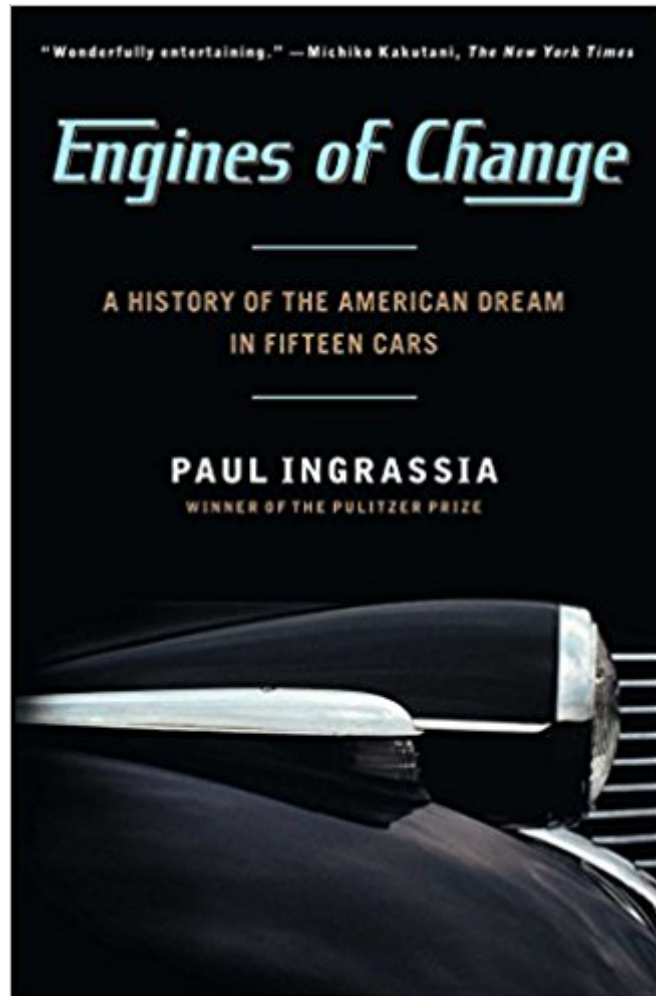




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Engines Of Change: A History Of The American Dream In Fifteen Cars



Synopsis

From Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Paul Ingrassia comes a narrative of America like no other: a cultural history that explores how cars have both propelled and reflected the national experience—from the Model T to the Prius. From the assembly lines of Henry Ford to the open roads of Route 66, America's history is a vehicular history—an idea brought brilliantly to life in this major work by Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Paul Ingrassia. *Engines of Change* is a wondrous epic in fifteen automobiles, including the Corvette, the Beetle, and the Chevy Corvair, as well as the personalities and tales behind them: Robert McNamara's unlikely role in Lee Iacocca's Mustang, Henry Ford's Model T, as well as Honda's Accord, the BMW 3 Series, and the Jeep, among others. Through these cars and these characters, Ingrassia shows how the car has expressed the particularly American tension between the lure of freedom and the obligations of utility. Narrative history of the highest caliber, *Engines of Change* is an entirely edifying new way to look at the American story.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

“You will never look at a car the same way after reading *Engines of Change* as I strongly recommend to anyone who relishes great storytelling that combines biography, social and political history, science, and romance. Having driven and virtually lived in a 1953 Plymouth on a year's journey across Eisenhower's America, and having followed that up many driving years later by writing on the innovations of Henry Ford, I thought I knew something of the

history of cars. I was all the more surprised—and vastly entertained—by the riches in Ingrassia's stories of fifteen vehicles embodying the American dream from the Model T to the Beetle, the Corvair, the Corvette, and the Mustang to the pickups and the Prius (driven by the Pious). Even readers who cannot tell a camshaft from a cami-knicker will find fascination in a gallery of characters depicted by Ingrassia with vivacity and wit.

—Sir Harold Evans "The whole country in 15 cars—that's crowded! And *Engines of Change* is indeed packed from rocker panels to sunroof with good stories and salient facts about the automobiles that shaped America, from the oddity of the Model T to the oddballs driving the Prius."

—P.J. O'Rourke "Highly entertaining... lucid... *Engines of Change* informed and charmed me..."

—Joseph Epstein, *The Wall Street Journal* "The prose is lapidary, the tone informed by humor. Paul Ingrassia has written an automobile book that goes beyond the genre; it's for anyone interested in modernity and what led us to where we are."

—Miles Collier, *The Revs Institute for Automotive Research* "Paul Ingrassia knows where the bodies are buried, or maybe where the keys to the American car business got lost. With a swift, sure scalpel honed by years as the industry reporter, he anatomizes Detroit in all its glory and inglorious decline. A thoughtful, propulsive assay of the machine that changed a nation, a world."

—Dan Neil, car critic, *The Wall Street Journal* "Entertaining and instructive..."

—George Will, *The Washington Post* "Sure, cars suck up gas, and they promote suburban sprawl, but they also help drive the economy, and drive families from home to school to soccer field. And, of course, cars fire our imaginations. Paul Ingrassia, who won a Pulitzer Prize for reporting from Detroit for *The Wall Street Journal*, has written a book about cars that may not all be cherished classics or engineering marvels, but have earned a place in America's scrapbook."

—Scott Simon, *National Public Radio* "Ingrassia succeeds in fashioning well-researched, swift-paced narratives around each of these 15 select automobiles. Using colorful detail, he effectively recasts these significant driving machines in their respective cultural contexts and brings to life the eras they influenced."

—Kirkus Reviews "A must for anyone with a passion for cars, history, or simply an interest in America's story."

—Bask Magazine "Paul Ingrassia is probably the best broadsheet reporter ever to cover the car business. Picking 15 vehicles as tent poles for this sprawling canvas was a good idea, and Ingrassia chose well. Any book on a topic so overwhelming as the car in America has to be more of a goad to, than a proof of, argument. And here Ingrassia has succeeded."

—Weekly Standard "In this new book, Ingrassia traces the history of some iconic cars and how those models reflected shifts in politics, culture, and technology. He also takes readers inside the industry, skillfully navigating among the soaring tail

fins, egomaniacal visionaries, and corporate intrigue that surrounded the creation of these vehicles." — *Boston Globe* Paul Ingrassia — "His Engines of Change: A History of the American Dream in Fifteen Cars ranges as widely and quirkily as the title suggests among the people, passions and foibles of the automotive industry. As a journalist for the Wall Street Journal, Ingrassia shared a 1993 Pulitzer Prize for writing on General Motors Co. In this book he lets out the journalistic stays, enjoying the freedom to openly needle an industry and admire its pioneers without any loss of the good reporter's delight in detail and a fine tale." — Jeffrey Burke, *Bloomberg BusinessWeek* "In Engines of Change, Mr. Ingrassia arguably does for cars and culture what David Halberstam did for a decade in *The Fifties*. History well researched, made alive, relevant and eminently readable." — John Lamm, *The New York Times* "Using his nimble narrative gifts, Mr. Ingrassia turns the creation stories behind the Prius and other cars into gripping accounts of how visionary design, corporate competition and inventive engineering combined to produce automobiles that would come to represent an era or a mind-set." — Michiko Kakutani, *The New York Times*

Paul Ingrassia, formerly the Detroit bureau chief for *The Wall Street Journal* and later the president of Dow Jones Newswire, is the deputy editor-in-chief of Reuters. Winner of the Pulitzer Prize in 1993 (with Joseph B. White) for reporting on management crises at General Motors, he is the author of *Crash Course: The American Automobile Industry's Road from Glory to Disaster*.

What a great retrospective on the auto business channeling iconic vehicles in our history. Love Mr. Ingrassia's lighthearted and very readable writing style. Can't wait to read his other books related to the auto industry. I'm trying to slow down and savor every page.

I enjoyed the book enough. Paul Ingrassia wrote an interesting enough book and said from the beginning that it was his opinion of what the 15 most important cars have been to the United States. The only problem was that it turned more into a book about the 15 most important makes to the United States than it was about the models. I understand that models often influence the make as a whole (remember the Ford tagline from a few years ago that a single car "could be the pace car for an entire company"?) but I think the way Ingrassia went about weaving this together went a little too far. The chapter on the BMW 2002 as an example, started with the problems BMW faced in the aftermath of WWII, got to the introduction of the 2002, then followed into the heyday of the 3-series and the yuppies and yuppie psychology. Really? He had a longer discussion of some of the BMW

snobbery than he did of the car itself. There is a chapter on the Ford truck which brings in discussions of everybody else's trucks. The Honda Accord's chapter talked more too about the manufacturer's range and history than the model. While the subtitle of the book is "A History of the American Dream in Fifteen Cars," I think he could have made the subtitle more about the makes and been more accurate and maybe have then put the story together a little more coherently than what emerged. Finally, as another reviewer noted, there are few errors in the book but I can't recall them now that I am reviewing this about a month after reading; they were not overly glaring and will only be noticed by those who are car crazy themselves. I did like the book well enough in the end--I am a car guy after all. It is well written for what it is and I will admit to learning a few things through my read.

I had read this book some time ago and recently purchased the audio book because I enjoyed it so much. It is not as good as his other book, *Crash Course: The American Automobiles...* but entertaining, nonetheless. Sometimes he reminisces too much about songs and TV shows from the era of the car he is discussing, but that is a minor complaint. If you are a car enthusiast, you will enjoy this book. If you hate cars or find them boring, you would not be reading this review in the first place:)

Engines of Change is an OK book. It has more details about 15 cars like the Mustang, Prius, and Cadillacs than you would ever want. For example, did the readers really need to know about the Prius being the featured car on *Curb Your Enthusiasm* or a funny *South Park* episode? I think the book was good, but you get bogged down in minutiae and you just feel sick. I agree with the other reviewer that said basically that he tries too hard to be cutesy with his titles and humor (example "From Hitler to Hippies"....and "Baby Boomers become Soccer Moms and a, um, Driving Force in American Politics." The strength of this book is that it is a unique concept: a history book that contains 15 vehicles that shaped American history. The problem is the minute details and just "over doing it" when it comes explaining the stories circling these cars. Just give me the stories without all the BS and I will be happy.

It's pretty clear that Paul Ingrassia may understand the auto industry, but doesn't really know cars. There are a few factual errors that were obvious, like his assertion that pickup trucks had suicide rear doors in the 1970s (they did not) or his erroneous description of the Corvair suspension, that call into question the veracity of the rest of the book. Still, if you love cars it's fun to see someone

attempt to tell the story of America through seminal cars. I just would check the facts before spouting them off to your local car nerd.

This is a well written book that takes you through some of the highlights of automobiles in American culture. The drawback is that it tells those archetypal stories that any real car enthusiast already knows. If you don't know a lot about the history of cars in the US, but want to, this book is ideal. If you grew up reading car mags and wrenching on old cars, leave this one on the shelf.

Well-written, anecdotal and historic stories of cars that had great impact on American society. He keeps it interesting, about the people as much as the product.

Mr Ingrassia attempts to interweave car history into "American dream" history and by this over-reach, does a disservice to both. The book has a comic-book version of 20/21st century American history featuring tail fins, hippies, soccer Moms, yuppies, and red-staters. If only American history were so easy! My favorite simplification is the wave-topping summary of the 70's decade (p. 192): "The car's life spanned the decade of Watergate, defeat in Vietnam, two oil shocks, the Iranian hostage crisis, inflation, stagflation, and national "malaise." The descriptions of automotive history are similarly inconsistent, with detailed explanations of John Z Delorean's wardrobe and personal life, contrasted with a one-paragraph passing mention of how Ed Cole singlehandedly brought unleaded gasoline and catalytic converters to the US market (if this is really true, it deserves more exposition than it received). Finally, Mr Ingrassia's writing style was chatty and breezy, with repeated attempts at "cleverness" and detours into random areas of pop culture in an attempt to provide period "ambiance." Summary: this book was more like an extended magazine article in terms the depth of research, quality of writing, and clarity of theme. While automotive history is clearly interwoven with American history, this book doesn't do either subject justice.

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