Innovations and Contributions of Henry Ford Celebrated During 150th Anniversary of His Birth

- Yearlong activities around the 150th anniversary celebration of Henry Ford’s birth are under way and culminate around his birthdate of July 30

- Dedicated website, www.henryford150.com, hosts an interactive timeline of Ford’s life, a calendar of activities, and information and efforts to preserve Ford’s legacy

- Henry Ford’s spirit of innovation continues to fuel Ford Motor Company today

DEARBORN, Mich., April 25, 2013 – A farmer’s son who turned his mechanical interests into a global company that transformed the world, Henry Ford will be celebrated throughout 2013 – the 150th anniversary of his birth.

The life and interests of the founder of Ford Motor Company, as well as his contributions as an innovator and industrialist, are brought to life and into perspective through tours, educational programming, dramatic re-enactments, lectures, integration and special events at auto shows.

An immeasurable legacy
The impact Henry Ford had on the world is almost immeasurable. His introduction of the automobile into the mass market transformed agricultural economies in the United States and even around the world into prosperous industrial and urban ones. Many historians credit him with creating a middle class in America. His high minimum wages – revolutionary at the time – set a precedent for fair distribution of company wealth that influenced later management practices.

And of course, there were the cars themselves. Ford’s curiosity and enterprising nature were directly responsible for a long list of automotive innovations, from the V8 engine to safety glass.

His spirit of innovation continues to guide Ford Motor Company today, seen in vehicles as diverse as F-150, Mustang and Fusion Hybrid, technology like SYNC and EcoBoost, and through employees serving customers across six continents.

“My great-grandfather’s vision was to improve people’s lives by making cars affordable for the average family,” said Executive Chairman Bill Ford. “His vision to build cars that are reasonably priced, reliable and efficient still resonates and defines our vision today.”
Henry Ford’s beginnings
Born on July 30, 1863, in Wayne County in Michigan, an area that later became Dearborn, Henry Ford was the oldest of six children. While always a contributor to the family farm, Henry’s earliest exposure to his real passion – machinery and mechanics – came from visits to town with his father, where he saw some of the earliest technology of machines, engines and mills.

In April 1888, Ford married Clara Bryant. Success soon came to him as he took a position in 1891 as an engineer at Edison Illuminating Company, and fairly quickly climbed the ranks. Greater financial security along with more freedom to explore his own experiments came with his promotion to chief engineer in 1893 – the same year his only child, Edsel, was born.

Although he had established a solid career at Edison Illuminating, Ford was restless and ready to venture into the field of automotive engineering, in which he had long been experimenting.

As a young boy, Ford took apart everything he got his hands on; he became known around the neighborhood for fixing people’s watches. As he grew up, he explored every mechanical opportunity he could find, learning to fix steam engines and run mill operations. In the 1890s, he focused particularly on internal combustion engines.

Early challenges
Henry Ford called his first vehicle the Quadricycle. It attracted enough financial backing for Ford to leave his engineer position at Edison Illuminating and help found Detroit Automobile Company, in 1899. The company faltered for a variety of reasons, and in 1901 Ford left to pursue his own work again. Later that year, Henry Ford Company was born. He left in early 1902 to devote more time to refining his vehicles.

In his small workshop, he went to work on two new racers, the “Arrow” and the “999.” With the help of a draftsman, a mechanic and a retired bicycle champion, the new cars were made ready for racing.

Barney Oldfield, considered by some historians as the greatest driver in the early days of racing, piloted the “999” in the Manufacturers Challenge Cup Race at Grosse Pointe, Mich. The car finished a mile in front of the competition. More information about Henry Ford’s racing ventures can be found here.
After the race, A.Y. Malcomson, a Detroit coal dealer, became interested in Henry Ford and his automobiles. The two became partners in a new venture, with Ford beginning work on a model for a new car. During early 1903, more investors arrived. Ford Motor Company was founded on June 16, 1903.

A month later, Henry Ford faced a daunting situation: The company’s cash balance stood at less than $250. A much-needed cash infusion arrived on July 13, 1903: One full payment and two deposits totaling $1,320 for three Model A cars kept Ford Motor Company afloat.

In late 2012, one of those three cars – a red 1903 Model A Rear Entry Tonneau – returned to Ford when it was purchased at an auction by Bill Ford, the great-grandson of Henry Ford. It is believed to be car No. 3, chassis No. 30, and the lone survivor of the group of three Model A cars sold on that day.

With the company on better financial footing, Ford increased its vehicle offerings and improved the way cars were built.

The iconic Model T appeared in October 1908, opening a new era in America. The ninth of Henry Ford’s production vehicles, he called it “the universal car” – a low-cost, reliable vehicle that could be maintained easily and could successfully travel the poor roads of the era. More than 15,000,000 Model T’s were built and sold as Ford Motor Company truly put the nation on wheels.

Additional facts about the Model T are available here.

In 1913 Ford Motor Company invented the integrated moving assembly line for automobiles. Conveyors and overhead moving hangers brought parts to the moving assembly line. This increased production and drove the cost of the automobile down.

In 1914 Ford – with 13,000 employees – produced about 300,000 cars, while 299 other companies with 66,350 employees produced about 280,000 vehicles.

Next, construction of the Rouge plant in 1917 was the first step toward Ford’s dream of an all-in-one manufacturing complex, where the processing of raw materials, parts and final automobiles could happen efficiently in a single place.

Bringing cars to the common man
In addition to his vehicles, what made Henry Ford successful was he understood the potential of those vehicles to transform society.
Before Ford, cars were luxury items, and most of his early competitors continued to manufacture and market their vehicles for the wealthy. Ford recognized that with the right techniques, cars could be made affordable for the general public – and that the general public would want them. Ford focused on making the manufacturing process more efficient so he could produce more cars and charge less for each.

Ford also recognized that his business was about more than just cars; it was about transportation, mobility, changing lifestyles. He anticipated the ripple effect from mass production to create more jobs that let more people afford the cost-effective cars he produced.

He made Ford Motor Company an international enterprise far earlier than any of its competitors. At the height of Henry Ford’s fame and business power, his company operated or sold in more than 30 countries around the world, including China, Brazil and much of Europe.

Providing opportunities for a better society
Henry Ford’s personal motto of “Help the Other Fellow” spilled over into his management style; he recognized that policies generous to his employees would result in happier workers and a better product. He claimed, however, not to believe in conventional charity – rather, he preferred to provide opportunities for people to help themselves.

Some of the innovations Ford implemented within his company include:

- The $5 workday, doubling the industry standard for a day’s wages and bringing his employees closer to affording the cars they built. Ford considered it a way of sharing the company’s profits with all those who had helped make those profits possible
- Employment policies that created opportunities for those with physical and mental challenges
- A variety of educational facilities at the workplace, starting with the English Language School at the Highland Park plant in 1914, when he realized his largely immigrant workforce needed language skills and assistance

A business leader
Henry Ford retired, for the first time, in 1919, when he handed over leadership of his company to his son Edsel. Also in 1919, Henry, along with his wife and Edsel, acquired the stock of the company’s minority shareholders for the astonishing (for 1919) sum of $105,820,894, and became sole owners of Ford Motor Company – truly making it a family-owned business.

In 1943, after Edsel’s death from cancer at 49, Henry returned as president, but many say he was never the same after the death of his beloved son.

On Sept. 21, 1945, the Ford Motor Company board of directors was presented with a letter from Henry Ford, resigning as president of the company and recommending Henry Ford II, Edsel’s eldest son and Henry’s eldest grandson, as his successor. With that, Henry Ford permanently left behind management of Ford Motor Company. He was 82 years old.
Henry Ford’s retirement found him as busy as ever. He spent April 7, 1947, inspecting buildings and grounds around Dearborn that had been damaged by the worst floods in that area’s history. The flood had cut off power to Ford’s home, Fair Lane. He died in his bed that night by candlelight, in an odd re-creation of the electricity-free world into which he had been born.

For additional information, go to http://media.ford.com/mini_sites/10031/HenryFord150.


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About Ford Motor Company
Ford Motor Company, a global automotive industry leader based in Dearborn, Mich., manufactures or distributes automobiles across six continents. With about 175,000 employees and 65 plants worldwide, the company’s automotive brands include Ford and Lincoln. The company provides financial services through Ford Motor Credit Company. For more information regarding Ford and its products worldwide, please visit http://corporate.ford.com.

Henry Ford 150th Celebration
For more on the yearlong celebration of the 150th anniversary of Henry Ford’s birth, visit www.henryford150.com, a special website featuring plenty of unique content.

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