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Louis Chevrolet: La Chaux-de-Fonds' motor car magnate

The second of seven children, Louis Chevrolet came into the world on December 25 1878 in La Chaux-de-Fonds, where his father worked in the watch making industry.

At the end of the economic crisis in 1880, Louis' talented watchmaker father returned to work in his hometown of Bonfol in Porrentruy in the Swiss canton of Jura. The family resided in the neighbouring village of Beurnevésin.



Louis Chevrolet (on right)
©www.louis-chevrolet.ch/history

In 1887, the family moved to Beaune in France. When he left school, he apprenticed as a bicycle mechanic and participated in competitive cycling. During this period, he met the American billionaire Vanderbilt, who offered Louis work in the USA.

Notwithstanding, he continued working in France in the Darracq automobile factories in Paris. Louis eventually decided to leave Europe after all and, after passing through Quebec in 1900, he arrived on American soil and commenced work at De Dion Bouton America, a French automobile and railcar manufacturer in New York.

In 1905, Louis Chevrolet was employed by the car manufacturer Fiat as a racing driver and won his first car race with a Fiat.

The following year, he beat the One-Mile record behind the wheel of a Darracq.

With a new-found reputation in racing, Chevrolet met W.C. Durant in 1907. Durant was considered to be the "father" of General Motors, and noticed Chevrolet's genius and eye for perfection. He put him to work designing Buick concept cars that led the Buick Racing Team to many victories.

In 1909, after winning many popular races, he came second-best in the American Championship. Chevrolet co-founded his Chevrolet Motor Car Company of Michigan on November 3, 1911. Under this emblem, he launched the luxurious Classic Six sedan, forever remembered in America as a marvel of innovation at its time.

Louis took advantage of a European voyage to retrace his childhood footsteps. Upon his return to the States and following a disagreement, he ceded his shares and the Chevrolet name to his associate, William Durant.

Faithful to his motto "Never give up", he created his own racing car with his new company Frontenac, which he founded with his younger brothers Arthur and Gaston in 1914.

The Frontenac racing cars, innovative due to their power and lightness of their aluminium construction, brought both glory and death to Chevrolet's brother Gaston, who was posthumously crowned champion of America in 1920.

After the death of his brother Gaston, Louis recovered his passion for mechanics. With his brother Arthur, he founded the "Chevrolet Brothers Manufacturing Company" in 1921, a firm

developing motors for the automobile and aircraft industries.

As the 1929 economic crisis spread, Louis gave up the business to his brother and found work at the Chevrolet factory in Detroit.

Battered by illness and the loss of family members, he passed away on June 6, 1941. He is buried in the public cemetery in Indianapolis, where a memorial is now erected to honour the extraordinary man whose life and work marked American history forever.

By Alexandra Beskid Jung

Chevrolet watches

Did you know you can create your own customized Chevrolet watch on-line?

www.configurateur.louischevrolet.ch/categories-en

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