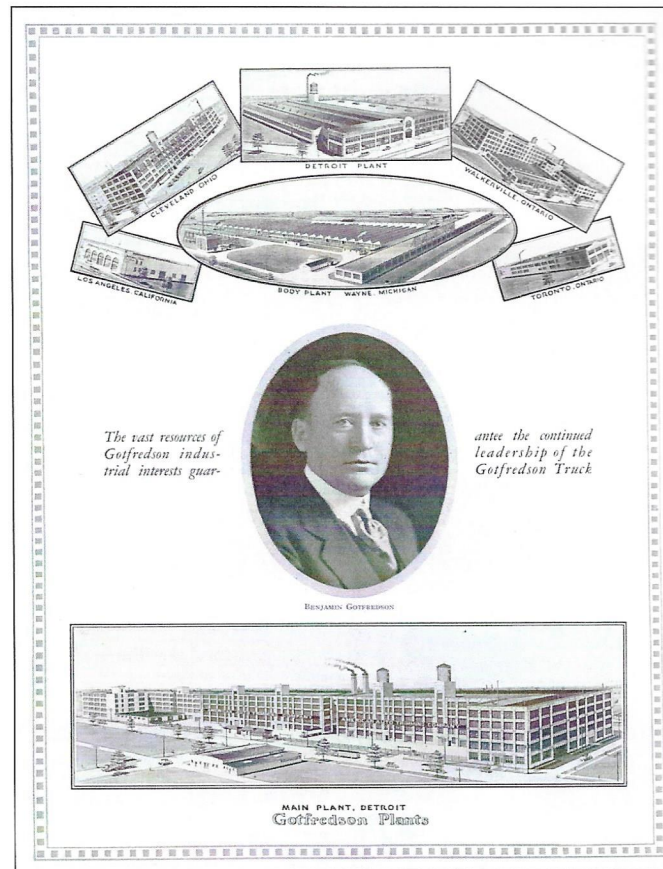


Gotfredson

"It has been said that a great business development is founded on one strong individuality. The Gotfredson Truck is only six years old, but already an established factor in world transportation, and the latest achievement of a man whose automotive successes have been conspicuous throughout a generation." In 1926, the Gotfredson Truck Corporation, Ltd., "the largest truck manufacturer in Canada," published these remarks paying homage to its noted founder, Benjamin Gotfredson—a man of "business courage" and "clear vision and indomitable spirit."

To tell the story of the man and the company he created more completely, we need to go back to the earliest years of the Twentieth century. The United States was in the throes of a dynamic industrial transformation. Responding to the need for labor in the burgeoning factories, immigrants crowded the growing urban centers seeking a better life than they could ever hope to achieve in the "old country." At the time, the horse was the primary means of transportation, providing the power for the work of the increasingly industrialized economy. Moving to Detroit from Wisconsin, in 1905, Benjamin Gotfredson responded to this situation by creating the Gotfredson Horse Market for the purpose of buying and selling large quantities of horses. However, the automobile and the motor truck were beginning to replace the horse. Today, the outcome of this contest seems pre-ordained, but both sides contested it vigorously, waging the battle for supremacy for years.

Turning his back on the horse, and staking his future on motorized transportation, Benjamin Gotfredson established the American Auto Trimming Company, in Detroit, Michigan, in 1909; and a Canadian counterpart, the American Auto Trimming Company, Ltd., in Walkerville, Ontario, in 1911. (Now a "heritage precinct" of Windsor, located just across the Detroit River from Detroit, Walkerville was established by Canadian Club Whiskey owner Hiram Walker, in 1890.) Success subsequently resulted in the establishment of branches in Cleveland, Ohio, and Los Angeles, California. These companies specialized in painting and applying interior and exterior trim to bodies for automobile and body manufacturers. A news article indicated the Canadian factory also manufactured automobile tops. Nelson Brownier, who joined the company in 1921, becoming the chief engineer for the Gotfredson & Joyce Corporation, Ltd, Walkerville, explained, "There was a constant stream of vehicles to and from these plants for the transportation of

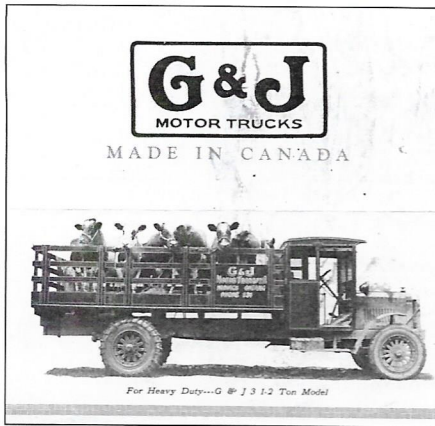


A Gotfredson sales brochure featured this page touting the firm's "vast resources," reflecting the various enterprises created by Benjamin Gotfredson, who initially established the American Auto Trimming Company, in Detroit, Michigan, and a Canadian counterpart in Walkerville, Ontario. DPL

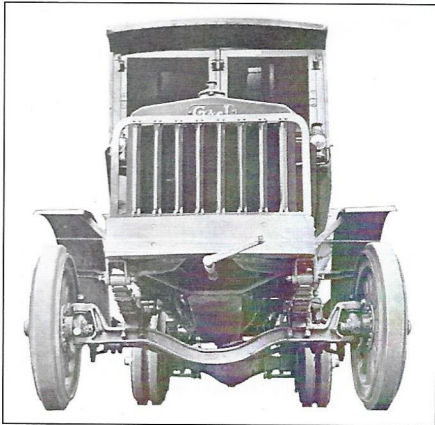
bodies, either unfinished and in need of paint and trim, or finished and ready for the chassis." This required trucks to transport the bodies.

Perhaps trite, but "Necessity is the mother of invention" explains the creation of the initial trucks by American Auto Trimming that first became the G & J and then the Gotfredson truck. Trucks manufactured in the United States and shipped to Canada were subject to high import duties, to encourage Canadian manufacturing. Consequently, American Auto Trimming Company, Ltd. decided to construct its own trucks in Canada. According to chief engineer, Brownier, an American Auto Trimming Company mechanic "went across the river to Detroit and picked up his engines from Hinkley, a few axles from Timken, and whatever else he needed. McCord had a radiator plant nearby...also the frames from the Canadian Bridge Company." The assembly of these components into trucks took place in the Walkerville plant.

Gotfredson and Frank Joyce, Secretary and Treasurer of American Auto Trimming Company, Ltd., subsequent-



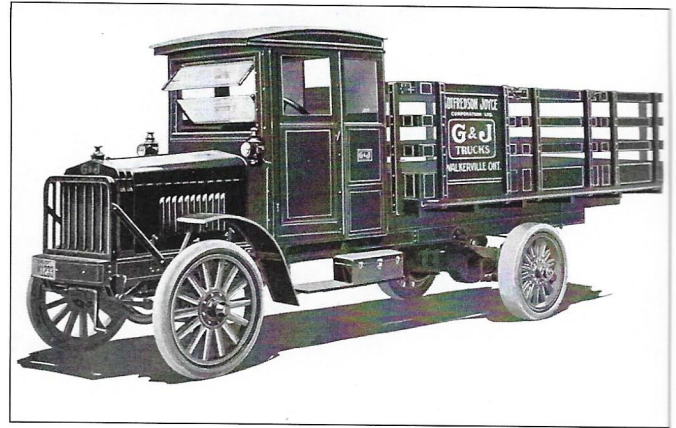
Benjamin Gotfredson and Frank Joyce established the Gotfredson-Joyce Corporation, Ltd., in Walkerville, Ontario, Canada, in 1920 to manufacture G & J trucks for sale and distribution in Canada. *FLP*



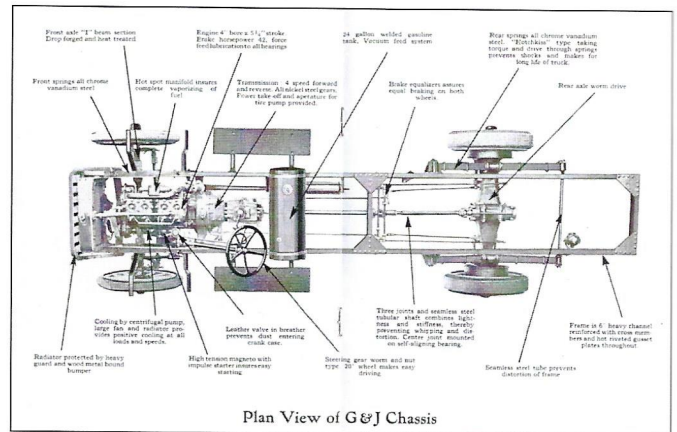
Production of the G & J 2-ton model began on a small scale in the Walkerville, Ontario factory in the fall of 1920. The subsequent G & J sales folder emphasized the truck's suitability for Canada's "varying road conditions." *FLP*

ly established the Gotfredson-Joyce Corporation, Ltd., in Walkerville in 1920 to manufacture G&J trucks for sale in Canada. An October 1920 advertisement optimistically indicated the factory had "an annual capacity of 2,500 motor trucks and has every facility for future expansion. Not only is this truck built in Canada, but it is built for Canada. Read the specifications—study them." Subsequent news coverage, dated June 1, 1921, covered the "Newcomer in the Canadian truck field...the G&J truck. Production of the 2-ton G&J truck began on a small scale in the fall of 1920 in the Walkerville plant. The designs of the 3-1/2-tonner have also been completed. It is also proposed to bring out a light, 1-ton model, and eventually a 5-ton model," developed by Brownier.

A 1921 G&J Motor Trucks sales brochure for the 3-1/2-ton model declared, "G&J Motor Trucks are built in Canada to meet Canadian requirements. They are distributed and sold exclusively in Canada." As a new manufacturer, the brochure sought to reassure potential customers of the safety in the purchase of a G&J truck. "The Gotfredson-Joyce Corporation is founded on the bed rock of experience, honest product and ample capital. The men in the company are men who have had years of experience in the automotive business and their reputation in the industry is a recommendation for any product they might make." The specifications indicated a 50 HP "Hinkley-Liberty truck type" engine powered the



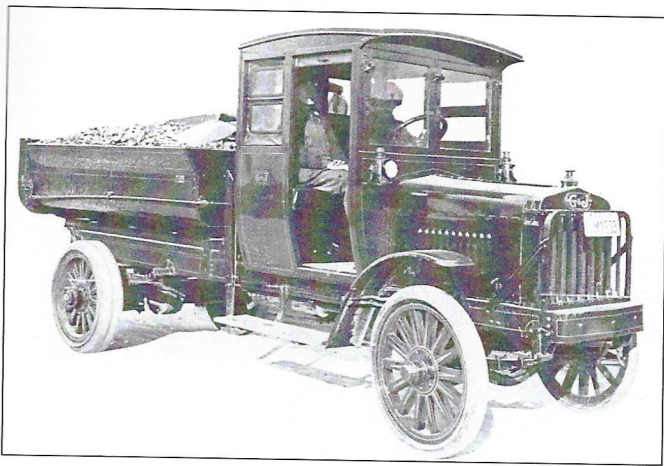
Specifications from the folder featuring this illustration indicated a 42 HP "Liberty truck type engine" powered the G & J 2-ton worm drive model. The truck also featured a 4-speed transmission, wood artillery type wheels, and a wood bumper. *FLP*



The 2-ton model sales folder included a "Plan View of [the] G & J Chassis" highlighting specific features. *FLP*

160-inch wheelbase model. Sales literature for the 2-ton model emphasized the importance of the truck's Timken worm drive type rear axle. "The rear axle of any motor truck has four important functions. It must transmit the power to the wheels. Through its differential it divides the power between the two wheels so that one may revolve faster than the other when rounding a corner. Its brakes must take the strain of stopping the truck. While doing these three things it carries more than half the weight of the truck and its load."

The Gotfredson-Joyce Corporation, Ltd. became the Gotfredson Truck Corporation, Ltd., in 1922. An undated *Motor Trade* magazine advertisement, likely late 1922, identifies "A Partial List of GTC Owners," indicating the incomplete transition from the J&G truck to the Gotfredson truck. The advertisement indicated the lineup included 1-ton "Speed Trucks." This acknowledges



The sales folder for the G & J 3½-Ton Model introduced in 1921 promoted the firm's future longevity, asserting the company was "founded on the bed rock of experience, honest product, and ample capital." *FLP*

the company's recognition of the popularity of the "Speed Truck" class of light duty vehicles offered by most manufacturers following the introduction of the precedent setting Reo Speed Wagon.

Automotive Industries, April 9, 1923, covered the creation of the Gotfredson Truck Corporation, located in Detroit—"organized as an offspring of the Gotfredson Truck Corporation, Ltd, of Canada, to manufacture a specialized unit vehicle for general distribution in the United States. The company will make a full line of trucks ranging from one to five ton capacity." The article continued, explaining, "The American truck will differ somewhat in specifications from the Canadian vehicle to meet different conditions, but on the whole will be similar to the vehicle which has been made in Canada for a number of years."

The Buda Company promoted the "Buda-equipped Gotfredson Truck built by the Gotfredson Truck Corporation, Limited, Walkerville, Ontario, and Detroit, Michigan" in a December 15, 1923 advertisement in *The Commercial Car Journal*. The advertisement declared, "Performance is better than reputation. Those who deal in Buda-equipped trucks best know the power of those magic words—'it has a Buda engine.'"

A late 1923 Gotfredson Truck Corporation, Ltd. sales brochure addressed the soundness of the company. "The Company is most important. Is the Company financially so sound and intact that it will be here in two years or in five, and thus protect the buyers' investment, as well as allow him to standardize his trucks and trucking equipment without detriment to his investment? This question is answered by the fact that the Gotfredson Corporation, Limited is closely held and operated by men who have

achieved success in other lines. For years they have been truck users themselves. From every viewpoint of financial resources and organization, the Gotfredson Truck Corporation, Limited, is a permanent institution." The brochure featured the five-model lineup that included the Model 30 Speed Truck, Model 40, Model 50, Model 80, Model 100, and the Model 100 Dump Truck. While not exact, the weight of the chassis determined model designations, i.e., the Model 40 chassis weighed "40 CWT," or 4,000 pounds. All models featured Buda 4-cylinder engines and Timken full floating worm drive rear axles. The two light duty models featured a unique cast aluminum radiator shell and a sloping windshield—both distinctive design elements of Gotfredson trucks for many years.

According to the March 15, 1924 issue of *The Commercial Car Journal*, "The Gotfredson interests, which include the Gotfredson Truck Corp., of Detroit; the Gotfredson Truck Corp., Ltd., of Walkerville, Ontario; the American Auto Trimming Co., Ltd., of Detroit; the American Auto Trimming Co., Ltd., of Walkerville, Ontario, and the American Auto Trimming Co., of Cleveland, Ohio, and the Gotfredson Land Co., of Detroit and Ypsilanti, Mich., have purchased the Harroun motor plant, with the idea of ultimately making it the home of the Gotfredson Truck Corp." (In an interesting side note, in 1929 the Graham Brothers Corporation "annexed" the "buildings of the Harroun Motor Car Company in Wayne, Michigan," to assemble Graham-Paige automobiles.)

The article added, "The truck met with much favor in the British Isles and the export business is very satisfactory. The company recently opened a factory sales and service branch in Los Angeles, Cal., and one in Cleveland, Ohio. In connection with the Canadian company, sales and service branch is maintained at Toronto, Ontario, Montreal, P.Q. and Winnipeg, Manitoba." In May, the magazine reported, "Officials of the Gotfredson Truck Corp., Los Angeles, Cal., have approved the plans for a two-story factory branch to be erected at a cost of \$100,000. Benjamin Gotfredson, head of the truck firm, considers Los Angeles the logical center of the Pacific coast commercial car field." The article added that the facility would "eventually" become an assembly plant. Of particular interest in this news account is the number of distinct entities constituting the "Gotfredson interests"—a complex of Gotfredson organizational and financial arrangements that would lead to future difficulties.

Reflecting an effort to diversify its product offerings, *Motor Age*, March 19, 1925, covered the company's development of taxicabs. "A completely equipped taxicab is under production now at the Walkerville, Can., plant of Gotfredson Truck, Ltd., being intended primarily for sale and use in that country and in the export field. The distinctive appearance, which is characteristic of all Got-

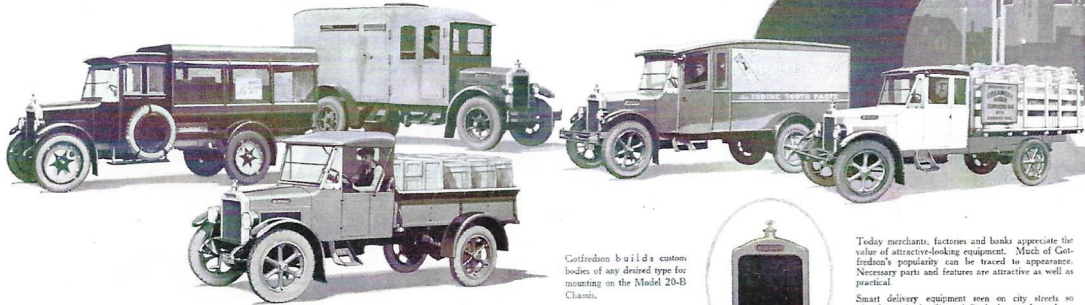
The Life of a Speed Truck

UP early on the job often before sunrise, driven at top legal speed until nightfall—and frequently later—the Speed Truck must have a sound heart and strong limbs—if it expects to live beyond a brief year. Daily battling with the terrific wear and tear of city traffic and the constant need to haul, to deliver, to carry merchandise, money, package goods and countless other things, speed, yes, is essential. To maintain that speed for one year, three years or more, fundamentals must be actually right.

All units and all materials built into Gotfredson Speed Trucks are truck units and materials. Engineering specifications demand in every detail the finest and the best. Many features of design are exclusive with Gotfredson.

Gotfredson Speed Trucks are noted for their sturdy and consistent performance. Driven hard day after day your Gotfredson Speed Truck will give you years of service. The same qualities that have made Gotfredson's reputation for endurance and long life likewise assure very low cost of operation. Both gasoline and oil consumption are moderate.

Gotfredson's Service System is a big factor in the economical operation of every truck. For one year the owner can take advantage of a free monthly inspection which is so complete that minor troubles are corrected before any serious service or repair problems arise. This Service System helps to keep all Gotfredson Trucks in continuous operation. In miles of haulage or delivery Gotfredson Speed Trucks offer the greatest possible equipment investment.



Gotfredson builds custom bodies of any desired type for mounting on the Model 20-B Chassis.



Today merchants, factories and banks appreciate the value of attractive-looking equipment. Much of Gotfredson's popularity can be traced to appearance. Necessary parts and features are attractive as well as practical.

Smart delivery equipment seen on city streets so often bears the familiar red Gotfredson trade-mark.

fredson vehicles, is maintained by the cast aluminum radiator shell and windshield frame, which includes glass corner panes." The taxicab featured the same 226.4-ci 4-cylinder Buda engine used in the Model 30 Speed Wagon and a three-speed Brown-Lipe Transmission.

Included on the same page in *Motor Age*, was coverage of the "new" Buda engine-equipped Gotfredson 21-29 passenger bus chassis. The article emphasized key design features including the left of center engine location that allowed for "greater room at the front door for the usual type of pay-enter urban buses." In addition, the "differential pot of the cast steel worm-driven rear axle is located next to the left spring pad so that no obstruction is raised at the center aisle position. Therefore a symmetrical seating arrangement and an aisle with no obstructions are possible." Typical of the time, Gotfredson bus bodies consisted of wood and metal. According to Gotfredson sales literature, the body framework was "second growth ash, thoroughly seasoned. Braced and jointed in conformity with best body building practice. All joints mortised and tenoned (sic). Entire body frame-work coated with creosote." The roof framing consisted of "reinforced ash bows, steam-bent and reinforced with steel plates." The exterior, covered with 14-gauge sheet aluminum, left "no exposed wood members." Earlier coverage appeared in the April 15, 1924, issue of *The Commercial Car Journal*. The article indicated Gotfredson manufactured the unusual rear axle. In addition, it noted that, "The Gotfredson Truck Corp, Detroit, also plans to build a similar chassis. Sales literature indicates Gotfredson offered additional "coach



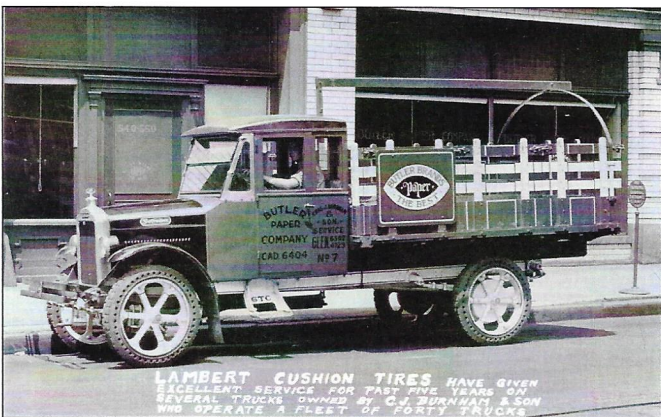
In 1925 Gotfredson offered a "Standard" 131-inch wheelbase and a 144-inch "Long Model" version for its 1-ton Model 20 Speed Trucks. A 226.4-ci 22.5 HP (S.A.E.) Buda W.T.U. engine supplied power for both worm drive versions. DPL

body" bus models. *Automotive Industries*, March 12, 1925, also covered the new bus and taxicab models.

By 1925, the increasing use of lacquer paints and closed bodies meant a decrease in the demand for the services of American Auto Trimming, in both Canada and the United States. Some accounts indicate American Auto Trimming Company, Ltd. merged with the Gotfredson Truck Corporation, Ltd., creating the Gotfredson Corporation, Ltd. Unless clearly identified, the existence of "Gotfredson interests" in both Canada and the United States contributes to a lack of clarity about corporate arrangements. For example, advertisements in *The Commercial Car Journal* in the latter half of 1925 suggest a single American and Canadian entity, referring to the Gotfredson Corporation, Motor Truck Division, located at 3601 Gratiot Avenue, Detroit, Michigan, with factories in Detroit and Walkerville, and branches in Detroit, Cleveland, Los



Speed Trucks, usually used by retailers, needed to make a kind of “fashion Statement” suggesting the owner was “better” and thus worthy of a customer’s business. This 1925 Model 20-B illustrates the distinctive appearance of Gotfredson’s Speed Truck Models. DPL



This 1½-ton Gotfredson truck, equipped with 34 x 5 demountable Lambert Cushion Tires, served as a “vehicle”—literally and symbolically—to promote the five years of “excellent service” the tires provided. DPL

Angeles, Indianapolis, Chicago, New York, Walkerville, Hamilton, Montreal, and Toronto.

A relative latecomer to truck manufacturing, Gotfredson continued the development and promotion of its Speed Truck offerings, introduced in 1922. Sales literature for 1926 covered “The Life of a Speed Truck.” Such a “life” meant being “up early on the job often before sunrise, driven at top legal speed until nightfall—and frequently later—the Speed Truck must have a sound heart and strong limbs—if it expects to live beyond a brief year. Gotfredson Speed Trucks are noted for their sturdy and consistent performance. Driven hard day after day your Gotfredson Speed Truck will give you years of service.”

From 1926 through 1928, Gotfredson provided chassis for Bickle Fire Engines Ltd, Woodstock, Ontario. Perhaps an example of corporate ego, despite providing only the chassis to Bickle, a 1927 advertisement for the Got-

70 MOTOR TRANSPORT

STRENGTH—LIGHT WEIGHT—DURABILITY

Gotfredson uses DAYTONS

Pleasing appearance is a valuable asset. Rugged power in motion has always claimed the world's admiration—the locomotive thundering over the rails—the dreadnought plunging thru heavy seas and the modern giant motor truck rushing silently on rubber-clad steel wheels over the roads.

The rugged attractiveness of the Gotfredson Truck is enhanced by the graceful, arched lines of its Dayton Steel Wheels.

Above we have a picture of power added to power—endurance added to endurance—quality added to quality—in the Gotfredson Truck and its Dayton Steel Wheels. For more and better truck service specify Dayton on your next order.

THE DAYTON STEEL FOUNDRY COMPANY, Dayton, Ohio

Dayton
Steel Truck Wheels

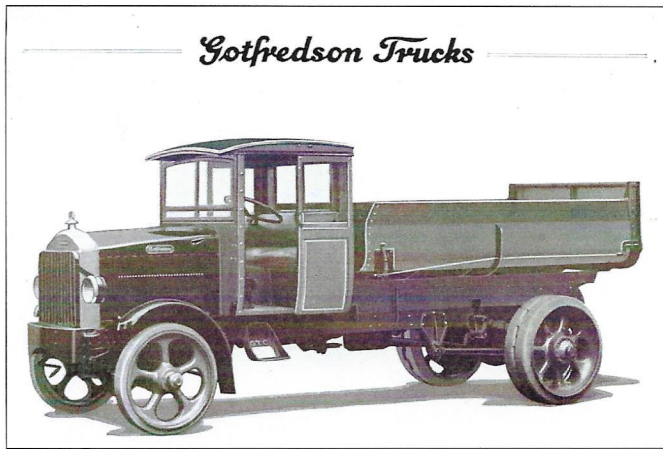
TIRE ECONOMY—ACCESSIBILITY—APPEARANCE

Citing durability, truck manufacturers increasingly opted for steel wheels. Featuring the 4-ton Model 80 Gotfredson, this 1925 advertisement offered another reason: The “rugged attractiveness of the Gotfredson Truck is enhanced by the graceful, arched lines of its Dayton Steel Wheels.” AACA

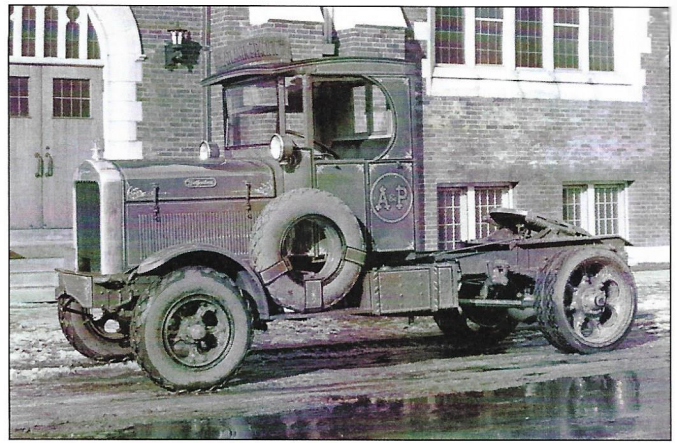
fredson Corporation Limited, Factory Branch, Toronto, promoted the five “Gotfredson Fire Trucks” acquired by the city of Toronto Fire Department.

Rolland Jerry’s account in *Old Cars Weekly* reports that Gotfredson Truck Corporation, Ltd. reported sales earnings of \$800,000 for the first four months of 1926, noting that with prices ranging from \$4,000 to \$5,000 “that was a lot of trucks and [an] impressive output.” This would represent sales of approximately 160 to 200 trucks for the period. Assuming sales continued at the same rate, yearly totals would range from 480 to 600. In the absence of data, Rolland Jerry’s account offers phrases like “selling like hot cakes,” its “truck sales were excellent,” the “1920s were very, very good for the truck business,” or “Gotfredson always had a firm grip on the Canadian market and its trucks were very popular in the Dominion.” In fairness, sales data for Gotfredson is for the most part nonexistent.

The Commercial Car Journal, February 1927, included the Detroit-based Gotfredson Truck Corporation’s lineup



Gotfredson 1926 sales literature declared, "Dump trucks receive the hardest usage of all." The worm drive Model 100 5-Ton Dump Truck, featured a unique "Breather Valve and Air Cleaner" and "a very low gear ratio in first speed." DPL



This Gotfredson pneumatic and solid rubber-tired tractor, owned by grocery chain giant A & P, the Great Atlantic & Pacific Tea Company, is probably a 5-ton Model 100. Aesthetics figured prominently in the cab's decorative "pin striping." DPL

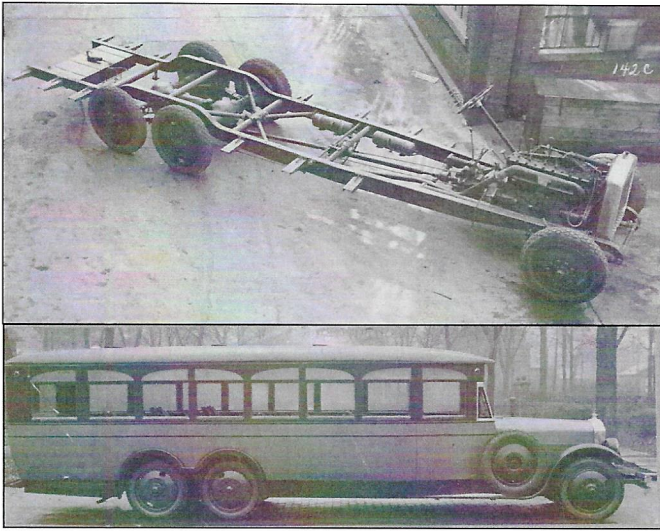
in the specifications section. The twelve models included the 1-ton Model 20B, the 1-1/2-ton Model 30B, the 2-ton Model 41 and 46, the 2-1/2-ton Model 51 and 56, the 3-ton Model 60 and 66, the 4-ton Model 80 and 86, and the 5-ton Model 100 and 106.

The Gotfredson Truck Corporation advertisement in the April 20, 1927, issue of *The Commercial Car Journal* alluded to its 1923 founding. "Gotfredson sales growth during the brief span of four years in the manufacture of fine trucks is entirely attributed to owner approval." The corporation continued to list both the factories in Detroit and Walkerville, implying there was only one manufacturer of Gotfredson trucks. In the same issue, a news article reported that "Production has just started at the Gotfredson factories on the new Model 30-C which was designed fundamentally for the use of contractors and paving work where it is impossible to get the necessary traction with the heavier trucks." The 2-yard capacity Model 30-C featured a gravity dump box. In response to the increased demand for these specialized units, Gotfredson joined a number of other manufacturers, including Republic, Federal, Schacht, and Stewart.

In June, *The Commercial Car Journal* covered the introduction of the 2-ton Model 36 "Speed Truck"—a "fast low, six-cylinder job" powered by a "heavy duty Buda engine." An interesting July 1927, Gotfredson Truck Corporation advertisement in *The Commercial Car Journal* focused on its home, declaring, "Detroit has always been swift to recognize real automotive achievement. Few truck owners are better qualified to appreciate real truck performance than the big industries of Detroit." To drive home the point, the advertisement featured a photograph of a Ford Motor Company-owned Gotfredson tank truck.

Promoting "the 1928 Gotfredson line," at the start of the year in its advertisement in *The Commercial Car Journal*, Gotfredson Truck Corporation continued to emphasize its "leadership in the fine-truck line," an assertion suggesting a ranking among truck marques comparable to that among automobile marques. In its day, think of something akin to the Cadillac, Lincoln, or Packard of motor trucks. Gotfredson introduced new Buda-powered models to its lineup as reported in *The Commercial Car Journal*, May 20, 1928. "Four new four-cylinder trucks have been added to the line of the Gotfredson Truck Corp. They are of 1-1/2, 2, and 2-1/2-ton capacities, designated as Models B-24, B-34, and B-44, respectively." While introduced in April 1927, the article also included the Model 30-C "utility dump truck" as one of the new models. The Gotfredson Corporation advertisement in the same issue featured the "New Model B-46" equipped with Lockheed four-wheel brakes and powered by a Buda 6-cylinder engine.

The year 1929 was a momentous one for Gotfredson with the bankruptcy and the reorganization of the "Gotfredson interests" identified in the 1924 news reports. Early in the year, Gotfredson offered an eleven-model lineup ranging from 1-1/4- to 5-1/2-tons and over for American buyers. The bankruptcy of Canadian-based Gotfredson Truck Corporation, Ltd. resulted in its reorganization as Truck & Parts, Ltd., becoming Gotfredson Trucks, Ltd. in 1932. *The Automotive Daily News*, August 8, 1929, reported on the creation of the Detroit-based Robert Gotfredson Truck Company, successor to the bankrupt Gotfredson Truck Company. The article indicated, "The products of the company consist of motor trucks ranging in sizes from one to seven tons. The company specializes

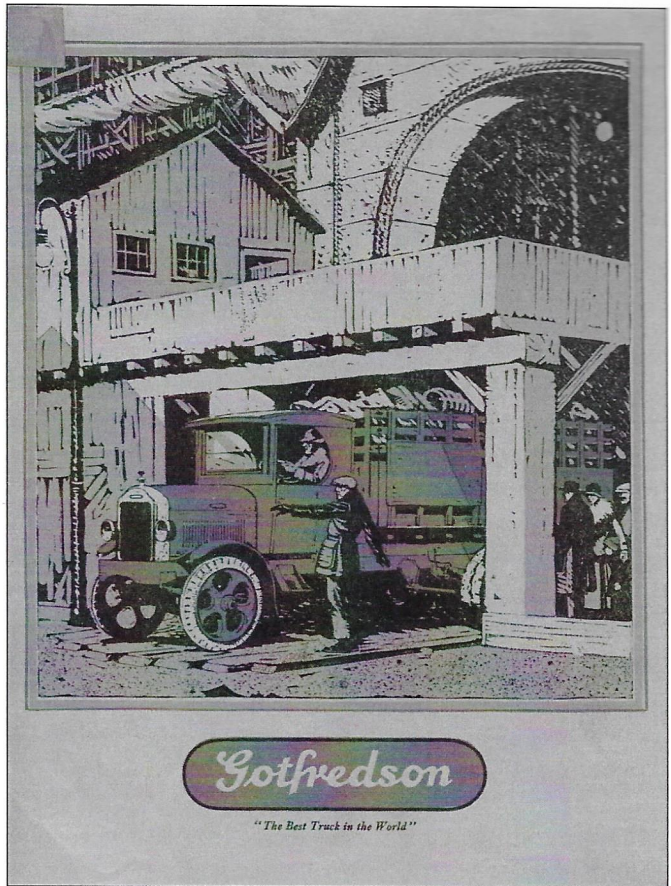


Gotfredson offered two bus chassis in 1925 including a 21-29 passenger bus chassis, with a left of center engine location, and this parlor coach bus chassis, featuring a variation of Gotfredson's unique "tilted and adjustable windshields." FLP

in the production of one, two, and three-ton models of trucks. Business of the company is showing constant improvements." The newly formed company, led by President Robert Gotfredson, the son of Benjamin Gotfredson, continued to occupy the Detroit facilities at 3601 Gratiot Avenue.

Indicating some lag in reporting on the reorganization, in June 1929, the Robert Gotfredson Truck Company advertised in *The Commercial Car Journal*. Linking the past with the present—the old with the new, the advertisement declared, "Constantly, for five years, the GOTFREDSON has been *adding fame, winning friends and meriting laurels* wherever motor trucks travel! Yet—as *fine and sturdy, dependable and economical* as the older GOTFREDSON has always been, a new and even *greater* GOTFREDSON is now rolling from the assembly line, a GOTFREDSON which includes all the *character, fettle and 'sand'* of its older twin brothers, yet a *newer, finer, more brawny* fellow; ready and willing to stand up and challenge the world—and keep standing!" The trucks continued to utilize the sloping windshield and triangular side windows—long a Gotfredson design characteristic.

The advertisement also emphasized the "New and Modern features of the GOTFREDSON." Specifically, the trucks featured a new insignia and radiator cap—the "New Centaur. Master of competitors—Swift as a Thoroughbred—co-ordinated to serve beyond established limits...this is the CENTAUR; immediately identifying the new and greater GOTFREDSON." The new models featured fender wells to carry the spare tires—"eliminating carrier under frame, subjected to water and mud." The advertisement noted, "A Gotfredson is made in ev-



Gotfredson featured a heavy-duty model on the cover of its 1926 catalog. In Canada, where it was the largest truck manufacturer, and in the United States, text asserted, "Gotfredson Trucks are looked upon as leaders in modern-day transportation." DPL

ery class, from *one to seven* tons." The following month, the Gotfredson advertisement indicated the line ranged "From the *one-ton flier* to the *10-ton Goliath*." Subsequent advertisements indicate heavy-duty models continued to feature the cast aluminum radiator frame with "Gotfredson" highlighted against a red background used as an insignia.

The "flier" in the July advertisement referred to the 1-1/2-ton capacity 4-cylinder RB34; and featured in an August 1929 advertisement and subsequent news article in September—both in *The Commercial Car Journal*—the 6-cylinder RB36. The advertisement declared, "Now - a *newer, even nimbler* member of the *mighty* GOTFREDSON line!" Offering the very best in hyperbole and "purple prose," the advertisement continued: "Famed everywhere as the CHAMPION of CHAMPIONS in all feats that demand the strength of Bull Elephants, the Power of Locomotives and the gameness of Pit-Terriers, the GOTFREDSON line now steps forth to introduce a NEW member of its family, *the one and a half-ton flash*'...the slim and speedy fellow, designed and built

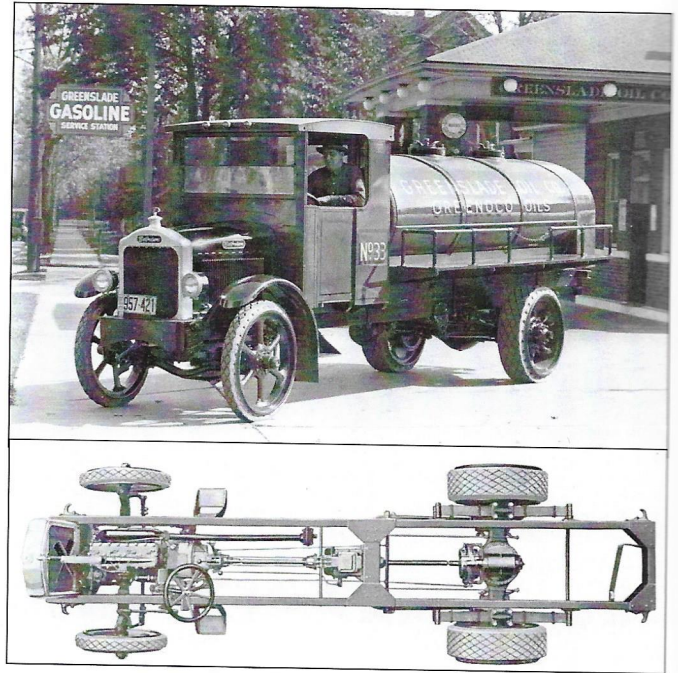
to slither nimbly through the heaviest traffic....geared to lay back its ears in fastest highway company and show its heels." Curiously, nearly two years later, in June 1931, *The Commercial Car Journal* covered Gotfredson's "new 1-1/2-tonner," the Model RB, with a Buda four or six at \$975 and \$1,075, respectively." According to the magazine, Gotfredson designated the four as the RB34 and the six as the RB36.

Gotfredson, with a long history of exclusive Buda engine use, began to equip some models with Hercules engines. As a result, the Hercules Motors Corporation, Canton, Ohio, promoted its heavy-duty engines and Gotfredson, in a September 1929 advertisement, declared, "Gotfredson—builder of sturdy commercial trucks—equips all heavy-duty models with Hercules Six-Cylinder Engines." Gotfredson advertising put it this way: "POWERED beyond your greatest intention to hope and constructed to lift the load of an ATLAS, the GOTFREDSON asks no quarter, expects no mercy...AND NEEDS NONE!"

While not the cause, the October 1929 crash of the United States stock market signaled a prolonged worldwide economic crisis. As an indication of the condition of the "Gotfredson interests" even prior to any significant impact resulting from the Great Depression, *The Commercial Car Journal* reported Gotfredson sales in the United States for 1929 totaled only 189. Sales clustered in five states: Pennsylvania 46, New Jersey 22, Michigan 39, Illinois 46, and California 19. In addition, sales occurred in only six other states: Colorado and Massachusetts and South Dakota 1 each, Nebraska 4, New York 2, and Ohio 8. The magazine indicated Gotfredson sales totaled 78 in 1930. It is likely the magazine generally included Gotfredson totals in the "Other" or "Miscellaneous" category. Rolland Jerry provides some figures for Canadian production of "just under 400 units" produced in each year in 1926 and 1927, with 133 in 1929 and only 37 in 1930.

The Robert Gotfredson Truck Company continued to advertise in 1930, emphasizing, as a January 1930 advertisement in *The Commercial Car Journal* put it, the "Day In and Day Out Performance" of the "even GREATER GOTFREDSON." Specific Gotfredson features contributed to this performance: "the super-strength of its six-cylinder power plant; the seven-speed transmission; its frame of Chrome Nickel steel; its four wheel Lockheed Hydraulic internal-expanding brakes; the wide range of wheel-base selection to suit the exact need and its overload springs, affording remarkable riding resiliency."

Its February 1930 advertisement featured the specifications for the full floating worm drive 3-1/2-ton capacity Model RW-66A, powered by a 94 HP 6-cylinder engine and equipped with a seven-speed transmission. All of the Gotfredson advertisements for 1930 also sought to interest dealers. The advertisements also reflected the deepening



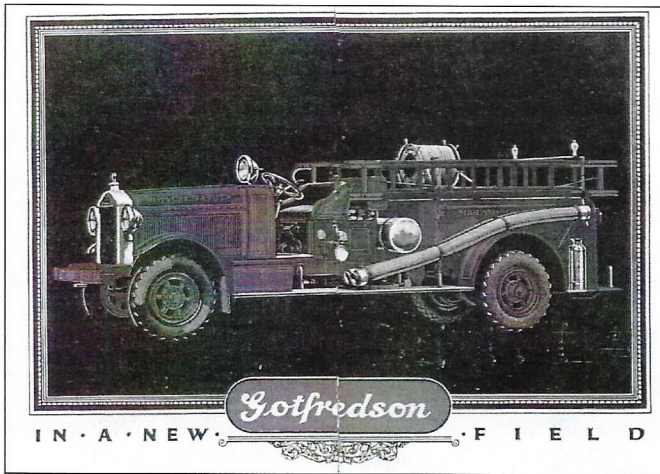
The 3-ton Model 60, shown in 1925, featured the "Gotfredson Patented braking system." Sales literature noted, "Mounting the brake on the propeller shaft just forward of the rear axle relieves undue strain on all moving parts and produces a tremendous leverage at the wheels." DPL

affects of the Great Depression. "More than ever before, the buyers of motor trucks are WEIGHING CAREFULLY the factors which constitute Truck Performance, Durability and Economy when considering a certain vehicle. Today...your prospect ...is invariably aware of those facts which mean operation cost, overhead and profit."

In addition to sales and production figures, a lack of information regarding the Gotfredson lineup creates additional problems for historians. The *Branham Automobile Reference Book* listed Gotfredson models only through 1930, including this note to explain the truck's subsequent absence: "No further data available because of manufacturer's failure to furnish same." *The Commercial Car Journal*, September 1931, listed the fourteen-model Gotfredson lineup ranging from 1-1/2- to 5-1/2- and over-tons in its "Table of Truck Specifications." The magazine did not carry Gotfredson specifications after 1931.

The International Nickel Company, Inc. promoted the use of its nickel alloy steel by Gotfredson in an advertisement in October 1931. Quoting the Robert Gotfredson Truck Company the advertisement declared, "By the use of nickel Chrome Steel frames we are increasing the life of our truck and reducing the cost per ton mile considerably. We have yet to know of one of our Nickel Steel frames fracturing or setting."

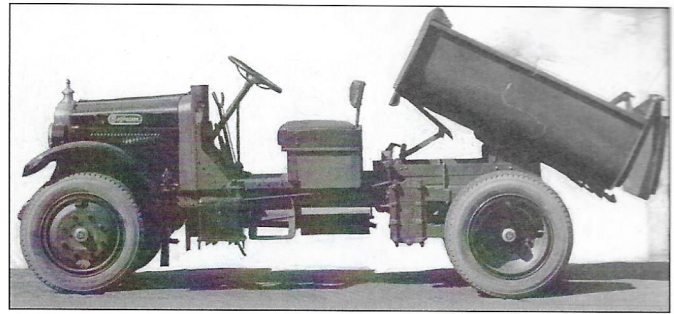
In an effort to survive the Great Depression, manu-



From 1926 through 1928, Gotfredson provided chassis for Bickle Fire Engines Ltd, Woodstock, Ontario. AACA

Manufacturers offered the cost saving advantages of the diesel engine. A “win-win” situation for manufacturers and vehicle operators, the engine’s lower operating costs were a compelling argument. One of the industry’s innovators, along with Indiana and Sterling, the Robert Gotfredson Truck Company offered diesel engines in October 1932. *The Commercial Car Journal*, October 1933, covered the operation of two Gotfredson Cummins diesel-powered tractors by Transamerican Freight Lines, Inc., Detroit. Fuel cost savings amounted to \$20 for every round trip between Chicago and Cleveland. At the time, a gallon of diesel fuel cost approximately 5 cents. Gasoline-powered units also took two hours longer to complete a trip due to “decreased lugging ability and slower speeds on hills” compared to diesel units. The article noted the significant maintenance reduction, increased life for tires, “clutch facings and bearings, transmissions, and rear ends.” Transamerica intended to purchase eight additional Gotfredson tractor trucks. While cost savings were clearly the incentive for diesel power, the choice of Gotfredson, at least in part, was due to Robert Gotfredson’s reported ownership of Transamerica. Accounts indicate a victim of the Great Depression, Transamerica declared bankruptcy and Robert Gotfredson subsequently acquired the firm in 1931. In addition, the Robert Gotfredson Company acquired the distribution rights throughout Michigan for Cummins diesel engines. In 1938, Cummins sales literature indicated Robert Gotfredson Truck Company, Detroit, and Upper Michigan Trailer Sales, Marquette, Michigan, sold and serviced Cummins Diesel engines in Michigan.

The Canadian magazine, *Bus and Truck Transport*, November 1932, covered “The new Gotfredson Six-Wheeler” manufactured by Truck & Parts successor, Gotfredson Trucks, Ltd. The article noted the truck



The April 20, 1927, issue of *The Commercial Car Journal* covered the Gotfredson Model 30-C, featuring a 2-yard gravity dump box, designed “for use by contractors and paving work where it is impossible to get the necessary traction with heavier trucks.” FLP

completed a 2,500-mile “demonstration tour” of Quebec and Ontario, providing “a demonstration for the Department of National Defense at Ottawa and the Royal Canadian Artillery at Kingston,” an indication that the company hoped to acquire military contracts. The “radically-designed six-wheel truck [featured] a third differential which positively overcomes the old bugbear of the rear wheels skidding around corners and, on account of extreme flexibility, road irregularities do not cause any frame distortion and the load is always properly balanced. The unit has no radius rods or spring shackles; each axle is driven independent of the other.” This unique bogie permitted “it to manoeuvre (sic) under the hardest operating conditions.” Significant sales of these vehicles failed to materialize.

Some chroniclers report Gotfredson Trucks, Ltd., listed itself as a “truck manufacturer” in “annual reports as late as 1935.” It is likely that with the exception of a few “custom” vehicles, production of Gotfredson vehicles in Canada probably ended in 1933 despite the assertion it would continue to manufacture trucks. The numbers are hard to ignore. With reports indicating sales of only 13 in the first five months of that year, the company became the distributor of Diamond T trucks for portions of Canada. Sources also report that in 1933, the company sold less than 20 Diamond Ts.

While no longer manufacturing Gotfredson trucks, the company continued—as Gotfredson, Ltd.—by doing in large part the kind of work that Benjamin Gotfredson conducted so successfully with American Auto Trimming starting in 1909. In 1934, the company began manufacturing bodies for trucks and station wagons, and did the trimming and finishing of convertible bodies for the Ford Motor Company of Canada, Ltd. This continued through World War II with Gotfredson supplying Ford with “thousands of cabs and bodies for military vehicles.”

Meanwhile, the Robert Gotfredson Truck Company continued small-scale truck production, concentrating on models equipped with Cummins diesel engines having established Diesel Sales of Michigan. Despite the now-recognized cost-saving benefits, economic conditions continued to make it difficult for businesses to purchase a diesel given its higher initial cost compared to gas engine models. In fact, by 1938 less than 500 diesel-equipped trucks existed in the United States.

In 1940, the company offered models utilizing the GMC cabs introduced in 1938, continuing to offer them until the rationing of truck production following the War Production Board's General Conservation Order M-100 of March 9, 1942. On April 11, the government declared, "Commercial truck production is completely stopped by Supplemental General limitation Order L-1-e, effective May 31, 1942." However, in June, yet another revision established a quota system for civilian production. Due to its small-scale production, Gotfredson did not receive a quota, resuming production of the models offered in 1940 following the war.

An article in *The Windsor Star*, September 14, 1945, indicated the extent of the relationship of Gotfredson, Ltd. and Ford of Canada. "Production lines at the plant of Gotfredson Ltd. were closed Thursday making idle another 480 workers. The shutdown was the direct result of the strike at the plants of the Ford Motor Company of Canada, Ltd. Ford of Canada 'farms out' a part of their work to Gotfredson. Materials are supplied to the latter, fabricated and shipped back to the Ford plants. Because no materials had been coming from Ford, no work is available for Gotfredson employees." Gotfredson, Ltd. ceased to exist when Ford purchased the Gotfredson properties after World War II.

Motor Truck and Equipment, September 1945, assessed the postwar future of United States-based Gotfredson for its Canadian readers—with a review of its past, first. "Canadian fleet men will be interested to learn that the Robert Gotfredson Truck Company are [sic] still in business, although in the United States only. It will be remembered that this firm once produced one of Canada's most popular heavy-duty trucks and latterly (sic) buses. For various reasons the company's Walkerville plant discontinued building trucks when all manufacturing activities were transferred to the Gotfredson, Detroit factory, which also shut down sometime later." This brief overview of the past was prologue. "At present the Gotfredson Truck Company occupies a sizeable portion of its old Gratiot Street factory and is engaged in the distribution of the Cummins Diesel engine for Ohio and Michigan. In addition to this, Gotfredson's builds a complete line of heavy-duty trucks and tractors built around the Cummins Diesel engine. Although on a somewhat limited production, a number of these trucks have been delivered throughout

Michigan and Ohio."

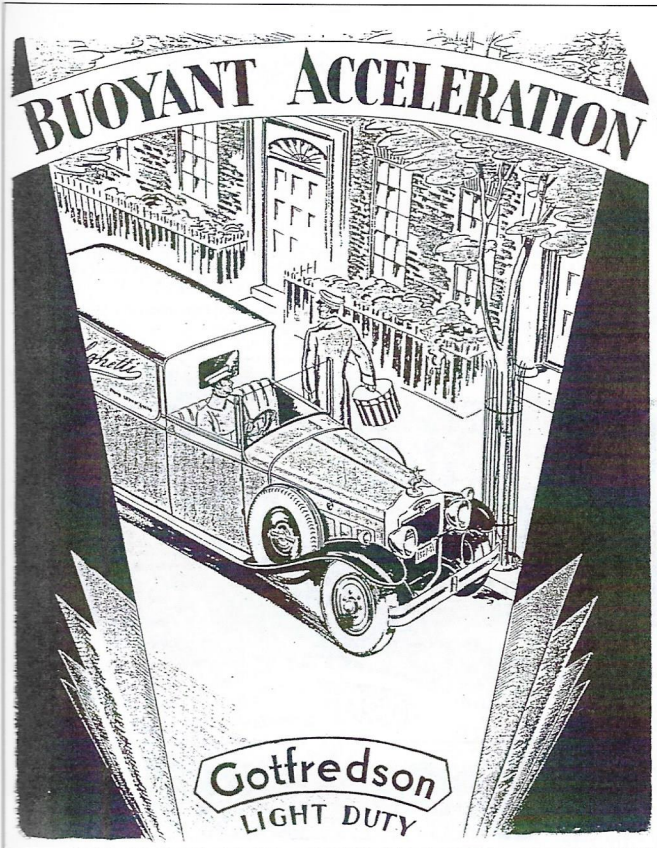
The article also described the appearance of the trucks based on the GMC truck cab declaring, "Styling is smart and modern but within the bounds of practicability. A streamline all-steel cab is used on a three point mounting for all models." Gotfredson also offered optional sleeper cabs. Illustrating the continuity of prewar Gotfredson offerings into the postwar, the article featured a photograph of a 1940 model indicating it was a "current model."

Given its very limited truck production, the Robert Gotfredson Truck Company could not continue to survive. Accounts differ as to the date the company ended production. Rolland Jerry asserts production ended in 1946, *The Complete Encyclopedia of Commercial Vehicles* gives a date of 1948, while the *Illustrated Encyclopedia of American Trucks and Commercial Vehicles* indicates, "trucks were built up to 1951."

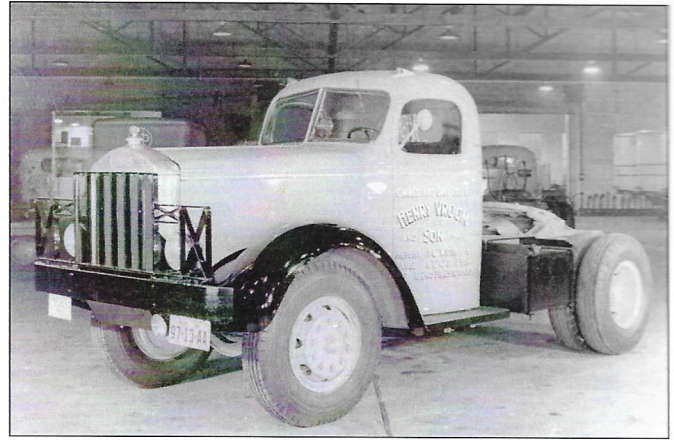
The Gotfredson story reflects the major developments of the Twentieth century's transportation industry in the United States and Canada. Initially establishing a horse-related business, Benjamin Gotfredson had the foresight to shift to the next important phase, supplying the automobile industry with essential goods and services. While a relative latecomer, Gotfredson next helped to establish a truck manufacturing business in Canada and the United States. Earning a solid reputation in Canada and the United States, Gotfredson also developed buses and taxicabs and was one of the early pioneers in offering Cummins Diesel-powered models. Like most early truck manufacturers, Gotfredson hoped for a larger market share than the company would achieve. The history of Gotfredson is unique—a tale of two companies set in two countries creating two distinct truck marques and led at crucial times by two family members.



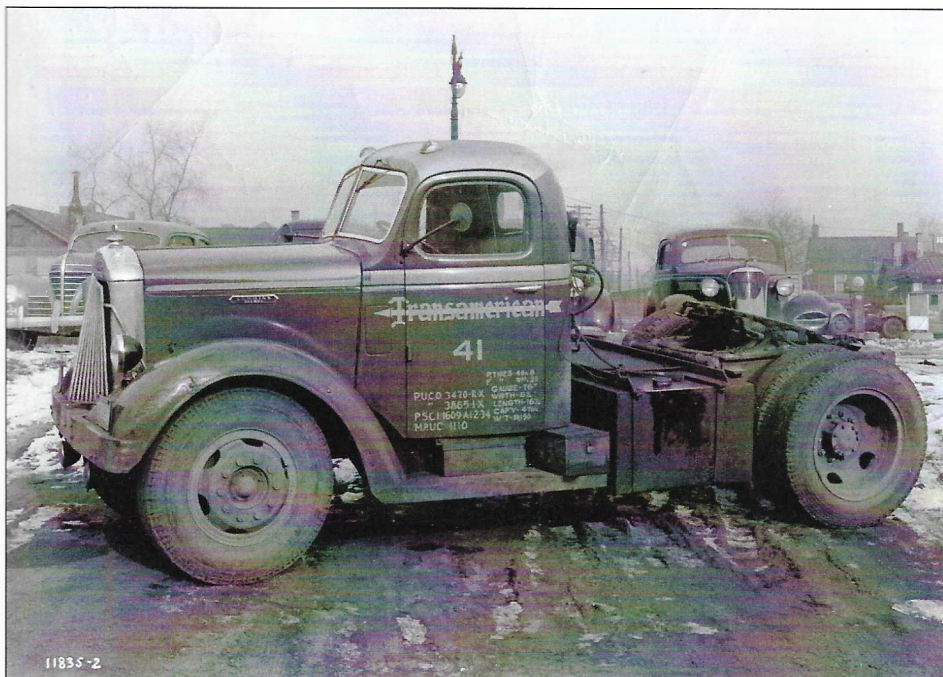
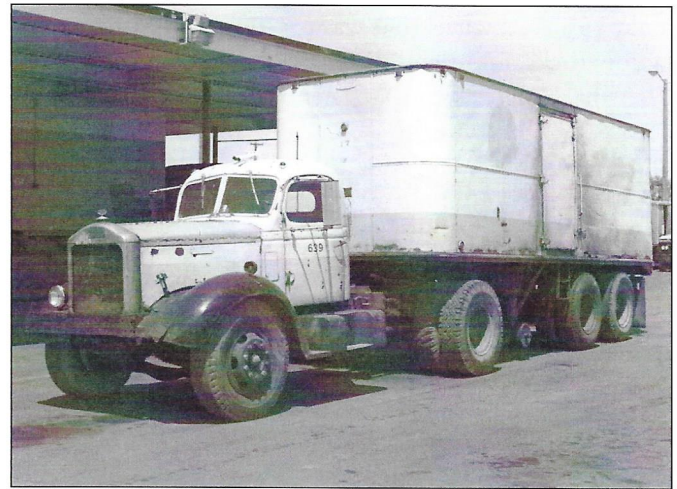
The 2½-ton Gotfredson Model 50 shown in 1928 on famed Woodward Avenue in Bloomfield, Michigan, featured Timken worm drive. A 312-ci Buda ETU 28.9 HP (S.A.E.) engine powered the truck operated by A & P. DPL



Established in 1929, the Robert Gottfredson Truck Company (Robert was Benjamin's son) created new design elements for its Light Duty trucks. This advertisement illustrates a new radiator cap featuring the "New Centaur." In addition, car-like fender wells carried spare tires. AACA

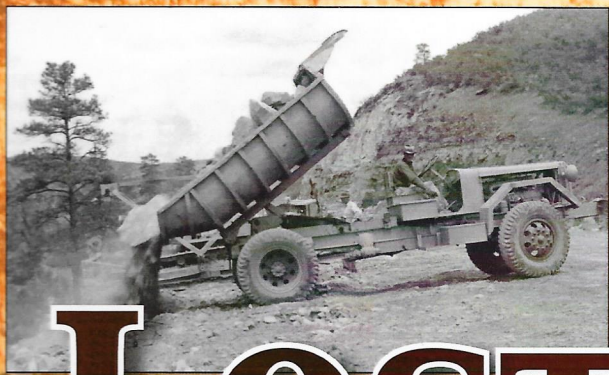


Shown in a 1940 photograph, this Gottfredson utilized GMC cabs. World War II resulted in the curtailment of civilian production starting in 1942. Gottfredson resumed limited production of these models following the war, concentrating on Cummins Diesel-equipped models. BP



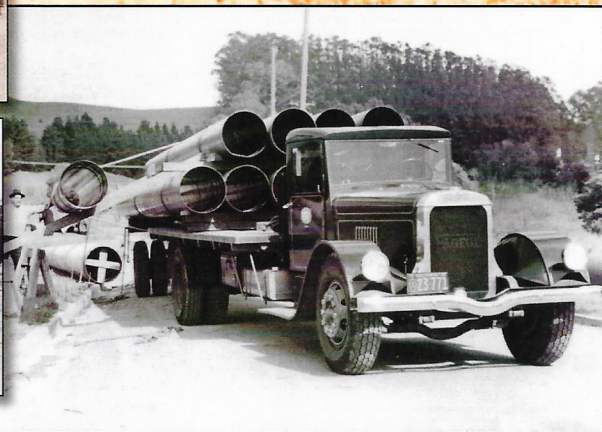
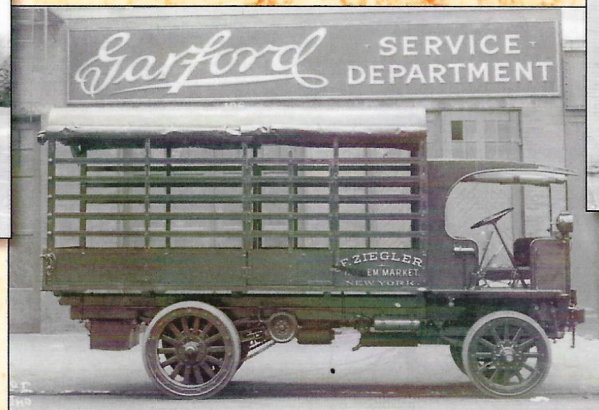
Soldiering on years after the end of Gottfredson production, this well-used survivor provides "living" proof of the durability of the trucks produced by a company founded on "the bed rock of experience, honest product, and ample capital." DPL

The Robert Gottfredson Truck Company initially offered diesel engines in October 1932. Transamerica Freight Lines, Inc., Detroit, acquired by Robert Gottfredson in 1931, operated Cummins diesel-powered Gottfredson tractors. This 1941 photograph features an example. GF



LOST TRUCK LEGENDS

AN ILLUSTRATED HISTORY OF UNIQUE, SMALL-SCALE TRUCK BUILDERS



ROBERT GABRICK