

Henry Ford Did Not Invent The Assembly Line



Like saying night is day or Pink Floyd isn't the greatest rock band of all time, saying [Henry Ford](#) didn't invent the [assembly line](#) goes contrary to conventional auto wisdom. But he didn't. It was actually [Ransom E. Olds](#).

You read that correctly, Pink Floyd is the greatest rock band of all time. However, it's also notable that Henry Ford, genius of mass production and ardent anti-Semitic founder of Ford Motor Company, didn't actually invent the assembly line, despite often being credited as such. The honor for this innovation instead rests on one of the giants of the era, Ransom Eli Olds. Ransom is one of the forgotten masters of the early century, the man most credited with bringing mass-production to Detroit and largely establishing the auto industry. The Oldsmobile Curved Dash was, for a time during the nineteen-ought's, the best-selling car in America and is considered the first mass-produced vehicles in history, selling 5,000 units in 1904. Those kinds of numbers would imply there was some kind of mass production system behind it.

Olds grew up the son of a blacksmith and learned his fathers ways — diligence and exacting work — at an early age. At the closing of the 1800s, Ransom got to tinkering with steam-powered cars but soon moved to gasoline. In 1895 Ransom and his father opened [Olds Gasoline Engine Works](#) where the two experimented and worked and by 1896 had built their first gasoline-powered automobile. He even went so far as to go racing with the terrifying creation above dubbed the "Olds Pirate." In 1897 he opened the Olds Motor Vehicle Company and that year sold a grand total of four cars.

The initial cars didn't sell very well on account of expense and what we'd consider an aversion to being an early-adopter. By 1899 an investor by the name of Sam Smith stepped in and bought the company, putting Ransom in charge of operations. 1901 was

a harrowing year for Olds, having moved his operations from Lansing to Detroit and set up shop at the [Olds Motor Works](#), he faced setbacks when the factory burnt to the ground in March. The Curved Dash Oldsmobile prototype was one of the few cars saved from the fire. He began producing later in the year and not only radically reduced the price of the car but made interchangeable parts the order of the day. When supply was outstripped by demand Olds developed and patented the very first assembly line. Ransom put in place much of what we recognize as the assembly line today, defined repetitive operations, fixed stations and parts delivered to the worker. In 1902 the factory's output quadrupled from 425 cars in 1901 to 2,500. By 1905 Olds had moved back to Lansing and was building 5,000 cars a year.

Eventually Smith wanted to go upmarket to serve the burgeoning luxury market and [Ransom Olds](#) left to form REO Motor Company and organized many of its suppliers. The credit for the invention of the assembly line often goes to Henry Ford because of one very critical addition, Ford put the cars on a conveyor of sorts, creating the all-important *moving* assembly line.

[[Wikipedia](#), [Ideafinder](#), [Detroit1701](#)]