

# *From* **Crazy** *to Cool to* **Classic**

**Nashville's Lane Motor Museum  
showcases unusual cars from around the world**

*Story by Trish Milburn • Photographs by Robin Conover*

**H**ave you ever had a collection of a certain type of item so large that you thought you could start a museum? That idea might not be more than a passing thought if you collect coins, stamps or postcards. After all, those items don't really take up that much space. But what if you collected cars, dozens of cars? Well, then, you really could open a museum, just as Susan and Jeff Lane did in Nashville in 2003.

The museum's collection of more than 300 cars got its start when Museum Director Jeff Lane was a teenager. It was then that he began restoring his first car, a 1955 MG TF, which visitors to the museum can see. Through the years, Lane continued to collect and restore interesting cars, and his personal collection of 70 cars was the donation that started the foundation that operates the museum.







**Above left, Jeff Lane demonstrates reverse on a 1965 Peel P50 microcar. Some of the other unique and most interesting cars in the museum include a 1932 Helicron with propeller, center, and a 1946 Hewson Rocket.**

Since the creation of the foundation, Lane has continued to acquire vehicles to add to the museum's rotating exhibits while his wife, Susan, serves as the museum's curator. There are some American-made cars in the collection, but it mainly consists of European and Asian cars that are technically significant or uniquely different. As you browse the 150 or so vehicles that are on display at any one time, words like "cool" or "crazy" might come to mind. Or they might just leave you speechless, scratching your head.

The Lane Motor Museum is one of the few museums in the United States to specialize in European cars. The displays are grouped by country, sitting underneath that country's flag, or by type of vehicle, such as motorcycles, race cars or microcars. But why the emphasis on European cars?

"My dad was a big MG fan," Jeff Lane says. "He bought a new MG in 1955 when he was in the Army, stationed in Germany, but he found it wasn't very practical when he got out of the Army and came back to Michigan."

Even though the elder Lane got rid of that original MG when Jeff was around 10, another MG joined the family, and father and son took it to meets around the country. From that early interest in

MGs, Jeff got interested in Citroën cars and others made in Europe.

Each car on display has a detailed description situated next to it so that you can learn about its unique history, including its country of origin, mechanical specifications, top speeds, place in history and any odd, fun facts.

The museum has the distinction of housing the largest collection of Czechoslovakian vehicles outside of Europe. Among these is the 1947 Tatra T-87 Saloon. It's said that Adolf Hitler liked this type of car because of its high speed, remarkable traction in bad weather and reliability.

Some of the cars you'll see were made by companies whose original purpose was something other than the manufacture of automobiles. For instance, Steyr was an Austrian rifle-maker until the terms of the Versailles Treaty after World War I took away that business. The company got into making cars, and one of the results is the 1936 Steyr 50 Baby.

Part of the collection's attraction is the fact that so many of the cars are either one of a kind or extremely rare. One such car is the cute little red Weidner Condor, circa 1959, one of only two known to exist.



**The Lane Motor Museum's collection includes, from left, a 1934 McQuay Norris Streamliner, which was used as a promotional vehicle for the McQuay-Norris Company of St. Louis, Mo.; a 1957 Messerschmitt KR 200, representing one of the first microcars; a 1936 Panhard Dynamic X76; and a 1956 IFA F9 convertible.**

Amphibious vehicles on display include the 1964 German Amphicar, which has propellers for when it travels in the water. The \$45,000 price tag of the 1982 amphibious Hobbycar B612 from France kept it from being a commercial success. Only 52 were built.

Among the racing vehicles in the museum is a 1966 Citroën DS Ice Racer affectionately named “Pumpkin” because of its orange paint job. Who even knew there was such a thing as racing cars on ice?

The 1948 Davis Divan on display is a prototype of a large, three-wheeled car that never went into production. The aerodynamic 1946 Hewson Rocket is also one of a kind since the car’s builder, William Hewson, had run out of funds by the time the car was completed.

In the section of the museum devoted to microcars, the 1965 Peel Trident made me think of the Jetsons’ flying car from the cartoon series, which, incidentally, was also a product of the ’60s. Instead of a normal roof, the car has a transparent Perspex dome — or a “bubble” as I like to call it.

While there are many cars that cause visitors to pause in wonder, perhaps the oddest is the 1932 Helicron. This one-of-a-kind French vehicle has a wood frame and a large propeller on the front.



Another vehicle that will have you doing a double take is the replica of a 1952 Citroën Cogolin. It’s basically two front ends of a car placed back to back, giving a whole new meaning to the phrase “coming and going.” Each end has its own engine, steering wheel and seating area. This unique design came about when a fire and rescue service colonel in France was patrolling in the mountains one night and found the road blocked. Unable to go

forward or turn around, he was forced to drive in reverse down the mountain for several miles with only the light of a fireman’s flashlight to guide the way. Because of this experience, he saw the need for a vehicle that could be driven either direction with equal ease.

While the museum has an extensive collection, the Lanes are always looking for additions.

“I have a list of about 30 cars I’d like to acquire,” Jeff Lane says. “A couple of examples are the Ligier JS-2 and a Burney Streamliner, a British aerodynamic car.”



**John Williamson, above, uses a pair of calipers to take an exact measurement in the museum’s restoration shop. Below left, Jeff and Susan Lane take their 1947 Tatra T-87 Saloon for a spin.**

The 40,000 square feet of the museum’s main show floor offers a lot for visitors to see — from two French cars built in 1924 to the 2003 Mercedes Smart Car. Besides the cars on display, there’s also a car-related art gallery, a car-themed play area for kids and a gift shop filled with model cars, books, postcards and car-themed toys and gifts.

Once you’ve exhausted the car-related offerings, you’ll want to take a few minutes to tour the section of the museum dedicated to the building’s history. The Lane Motor Museum is housed in the former Sunbeam Bakery at 702 Murfreesboro Road in Nashville. This building was home to the famous bread company from 1951 until 2002. The building’s high ceilings, natural light and brick-and-maple floors provide the perfect backdrop for the museum’s extensive collection while saving a Nashville landmark.

The museum hosts several special events throughout the year. Next on the calendar is free admission on Super Bowl Sunday, car demonstrations and a basement tour on March 15 and the Fifth Annual Microcar Drive on April 26. The rest of the museum’s event schedule is listed on its Web site.

Whether you’re a car enthusiast or someone who simply likes to tour museums with exhibits you don’t see every day, the Lane Motor Museum is the perfect place to spend a couple of leisurely hours. ☺

## Getting There

**Location:** 702 Murfreesboro Road, Nashville  
**Phone:** 615-742-7445

**Admission:** \$5, adults 18 and older; \$3, seniors (55 and older); inquire for group rates.

**Hours:** 10 a.m.-5 p.m., Thursday-Monday; closed Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year’s Day.

**Web site:** [www.lanemotormuseum.org](http://www.lanemotormuseum.org)

