

## HISTORY FROM OHA

# Neracar: Motoring on two wheels

■ BY THOMAS HUNTER

During the 1920s, businesses in Syracuse made washing machines, typewriters, automobiles, trucks, candles, china, mincemeat, beer, stained glass, traffic lights, caskets, even billiard tables. Yet another business made a motorcycle, but wouldn't call it that; they called it the Neracar, a two-wheel vehicle. From 1921-1928, the Ner-a-car Corporation, which made the vehicle that more closely resembled a motorcycle, instead promoted it as more "near a car."

In 1916, Carl Neracher, assistant general manager at New Process Gear, received a U.S. patent for the Neracar. The first Neracars were made by Sheffield-Simplex, a British car and motorcycle company, because American investors resisted the design and withheld their finances. Sheffield-Simplex built the Blackburn Neracar for Britain and its colonies from 1921-1927.

In 1921, Neracher attracted American investors once British production was under way. His financial backers included Alexander H. Cowie, president of the Rochester and Syracuse Railway; Huntington B. Crouse, president of the Crouse-Hinds Company; Frederick P. Assman, vice president of Continental Can Company; J. Allan Smith, president of New Process Gear; and King C. Gillette, owner of the Gillette Safety Razor Company, "the man who shaves the world."

With about \$2 million in capital, the Ner-A-Car Corporation opened at 196 S. Geddes St., with J. Allan Smith as the first president. The Ner-A-Car

Corporation offered its first Neracar in October 1921. It had a low-slung chassis and tubular frame, and featured a two-stroke, 221 cc engine. It weighed 190 lbs., had a maximum speed of 35 mph and was rated at 90 mpg. It also cost \$225.

The company boasted that the Neracar was cheap to operate, convenient to use, and safe to ride because of its low center of gravity; it also came with a luggage rack and its own tools. Women could ride the Neracar just as confidently as men in all attire. Advertisements promoted the Neracar as "an automobile on two wheels and should not be confused with what is commonly known as a motorcycle." Riders could easily glide through traffic and conveniently travel from home to work, parks, tennis courts, golf courses, or anywhere else one desired to go. The advertisements went so far as to claim riding a Neracar provided "numerous health advantages not available to users of other vehicles. [It was] recommended by and ridden by many physicians."

To boost sales for the nascent company, Erwin "Cannonball" Baker, a notable auto and motorcycle racer, famous for his point-to-point record-setting drives, rode a Neracar from New York to Los Angeles, spending just \$15.70 on fuel and oil. Baker made the trip in seven days and got nearly 75 miles to the gallon of gas.

Throughout the company's history, many Neracars were sold throughout the United States, as well as in Europe, Africa, Japan, China, Australia, South America, and the Caribbean islands.

Apparently, interest in the Neracar waned during the late 1920s, perhaps as other motorcycle models



and brands became available. The company dropped the price from \$225, down to \$185, and then to \$175. British production ended in 1927, American production the following year. The company announced its closing on Feb. 29, 1928, for inexplicable reasons.

Some Neracars still survive both in Syracuse, around the U.S., and in Europe. Locally, Frank Westfall, proprietor of the Ner-A-Car Museum in Syracuse owns, 1922 and 1925 Neracars; the

1925 was sold by a dealer in Paris. Other museums that have Neracars in their collections include the Southern Oregon Historical Society and the Riverside Museum in Glasgow, Scotland.

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