

# The 1934 Airflow: The First Modern Car?

*Gene Weiss* retired Chrysler Engineer, Oral History Interview:

While some people say that the first modern car was the 1924 Chrysler, I believe it was the Airflow. And the reason for that is the weight distribution of the car. Up until that time, cars had the majority of their weight on their rear tires. And to make things even worse, the person in the back seat sat over the rear axle thus taking more weight off the front axle. Cars of the day had a very strong rearweight bias. And any object in motion that is heavy on one end tends to go heavy end first. Imagine throwing a dart backwards. There's an aerodynamic component to that. On icy roads, when going around corners, and in various other dynamic conditions, these big lumbering sedans go sideways around turns. The car is only doing what come naturally, which is to go heavy end first.

What the Airflow did is basically equalize the weight distribution between the front and the rear. It actually started out a little front-weight biased, but as you loaded the car, it wound up being fairly even. Other cars of the day started with about 65 percent of the weight in the rear, and then when loaded, that percentage goes up to 70 or 75.

A significant improvement in the ride and handling also came with more equal springs in the Airflow. Beyond that, the Airflow was the beginning of unit construction. It had a whole list of engineering breakthroughs, but most of them revolve around weight distribution and around building a car that is safe at dynamic high speeds. At last, here was a car that could go 60 or 70 miles an hour and always wanted to go straight ahead.