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The archives of *Road & Track* magazine come to Stanford

An interdisciplinary team of Stanford researchers exploring the place of the automobile in modern society has inherited the entire 65-year archives of *Road & Track* magazine. The team members have become stewards of the legacy of the legendary auto enthusiast magazine, with a trove of detailed prose, notes, test data and photos for automotive researchers.

By Kelly Servick

The basic workings of a car might fit in a stack of technical manuals, but the culture of the automobile could fill a whole library.

Stanford has inherited just such a collection: the vast library of files of *Road & Track* magazine's 65-year history. The famous publication moved its offices from Newport Beach, Calif., to Ann Arbor, Mich., last summer and decided to entrust to Stanford thousands of books, photos, diagrams and other priceless ephemera left without a home.

The collection will now benefit Stanford's Revs Program, which was launched in 2011 to raise the level of academic understanding and discourse about all aspects of the car, from its engineering intricacies to its role in the social sciences and the arts.

"Our goal really is to bring the automobile to the center of Stanford," said Revs Executive Director Reilly Brennan, "to fund and support smart people doing interesting and new projects with and about the automobile."

The Revs Program will preserve the collection for future research and make its information available to the public.

"An important part of our mission is to provide long-term access to archives and unique collections, whether they originate with individuals or organizations," said Henry Lowood, the curator of the history of science and technology in Stanford Libraries. "The *Road & Track* archive will find a place among our collections that document the history of companies ranging from the Southern Pacific Railroad to Apple Computer."

**Navigating past and future**

*Courtesy Stanford Libraries*

A publicity photograph of an experimental Lincoln from Ford Motor Company is part of the *Road & Track* archive.
Road & Track's library, which once filled a two-car garage at the Newport Beach facility, contains folders of information from every article written for the magazine. The stacks include interviews, photos and even old road tests illustrated on graph paper. More unusual artifacts – a dinner receipt from the chief engineer of the Corvette, for example – were also preserved.

"Connecting with Revs during our move to Ann Arbor was the perfect opportunity to properly archive Road & Track's years of automotive history and, even more exciting, make all of those materials available to a much wider audience," said Road & Track's Editor-in-Chief Larry Webster.

Brennan said the massive collection reflects Road & Track's legacy as a pioneer in automotive journalism: "They became the first American car magazine to really treat the subject like The New Yorker treated its editorial content." From its first issue in 1947, the publication invested in talented writers and high-quality photos. Road & Track also started paying attention to European and Japanese models before international cars were on other magazines' radars, said Brennan.

Webster said that Stanford is a proper home for the collection: "Revs' mission to connect the past, present and future of the automobile is one we very much take to heart at Road & Track, and we're very excited to be a part of it." Road & Track reviews cars as they hit the market, describes new technology under the hood and performs road tests. But it also focuses on the legacy of the automobile, running feature stories on the racing scene and retrospective pieces for the vintage enthusiast.

Like Road & Track, Revs straddles different eras of the automobile. One Revs study in the works seeks to gather the physiological and neurological response to driving by applying EEG sensors to drivers' heads to record brain activity as they maneuver. Another uses the damaged lacquer on a 1952 Cunningham C-4RK to learn about the chemistry of corrosion.

"They are studying and uncovering facets of the auto that few people have looked at," Webster said, "but which help to round out our understanding of why the automobile holds such an important place in our culture."

**A shared inheritance**

Among the gems from the archives: original photography from the '50s and '60s, a sampling of the collection's 2,000 books and even old letters from manufacturers complaining to Road & Track editors about negative product reviews.

These artifacts will reside in Stanford Libraries' Special Collections, where they will be available on request for academic research. Revs Director Clifford Nass, a Stanford professor with a primary appointment in communication, believes this resource will help restore the automobile to its rightful place in university scholarship.

"I think universities have given automobiles incredibly short shrift," said Nass, who specializes in the psychology and ergonomics of driving. "You can go through an entire college education without every hearing the term 'automobile,' when in fact it was arguably the most important 20th-century technology."
The collection is already meticulously organized by year, make and model for easy reference. Nass said disciplines from art to urban studies could make use of the archive. "It's hard to imagine a field where understanding the automobile wouldn't be impactful," he said.

Nass said this inheritance puts Stanford one step closer to becoming the de facto hub for important automobile collections. Revs has already archived and digitized the collection of Miles Collier, a vintage car connoisseur and Revs' founding donor. The next step is to digitize the highlights of the Road & Track library, making them available and searchable online for academics and auto aficionados.

Brennan hopes even those not already entranced by the automobile will see the value of this collection: "We don't want to turn people into gearheads, we just want the auto to be considered, because we believe it's a transformative object and has a rightful place within academia."

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