

By **HENRY FORD III** *AutoWeek* | Updated: 08/14/07, 3:28 pm et

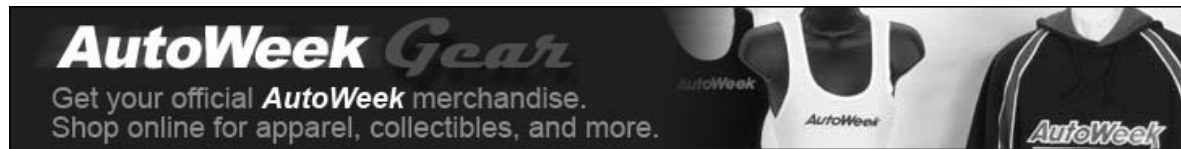
The year 1932 was undeniably pivotal in the history of the Ford Motor Company, and in order fully to grasp the lasting legacy of the 1932 Ford V8, you have to acknowledge and appreciate the dire circumstances facing both the company and the country at the time. The Great Depression, which many trace back to the stock-market crash of 1929, already had caused the collapse of more than 50,000 U.S. businesses by 1932, and its effects on the automotive industry and the state of Michigan were particularly destructive.

In 1929, the Ford Motor Company employed more than 174,000 Americans, and by 1933, this number dropped to just less than 49,000—a 72 percent decrease of the workforce in only four years. At the Rouge plant, the birthplace of the 1932 Ford V8, the number of hourly employees dropped from more than 98,000 in 1929 to less than 29,000 in 1933—a 71 percent decrease. The unemployment rate in Michigan hovered around 40 percent in 1932 and approached 60 percent in Detroit. Life had become unbearable for many, and on March 7, 1932, more than 3000 people marched from Detroit, in protest over the dramatic job losses, to the Rouge plant—then, and still today, a symbol of American industrial might that at the time could no longer support the people who needed it most. What began as a peaceful protest deteriorated into a horrible tragedy, and in what would later be known as the Ford Hunger March, four people were killed and more than 50 injured, making it one of the darkest days in the history of the Ford Motor Company.

Less than a month after the devastating Ford Hunger March, the 1932 Ford V8 was released to the public, signifying that Ford would not be beaten down by the Great Depression and that it would do everything in its power to continue building cars, while keeping as many people as possible employed. That the 1932 Ford V8 was born out of such a desolate time is as much a testament to its iconic status as is the fact that it remains, to this day, one of the most popular hot rods around. A prime example of Ford innovation, it not only had the world's first mass-produced V8 engine but also had the distinction of being the world's first low-cost, high-performance vehicle—extending the joys of driving a high-end automobile to the masses. Powerful but affordable, versatile yet simplistic, it was and is the quintessential car that appeals to all.

The 1932 Ford V8, although limited in original production, set in motion a successful turnaround for Ford out of the Great Depression, through World War II and well into the future. As history has a tendency to repeat itself, we again find ourselves in trying times, but there is no doubt in my mind that we have the products to straighten ourselves out once again and provide a way forward, just as the 1932 Ford V8 provided for 75 years ago.

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AP/Wideworld Photos

1928 Ford Model A on the assembly line at the Rouge plant in Dearborn.

1932: A  
Year of  
Tragedy  
and  
Triumph