispano Suiza 15 CV Cabriolet Conduite Intérieure with a tall roof rather exaggerated by the shortness of the chassis and very angular mudguards; perhaps not the best of Jacques's early designs and probably

what would have been called a Doctor's Coupe in England but a strange choice for a sporting chassis. By the mid-1920s "La Transformable" has become very prominent and the 1923 brochure includes illustrations of the operation of the patented system with its luxuriously lined hood. Further into the volume are many coloured design drawings, and a brochure for Saoutchik's most famous designs drawn in 1931 for Buccioli and covering a whole range of styles, most of which look somewhat impractical with impossibly low hoods or tops for our American readers and bonnets which could have hidden a straight sixteen had such a thing ever existed. All very 'Cruella de Vil' but quite stunning and, as the author says "...supreme style, simply for the sake of it"! The volume finishes with various designs on the Pegaso Z102 chassis, a visual delight but very redolent of the 1950s.

Volume III concludes this huge work, surely the most comprehensive book ever on a single coachbuilder? Sub-titled 'Heavenly Bodies – The Music of Spheres in Steel' it is a photographic record of the cars bodied by Saoutchik between 1907 and 1954. Many of these 833 photographs have never been published before and, unlike Volume I, this is not a book to sit down on a long winter's evening to read but rather to browse at leisure and marvel at the imaginativeness of Saoutchik's designs. It seems that not all recent owners appreciate the artistry and some cannot resist the temptation to embellish the work of the master; four pictures of an Hispano Suiza H6B demonstrate this trend perfectly with an original shot showing a tasteful and elegant four light transformable which was modified in period, with photographs showing the modified car in a semi-derelict condition and again as restored and at Pebble Beach but with rather tasteless additions such as chrome hood irons and door surrounds. It certainly looked best 'as built' but perhaps a future owner will return it to its original, simple elegance. Surprisingly few Bugattis were bodied at the Rue Jacques-Dulud, just a handful including a Type 57 that was rebodied by Saoutchik in the 1950s, but by the 1930s Mercedes Benz had been replaced by Delahaye, Delage and Talbot Lago, all which continued post war to be joined by Pegaso with the occasional Daimler and Cadillac. The book concludes with a listing of Saoutchik cars extending to eight pages and then a full and comprehensive index, which is to be applauded and should be compulsory for any book of this nature. This is a serious and important work that covers the life, times and cars of Jacques Saoutchik, and his son, Pierre, in incredible detail. The production is to Dalton Watson's usual high standard with one minor disappointment; the black 'gilding' used on the page edges has reacted with the ink where the pictures are printed full page and this has stuck the edges together. They separate easily enough but this leaves a slightly ragged edge on dark pictures that are 'bled off' the page. That aside the workmanship is fine with solid and robust bindings in a heavy slipcase resulting in a book to give years of pleasure and surely destined to become the standard, reference work on the 'Carrosserie de Luxe'. It is hard to see how it could be improved upon and, since there are only to be 500 copies, early purchase is recommended. Those who see the cars as an unnecessary extravagance might view the book similarly but they are truly missing the point of both. Viewed as three separate books in a common slipcase these are good value for money and highly recommended as a worthwhile addition to any serious motoring bookshelf. Treat yourself to a copy for Christmas.

JRCS

"A Comprehensive History of the Austin Seven Grasshopper" by Peter Hornby and Michael Hanna. Published by The Pre-War Austin Seven Club Ltd., 1 Westminster Close, Melton Mowbray, Leicestershire LE13 0PF, UK. Paperback. 11½ x 8¼ ins. Profusely illustrated in b & w and colour. ISBN: 978-0-9572426-3-0 Price: £18.95 inclusive of postage & packing from Graham Beckett, 77 All Saints Lane, Nettleham, Lincoln LN2 2NJ. Cheques payable to Pre-War Austin Seven Club Ltd.

To non-Austin Seven people the Grasshopper is a rather mysterious model that they are not sure is a 'proper' car or a special. This very interesting book will remove any doubt; these attractive little sports cars were Works cars built specifically for competition use including trials and Le Mans so there can be no doubts about their origins. Perhaps within the VSCC confusion has arisen because the Grasshopper chassis is based on the Ruby which is still not an eligible PVT car, although the Nippy, Speedy, "65" and, importantly, the Grasshopper are all accepted, but the latter are rarely seen in VSCC competitions nowadays. It will not have helped that the *Light Car* first announced the three cars entered for the Lands End in 1935 as Austin Specials.

Those three cars had a unique two bearing crankcase, block and alloy cylinder head and had a reasonably successful debut, winning two awards, one gold and one silver, between them. The Works then built a further four cars for Le Mans with larger, 10 gallon petrol tanks. The name Grasshopper did not appear until March 1936 and was inspired by the cars' behaviour on take off as witnessed on the Coventry Cup Trial in March of that year. Another series of four cars were built for the 1936 Le Mans race and to show their versatility one of these was used in 1938 for the Paris Nice Rally when Kay Petre and Anne-Cécile Rose-Itier won their class.

In all twelve Grasshoppers were built and, of those, seven still survive making them not quite as scarce as the twin cam but, nonetheless, a rare and desirable Works competition car, each with an interesting history. Those individual histories are covered in detail, where known, including both period and more recent photographs and this section finishes with details of copies of Grasshoppers, the best known of which was built by Artesi (RTC or Roach, Taylor, Clarke) for Geoff Winder and now, apparently, owned by Martin Eyre. All the components that are special to the Grasshoppers are also depicted in this section.

A large section of the book details the competition history by means of contemporary press reports and detailed results and the there 23 pages of photographs, sometimes 10

