

**Accession 765**

**C. Gayle Warnock Records**

**Director of Edsel Automobile Marketing & Public Relations Department**

**1947 – 1960**

**(3.4 cubic feet – 9 document boxes & 1 oversized legal)**

**Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village**

**Dennis Lyons**

**May 1, 2000**

Open For Research

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## Edsel Product Development Chronology

<b>September 28, 1948</b>	<b>Henry Ford II sells the idea to build an intermediate size car to the Ford Forward Product Planning Committee</b>
<b>1949</b>	<b>The project gets underway aiming for a 1951 or 1952 model</b>
<b>1950-51</b>	<b>Korean war puts Edsel project on the shelf</b>
<b>1952</b>	<b>Henry Ford II dusts off the Edsel project once more.</b>
<b>December 6, 1954</b>	<b>Detailed presentation made to Administrative Committee.</b>
<b>July 7, 1954</b>	<b>Stylists begin dreaming and engineers plot a “package size” interior and exterior dimensions of the Edsel.</b>
<b>1954</b>	<b>Dick Krafve, Assistant General Manager of the Lincoln-Mercury Division becomes involved in the project. He later will become General Manager of Edsel and a Ford Vice President.</b>
<b>January 10, 1955</b>	<b>Presentation made to Board of Directors.</b>
<b>April, 1955</b>	<b>Engineering decides on four models or body shells for the Edsel.</b>
<b>May 1, 1955</b>	<b>J.C. Larry (Doyle) names general sales and marketing manager.</b>
<b>June, 1955</b>	<b>Intensive market research begins to plan dealer locations.</b>
<b>July, 1955</b>	<b>Engineers start structural design.</b>
<b>August 16, 1955</b>	<b>Stylists finish their work , and the 1958 Edsel is” locked-up” as far as design is concerned, minor changes continue to be made by Krafve.</b>
<b>August 17, 1955</b>	<b>Ford executives applaud after seeing a mock-up of the Edsel</b>
<b>Late 1955</b>	<b>Ford spends \$100,000. To perform “motivation” research to identify potential Edsel customers.</b>
<b>January, 1956</b>	<b>Orders for the special tooling and sheet metal for the Edsel are placed, the car name Edsel is formally adopted.</b>
<b>February 1956</b>	<b>Automobile assembly facilities are allocated for the Edsel. Foots, Cone &amp; Belding named advertising agency.</b>

**March, 1956**      **Wooden pattern models of the Edsel are turned-over to the toolmakers.**

**August 7, 1956**      **Five regional sales managers selected.**

**November 19, 1956**      **Special Products Division re-named Edsel Division and moved into the former Lincoln Continental Building offices.**

**December, 1956**      **Upholstery and small hardware items for the Edsel are ordered.**

**February 5, 1957**      **Announcement issued that Edsel will have 18 models in four series – Ranger, Pacer, Corsair, Citation.**

**April, 1957**      **Eight completed Edsel’s roll-off the assembly line at Ford’s Mahwah, New Jersey plant to test assembly facilities.**

**June, 1957**      **Dealers begin signing sales agreements.**

**July 15, 1957**      **Production of the Edsel begins.**

**August 27, 1957**      **National press show held in Dearborn to introduce Edsel.**

**September 4, 1957**      **The 1958 model Edsel goes on sale.**

**December 31, 1957**      **54,607 Edsels built in first six months.**

**January 15, 1958**      **Edsel merged with Lincoln and Mercury Division to become M-E-L Division with James Namce general manager and Ben Mills as assistant general manager.**

**August, 1958**      **Model year ends with a total of 63,110 automobiles produced. This included 45,341 Ranger and Pacer models and 17,769 Corsair and Citation models. Los Angeles produced 1,485, Somerville, MA 11,354 and the rest at Mahwah, San Jose and Louisville.**

**September 29, 1958**      **Production of the 1959 models begins at Louisville, KY.**

**October 31, 1958**      **The 1959 Edsel line of 10 models introduced to the public.**

**December 31, 1958**      **Production of 1959 Edsels, year to date, total 26,563.**

**November 11, 1959**      **Night letter sent via Western Union to all Edsel dealer’s announces Ford’s decision to discontinue production of the Edsel due to disappointing sales.**

## **Introduction**

In 1999 the Ford Motor Company was ranked in the top ten of the largest companies in the world and the number two auto maker after General Motors Corporation. It's operations are worldwide in scope and it has introduced the concept of the world car, a model that is basically the same and offered for sale in several different countries.

During the early 1950's Henry Ford II decided that Ford needed to develop a midsize automobile to fill a niche he felt existed between the various models offered by Ford as compared to those being offered at the time by General Motors which at that time commanded over 40% of new car sales market share. The senior management of the company agreed and soon the Forward Planning product Group was soon busy formulating plans for the new model.

But before the concept got very far the Korean War began and auto production slowed so that war time vehicles could be built, the project was delayed until 1954. By July 1957 the Edsel automobile began production. It was not however the niche filling mid-sized car that Henry Ford II had visualized and Ford management had approved. Soon after it's introduction in 1957 the Edsel became known as a pricey model of shoddy workmanship. After just two short model years, 1958-59 the Edsel was discontinued.

What led Ford to move so far from its original concept is still the subject of conjecture inside and outside the Company. What is known is that many files containing information about the development of the Edsel are missing. They inexplicably disappeared shortly after the Edsel product failure. At the same time some officials at Ford during the Edsel's development would like to distance themselves from the product.

C. Gayle Warnock was the Edsel Division Director of Public Relations during the Edsel years. His files are the basis for this archival project. Mr. Warnock has also published a book about the Edsel entitled "The Edsel Affair: What went wrong?"

Warnock left Ford Motor Company shortly after the introduction of the Edsel to assume a position with ITT and McCann Erickson Advertising in New York, he later rejoined Ford in 1963 to manage it's Worlds Fair exhibition.

What follows is a detailed overview from, based on Warnock's book, of the reasons for the Edsel's failure. The book also points out some missing pieces in the Edsel story. It is the only publication based on the recollections of a Ford official familiar and willing to talk at length about this conflicted chapter in the history of the Ford Motor Company.

### **The Edsel Affair : What Went Wrong?**

In his book, "The Edsel Affair: What Went Wrong?" C. Gayle Warnock the former Director of Public relations for the Edsel Division of the Ford Motor Company laments about the possible causes of the Edsel's failure. First there was the economy, "it was a bad year for introducing new products especially an automobile" he said. Research seemed to indicate that Ford had an airtight case to build a new, medium priced car that could compete with the popular Dodge and Dsoto, made by Chrysler, the Pontiac, Oldsmobile and Buick from General Motors and even Ford's own Mercury models. In

addition, the research showed that Edsel might also take a small part of the market from other Ford models as well as Chevrolet and Plymouth.

### **The Coming of the Compact Car**

The above case was made in 1954, three years before the Edsel would actually appear on the market. During the period between 1955-1958, the American public tastes in autos was changing towards those smaller cars that would become known as compacts. An early evidence of the compact's coming success was the American Motors Corp. Rambler. This was an area that the market research of 1954 had entirely overlooked, because it didn't exist in 1954. But by 1956, 171,310 small cars were sold in the United States. In 1957 this number had doubled, and by 1958, the introductory model year of the Edsel, the figure had leaped to 712,000 compacts, a third of them Rammers. In 1959 about a month before the Edsel was abandoned, Ford introduced its own compact car, the Falcon, and it sold a record 417,174 units in its first year of production compared to 63,110 Edsel units sold during its 1958 introductory year. Edsel's 1959 sales dipped to 44,891 and during the 1960 model year, when the Edsel was discontinued, only 2,846 were sold.

Edsel's financial planning called for a 3 percent market share base of the 1955 market. Auto sale slumped overall in 1958 when Edsel's were introduced. A three percent share of the 4,650,313 autos sold that year would have translated to 460 new Edsel sales per day. Company planners agreed that 400 sales per day would be profitable. But Edsel sold only one third of the total sales needed to remain in business.

### **Price Competition**

Price was another important factor in the short life of the Edsel. The solid acceptance of the Rambler indicated American motorists were knotting the drawstrings on their pocketbooks. A discerning public was quick to recognize the wide price variance between the Edsel and the competition. The car had been advertised and promoted as competitive with the top cars in the low-priced field and the bottom models of the high-priced field, but was actually neither one. Advance publicity said that the Edsel Ranger, 4 door sedan model would be priced \$220. dollars above the 1957 Ford Fairlane model and \$103. over the Fairlane 500 model. But shoppers soon discovered that the cheapest Edsel they could buy was listed from \$2519 without accessories, while the Ford Airline, a popular car with radio, whitewall tires, tinted glass, electric clock and two-tone paint was offered at \$1876. This was a difference of \$640. not \$220. With comparable equipment Chevrolet models were selling for \$1880. and Plymouths for \$2195, with the strongest competition coming from Ford's own Ford and Lincoln – Mercury line models.

### **Quality**

Many Edsels contained a large number of small but annoying factory defects which neither the engineers nor the production staff had managed to detect and correct. Although the Edsel was replete with new engineering features such as; instrument panel motion study (now called ergonomics), design of controls, speed warning light, dial-temp

control for heating and ventilation, three stage cooling system for the massive 475 cubic inch engine and automatic brake adjusters, the car was plagued with defective parts problems and a lack of quality control. Standards were low for the early Edsel cars. Vendor problems caused monumental problems. Brakes, bumpers, cigar lighters, clock assemblies, molding lamp assemblies, wiring, steering columns were among a long list of items that were not up to quality standards but the cars were shipped anyway to meet schedules. Indeed when the Public Relations Department asked for a picture showing the new Edsels being loaded on a new car carrier truck none of the pictures taken could be used because the plant manager said several vehicle defects were visible.

### **The Styling**

Warnock recalls a conversation between two Ford advertising executives studying a new consumer survey which quoted some reactions to the car's styling. The grille of the 1958 Edsel was compared by many to a horse collar. However, inside the car the front seat configuration was an immediate hit with driver and passenger alike. The driver's seat always came in one color, while the passenger seat featured a two-tone treatment.

At the outset styling got more blame than it deserved for the Edsel's failure, but passing years have weakened this criticism. When the car failed to attract buyers in quantity the media immediately began to look for something that could be quickly defined, quickly illustrated and easily recalled to blame. The grille served this purpose nicely.

### **The Promotion**

Just as Edsel's styling may have come on too strong, so too perhaps did Edsel's public relations. The press in fact seemed mesmerized by the pre-production publicity for the Edsel. It went along cheering every tantalizing revelation and covering every executive pronouncement in agonizing detail. Reader's Digest commissioned J.P. McEvoy, a noted writer to do an exclusive story on the Edsel. Fashion magazines requested permission, a year before introduction, to photograph its fashion models with the the Edsel agreeing to delay publication to coincide with the car's introduction. Stories filed by newspaper reporters who visited Detroit for the preview, and those written immediately after they returned home were very complimentary concerning the car's ride and performance. Maybe it was (1) too costly, (2) too highly styled, (3) lacking in quality, (4) overly hyped in the media, or (4) all of the above which led to the vehicles rejection by the public.

When it became apparent that the Edsel was not selling like the proverbial hot cakes, some red faced writers were forced to do an about face, to save face.

## **Scope and Content Note**

**The collection consists of two series:**

**Edsel Motor Car Records (1954-1959)**

**Lincoln-Mercury Division Records (1947-1952)**

C. Gayle Warnock worked in Ford's public relations department in the late 1940's and continued to work for the company after his retirement. The bulk of this collection relates to Warnock's involvement with the beginning and short life-span of the Edsel automobile as well as his earlier work for the Lincoln-Mercury Division in the late 1940's through the early 1950's.

The Edsel records contain information and photographs relating to the design process the design process as well as the marketing and advertising relating to the vehicle. There are photographs, transparencies and diagrams of the Edsel automobile and Edsel assembly plants. The photographs are glamour shots taken from various angles by Ford's PR department. Some press releases and advertising copy is also interspersed throughout the series. The diagrams are actually photographs of engineering drawings of various assemblies. The marketing and advertising material relates to the activities involved in launching the Edsel and the follow-up studies necessary to introduce a new automobile to the buying public. This includes marketing and comparison studies, dealer initiatives, price lists, engineering and production progress reports and other background information about the creation and presentation of the Edsel. Also included are the actual programs used to sell the car to the buying public and records designed to motivate dealers and provide suggestions on how to appeal to the buyers.

The Lincoln-Mercury Division material relates to Warnock's involvement with presenting the Lincoln-Mercury product to the public. It includes numerous press releases and clippings along with photographs of dealer's meetings. Also included here is information and photographs about the opening of the St. Louis plant in 1947 as well as clippings relating to that plant's 1949 strike.

**Series I**  
**Edsel Automobile**

**Box 1**

**Photographs & Diagrams**

Edsel Glamour Shots

1957 Edsel

1957 Edsel with Kim Novak & Robert Horton (Wagon Train)

Personalities in Edsels

1958 Edsel

Album containing pictures of the '59 Edsel with Ad copy

1959 Edsel on Car Carrier

1959 Edsel sedan & wagon

Album of 1960 Edsel

Interior view left

1960 Edsel Ranger right side

Edsel 4dr. hardtop front & left side

1960 Edsel 4 dr. sedan front & left side

Edsel 4 dr. sedan on test track

Edsel '60 4 dr. sedan with home

Edsel '60 convertible - rear

Edsel '60 sedan - front

Edsel 4 dr, - left side

Edsel '60 station wagon – rear & left side

Edsel '60 station wagon – front & right side

Edsel '60 station wagon – rear lift gate

Edsel '60 sedan -rear & left side

Edsel '60 sedan – rear trunk open

Edsel '59-'60 sedan – rear view comparison

Edsel '59-60 sedan - front view comparison

Edsel '60 Ranger Convertible

Edsel engine compartment

Edsel engine compartment – left side view

Edsel '60 instrument panel

Edsel '60 front & left side view

Edsel '60 various transparanies

Edsel Chassis and Power Train

**Box 2**

Diagrams (photoprints)

Edsel station wagon fold –down seat assembly

Edsel 8 cylinder engine chassis

Edsel body-in-white 4 dr.

Edsel 223 engine

Edsel front body pillar compartment

Edsel spring assembly

Edsel multiple light connection

Edsel wiring harness

**Box 2**  
(con't)

Edsel rear suspension  
Edsel exhaust system 8 cylinder  
Edsel radiator 8 cylinder  
Edsel front suspension  
Edsel ignition switch  
Edsel f & e front suspension  
Edsel 292 engine  
Edsel brake system  
Edsel brake assembly  
Edsel power brake  
Edsel automatic transmission - dual range  
Edsel advertising cut lines  
Edsel heater defroster  
Edsel automatic transmission - 2 speed  
Edsel Muffler section  
Edsel Frame  
Edsel Switch  
Edsel 352 engine  
Edsel Heating system

Plants and Offices

Edsel Division Headquarters Dearborn (2 folders)  
Somerville Assembly Plant  
Metuchen Plant  
Unidentified Edsel Assembly Line

Introduction of the Edsel in the Detroit District

Edsel Executives and Dealers (6 folders including press releases and sales agreements)

**Box 3**

**Marketing**

Special Products Division – Public Relations Program Proposal, 5/26/1955

Edsel Introduction

Planning The Product  
Naming the Edsel  
Background on the Edsel Story  
“The Edsel Story”  
The Market and Personality of the E Car  
Pre Introduction Program  
Edsel Product Progress Reports, 1955-1957  
Edsel Introduction – Program and Planning  
Publicity Goals for Edsel Introduction  
Marketing Preview  
Suggested List Prices

**Box 4**

Pre Announcement Publicity  
Special Projects Division, Public Relations Budget, 1956  
Establishing an Edsel Dealership  
Dealer Introduction Plans

**Box 4**  
(con't)

Edsel Introduction – Dealers Plan  
Consumer Correspondence, 1957-1958  
Consumer Correspondence, 1958-1960  
Edsel Loaners, 1957-1958

**Box 5**

Edsel Marketing, 1958-1960  
Public Relations Program, 1958  
Survey of Edsel Purchasers, 1/1958  
Second Survey of Edsel Purchasers, 7/1958  
Fleet Sales, 1958  
1959 Marketing Plan, 5/1958  
1959 Promotion Plan, 6/1959  
Price List, 1959  
1959 New Car Introduction (2 folders)  
Themes, Styling, Colors, Engines and Names for 1959 Edsel  
Edsel Correspondence, 1959

**Box 6**

Discontinuing the Edsel, 1959-1960  
Consumer Response to Notice of Discontinuance of Edsel, 1959-1960  
Edsel Advertising and Promotions  
Press Releases, 1957 (2 folders)  
Press Kit, 11/1957  
Telegrams, 1957  
Television and Dealer Film Promotions, 1957-1958  
Wagon Train (includes press releases and photographs), 1957  
Superhighway (Public Service Film), 1958  
Miscellaneous Film/Television Promotions, 1957-1958  
Magazine Promotions, 1956-1957  
Business Week  
Car Life  
Newsweek  
Tide: The Magazine for Advertising Executives, 11/1956  
Your Edsel Marketer Magazine

**Box 7**

Edsel Promotion Program for 1958 (2 folders)  
Publicity Planning For 1958  
Dealer Promotions, 1957-1958

**Box 10**

Phonograph Records  
Edsel Division presents Getting A Head Start, ca 1957 (promotion for dealers)  
Dealer Announcement Show presents Once In A Lifetime, 1958  
(promotion for dealers)

**Box 7**  
(con't)

Vendor Promotions, 1958  
Product Literature about the Edsel, 1958  
Direct Mail Campaign, 1958  
Press Packets, 1958-1959 (3 folders)  
Engineering the Edsel (Background on the 1959 Edsel)  
Advertising Ad Mats and Proof Sheets, 1959-1960

**Box 8**

Advertising Copy, 1960  
Press Release for 1960 Edsel

**Lincoln-Mercury Division Records**

Role of Market Research, 1958  
Henry Ford II Article, 1957  
Benson Ford – Sports Lodge Citizen of the Year Award, 1953  
Television Advertising, 1950-1952  
Cardinal Mooney Car Donation, 1954  
St Louis Plant  
Dedication (Clippings and Speeches), 1948  
Strike, 1949  
Photographs  
Ariel and Construction, 1947-1948  
Main Office Building, 1948-1949  
Assembly Areas, 1949  
Shows and Press Events  
Miscellaneous Press Events, 1948-1952  
Miscellaneous Press Events, 1952-1954 (includes photographs  
of Truman and Eisenhower)

**Box 9**

Air Races, 1949-1951  
Sports Car Show, 1948-1952  
A Day With the Engineers: Engineering Show, 1951-1952  
Little 500 Bicycle Race, 1951-1952  
1953 Press Preview (Scrapbook)  
1954 New Car Preview  
1959 Lincoln Press Preview  
1959 Press Preview  
National Press Show, 1959-1960

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Charles Scribner's Sons, 1962-63.  
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