

A TUCKER CONVERTIBLE? ABSOLUTELY!

The Tucker Club's press release dated January 4, 2010 states that "The Seller (Benchmark Classics) has not responded to our (Tucker Club) request seeking the engine serial number and data plate information."

In an effort to clarify this issue please consider the following correspondence. On December 9, 2009 Benchmark received the following e-mail from Jay Follis which is quoted verbatim below:

"How is the convertible project coming along? I would still very much like to come up and look at the car or look at it when it is shown again. Being *I have not personally seen the car* or engine used in this car could you please provide the engine serial number? It would also be nice to get a photo of how the data plate currently reads and the cowl stamping" *Emphasis added.*

Justin Cole, of Benchmark Classics responded as follows:

"You have gone on record as saying that you *would not be able to verify whether or not the convertible was a Tucker concept if you saw it (Grand Rapids Press August 14, 2009)*. The press has pitted your club and you against me and my company. I have also been attacked personally on your club's website. What I am wondering is how your coming and inspecting my car is going to help me? Please don't take the question the wrong way. I am hoping you can tell me something I have not thought of. Thanks." *Emphasis and citation added.*

Probably due to an unfortunate oversight, the TACA President, never responded to Benchmark's e-mail and made no further attempts to examine the car, or personally review its supporting documentation. No Tucker Club member has ever been told that they could not come and see the car. The car has been continuously open to the public since it originally arrived at Benchmark Classics in December of 2008. In addition, the Tucker Convertible was on display at the Keels & Wheels Concours D' Elegance (Houston, TX), the Auto Historica Event (Chicago, IL), the Fairfield County Concours D' Elegance (Newport, CT), and most recently, the largest car show in the world, the Antique Automobile Club of America's Hershey, PA Meet. As a side note the Hershey event officials commented that the Convertible was by far the most popular car at the entire four day event.

The TACA press release appears to have been very craftily written by a marketing expert. It attempts to support its case regarding the Convertible's originality by referring to the "consensus of individual opinions" without referring to the number or identity of these "individuals" or, for that matter, to their qualifications to render an opinion.

None of these "individuals" have examined the Convertible. In fact, some of these "individuals" have claimed on the Club's website that the Tucker Convertible is actually Tucker #1027, which was scrapped after it was rolled at Indy (a few spare parts still exist), or Tucker #1052, which now resides in Roscoe, Illinois. The car can't be in three places at once. These are our critics exposing their "individual opinions."

TACA has over 400 registered online members many of whom have seen the car and expressed their opinion that the "Club's stance does not reflect their views or the views of other Tucker Club members." Presidents of many organizations, including the United States, do not necessarily reflect the views of all of their constituents.

The TACA press release states, "That it is not a case of TACA having an interest in the existence or non-existence of such a vehicle: either way, TACA neither gains nor loses anything." Nothing could be further from the truth. Unfortunately, its recognition as the alleged "foremost authority on Tucker Automobiles" is at stake. Its reputation has been challenged. Its own members have gone so far as to apologize for the behavior of certain Tucker Club "individuals." Clearly the Tucker Club is a house divided.

No one invests in very expensive collector cars, no matter what documentation may exist, without engaging an independent expert to thoroughly examine a car. Decisions to purchase multimillion dollar cars aren't based entirely on paper documentation.

Benchmark engaged Al Prueitt, an engineer by trade and a true legend in the restoration business with over 50 years of experience, to evaluate the Tucker Convertible. He has won over one hundred awards at venues such as Pebble Beach, Amelia Island, Meadow Brook, Hershey and the CCA Nationals. As a restoration expert, who also currently serves as a museum curator and automobile historian, he is extremely knowledgeable, not only with regard to the evolution of manufacturing technology but also with regard to the techniques that were used to fabricate reinforced frames and sheet metal in the 1940s and 1950s. His credentials can be viewed at Benchmark's "Tucker Convertible" website.

He carefully examined many different aspects of the Convertible, including its one of a kind box-wrapped ovalar (tubular) frame, which was created to compensate for the loss of rigidity when Tucker Sedan #1057 was transformed into Tucker Convertible #1057, thereby satisfying the performance expectations of the Tucker Engineering department. He also focused on the passenger doors that are long in comparison to those of a sedan and appear to have been stamped suggesting more convertibles were to come. That insightful observation came from Holly Bedsole, the executive director of the AACA Museum who has also seen the Convertible. Car # 1057 was not going to be the only convertible produced by the Tucker Corporation.

After spending a couple of days examining the car Mr. Prueitt authenticated its originality. His authentication may be found and viewed on the Tucker Convertible website.

Jay Follis is an immensely likable man. We agree that he is unable to authenticate the Tucker Convertible. It is our understanding that he has no experience working as a paid employee in a restoration business and doesn't have a background in engineering. He didn't join the TACA until 1994. He has served at the Gilmore museum as its marketing director for 11 years. Before that he had a career in law enforcement and as a private detective.

Again, Mr. Follis represents the Gilmore Museum very well but Mr. Prueitt has been in the restoration business longer than Jay has been alive. That is why Benchmark turned to Mr. Prueitt. Benchmark needed that expertise. It is not uncommon to engage professionals such as Mr. Prueitt, with over 50 years of engineering and restoration experience to authenticate cars. Many times key documents have been destroyed or lost and the exact nature of a car's origins are muddled.

In conclusion, Mr. Follis genuinely seems dedicated to preserving the fascinating history of the Tucker automobile. With these same interests in mind we engaged a highly regarded restoration expert to independently evaluate the car based on his knowledge and experience and the car's construction. Paper archives just weren't enough.

Justin Cole

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Justin Cole". The signature is stylized and cursive.

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