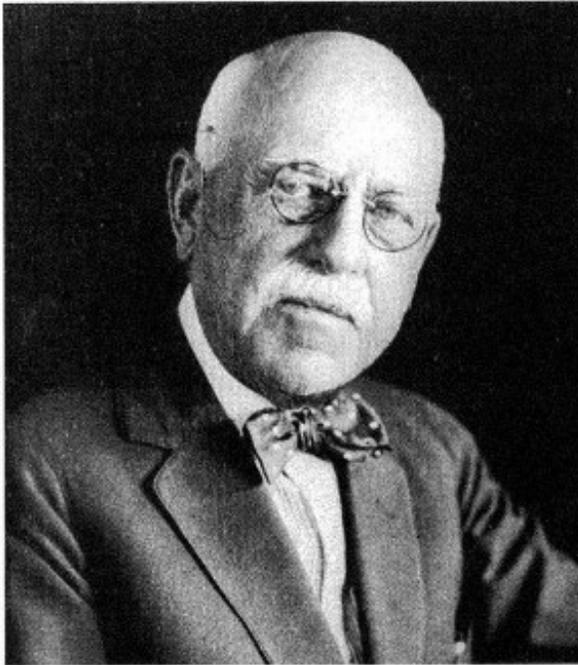


*Pioneers of the U. S.
Automobile Industry*

Michael J. Kollins



Edwin Thomas

While the production of the Thomas car did not reach millions, nor even hundreds of thousands, Edwin Thomas built some of the finest engines, motorcycles, and the most powerful cars of the time. He gave generous financial support to fledgling companies that furnished the "roots" to subsequent great automotive corporations. And winning the "Race Around the World" was one of America's most spectacular achievements.

* * *

E.R. Thomas Motor Company

The E.R. Thomas Motor Company was organized on April 25, 1900, by Edwin Ross Thomas for the purpose of manufacturing motor bicycles, motor tricycles, and their components for other manufacturers of motorcycles and automobiles. In addition they offered their own models, the Autobi No. 1, Autobi No. 2, the three-wheeled Autotri roadster, and the Autotwo. All Thomas vehicles were powered by the famous Thomas air-cooled engines.

	Autobi No. 1	Autobi No. 2	Autotri	Autotwo
Hp	2.25	1.5	3	3
Weight (lb)	95	75	90	100
Price	\$250	\$200	\$350	\$400

In late 1902 the E.R. Thomas Motor Company announced their first automobile, the 1903 Thomas Models 17 and 18. The cooling radiator was located up front in a sloping position. The engine power was transmitted



1901 Thomas Autobi No. 2 tandem.

by a lined cone clutch to the three-speed sliding-gear transmission, to the bevel gears and chain drive, through the roller-bearing axle to the rear wheels. The chassis suspension was by four parallel fully elliptical springs.

1903 Thomas Models 17 and 18

Wheelbase (in.)	78
Price	\$1,250-1,400
No. of Cylinders / Engine	1
Bore x Stroke (in.)	5.00 x 6.00
Hp	8 ALAM
Body Styles	tonneau and touring
Other Features	water-cooled engine

The 1904 Thomas Flyer Models 22 and 23 were announced in November 1903.

1904 Thomas Flyer Model 22

1904 Thomas Flyer Model 23

Wheelbase (in.)	84	92
Price	\$2,650	\$3,000
No. of Cylinders / Engine	3	3
Bore x Stroke (in.)	4.50 x 5.50	4.50 x 5.50
Hp	24 ALAM	24 ALAM
Body Styles	tonneau	limousine
Other Features		

The engine's three cylinders were cast separately, mounted on a crankcase of cast aluminum. The crankpins were set 120 degrees apart. The crankshaft was of drop-forged steel, carried on four babbited main bearings. At fairly high prices, the Thomas car sales were very limited.



1902 Thomas.

The new 1905 Thomas Flyer models 25, 26, 27, 29, and 30, were announced in November 1904.

1905 Thomas Flyers

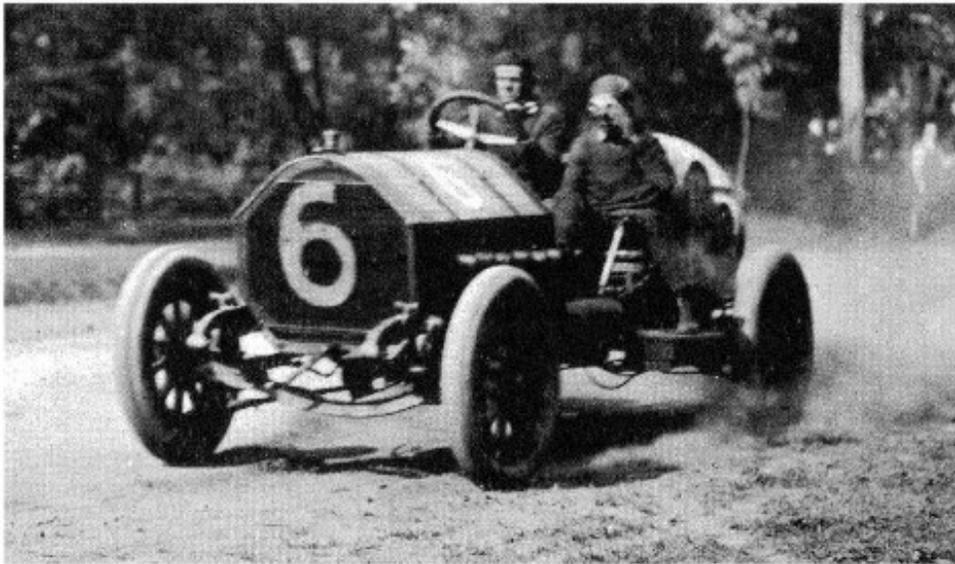
Wheelbase (in.)	106/110/114/124
Price	\$3,000-7,000
No. of Cylinders / Engine	T-4 / T-6
Bore x Stroke (in.)	5.00 x 5.50 / 5.50 x 5.50
Hp	40/50/60 adv, 40/43.8 ALAM
Body Styles	6
Other Features	

While the 60-hp engine was offered in the Model 27 touring and the Model 30 limousine, the primary reason for the development of the 60-hp, six-cylinder engine was E.R. Thomas' personal interest in participating in racing events. The Thomas Flyer racing car ran successfully in the Vanderbilt Cup race, the French Grand Prix, and many other notable events, including the Fairmount Park Race in Philadelphia.

For 1906 the Thomas Flyer was confined to one line, with Models 31, 32, 33, and 34.

1906 Thomas Flyer

Wheelbase (in.)	118
Price	\$3,500-4,600
No. of Cylinders / Engine	T-4
Bore x Stroke (in.)	5.50 x 5.50
Hp	50 adv, 43.8 ALAM
Body Styles	touring, seven-passenger limousine, seven-passenger landaulet, seven-passenger semi-limousine
Other Features	



Thomas stock car in Fairmount Park Race, October 10, 1909. Haupt, driver, and Tom Wilkie, mechanic.

The main new features of the 1906 Thomas Flyer were the new dry-disc clutch, replacing the former lined-cone type, and a new four-speed speed-change gearbox (transmission) with an interlocking mechanism to prevent the possibility of getting into two gears at the same time. The ignition was of the high-tension type, featuring a synchronized system, a high-tension timer combined with a low-tension interrupter. A single coil was used, the primary current from a storage battery carried on the outside step. The production and sales of the 1906 Thomas Flyer amounted to approximately 500 cars.

Thomas-Detroit Company

Another important event happened in 1906, when Roy D. Chapin and Howard E. Coffin went to the Pacific coast to try to obtain financial support to organize their next venture. Their search was fruitless, so they decided to return to Detroit by train. However, on April 17, 1906 (the day after the tragic San Francisco earthquake), in the dining car of the Union Pacific train, they met Edwin Thomas. After several hours of Chapin's salesmanship, they were able to convince Thomas to provide financial support to organize the Thomas-Detroit Company, to build a less-costly version of the Thomas Flyer. It was arranged that the Thomas-Detroit car would be merchandised by Thomas dealers.

Edwin R. Thomas was elected president of the Thomas-Detroit Company, and Roy Chapin and Howard Coffin vice presidents. The Thomas-Detroit Company located a factory building, installed the machinery and tooling, and was in production by the end of 1906. The Thomas-Detroit car was essentially a downsized Thomas Flyer.

Thomas-Detroit	
Wheelbase (in.)	110
Price	\$1,500
No. of Cylinders / Engine	T-4
Bore x Stroke (in.)	5.00 x 4.75
Hp	40 ALAM
Body Styles	touring and roadster
Other Features	

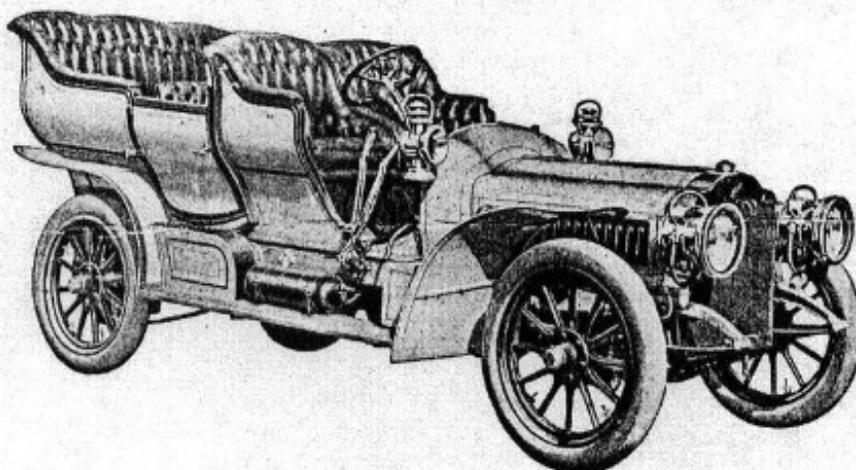
The Largest Factory in the World

Devoted to the Manufacture
of High Powered Automobiles

now in course of construction will be taxed to the full limit of its capacity
to meet the extraordinary demand for the magnificent

50 H. P.

THOMAS FLYER



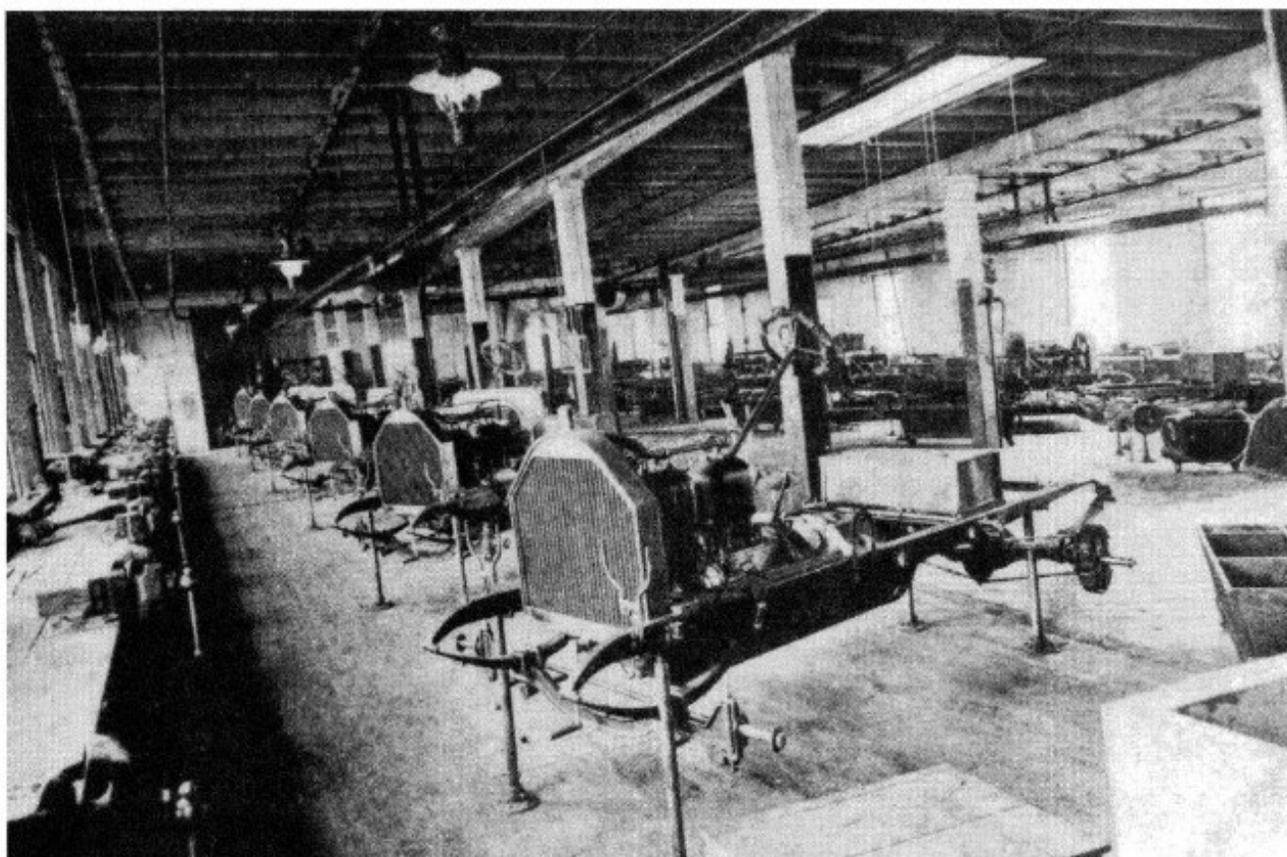
The story is the same in every big city in the country—the complete supremacy of this wonderful car conceded on every hand and agents begging for a larger allotment. There is nothing accidental about this extraordinary enthusiasm. It is the logical outcome of years of painstaking experience and preparation, culminating in a car which represents the most costly and the most perfect possible construction throughout. The 1906 Thomas marks the arrival of the long-expected American car which will wrest supremacy from the finest foreign product. Just one indication of its marvelous efficiency is the fact that

**Every Stock Thomas is Guaranteed to Show
Sixty miles an hour before leaving the Factory.**

We are merely consulting your own interests when we advise you to get in touch with the nearest Thomas representative at the earliest possible moment.

THE E. R. THOMAS MOTOR CO.,
1416 Niagara Street, **BUFFALO, N. Y.**

Members Association of Licensed Automobile Manufacturers.



General view of the Thomas-Detroit assembling floor showing arrangement of chassis. (Source: NAHC)

The car was successful, as over 500 Thomas Detroit cars were built and sold during the first six months of 1907. However, the Thomas-Detroit was not exactly the car that Chapin and Coffin had in mind. They convinced Hugh Chalmers to buy Edwin Thomas' interest in the Thomas-Detroit Company. In July 1908, the Thomas-Detroit Company became the Chalmers-Detroit Company, and became the Chalmers Motor Company in 1910. Impatient as Chapin and Coffin were, they organized the Hudson Motor Car Company on February 24, 1909, with Hugh Chalmers' blessing. (See Chalmers' story in Volume 3, and the chapter on the Hudson Motor Car Company in this volume.)

The Taxicab

For 1907 the E.R. Thomas Motor Company introduced two separate model lines: the Thomas 40 and the Thomas Flyer.

	1907 Thomas 40	1907 Thomas Flyer
Wheelbase (in.)	112.5	118
Price	\$2,750	\$4,000-5,200
No. of Cylinders / Engine	T-4	T-4
Bore x Stroke (in.)	3.62 x 4.13	5.75 x 5.50
Hp	40 adv, 21 ALAM	60 adv, 53 ALAM
Body Styles	3	6
Other Features		

On May 8, 1907, Thomas introduced a new "taxicab" Model G, built on a 103-in. wheelbase chassis, powered by a new, smaller, four-cylinder, T-head engine, rated at 20 hp ALAM. A new shaft drive was introduced. The body was a semi-limousine designed by Gustave Chedru, head of a French designing company. The taxicab sales became a lucrative source of income for the E.R. Thomas Motor Company, and was administered as a separate company operation.

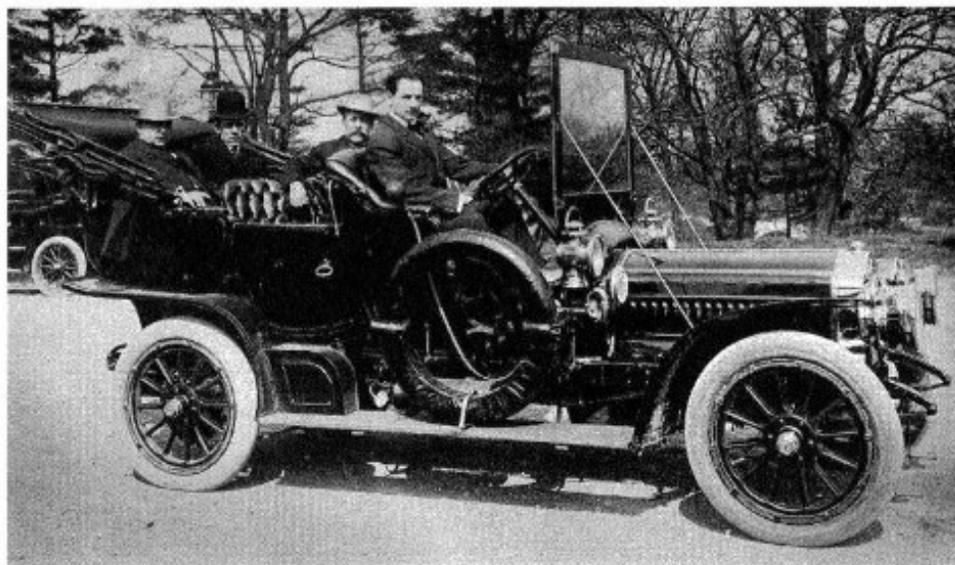
Due to the great demand for a high-powered Thomas Flyer runabout, Thomas introduced such a vehicle on May 22, 1907, built on a 118-in. wheelbase chassis, using the powerful, four-cylinder, T-head engine rated at 60 hp ALAM, and having a five-main-bearing crankshaft. The ignition was by two separate systems: one by Bosch magneto, and the other by Atwater-Kent battery-powered coil and distributor, firing two sets of spark plugs. Approximately 700 Thomas cars were built and sold in 1907.

Every season the E.R. Thomas Motor Company added something new, something progressive, something above the ordinary lines, and 1908 was no exception. They entered the new season with a proliferation of cars, ranging in wheelbase lengths from 103 in. on the Model G to 140 in. on the Model K. Engine horsepower ranged from 20 (Model G) up to 70 for the reinstated six-cylinder, T-head engine of the Model K. The body styles included runabouts, tourabouts, touring cars, cabriolets, landaulets, and limousines; a line-up to satisfy any requirement. One of the outstanding new models was the 4-20 Model G town car designed by Gustave Chedru of France.

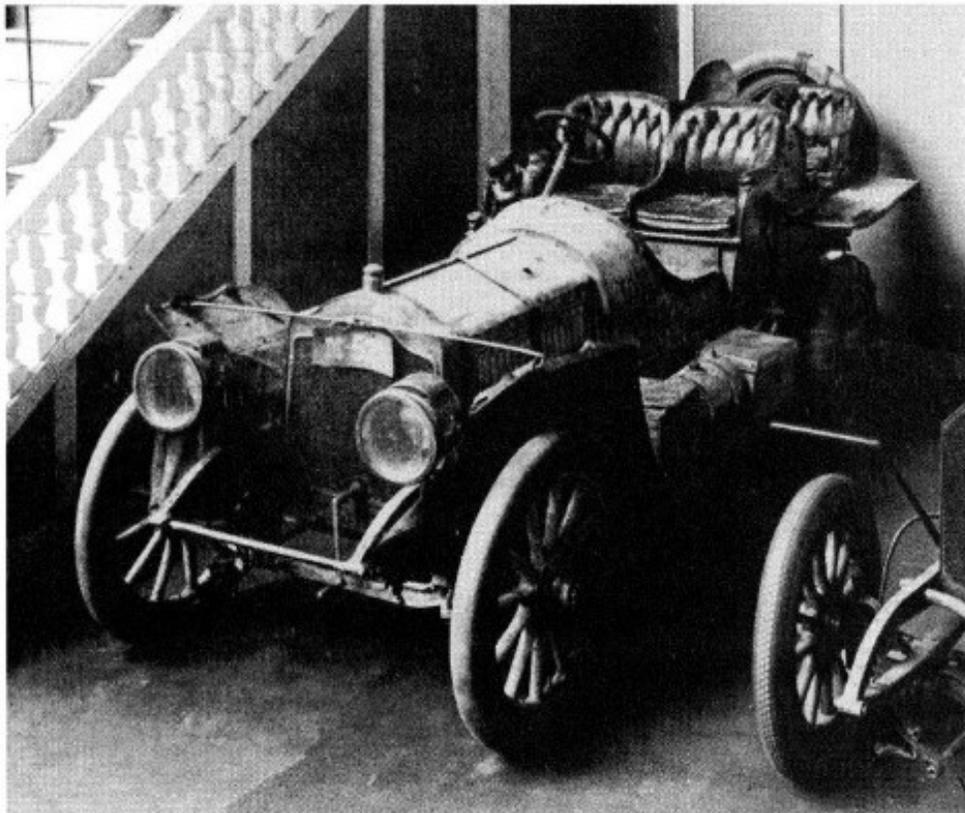
The Model 4-60 Thomas Flyer was redesigned by Howard Coffin and Gustave Chedru, and while the specifications remained the same as the 1907 model, the Flyer was much faster and smoother, and it was lower and racier in appearance to meet potential buyer expectations.

The 1908 Thomas, priced from \$3,000 to \$6,000, offered 21 body styles: six in the Thomas Model G (including the taxicab), five in the Model DX, five in the Model F, and five in the Model K, powered by the 70-hp, six-cylinder, T-head engine. Over 800 Thomas cars were built and sold in 1908.

During 1908 Thomas Flyer racing cars, designed by George Salzman, chief engineer, participated in the French Grand Prix, the Vanderbilt Cup race, and many notable contests, the most spectacular of which was the "Race Around the World" in 1908.



*Thomas Flyer 4-60 touring.
(Source: NAHC)*



*1907 Thomas Model 36
"New York to Paris" car.
(Source: Smithsonian
Institution)*

The Trip Around the World

The automobile industry has always had a full appreciation of publicity. It was the golden profit to be reaped in publicity and was the prime mover for almost all factory participation in racing. Since the beginning of the automobile industry, there had been literally thousands of contests promoted with the single purpose of gaining newspaper notoriety. There had been transcontinental trips by Packards, Wintons, Reos, and others in the early days. There was a transcontinental trip by a dozen Premiers in a caravan, by Whites and many others at later dates. They all had one goal in mind and they achieved it in greater or modest measure, depending on the time, when the contest was promoted, and other conditions.

The most prominent contest of all was the "Race Around the World," scheduled to be run from New York to San Francisco (4,300 miles), then ship to Valdez, Alaska, where cars were to be driven 1,200 miles to Nome, Alaska. From Nome the cars were to be shipped to East Cape, Siberia, and from there they were to be driven cross-country to Petrograd, Russia, and thence through Berlin, Germany, to Paris, France. The total land mileage was 11,350 miles.

The start of the race was from Times Square, New York City, on February 12, 1908, and was witnessed by a quarter-million people. There were six participants:

Car	Driver(s)	Mechanic	Extra
DeDion Bouton (French)	Boursier St. Chaffray	Hans Hansen	Mons. Autran
Moto Bloc (French)	Charles Godard	Hue Aethur	Maurice Livier
Sizaire-Naudin (French)	August Pons	Lucien Deschamps	Maurice Berthe
Zust (Italian)	Antonio Scarfoglio	Emilie Sartori	Henri Haaga
Protos (German)	Lt. H. Koeppen	Hans Knape	Ernst Mass
Thomas (American)	George Schuster	George Miller	Montague Roberts



*Crew of the Thomas Flyer:
George Schuster, driver,
George Miller, Montague
Roberts. Correspondent
George McAdam in back
seat with checkered cap.
(Source: Motor World)*

The Thomas entry was definitely a production stock car, powered by a four-cylinder engine rated at 60 hp. The others were all more or less within the stock car classification, but had more special equipment and work than the American car. In the midst of the cruel northern winter, reports declared an even more severe season in the western mountains.

The start of the race was delayed by 1 hour and 15 minutes because Mayor McLellan, who was to fire the starting pistol, had not appeared at his special grandstand by 11 a.m. After waiting 15 minutes more, Colgate Hoyt, president of the Automobile Club of America, fired the starting pistol at 11:15 a.m. The contestants proceeded up crowd-lined Broadway and the race was on its way.

The Sizaire-Naudin had gone as far as it could at Red Hook, New York; Moto-Bloc failed in Cedar Rapids, Iowa; the Protos loaded their car on the Oregon Railway and Navigation's rail car at Pocatello, Idaho, instead of driving under its own power. But, the Thomas, Züst, and DeDion reached the Pacific Coast under their own power, with the Thomas covering the route in 42 days. This was 11 days fewer than the Züst, and 14 days fewer than the DeDion.

No automobile had ever made the short journey of 1,200 miles from Valdez to Nome, Alaska, where there were no roads and hardly any trails. In the condition of the terrain at the time of the race, Alaska was perhaps the most impossible area to traverse anywhere on earth. Anyone who had visited Alaska before that time would know that the trail between Valdez and Nome was impossible for automobiles. But that fact remained for the Thomas crew to discover after their car had been shipped to Valdez from the Pacific Coast. After making a thorough personal inspection of 10 miles of the proposed route to Nome, George Schuster wisely decided that neither the Thomas car nor any other car could possibly make that drive. The Alaska portion of the race had to be eliminated. The Thomas car was returned to Seattle, Washington, where it was learned that the other contestants had already sailed for Vladivostok, without waiting for the return of the Thomas group from Alaska.



Thomas team encounters blizzard during "Race Around the World." (Source: Motor World)

The Thomas group took a cargo ship from Seattle and landed at Yokohama, Japan, and toured 350 miles of the Japan country. From Japan the Thomas car was shipped to Vladivostok, and from there they crossed Siberia, encountering difficulty in obtaining enough gasoline. They crossed Siberia, Russia, Poland, Germany, and France to Paris, making the 8,280 miles from Vladivostok to Paris in 49 days running time. The Thomas car reached Paris on July 30, 1908, making the final sprint of the journey at 50 miles per hour. The Thomas car had covered the land distance of approximately 11,350 miles in 170 days elapsed time; the daily average run was 152 miles, and the longest day's run was 420 miles. The Thomas car had covered 2,385 land miles in excess of the mileage of any other car entered.

Considering the condition of the roads, weather, and difficulties of making such a trip at that period of automobile development, the feat stands out as the most brilliant and extraordinary achievement ever carried out in the automobile industry. The single fact that three automobiles were able to run under their own power from New York to San Francisco at high speeds shed a new light on the sturdiness and reliability of the American motor car, and gave it tremendous publicity in public newsprint. How the passengers managed to ride is a mystery when one thinks of the thousands of miles riding in a tonneau seat that was insecure, uncomfortable, and dangerous, considering the Siberian route.

The Spoils of Victory

In the fall of 1908, the E.R. Thomas Motor Company announced their 1909 models. The G, F, and K were carried over into 1909, with refinements and new added features. The Model DX was discontinued, but a new Model L was added.



Thomas team in Siberia in 1908. (Source: Motor World)

1909 Thomas Model L

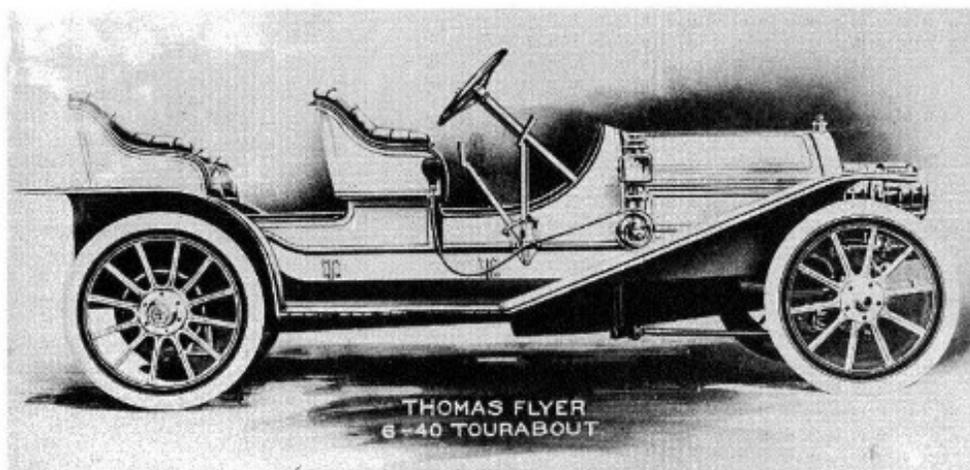
Wheelbase (in.)	122
Price	\$3,000-4,500
No. of Cylinders / Engine	T-6
Bore x Stroke (in.)	4.25 x 5.50
Hp	40 adv, 43.35 ALAM
Body Styles	touring, Flyabout, Tourabout, limousine
Other Features	

The full Thomas line, available in 15 body types and a taxicab, was priced from \$3,000 to \$7,500. Apparently, winning the "Race Around the World" gave E.R. Thomas Motor Company a boost in sales, because 1,036 Thomas cars were built and sold in 1909.

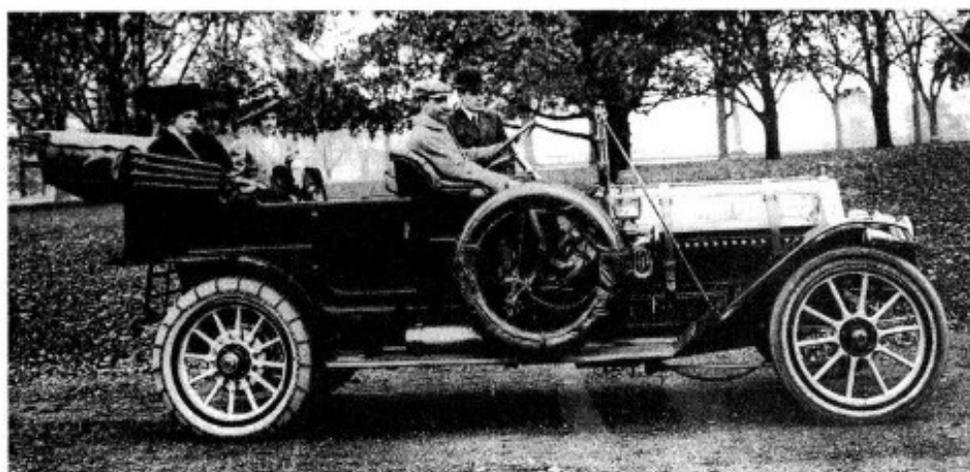
For 1910, the 1909 Thomas models were carried over, but given new model designations. The G became the Model R-4-28, the L became the Model M-6-40, the F became the F-4-60, and the K was called the K-6-70. The Thomas cars were priced at \$3,500 to \$7,500. Sales momentum continued as approximately 1,000 Thomas cars were built and sold in 1910.

Trouble Begins

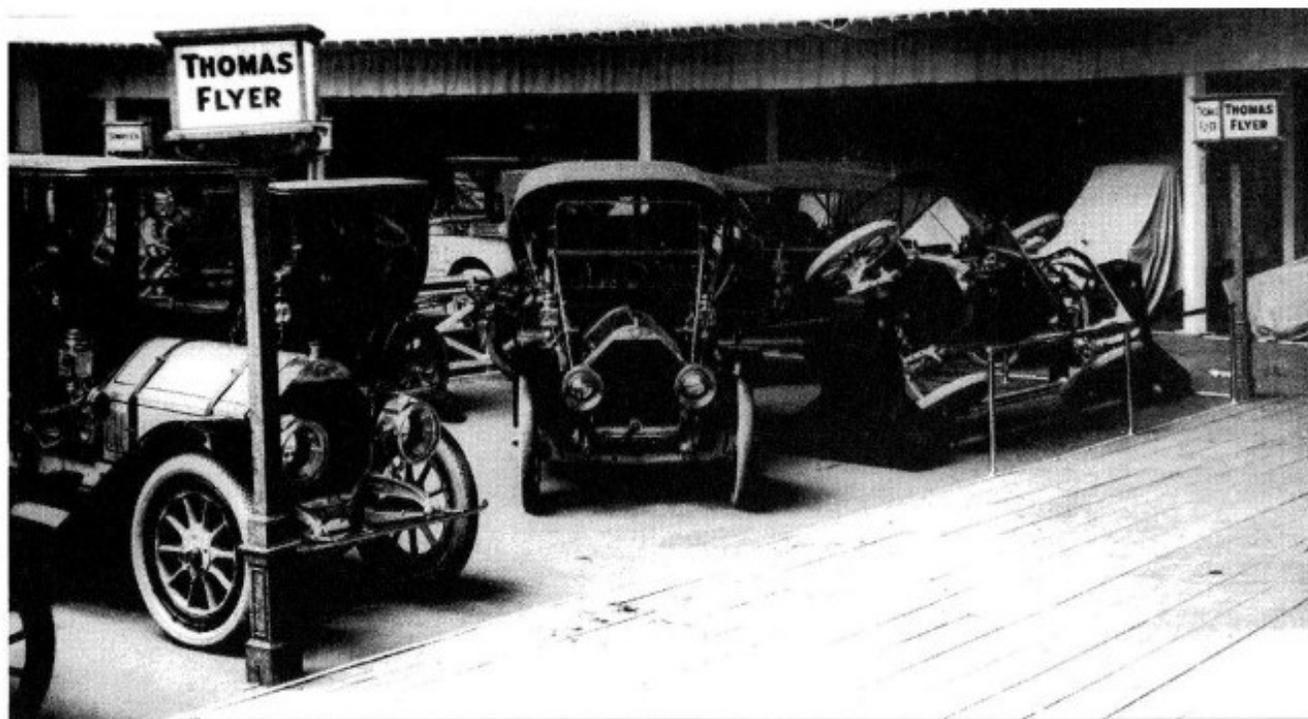
While the economic depression of 1910 may have had some effect on automobile sales in general, perhaps the Thomas management "rested on their oars" and expected the sales momentum to carry them through 1911. It did not, and the Thomas sales fell to a dismal low, with expenditures as high as ever. Edwin R. Thomas found himself in a quandary. He resolved his personal problem, by selling his interest in the E.R. Thomas Motor Company to Eugene Mayer and Company, New York bankers. But, Thomas wisely held on to the taxicab entity. The E.R. Thomas Motor Company was reorganized and the name was changed to E.R. Thomas Motor Car Company. The model line-up for 1911 did not change, except the E-4-30 superseded the R-4-28, and the price of the K-6-70 landaulet was increased to \$7,600.



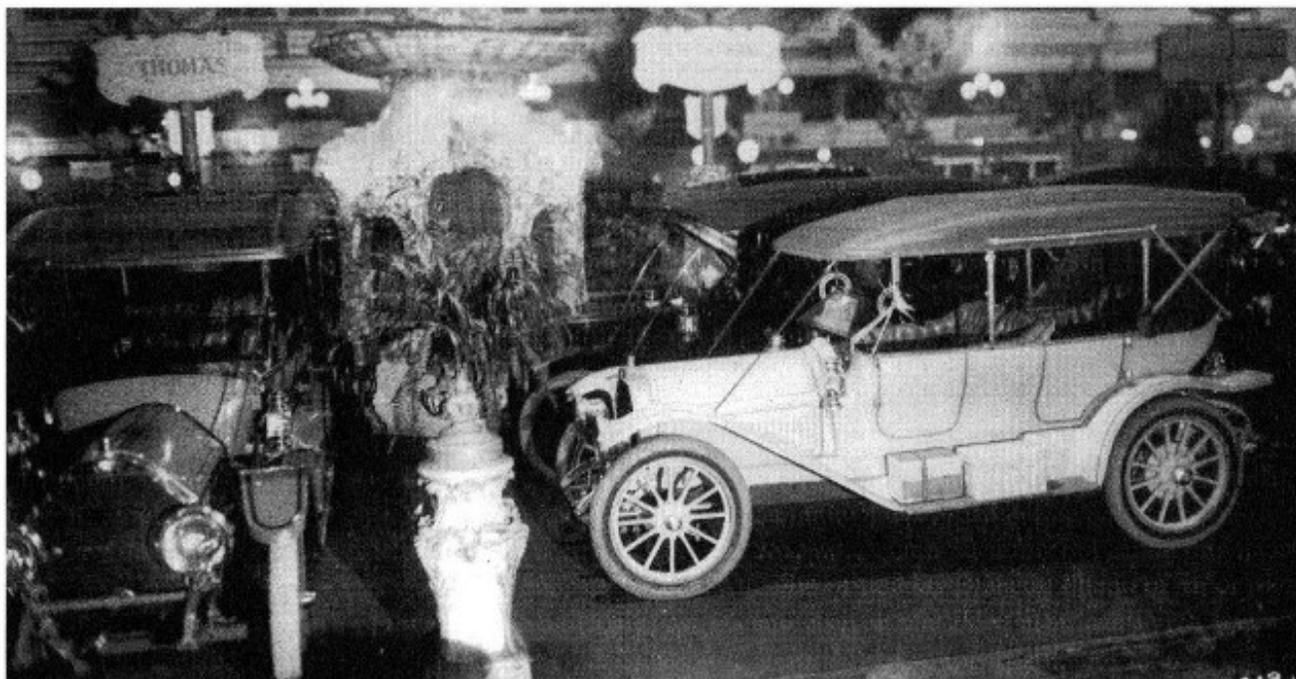
*1910 Thomas Tourabout
6-40.*



*1910 Thomas Model
K-6-70. (Source: NAHC)*



1910 Thomas Flyers at Auto Show. (Source: NAHC)

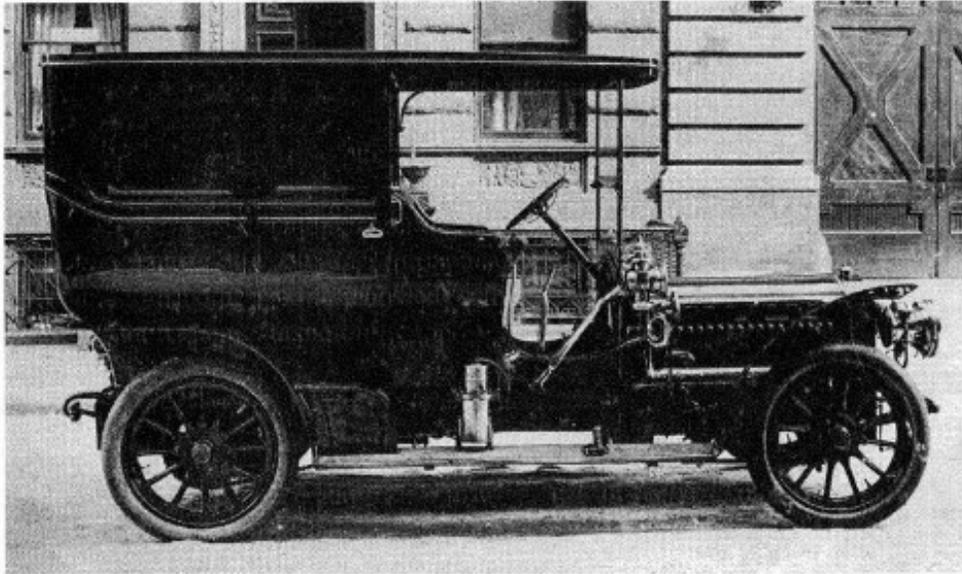


1911 Thomas exhibit at Auto Show. (Source: NAHC)

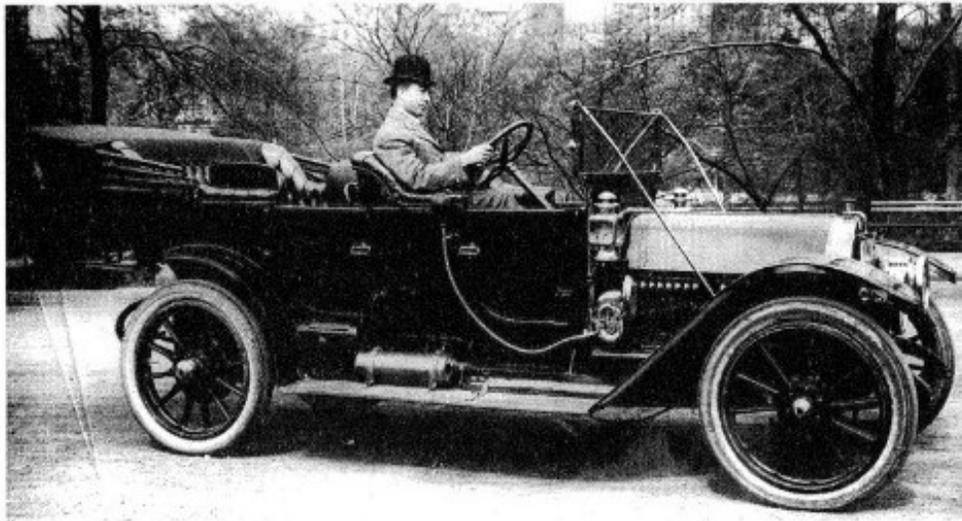
Shortly after the acquisition of E.R. Thomas' interests in February 1911, the Eugene Mayer and Company of New York proudly bragged that Mayer had induced several of the Packard Motor Car Company executives to cast their lot with the E.R. Thomas Motor Car Company. E.L. Chalfant was made president, F.R. Humpage vice president, W.L. Gleason factory manager, and J.J. Ramsey treasurer. At the time of reorganization, several E.R. Thomas Motor Company key executives were discharged. However, all of this came to naught because, by February 1912, Chalfant had resigned and was succeeded by Humpage as president, and on August 29, 1912, the E.R. Thomas Motor Car Company was placed in receivership.

The financial difficulties that plagued the E.R. Thomas Motor Car Company for more than a year came to a conclusion on August 29, 1912, when Judge Hazel in the Federal Court in Buffalo, New York, placed the concern in the hands of George G. Finley and Adolph Rebadow as receivers, under bonds of \$50,000, with instructions to continue the business of the company. Within the previous few weeks, however, it was reported that the production of the plant had stopped. In August 1912 three of the executives who left the Packard Motor Car Company to join E.R. Thomas Motor Car Company when it was reorganized had retired. They were president Humpage, vice president Gleason, treasurer Ramsey; sales manager Fitzsimons also resigned. On September 2, 1912, the Judge ordered that the assets of the E.R. Thomas Motor Car Company be sold at auction.

The auction of the assets of the E.R. Thomas Motor Car Company opened on March 17, 1913, with about 400 bidders in attendance. Fifteen of the Thomas cars were sold at \$1,900 each. These and most of the other items were bought by C.A. Finnegan, president of the Empire Smelting Company. Finnegan officially bid and paid \$51,000 for these items as one lot of Thomas' material. He paid an additional \$5,360 for machinery, tools, lathes, and other material not included in the first lot. The total realized by the auction of the Thomas' assets was \$256,400, a mere pittance compared to the investment.



1911 Thomas 6-70 Model K limousine. (Source: NAHC)



1912 Thomas 6-70 seven-passenger touring. (Source: NAHC)

Finnegan also bought the victorious “Race Around the World” Thomas Flyer race car for \$200, and the famous New York to Paris trophy for \$300. Ironically, the trophy was sold for more than the racer that won it.