

Simple Stuff

Here's Looking at You Kid!

by Bob Vitrikas

Something we all look at every time we get behind the wheel is the windshield or wind-screen as it is referred to in the "old county." It hasn't always been there for us so let's take a closer look at what lies before us.

Cars evolved from the horse and buggy and bicycles, neither of which had windshields. Speeds were modest and the danger of getting outside elements thrown in your face were slight. As automobiles got faster it soon became obvious that more protection was needed. The first automobile windshield appeared as an option, along with headlights and speedometers, in 1904. In 1915, Oldsmobile was the first to offer a windshield as standard equipment.

Early windshields were made of plate glass and folded horizontally for convenience and cooling in the hot months. Turns out plate glass was very susceptible to shattering and the resulting injuries or deaths. Laminated glass, developed by the British firm Triplex, solved the problem. Developed in 1905, you can still find the Triplex name on your British car glass! Henry Ford adopted laminated glass for his cars in 1927. Other advances came fast and furious. A special urethane aided attaching windshield glass to the car frame. Lincoln began supplying bullet proof windshields with its police vehicles. In 1934 Chrysler sold the first curved glass windshield. In 1938 Pittsburgh Plate glass introduced Herculite tempered glass which had improved shatter resistance. In 1966 the Fed got the green light to legislate automobile safety regulations including making shatter-resistant windshields mandatory.

In the 1920s car designers adopted a vertically split windshield for aesthetic and aerodynamic benefits. Having two panes of glass provided extra structural support, thus reducing the risk of windshield cracking plus the panes could be opened separately for more flexible ventilation. Wrap around windshields became a styling thing in the late '50s as well as tinted auto glass.

As we peer through our windshield, what lies ahead?

- All car glass will be laminated providing an added measure of safety.
- How about a self-cleaning windshield?
- Smart windshields capable of displaying directions and other information. Sounds like a heads up display (HUD) to me. FYI the first production car to have a HUD was the 1988 Oldsmobile Cutlass Supreme Indianapolis 500 Pace Car Parade convertibles.
- The average life of an automobile windshield is five years.