

All the automotive info you need to start the New Year.

1. Back in 1900, a new car company named Horch appeared in Germany, founded by former Benz engineer August Horch. He didn't get along with his directors and, when he left nine years later, the company took legal action to prevent him from putting his name on any new automobile. Horch roughly translates to "listen," so he used the Latin version: Audi.

2. The MacPherson strut is a spring/shock absorber combination used on the front suspension of most of today's front-wheel-drive cars. It was invented in 1947 by Chevrolet engineer Earle S. MacPherson for the rear suspension of a planned compact model called the Cadet. The car was never built, and a disappointed MacPherson left GM and moved to England to work for Ford.

3. From 1956 to 1959, you could order your Chrysler with a record player. You got six discs with the car and could buy more from the dealer, but your choices were limited to artists signed with Columbia, which made the unique records that worked with the player. They tended to skip over bumps and didn't work very well, and disappeared for 1962.

4. The first Chevrolet Corvette, introduced for 1953, didn't have any outside door handles. It was a soft-top roadster that also lacked side windows, so you simply reached inside to unlatch the door.

5. Henry Ford started two unsuccessful companies before hitting his mark with the third, the one that exists today. His second company was taken over by its board and run by director Henry Leland, who renamed it Cadillac to build cars of his own design. After selling Cadillac to General Motors, Leland started Lincoln, which Ford eventually purchased.

6. Studebakers were built in Hamilton for two years after the automaker closed in the U.S. in 1964. Because the government now considered it a Canadian automaker, it could import cars duty-free. To make extra money, the cash-strapped company bought Volkswagens in Germany and sold them to VW Canada. Even with Studebaker's markup, the cars cost less than what VW would have paid to bring them in. Studebaker also tried to distribute Japanese cars but the deal fell through, partly due to a Studebaker board

member on the advice of his law partner: future U.S. president Richard Nixon.

7. Charles Rolls, co-founder of Rolls-Royce, was the first Englishman ever killed in an airplane and the 12th person worldwide when the Wright Brothers biplane he was flying at an air show in Bournemouth, England, in 1910 snapped its tail and crashed. Henry Royce ran the company after his partner's death, mailing instructions to his employees when deteriorating health confined him to his home.

8. The first production Ford Mustang went on a tour of the U.S. and Canada in 1964, and was eventually sold to airline pilot Stan Tucker in St. John's, Nfld. Two years and some 16,000 kilometres later, Ford realized the car's significance, swapped Tucker a brand new 1966 Mustang for it, and donated it to the Henry Ford Museum in Michigan.

9. The tow truck dates to 1916, when Ernest Holmes of Chattanooga, Tenn., was asked to help pull a crashed Ford Model T out of a creek. It took 11 men almost a day to do it with ropes and blocks. Figuring there had to be a better way, Holmes bolted three poles to a 1913 Cadillac chassis, added a pulley and ran a chain through it, which provided leverage to lift vehicles. He also built up a truck body on the chassis for tool storage. His patented design became the standard for vehicle recovery.

10. BMW started as an aircraft company, moved into motorcycles and truck engines, and in 1928 built its first car, the Dixi, a licensed version of the British Austin Seven. Bigger and better models followed, but the company fell on hard times after World War II. It was saved in 1955 by the Isetta, its version of a tiny Italian model. It used a motorcycle engine and its single door was the car's front end, but its low price resounded with buyers, and its success put the automaker back on track.