ETTORE BUGATTI — PERFECTIONIST AND INVENTOR



From five-toed shoes, to special cutlery and the Bébé Bugatti — a little journey through the Bugatti founder's lifework.

A technical product is not perfect until it is aesthetically impeccable as well, Ettore Bugatti once said. And the company founder applied this standard not just to his own automobiles but to other everyday items too. If he was not satisfied with something he had bought, he often improved it or decided to produce his own version of it. The following small selection of examples demonstrates just how wide-ranging his inventive talent was.

THE HENHOUSE

Ettore Bugatti loved pasta more than anything and always had it freshly prepared by an Italian cook. For this he needed chicken eggs. When he went out to get some one day, he returned

2026 BUGATTI AUTOMOBILES S.A.S.

in an angry state without having purchased a single egg: the prices had gone up yet again. He then decided to keep chickens himself and set up his own little chicken farm. He designed the henhouse with wheels so that he could move it around his large grounds. Of course, the investment required meant that the eggs were subsequently much more expensive than if he had bought them individually. But at least they were fresh and he was no longer dependent on the farmers.

THE PASTA MACHINE WITH A STEERING WHEEL

One day Bugatti's cook complained about a malfunctioning pasta machine in the kitchen. It would take several weeks before a new machine could be delivered to the Alsace region. Since Ettore Bugatti was not about to go without his beloved pasta, he designed a new machine — one that was easy to use, aesthetically attractive and capable of producing the best pasta far and wide. The mechanics at his production facility built the machine based on his drafts. The design reflected Bugatti's automobile roots: instead of an ordinary handwheel, a Bugatti Type 46 steering wheel served as a crank to operate the machine and convert the dough into pasta. The original machine was auctioned in March at Bonhams for around 37,500 dollars.

ORANGERY FOR HIS BASIL

For Ettore Bugatti, a proper serving of pasta always required two to three leaves of basil for garnishing purposes. Since his beloved basil was not freshly grown near Molsheim, Ettore Bugatti built a greenhouse of his own with a special ventilation system and based on a remarkable steel construction. This orangery still exists to this day. Bugatti had fruit and other plants grown there in addition to basil.

ETTORE BUGATTI'S CUTLERY

As can be seen by the fact that he had his own chicken farm and pasta machine, good food was very important to Ettore Bugatti. He was irritated that there was no specific cutlery for the intermediate course of a regular meal, for example, so he decided to design and develop his very own cutlery. Each item bore an "EB" crest and was ergonomically perfect to hold. He also established a specific method of laying the table with cutlery, plates and glasses that was tailored to his needs. Famous for his impeccable manners and expecting the same of his guests, Bugatti is said to have once refused to sell a car to a gentleman of royal descent because he had bad table manners — he was simply unable to eat with a knife and fork.

BÉBÉ BUGATTI TYPE 52

If you want to be a good driver, you can't start early enough. As a gift for his son Roland on his fifth birthday, Ettore Bugatti designed a 1:2 miniature version of the Type 35: the Type 52. This vehicle, called "Bébé Bugatti", was powered by an electric motor and a 12-volt battery and was able to reach speeds of up to 20 km/h. The vehicle served his offspring as a swift means of transport around the château grounds, but it quickly found favour with visitors, friends and customers, too. The Bébé Bugatti became quite popular and numerous orders were placed for

it. In total, Ettore Bugatti produced several hundred of these vehicles between 1927 and 1930 — a resounding success. The Bébé Bugatti was recently revived by The Little Car Company.

ETTORE'S PATENTS

Ettore Bugatti patented about a thousand inventions in the course of his life. Not all of these patents are directly related to cars like the aluminium wheel rim, the unbreakable windscreen, ultra-light folding seats and automatic filler caps are. Not to mention his very own hexagonal nuts and bolts, which provided more effective and more stable grip than others, even at high speeds. Ettore Bugatti was also interested in everyday objects and had his new ideas patented if they were promising. These included a cylindrical razor, an ultra-light frame for bicycles and motorcycles, and security locks. The ingenious inventor even created a casting rod for anglers. He also designed countless items for practical everyday use that were not patented: these included gates, doors, lighting fixtures, armchairs, vices, surgical instruments, horse harnesses and blinds for windows.

PUR SANG

In addition to his passion for technology and automobiles, Ettore Bugatti was particularly enthusiastic about horses — even though he actually made horses as means of transportation unnecessary by producing cars. As an expert on thoroughbred horses, Ettore described cars as he would horses: hot-blooded, fast and reduced to the pure essentials of muscle power — ''the pur-sang of the automobile world''. As far as Bugatti was concerned, horses were not primarily a means of transportation: they were noble creatures. He bred thoroughbreds (pur sang) which he kept on his grounds in Molsheim, in the North Remise and the South Remise. His love for horses went so far that he had some of the doors in his workshops replaced by special lock plates he designed himself which the horses could open by pressing their noses against them. This meant that he no longer had to dismount and open the doors himself before entering the workshops, but was able to ride through conveniently. Ettore Bugatti also enjoyed welcoming visitors and customers on horseback. Sometimes he was accompanied by his donkey Totosche, which he received as a gift from Count Florio after winning the Targa Florio in 1929 for the fifth time in succession. The lucky animal was able to roam freely around the grounds as part of Ettore's private zoo. In addition to horse breeding, Ettore Bugatti was also an enthusiastic breeder of terriers.

ETTORE'S FIVE-TOED SHOES

Ettore Bugatti walked around in five-toed shoes long before the modern versions of this footwear emerged. In the 1920s racing driver Louis Charavel — who generally went by the pseudonym ''Sabipa'' — went to visit Ettore Bugatti in Molsheim. The latter was wearing a colonial helmet, a cream-coloured silk jacket with a blue hem and very special shoes — like fingered gloves, they had a bulge for each individual toe. For Ettore Bugatti, this was the most natural thing in the world and very comfortable: ''After all, you don't buy mittens if you want fingered gloves. Why shouldn't it be the same with shoes?'' he asked his astonished guest. Even though he rarely wore these shoes, they were of course perfectly manufactured — like all his inventions.