

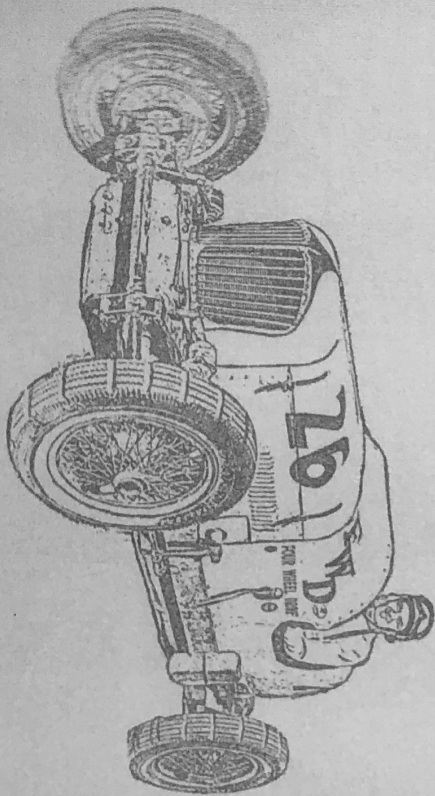
THE

FOUR

WHEELS

DRIVE

A CHAPTER IN
COOPERATIVE ENTERPRISE



STORY

by HOWARD WILLIAM TROYER

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his stock canceled. He was refused. There was much trading and selling of stock among local stockholders and the price rapidly declined. One of the directors moved that all stock subscribed and not paid for be canceled or that the manager take whatever legal steps were necessary to force payment on delinquent subscriptions. Then the company began borrowing money for current expenses, covering it with mortgages on the factory and on the unfinished cars.

"I have not been in Clintonyville for three months," wrote one of the out-of-town stockholders, to Walter A. Olen,

and I have not herd anything about the Four Wheel Drive only some knocking on it. You are a lawyer and I would like a little of your advice. I got a letter from the company and Anabels' name as Gen. Manager and as there is some money dew from me he wrote for it but I am tempted not to put any more money in it as I say I have herd nothing but knocking on it since I am up here.

The attitude was typical.

The first car built for sale to the public was finally finished late in the summer and sold to August Matuzczak of Clintonyville for a small down payment, the rest covered by a mortgage. The second car was not completed until late in the winter, nor sold until well into the next year. Indeed, it is almost incredible—what with the delays in manufacturing and the difficulties in selling stock or collecting money for that already sold; with mounting debts and mortgages and a steady decline in the price of the stock; with the stockholders discouraged and disgruntled—that the company survived the first year. It took courage to keep on going, and a kind of bullheaded tenacity.

In the middle of the summer, when H. B. Anabel, the

general manager, had resigned, the company had faced a crucial decision. Walter A. Olen had been president from the time of reorganization, but he himself was an attorney with a business of his own. The law had been and still was his first interest. The first inclination of any man—seeing how things were going—would have been to remain in his own profession. After all, he was simply an investor like the others. On the other hand he had been responsible for the initial move in organizing the new company. He had persuaded his neighbors to invest their savings. He was, as president, responsible, he felt, to the stockholders and to the town. Moreover, he still had faith in Otto Zachow and the invention. In July he surrendered his law practice and dissolved the firm, agreeing to give his full time to the Four Wheel Drive Auto Company, assuming the duties of the general manager, as well as the presidency of the board.

As general manager he made two astute moves. Sensing the growing interest in trucks and trucking vehicles—an industry lagging some ten years behind the development of pleasure cars—he persuaded the stockholders, in what seemed to many of them throwing good money after bad, to change their original directive, calling for seven cars, to include a 2-ton truck, and, as general manager, promised Otto Zachow a \$450 bonus if the truck could be completed by the next February. The second thing he did was to hire, impulsively, P. J. F. Batenburg, a foreigner, almost at first sight.

Peter Johannes Frederick Batenburg had been born in Holland, son of a well-known surgeon with a family of nine children. Forced to shift for themselves, the boys had spread out over Europe, Peter himself, interested in and studying

through, daring others to follow, or at other times forcing a rival truck into an impassable stretch. On one occasion, too, with the big Four Wheel Drive parked along the street on a slope and the drivers resting under the shade of a tree on the opposite side of the street, the brakes were mysteriously released and the big truck went crashing down into a bridge, damaging the front axle and radiator.

To some degree, certainly, the rival companies helped to defeat each other, though even without such antics, two fundamental problems remained: the almost impassable condition of the early roads during a greater portion of the year, and the necessity for gearing down motor vehicles accompanying the troops to a mile and a half an hour, the forward progress of a foot army. In spite of the commendation of officers in the field for the four-wheel-drive principle, all the rented trucks were discharged as soon as the regiment reached Sparta, and Williams and Dorn drove the Four Wheel Drive back to Clintonville.

With the failure of the government to follow through on the expected order for 1,200 vehicles, gloom settled over the town and the factory. To be sure, the men were kept busy, and as the summer progressed more and more of the individual cars and trucks already under construction were completed and sold. The first car had gone to August Matuzczak; the second, to Marcus Model, proprietor of the Ward House, for whom it had been reconverted into a bus, hauling passengers from the depot the three-quarters of a mile to the hotel. The third and fourth touring cars were now completed and sold, one to M. W. Pinkerton of the Pinkerton Detective Agency of Chicago and the second to Charles W. Zingler of Shiocton.