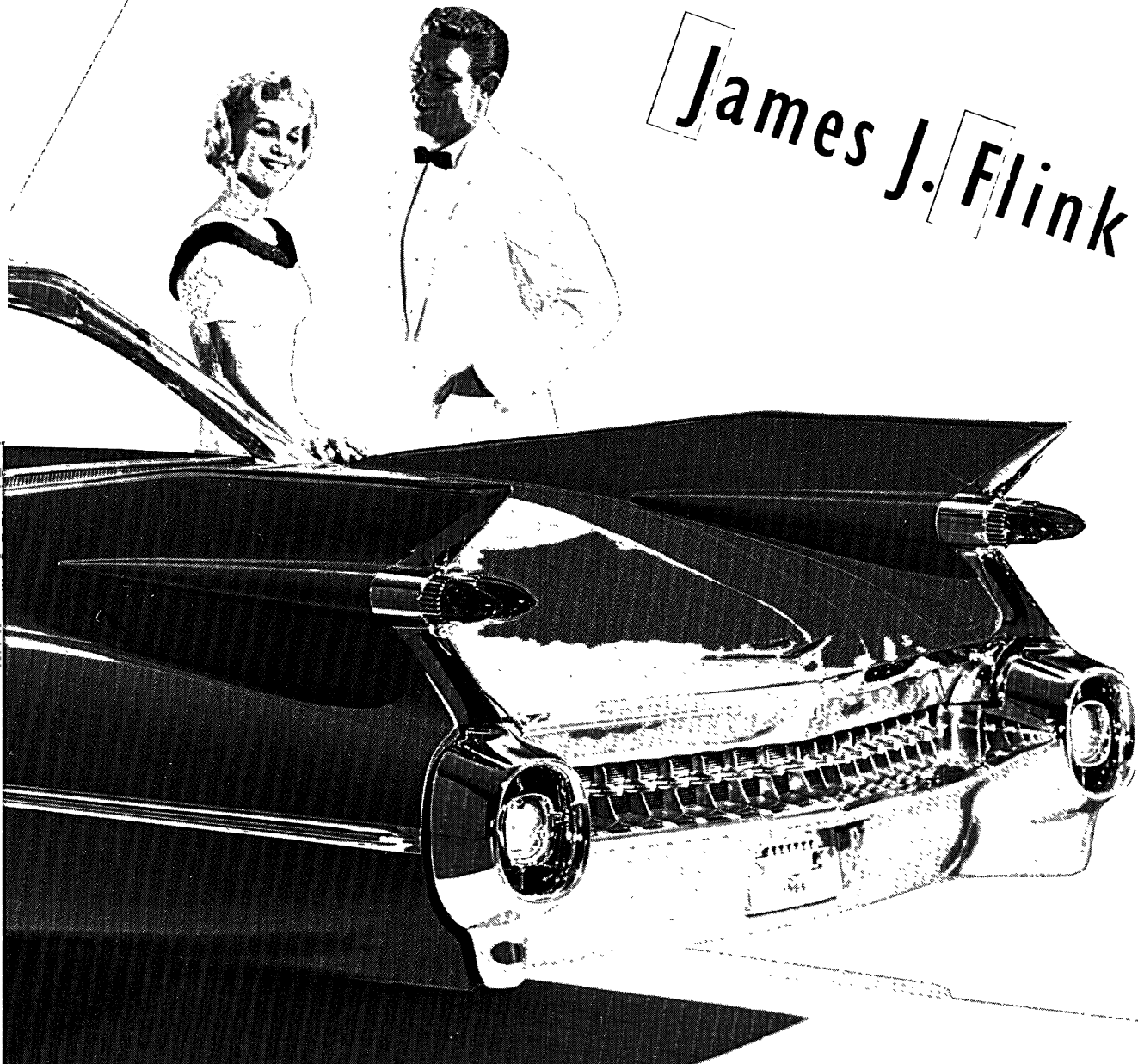


The Automobile Age

James J. Flink



The Automobile Age

The Automobile Age

James J. Flink

The MIT Press
Cambridge, Massachusetts
London, England

Sixth printing, 2001

First MIT Press paperback edition, 1990

© 1988 Massachusetts Institute of Technology

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form by any electronic or mechanical means (including photocopying, recording, or information storage and retrieval) without permission in writing from the publisher.

This book was set in Bembo by Asco Trade Typesetting Ltd., Hong Kong, and printed and bound by Hailiday Lithograph in the United States of America.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Flink, James J.

The automobile age.

Bibliography: p.

Includes index.

1. Automobile industry and trade—United States—History. 2. Automobiles—Social aspects—United States. 3. Automobiles—History. I. Title.

T123.F5713 1988 303.4'832 87-26095

ISBN 0-262-06111-2 (hardcover)

0-262-56055-0 (paperback)

For Iona, for many reasons

Who can find a wife with strength of character? She is far more precious than jewels. The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will never lack profit. She does him good and not harm all the days of his life. . . . Many daughters have done nobly, but you transcend them all.

Proverbs 31 : 10–12, 29

Contents

Preface	viii
<hr/>	
1	
The Automotive Idea	1
2	
The Emerging Industry	15
3	
A Car for the Great Multitude	27
4	
Fordism	40
5	
The Rise of the Giants	56
6	
War and Peace	73
7	
Modern Times	112
8	
Diffusion	129
9	
The Family Car	158
10	
On the Road	169
11	
Hard Times	188

12		
Sloanism		229
13		
American Challenge, European Response		251
14		
Freedom's Arsenal		268
15		
The Insolent Chariots		277
16		
Up from the Ashes		294
17		
Japan as Number One		327
18		
New Frontiers		346
19		
The Triumph of the Automobile		358
20		
Decline and Resurgence		377
Epilogue		
The Future of the Automobile		404
Notes		410
Index		430

Preface

The rise of the automobile industry and the socioeconomic impact of the road and the car are central to the history of the advanced capitalist countries in the twentieth century, and explain an especially large part of the history of the American people. A definitive exposition, analysis, and synthesis of this most important phenomenon to mankind has yet to be written, and many aspects of the topic are still generally misunderstood or shrouded in myth.

In this book I have drawn upon the automotive history scholarship of the past decade and have utilized the research strategies of comparative history and the new social history to revise significantly my earlier revisionist synthesis, *The Car Culture*, published by The MIT Press in 1975. Here the perspective is very different. Even in passages abstracted from my earlier books a number of factual errors have been corrected, new information has been added, and the evidence often has been reinterpreted substantially. I am far less polemical here, and I rely much more on statistical data, much less on the assessments of participant-observers in the interpretation of historical events and processes. Most important, this is a comparative history, not in the sense that equal attention has been given to the history of the automobile in the rest of the world, but in the more limited senses of providing perspectives on the American automobile culture and of explaining developments elsewhere that have affected it. Like *The Car Culture*, this book focuses on the United States. It could not be otherwise, for to understand the worldwide automobile revolution one must put center stage the world's foremost automobile culture.

Throughout the text I explore and interrelate six general themes. One is the technological evolution of the motor vehicle, particularly the passenger car. Another is the development of mass-production techniques,