

Internal Combustion Engines

The auto industry is constantly bringing us new technologies, whether it be for safety, entertainment, usefulness or sustainability.

Internal Combustion Engines (most cars!)

When did cars first appear? In 1769 Nicolas-Joseph Cugnot of France arguably invented the first full-scale, self propelled mechanical vehicle or automobile. It was a steam-powered tricycle (so not quite a car!).

From them, various people began experimenting and designing and constructing. In 1807 Nicéphore Niépce and his brother Claude are believed to have built the world's first internal combustion engine. However, they chose to install it in a boat and not in a car. That same year François Isaac de Rivaz finished his own internal combustion engine and used it to create the world's first internal combustion engine vehicle.

The Benz Patent-Motorwagen is believed to be the first modern automobile. It was built in 1886 by German inventor Carl Benz. However, it was Carl's wife Bertha who became the first person to drive a car over a long distance. Without telling her husband she 'borrowed' one of these Motorwagen's and along with her two eldest sons drove from a town called Mannheim in southern Germany to Pforzheim. She wanted to prove that the car was useful enough for the general public to use.

Bertha Benz's road trip was a pioneering drive and a proved to be very important in the technical development of the car. She did the round trip of 106km in two days and solved numerous problems on the way: she invented brake lining when the brakes needed repairing; she cleaned the fuel pipe with a hat pin; and she used a garter to insulate a wire. On her return home she made many other suggestions, such as the need for places to pick up petrol and of another gear in the car for climbing hills.

As demand for cars grew a need arose to manufacture affordable cars on a large-scale basis. In 1902 Ransom Olds developed the first production-line manufacturing system while Henry Ford's Model T car (introduced in 1908) was the first car to become publically affordable due to improved production line manufacturing. In 2010 it was estimated that there were over 1 billion vehicles in the world, up from half a billion in 1986.

Petrol and diesel are still used to fuel the internal combustion engine today. However, both of these fuels have environmental costs, such as causing air pollution and contributing to climate change. In addition, there are concerns about the long-term availability and affordability of petrol. Many car manufacturers are now investing in alternative technologies for cars, such as electric vehicles, hybrid vehicles, hydrogen vehicles and vehicles using alternative fuels such as natural.



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