

COMMENTARY

A little higher in price

■ Though not cheap, Anderson autos were popular.

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Plenty of people around Rock Hill have seen one of the now-legendary Anderson automobiles. The Rock Hill-made car is on display at the Museum Of York County and at the State Museum in Columbia.

Privately owned Andersons sometimes show up in local parades. Perhaps as many as a dozen have survived.

The usual dates given for the manufacture of the automobile are from 1915 until the closing of the plant in the Depression of 1924. Stories about the car generally mention that as early as 1910, John Gary Anderson gave out information about his plans to manufacture a four-seat car with a 30-horsepower engine. The writers say he didn't manufacture the car, probably because the Rock Hill Buggy Co. was so successful that it required all of the company's time and energy.

However, in an April 1910 article in *The Charlotte Observer*, an Anderson-built 30-horsepower, four-passenger touring car was seen on the streets of Charlotte. The paper said it was the "first automobile turned out by this S.C. concern."

Anderson bought the "motor, axles and



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**LOUISE
PETTUS**

heavy essentials" from large automobile specialty companies who were just getting to the point of producing standardized parts. What Anderson made in his buggy shop, according to *The Observer*, were "The shields, guards, body, top and everything of that nature." The car seen on the streets of Charlotte was "ivory enamel, standard pattern with improvements."

The paper said J. W. Anderson persuaded his father to add an automotive department to the buggy concern. Anderson was also seeking N.C. agents.

A price was established. The 1910 30-horsepower car sold for \$2,250 and the 40-horsepower car for \$2,500. Both were topless, and each had a "floating axle." The price was comparatively steep when one considers that his first 1915 Anderson 38-hp and six-cylinder engine roadster sold for \$1,250 and a 1922 five-passenger touring car with leather upholstery and a six-volt 50-hp engine was priced at \$1,495.

The hood ornament on Anderson's cars bore the slogan "A LITTLE HIGHER IN PRICE BUT —" above two powerful rams butting heads and the name. The slogan was first used to sell buggies, Anderson once told C.K. Schwarz, editor of *The (Rock Hill) Record*, that the slogan came from a painter who wanted to paint a sign for the Rock Hill Buggies Co. building. He painted: "Rock Hill Buggies Are Good Buggies, a Little Higher in Price, But —" When Anderson got into the auto business, he

simply cut off the first half of the slogan.

Anderson believed in advertising, and his campaigns were generally successful. By 1920 he had around 150 dealers and used a New York commission house to handle sales to foreign companies. Anderson once remarked that he sold more automobiles in Detroit than he did in South Carolina.

But Anderson's cars couldn't compete in price with Fords, which sold for \$298 in 1922. Besides that, Ford dealers began offering installment plans (practically unheard of for major purchases at that time). When Fords could be had for \$5 weekly payments, the handwriting was on the wall.

By the time Anderson Motor Co. stopped manufacturing, it had turned out almost 6,000 vehicles. The building, beside the railroad tracks on West White Street, was sold in 1928 to Lowenstein & Sons and became known as the Rock Hill Finishing Plant, or "the Bleachery." The huge buggy-shop-auto-assembly plant-bleachery building, much altered but still a Rock Hill landmark, is now owned by Springs Industries Inc.

And what of the Anderson car that appeared on the streets of Charlotte in spring 1910? Not even a picture of the sporty little topless touring car is known to exist.

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Louise Pettus is a retired history professor from Winthrop University. Her column appears Saturdays.