

Fashion Trends in Automobile Colors Change And G. M. Styling Staff Must Study Them; Brighter Paints in Demand in Good Times

The artists who create colors for automobiles in the General Motors styling section, says Harley J. Earl, director of G. M.'s styling section, find themselves in a field of unlimited research, not only in the determination of what colors people want for their cars, but also in the creation of these colors on a practical basis.

Fashions affect colors, as well as designs, and popular tastes are swayed season by season. Fortunately for the automobile manufacturer, fashions in automobile colors do not change rapidly; but there are noticeable differences over a period of time and between different sections of the country.

Color trends must be studied by a special group of color experts. Their studies and the assistance they give to the designer are all-important, for it is the job of the designer to combine the mechanical requirements with the human requirements—to bring together the science of the engineer and the skill of the artist in order that the automobile might be as beautiful as it is useful.

Color Preferences Tabulated

General Motors' color experts do not guess what colors should be used for the selection of the automobile buyer—they find out by conducting field surveys at regular intervals among new car buyers everywhere, tabulating exactly what colors people like. On a large map, the color "vote" for each state is recorded and preferences tabulated at regular intervals.

In analyzing the present situation as regards color choice being exercised in the purchase of motor cars throughout the United States, it is found that quite a few noticeable taste preferences are being expressed by the public. The one particular phase of paint choice which is continually assuming more and more importance is those colors which have aluminum powder added, creating a somewhat metallic effect. This type of paint has been growing in popularity steadily for about the last five years. The metallic effect is in close harmony with the modern trend of the motor car and the metallic finishes produced.

Black has always led by a considerable margin throughout the United States generally in percentage, but in the course of the last two or three years, certain gunmetal shades have gone as high as 35% or 40% of the total production. This is quite significant because at no time in the history of painting automobiles, and their merchandising to the public, has any color assumed so big a proportion of the total output.

Bright Colors—Good Business

Quite an interesting psychological effect has been noticeable in that to a marked degree, the amount of bright color on motor cars is greater when business increases. When the economics of the country decline, black again assumes a much bigger proportion of all cars bought.

A marked difference exists in color choice in warm and cold sections of the United States.

The New England states buy a tremendous quantity of black, dark greys, maroons and dark blues. Black, on the contrary, has never led in California, and the much lighter hues predominate. A color engineer must, by necessity, keep these points very clearly in mind when selecting colors for a given make of car. The central states and the northwest states must be taken care of with a mixture of the light hues and the dark tones. As a consequence, cars in this section represent the full range of colors available.

Another quite prominent factor is that cars in the low price group, and also all other cars, to quite a degree, continue to offer more color options to the buyer, giving him a much wider choice. It has not been more than ten years since the buyer of an inexpensive car had to choose between as few as three or four colors. The situation has been decidedly improved by an analysis of the buying public as to just what was desired in the way of certain colors.