

LOWER AUTOMOBILE PRICES AID MAKER AND THE BUYER; STABILIZED YEAR PROMISED

Better Service to Owners Predicted in Addition to Competitive Values—Better Methods of Selling Used Cars—Clean Out High Inventories at Low Retail Prices.

(By Alfred Reeves, General Manager, National Automobile Chamber of Commerce.)

Because automobile manufacturers reduced prices directly to the final consumer, instead of lowering them to the wholesaler and retailer, the automobile business fared very much better during 1921 than was generally expected and better than many other lines of manufacture.

The increasing need for highway transportation, coupled with price reductions in tires, gasoline and other things entering into car maintenance, permitted a production of about 1,680,000 motor vehicles or only 24 per cent less than the 3,305,000 in the record year of 1920. Of this 145,000 were trucks and about 1,335,000 passenger cars.

The decrease in truck production was proportionately greater than in passenger cars because of the falling off in the demand for transportation that came in the decrease of general business—a development that affected the railroads to an equal degree.

These reduced prices have not been without substantial losses to the manufacturers and the 23,000 motor car dealers. But it was deemed worth while because with final price adjustments about completed, the industry enters 1922 with high prices and inventories liquidated, labor more efficient, finances adjusted and definite and economical production programmes under way. The adjustments have been drastic with comparatively few motor companies showing any profit for the past year, but in the opinion of economists and bankers, the action taken will make for a much healthier situation during 1922.

He turned to address R. C. Babo, the department superintendent, to whom young Dodge was assigned for his first apprenticeship. "Better than that," said Babo. "They were fine. But the principal idea is to give you a good working knowledge of the whole department. You can't hope to learn everyone of these machines."

Babo added that young Dodge seemed determined to emulate his father in the latter's mechanical versatility. The elder Mr. Dodge, it was said, could run any machine in the entire factory as well as the most expert workman.

"We have a hard time keeping this young man off some of these machines," he said. "He wants to know everything first hand. The first week he was here he ruined a suit of clo-

thes and was quite painfully burned because he insisted on getting too close to a cupola they were dumping in the foundry. What we are trying to do is keep him out of danger and teach him the general routine, so that he will know what he is talking about in later years when his responsibilities are greater. From here he will move on to another department and so right on through the factory. He has mapped out an ambitious programme for himself, but he has the right stuff in him and I believe he's going through with it."

Babo related an incident which tends to prove his contention that Dodge likes his work and that his daily presence at the factory is not merely for the gratification of a whim.

"He was not feeling well one day," the superintendent said, "and the doctor ordered him to stay at home. Horace objected, but his mother interceded, with the result that I was notified he would not be here. 'At least not today, and probably not tomorrow,' the message said. About 2 o'clock that afternoon Horace walked into the shop and took off his coat. I couldn't drive him out, but I did refuse to let him work. Even then he hung around watching the others until quitting time."

"Ask me whether he is really interested and I say, 'No—he is enthusiastic.' I walked over to young Dodge, who had in the meantime resumed his work at some large wooden object that was whirring around in a dizzy fashion on a lathe, and asked him how long he thought it would take him to turn the whole factory from top to bottom. There was not a moment's hesitation.

"All my life," he answered. Knowing that Dodge Brothers' factory comprises some 100 acres of floor space and that there are literally hundreds of departments and thousands upon thousands of perplexing details to master before anyone can hope to "know it all," I concluded then and there that I would concur in the estimate of his boss, who a moment before had said:

"He has the right stuff in him, and I believe he's going through with it." Nationally the manufacturer can take the experience of one territory and pass it on to another.

Must Sell Used Cars, Too. The industry is also becoming increasingly aware of the fact that it must sell used cars as well as new cars. The habit of large sections of the American public of getting a new

motor car every two or three years has developed a huge business in traded-in cars, which still have plenty of service left in them.

Used cars unfortunately have been badly merchandised and 1922 will be devoted to correcting a number of mistakes and building new policies. The customer has been a sufferer because used cars sometimes have not been properly rebuilt or have frequently been misrepresented when sold "as is." On the other hand, the consumer has received far more than the resale value, in many instances, when trading in a used car.

The future will probably see dealer and consumer getting together and forming appraisal bureaus where an impartial judge will pass on the value of the used automobile. Better mechanical attention will be given the used vehicles put on sale, and there will be more consideration shown to customers of this part of the business.

Farmer A Future Reserve

The farmer, who is normally the largest customer of the automobile industry, will eventually be a strong buying factor again. The unusual values now offered in most lines of automobiles are bringing in some of his trade, but in the main he must be considered as a backlog for future sales rather than an immediate prospect. Farm products have been the first to take the post-war deflation, and until the other products besides automobiles have come down in price correspondingly he will not be in the market.

The fact that \$1,000,000,000 is available for road construction, that city planning is making automobile use in cities more feasible, that cost of operation studies are making for more economy—all of these things promise greater serviceability and consequently greater sales for motor cars and motor trucks.

Nineteen-twenty-two will see the sales departments put in order. It will see new methods and policies developed, companies and individuals tested. It will lay the bedrock for a strong growing business in the years to come.

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