

SIGNIFICANT PEOPLE - HENRY FORD (1863-1947)

Henry Ford did not invent the motor car, but he found ways to build cars very cheaply, so that many more people could afford them. Henry was born on a farm near Detroit in North America, but preferred tinkering with machinery rather than working with his father on the farm. He watched early steam engines starting to replace men and horses on the farms, and this helped to convince him that machinery could make life much easier. When he left school he worked as an apprentice in local engineering companies and went to a business college, but still dreamed of making his own engine.

When he was 33 he built his first car in a shed behind his house. It had four bicycle wheels, a wooden body and an engine made from scrap metal. A few years later in 1903, Henry launched the Ford Motor Company, and started producing cars to sell. He wanted to make a car that was reliable, easy to repair (there were few garages then) and able to survive the rough roads in rural America. In 1908 the Ford Model T was ready. It was simple, easy to drive and cheap. It would be the first car that most people had owned, and enabled



them to travel easily for the first time. The Model T had no heater and a canvas roof with no sides, but it was cheaper and faster than a horse and cart. It was affectionately known as "Tin Lizzie".

Cars were then made in batches with groups of workers moving around them, but as more cars were sold a better way to make them was needed. Henry modified his factory so that the cars were built on a moving conveyor, with workers

fitting the same parts to each car as it went past. This speeded up production, and meant more cars could be produced cheaper than ever. Most cars were black, because black paint dried more quickly. Over 15 million Ford Model T vehicles were produced until the Model A arrived in 1928. New factories were built in many countries including Britain, with Dagenham plant opening in 1924.

Henry Ford went on to design the first mass produced V8 engine in 1932, which was more powerful than the four cylinder engine and was used in cars, trucks and boats. During the Second World War Ford factories produced tanks, aircraft parts and Jeeps. Ford Motor Company is still one of the biggest companies worldwide, all thanks to Henry working away in his shed.