

# Fifty years ago



50 years ago on the afternoon of March 4th 1966, Studebaker publicly announced that it was ending vehicle manufacturing after 114 years. On March 17th, the final Studebaker rolled out of the Hamilton Ontario plant.

Studebaker of course did not go out of business. Quite the contrary. The company had embarked on a diversification program many years before and most of it's divisions were making money ...but not the automotive division. Shutting down car production was probably a sound business decision. If you owned Studebaker stock in 1966, and hung onto it, you'd still have shares (in something) today.

The decision to end Studebaker production was made in the fall of 1963. Studebaker's dynamic CEO, Sherwood Egbert had developed cancer and left the day-to-day running of the company. Without him campaigning to continue the building of cars, the Board of Directors moved quickly to shut down the automotive division. The South Bend facilities closed before the end of the year.

What the company accomplished, was winding down the automotive operation in a manner that avoided potential law suits. Continuing to build a limited line of cars in Canada allowed dealers time to liquidate inventory and shift to other brands. Supposedly, management in Hamilton believed the Canadian operation had a chance of survival. Costs were under control and they were actually making a small profit.



In hind sight, the Board of Directors' intentions were clear. One of the edicts was that no new dealers would be signed. Insufficient money was allocated for design and development to keep the products up to date.

In 1967, regulations would kick in that required a collapsible steering column in all new cars sold in the U.S. Studebaker did not have one, nor did they move to develop one. This was another sign that 1966 would be the final year.

The end came in an inglorious manner. 1966 production would continue until it became impractical. It's been reported that at some point the stamping die for trunk lids failed. Management would not invest in replacing the tooling. They took inventory of what remained and when the trunks ran out, so did production.

The final Studebaker, a Cruiser sedan, rolled off the assembly line on the morning of March 17th. That car was retained by the company and did yeoman's work for about 18,000 miles before being put into storage. It has since been restored and can be viewed at the Studebaker National Museum in South Bend.



Studebaker continues to live on in spirit through loyal members of The Studebaker Drivers Club. With support from dedicated parts vendors, Studebakers enjoy a high survival rate and many are still on the road today.

One final note on this somber occasion. Studebaker hired an outside styling firm, Marcks, Hazelquist, and Powers to do the face-lift for the 1966 Studebakers. Bob Marcks also worked up an attractive proposal for 1967 and renderings of future designs based on the 1966 platform.

This Marcks design for a future Studebaker is my personal favorite. If they built this car today... I'd be first in line to buy it!



You can see more on Bob Marcks' web site:

<http://www.deansgarage.com/2009/bob-marcks-designer-at-studebaker-ford-and-chrysler/>

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