

An Approach to Automobile Styling

BY WILLIAM H. GRAVES

Two years ago a new product philosophy was approved at Packard which gave the engineering department a green light that had not been on since 1935. This enabled us to set up a program to style future cars for the luxury field. Since then, the formation of the Studebaker-Packard Corporation last October has brought Packard into a position where close coordination with Studebaker's advanced styling program is possible.

The factors involved in carrying out the new styling program are directly related to the position of the company in the automotive industry. As the fourth full-line manufacturer, the company has to establish a specific styling and design identity for each of its cars to set them apart from competitors and meet consumer desires.

Basically, Studebaker-Packard's styling approach is built on three distinct ideas. First, we are firmly convinced that there is plenty of room for individuality in the automobile business. We believe this because a sizeable segment of the American public does not want to live in a house that looks like his neighbor's; does not want to dress like the next fellow; eat in the same place, or drive the same kind of car. One characteristic that is distinctly American is the emphasis on individuality. We see our role in the automotive business as catering to this desire with cars of advanced and distinctive styling and outstanding quality.

We believe, secondly, that the next major move in automobile designing and merchandising will be directed toward providing the customer with greater riding comfort. The emphasis during recent years has been on mechanical improvement, with V-8 engines of increased horsepower, automatic transmissions, and power equipment. This emphasis is currently supplemented by the prominence given styling, so that the consumer is offered a wide choice of color and trim schemes with which to express individuality in his car. It was because of our strong belief that new standards of riding comfort would be the next major cycle in engineering development that the decision was made to introduce the new Torsion-Level method of suspension in Packard cars this year.

We know, lastly, that the corporation must try to offer the best car in each class. Of course, there is a different styling objective for our luxury cars from that for lower price models. In the upper price field, year-to-year changes are more gradual, less radical, with family continuity in successive models. In the Studebaker, the advanced styling which has been a feature since the war will be continued.

In translating this style philosophy into a successful line of cars the necessary ingredients proved to be people, modern research and testing facilities, organization of styling and design activities, consumer research.

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The Packard program was launched in October, 1952, with the formation of a new styling group of young men, whose average age was 28. A new \$2,000,000 styling laboratory was completed and two new single-story production and assembly plants were begun. An advanced design section and a special section to experiment with plastics as a possible material for both parts and dies were established.

For better evaluation of new equipment, a stringent testing program was instituted, which included such projects as trying out the V-8 engine of the 1955 model on a 25,000-mile endurance run. To test consumer reaction to new styling features, an experimental car program was undertaken. One of the results of this program is the Packard *Request* which offers the classic Packard radiator grille treated in a modern way.

We find it relatively easier to offer individuality of styling and design because of our advantage, as controlled volume manufacturers, of flexibility in planning and manufacturing. A new idea can be approved and in production in a matter of months, while it might take a year or more in larger companies.

A basic tenet of our program was to be the first to bring out new developments which would contribute to driving comfort and safety. Tubeless tires as standard equipment on all models in July 1954 were the first result. The development of torsion suspension for American production cars this year was the next. The years to come will see still further developments which will add to the automobile driver's comfort and safety.



William H. Graves, a Vice President and the Director of Engineering of the recently formed Studebaker-Packard Corporation, is a specialist in the field of styling automobiles for controlled volume manufacturers.