

# The Chalmers Automobile Newsletter

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A special thank you goes out to John Rehberg (#51) and Chuck Fanucci (#45) for responding to the question from the editor in the last newsletter regarding Model "Forty" information. They both provided some valuable details - thank you gentlemen.

In this issue, an interesting historical connection is made between a one of a kind Chalmers model and the sinking of the S.S. Titanic.

## CHALMERS CLASSIFIED

The Chalmers Classified listing is intended as a service for members to advertise Chalmers cars and parts that are for sale and/or wanted. Please contact me regarding items that should no longer be listed and pass-on your new wanted and for sale items.

### WANTED:

- 1922/1923 hubcaps (posted 4/2000) - contact Bob DuBois (#9).
- 1912-1914 Chalmers Model 12/18 "Six" (also 1910-1912 Model "Forty", 1912-1914 Model "36", or 1914-1915 Model 24/29 "Master Six") (posted 4/2000) - contact John Lehnert (#35).
- 1914 Chalmers Model 24 "Master Six" shop manual (posted 4/2000) - contact Jim and Donna Stamper (#52).
- Model T Splitdorf magneto for 1912 Chalmers Model 11 (posted 12/2000) - contact Al Shaw (#25).
- 1911 Chalmers Model "30" Pony Tonneau complete rear axle assembly (or any parts for it) (posted 7/2001) - contact Fred Hoch (#38).
- 1910-1912 Chalmers Model 11 "30" exhaust manifold gaskets (posted 3/2001) - contact Al Shaw (#25).
- 1908-1909 Chalmers-Detroit Model F "30" radiator (posted 10/2001) - contact Alan Leclair (#42).
- 1923 Chalmers Model "Y" Jaxon disc wheels (one or more) for 24" tires (posted 2/2002)- contact Alan Maris (#56).
- 1913 Chalmers Model 36 front wheel hub and left side bail handle sidelight (kerosene and electric) or a matching pair (posted 2/2002)- contact Lloyd Elliott (#26)
- 1912 Chalmers Model 11 "30" rear spring and running board toolbox (posted 2/2002)- contact Mike Morris (#65)
- 1915 Chalmers Model 26-C "Six-48" Entz starter/generator, oil gage, distributor, steering wheel, crank, hubcaps, speedometer, and other parts & photos of wood framing (posted 7/2002) - contact Scott Sandersfeld (#69)

### FOR SALE:

- 1916 Model 35-A "Six-30" parts and some sheet metal (posted 4/2000) - contact Don Ohnstad (#19).
- 1909 Model F "30" engine cooling fan assembly (includes fan, hub, pulley, and bracket) in good painted condition with no rust for \$95 or best offer (posted 9/2000) - contact Chuck Fanucci (#45).
- 1917 Model 35-A "Six-30" described as a diamond in the rough that is drivable but needs some restoration for \$5,000 (see it at <http://www.AlternateFuels.com/1917.htm>) (posted 3/2001) - contact Glenn DeRosa (#58).

### THE LUCILE SEDAN

In 1916, the Chalmers Motor Company engaged the services of a prominent (albeit infamous) fashion designer to design the interior furnishings of a new car model. This designer was Lady (Lucy) Duff-Gordon and the new model was introduced in 1917 as the "Lucile Sedan". The Lucile had a very unique interior, which Lucy called a "sun-parlor on wheels". Technically, it was a Model 35-B "Six-30" Standard. The 35-B body styles for 1917 included: Limousine, Sedan, Touring, and Town Car. Only the enclosed Limousine, Sedan, and Town Car styles received the Lucile design touch; the open style Touring was not suitable for this treatment. All 35-B's were 7-passenger cars and were sometimes referred to in print advertising as the "7-22" because of the passenger capacity and the wheelbase of 122 inches. The Lucile reflects an attempt by the Chalmers Motor Company to improve their sagging business base by marketing a car with an innovative and lavish interior design. It also reflects Hugh Chalmers' continuing desire to build larger and more luxurious cars.

The Lucile Sedan continued in production for the 1918 model year based on the Model 35-B "Six-30" Special 7-passenger Sedan, but the "7-22" moniker was dropped.

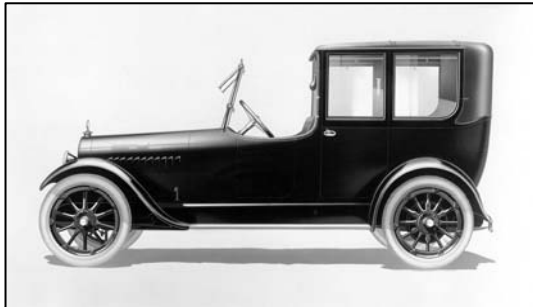
Lady Duff-Gordon focused her interest and skill on the furnishings of the passenger compartment. She had no interest in the exterior styling and did not want to understand anything mechanical such as engine, transmission, etc. Lucy admitted that it would be a difficult task to come up with a design that would please the tastes every one of the hundreds of diversified buyers. Her solution was to stick to the fundamentals. To her this meant harmonizing colors and fabrics, and making the cars "livable". The Chalmers factory supplied the best material to her. All the silks, carpets, cords, and other fabrics were very colorful and handsome - providing the opportunity for a very opulent, yet basic design.

Lucy chose inlaid mahogany for the woodwork. Mahogany provided a rich grain and deep coloration, which highlighted her design very nicely. The floors were treated with the finest thick carpeting. Window dressing for the Limousine and Town Car incorporated silk curtains blending with the colors of the carpets and woodwork. Eiderdown and silk lounging pillows and a small footstool were also included in complementary colors.

New and distinctive exterior characteristics of the Lucile included a sloped hood and windshield, and a center-door for passenger access. The Limousine and Town Car (both priced at \$2,480 and later, \$2,550) featured a dual cowl design; one at the base of the windshield and the second separating the driver and passenger compartments. Two spare tires mounted at rear were also available on these models and the Town Car provided no chauffeur/driver protection from the elements. The lower priced Sedan (\$1,780 to \$1,850) had two individual front seats separated by an aisle, two folding center seats, and a three-seat bench in the rear. Additionally, the Sedan featured removable door and window posts that provided the look of an open hard top.

Interior amenities of the more luxurious Limousine and Town Car styles included electric dome lights, clock, robe rail, speaking tube (to converse with

the chauffeur), and a toilette for the ladies' grooming needs. Also, at the touch of a button, an optional smoking set or toilette case sprung forth from a concealed compartment.



1917 Model 35-B Lucile Town Car  
with no weather protection for the  
driver



1917 Model 35-B Lucile Sedan with door  
& window posts removed

The Lucile Sedan was only offered for two years, 1917 and 1918. There is no historical record of the how successful the Lucile scheme was, but the fact that it lasted only two years and that Chalmers continued to suffer a sagging business base speaks for itself.

### THE TITANIC CONNECTION

During April of 1912 (five years before the Lucile introduction), Lady Duff-Gordon and her husband Sir Cosmo were embarked on the Titanic during its fateful voyage from London to New York. She had been building a business as a dress designer in London, Paris, and New York since the early 1900's. Unconfirmed reports say she specialized in racy underwear that became popular with the royal family.

By the spring of 1912, Lady Duff-Gordon had gained an international reputation and a booming business - when urgent business called her back to New York. She and Sir Cosmo reluctantly booked passage on the S.S. Titanic. Previously she had made similar trips, but never on a new untried ship making its maiden voyage. Miss Francatelli, Lady Duff-Gordon's secretary, traveled with them.

The Duff-Gordons boarded Titanic at the port of Cherbourg, France. They soon settled in to the life of aristocratic luxury that they were accustomed to in their first-class accommodations. Then, on the third night of its Atlantic voyage, the Titanic struck an iceberg at high speed and began to sink. Lady Duff-Gordon, her husband, and secretary were awakened by the collision. They assembled on the lifeboat deck in preparation for leaving the sinking ship. After a period of waiting and observing the chaos, they moved to a place with less confusion and boarded a lifeboat. The lifeboat was launched before it was filled to capacity. Only 12 people were aboard (7 crewmen and 5 passengers), but it was meant to hold 40! Women and children were to be rescued first, but somehow that went unheeded in the Duff-Gordon's case. While rowing away from the Titanic, they witnessed passengers struggling in the ice-cold water, but no attempt was made to pick them up. Lucy and her secretary, the only women in the boat, urged otherwise for fear of being sucked into Titanic's grave.

Once at a safe distance from the sinking Titanic, Lady Duff-Gordon turned to her secretary and mourned: "...you left your beautiful nightdress behind..."

To others in the lifeboat, particularly the crew, this was a stunning statement! It seems that, from the moment they had launched, the crew grew increasingly suspicious of the Duff-Gordon's motives. One by one, the crew began to realize that the Duff-Gordon's motive was to save themselves and they had an arrogant aristocratic indifference to the suffering and loss of others - including the lifeboat crew. The statement epitomized the feelings of Lucy and the Duff-Gordon's control over boat crew's inaction toward rescue of others. To most, the remark was interpreted as a gross lack of concern and understanding of the tragedy taking place; it became a defining moment. The statement implied that Lucy's only worry was the loss of her secretary's nightgown - something easily replaceable and irrelevant given the circumstances. Yet, there was no compassion expressed for the much greater loss of human life taking place in front of them. Words were exchanged and payments offered in the partially filled lifeboat that served only to reinforce the crew's opinion of the Duff-Gordon's misguided values. Later, investigators would label this lifeboat the "money-boat".

Eventually the Duff-Gordons made it to New York still exhibiting their nonchalance about the tragedy. Lucy and Sir Cosmo actually celebrated "their" survival by hosting a lavish party at the Ritz Hotel where they were staying. The consequence of all these events was felt a few days later when newspapers started running stories about the Duff-Gordons. The stories portrayed the egotistical indifference to rescuing fellow passengers, lack of compassion for victims, bribes, and the self-centered "survival" celebration. Soon the Ritz Hotel refused to serve or wait on them - and they were booed by people in the streets of New York!

The accusations drove Lucy back to London where she was dismayed to see that the bad press had followed her. Lady Duff-Gordon was called to testify before the British Board of Inquiry into the sinking of the Titanic. Her testimony was evasive and ambiguous. Several lawsuits, on both sides of the Atlantic, also forced Lucy to give testimony explaining her actions. Again, her answers were indirect and not to the point. In the end, Lucy's depositions failed to expunge the scandal - it just made it worse!

By 1916 when Lady Duff-Gordon was commissioned to design the Chalmers Model 35-B, the scandal was subsiding, the U.S. involvement in World War I was imminent, and her reputation as fashion designer was becoming strong again. In summary, I wonder what would have happened if Lady Duff-Gordon had not been disgraced by this scandal. Would she have been too famous for Chalmers to afford her design services? Some say it was in her nature to be controversial and that some sort of scandal was bound to happen eventually. On the other hand, it must have been a risk for Chalmers to engage the services of this infamous designer. Taken altogether, this makes the Lucile Sedan a truly unique car!

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I would like to credit Bob Dubois (#9) and Mike Kester (#12) for providing some of the information on the Lucile Sedan story.

That is all for now and I hope you enjoyed the story of the Lucile and its Titanic relationship. Please send in your questions, comments, and other information for the next newsletter.

Dave Hammond