

RANSOM E. OLDS BREAKTHROUGH

Engines Turning Wheels



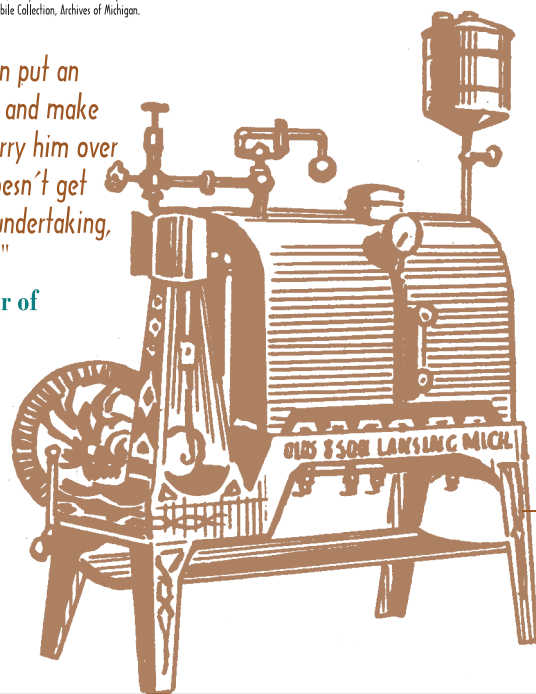
Olds and Son Gasoline Engine Works, 1886, ten years before the "son" premiered his car.
Photo courtesy of Helen J. Early Oldsmobile Collection, Archives of Michigan.

The spark of auto innovation ignited here in the 1890s.

P. F. Olds founded a prosperous machine shop here on River Street, repairing and building steam and gasoline engines. His was one of many Lansing manufacturing plants that produced small engines, carriages, windmills and other equipment used by farmers and businesses. His son, Ransom, had bigger ideas. He put engines in carriages, creating his first successful "horseless carriage" in 1896. A year later, the Olds Motor Vehicle Company became Michigan's first operating automobile company.

“Ranse thinks he can put an engine in a buggy and make the contraption carry him over the roads. If he doesn’t get killed at his fool undertaking, I will be satisfied!”

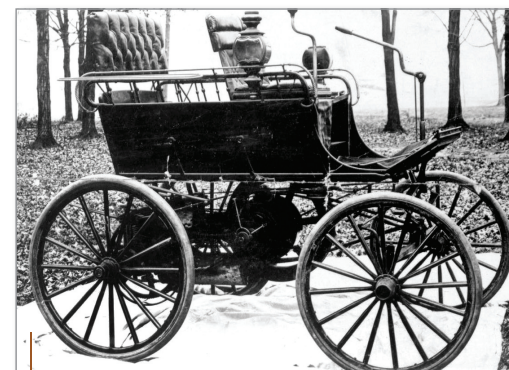
Pliny Olds, father of Ransom E. Olds



Olds first tried to power a car with a small steam engine. The engine provided too little power and too much weight. As the company developed gasoline steam engines and boilers like this one, Ransom had a better idea. Photo courtesy of Helen J. Early Oldsmobile Collection, Archives of Michigan.



On August 11, 1896, Ransom Olds demonstrated his first internal combustion horseless carriage. Lansing's Clark and Son provided the carriage for Olds' vehicle. In this photo are (left to right) Metta Olds, Ransom Olds, Harriet Clark, Frank Clark. Photo courtesy of Archives of Michigan.



Is there a connection between this early auto built by Olds and the Olds engines that powered small boats? Check out the steering mechanism. Photo courtesy of Archives of Michigan.

YOU AUTO KNOW

Ransom Olds' first car could "run at any speed from four to fifteen miles per hour, with perfect safety."