



Handmade HISTORY

Inspired by a single image of an 1898 Daimler platform truck – and with a little help from his Amish friends – Bill Eggers emerged from his workshop with a superbly reimagined replica

With an unmistakable rhythm from its small 2-cylinder engine, a beautifully constructed old truck – with green side panels, spoked wheels painted cream and “Daimler” script proudly adorning the engine compartment – drove onto the lawn of Old Westbury Gardens in late September. Every single person attending the Great Marques Concours turned to watch as the two gentlemen in turn-of-the-century garb – one with a great white beard, the other with an elegant handlebar mustache – dismounted from the antique vehicle’s high leather seat.

Could these men possibly be Gottlieb Daimler and Wilhelm Maybach, somehow transported through a time warp from the agricultural show in 1898 where just such a truck first threw down the internal combustion gauntlet to the horse-drawn beer wagons of the day? Sadly for science-fiction fans, the real story – clarified on an accompanying signboard – is that the two men who stepped out of the old truck were not fantastic time travelers but nonetheless driving something unusual.

Inspiration for his craft

In his black derby, frock coat, leather boots and that mustache, Bill Eggers could easily be mistaken for the authentic Wilhelm Maybach; he is, in fact, the master craftsman who created this replica of one of Daimler’s early vehicles. Replica

is the best description of the machine; it’s not a restoration, unlike the example on display in the Mercedes-Benz Museum in Stuttgart, and because the engine hidden away inside the front compartment is a modern counterpart to the original engine designed by Maybach, it can’t be considered a reproduction.

Instead, we might think of it as an operating one-to-one scale model of the famous Daimler truck, a model built by Eggers in his workshop near Goshen, Connecticut, based entirely on a single image that appeared on page 38 of the September-October 2017 issue of *The Star*.

This model is accurate to the museum example in almost all visual respects, and the hidden engine does power the truck through a transmission and chain drive to the rear wheels that is as similar as possible to that of the original vehicle. The upright steering wheel controls direction, and the stagecoach-style brakes are the only method of bringing it to a stop.

The only visible departure from the original is that the decorative vents on the engine compartment are applied decals (rather than pierced openings) to block the modern engine inside from view.

An engrossing avocation

Building replicas like these has become an engrossing avocation for Eggers, who retired about 15 years ago from his trade as a finish carpenter in New York City. He first applied his fine eye

PASSION

ARTICLE

BILL EGGERS

JENNIFER ORTIZ

GARY ANDERSON

IMAGES

BILL EGGERS

SEAN ARYAI



LEFT: Bill Eggers’s reimagined 1898 Daimler platform truck. TOP: Beautiful in black – Eggers’s 1886 Daimler Motor Carriage replica, completed in 2014. ABOVE: This image of the 1898 Daimler platform truck, which appeared in the September-October 2017 issue of *The Star*, inspired Eggers to create the beautiful replica on these pages. Automotive authorities regard this historic vehicle as the first modern commercial truck, as it is configured with a front-mounted engine sited ahead of the driver, and with cargo carried on a flat platform to the rear.

STEP BY STEP: BUILDING THE 1898 DAIMLER PLATFORM TRUCK REPLICA



1. The 1898 Daimler truck's basic frame is built from two 2x6 beams of laminated poplar, the same wood used in the construction of early Concord stagecoaches.



2. Using the poplar frame as a handy flat and true surface, the next step is to glue together the truck's dashboard out of traditional tongue-and-groove red oak bead board.



3. Fitting the fabricated metal brace to stiffen the front end, act as an engine mount and locate the engine crank.



4. Rolling the copper sheeting for the rear water reservoir by forming it around a section of large diameter metal pipe. Crude perhaps, but it works!



5. The next step is to form the copper gas tank and then test fit the crimped ends on both tanks prior to soldering them both tight.



6. Test fitting the modern engine after framing out the truck's front end in plywood. Sheet-metal cladding will be installed on top of the plywood frame.



7. The finished dashboard is installed on the passenger side of the plywood bulkhead. Note initial test placement of the transmission and clutch.



8. The steering wheel is initially cut out roughly with a bandsaw from walnut and then assembled and glued up in two laminated layers.



9. Establishing the correct location for the wheels. Proper steering angles and spring size must be determined, along with resolving a host of other mechanical issues.



10. In this view, potential front axle and steering problems are shown in the process of being ironed out. The tie rod measurements are also taken at this time.



11. Next, the rear leaf springs (buggy springs made by Amish craftsmen) and axle are bolted in place beneath the truck's body.



12. Drilling the Amish-made metal-edged wooden wheel rims to accept the wooden spokes, using basic geometry and a shop-made drilling jig.



13. Installing the first wooden spokes into the wooden wheel rims and axle hubs. Ash wood was a traditional material choice from which to make wagon-wheel spokes.



14. All of the wheel spokes dovetailed and inserted into the Amish-made metal axle hub in preparation for being bolted through the metal wheel hub.



15. Drive chains and chain sprockets had to be tested in conjunction with the engine to ensure the arrangement would transmit the proper speed to wheels.



16. Positioning and installing the transmission shifter handle and gate while ensuring the proper placement of the gear numbers (R-N-1-2).



17. Positioning, attaching and connecting up the 1898 replica's two small stagecoach-style shoe brakes.



18. Historic engineering on the fly: sorting out the correct positioning of the rear shoe brakes.



19. Test fitting the steam-bent ash-wood fenders to the Daimler truck's body.



20. The main frame has been painted green and the varnished red-oak rear bed is installed. Did I forget something? Oh, yeah. Where's the driver's seat?



21. Getting near the end of construction now, sorting out some final details; closeup of the rear tailgate with hefty strap hinges and matching side-pin latches.



22. Closeup of the truck's finished dashboard with the leather glove compartment, copper gas tank and bronze oil-pressure gauge installed.



23. Front end of the truck with the brass Daimler nameplate (cut with a laser) and two single-candle headlights installed. Note replica engine crank and flywheel.



24. The replica Daimler platform truck ready for final inspection, looking like it could have just rolled out of the workshop door in Bad Cannstatt, Germany, in 1898.



the first modern commercial truck, a vehicle distinguished by a front-mounted engine ahead of the driver – rather than underneath or at the rear of the chassis – and with cargo carried at the rear.

The machine, designed as a successor to the first Daimler truck built in 1896, was intended as a replacement for horse-drawn delivery wagons carrying beer and other goods. In fact, it was first displayed for sale at an agricultural show, with Daimler making the pitch that it was actually more economical to own and operate than a team of draft horses.

As much as the truck's physical layout, this realization was critical to motor

vehicles gradually succeeding in the commercial transportation sector, where economic operation was key – in contrast to the prestige and status-driven personal motorcar market, where purchase and running costs were not major factors.

Constructing the replica

As shown in these pages, each step in the process of designing and building the replica is a matter of planning, cutting and fitting. Working mostly alone in his basement workshop, Eggers does nearly all the work himself. In addition to the woodworking tools with which he made his career, he has taught himself to use

the machine tools and metal-forming and welding equipment essential to creating the various elements of the replicas.

However, there are a few specialized skills he farms out to other dedicated craftsmen still using traditional methods. These skilled tradesmen, found in an Amish community across the border in Pennsylvania, create lamps, leather upholstery for the seats, buggy leaf springs, metal-edged wooden wheel rims and metal wheel hubs (Eggers makes each of the wooden spokes by hand, including the complex joints).

Having said that, Eggers noted that if the completion of one of his historical

replicas requires even the simplest form of ornamentation, he has to add that himself; the Amish – much like the 19th-century Shakers – forswear all non-functional flourishes to their handiwork. Eggers takes great pride that, while the men with whom he works on his projects may not have any decoration or ornamentation in their workshops, they do have photographs of each of his vehicles to which they have contributed proudly hanging on the walls.

For additional examples of the quality and range of Bill Eggers's craftsmanship, visit WilliamEggersMotorcycles.com



TOP: Gottlieb Daimler (left, portrayed by neighbor Ernie Barker) and Wilhelm Maybach (Bill Eggers) at Great Marques Concours d'Elegance at Old Westbury Gardens, New York. ABOVE: The richness of copper, brass, wood, leather and iron.



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Craftsmen from the Amish community near Eggers's Connecticut home supplied handmade buggy leaf springs, metal-edged wheel rims, metal wheel hubs and leather upholstery.

for detail and deep desire for perfection to restoring classic motorcycles; he even helped curate the Guggenheim Museum's Art of the Motorcycle exhibition in 1998.

Since then, his understanding of the history and mechanical development of motor vehicles, combined with his superb fabricating skills, have propelled him down a satisfying new career path. As his reputation grew, Eggers received commissions for several impressive replicas, including a pony-sized (3/4-scale) stagecoach for Wells-Fargo, and precise copies of very early motorcycles requested by a number of renowned motorcycle museums.

His project to create a replica of the 1885 Daimler Reitwagen (riding vehicle)

led to an interest in other early Daimlers, including a replica MBCA members saw at a previous Long Island club car show, the 1886 Daimler Motor Carriage (see page 51). In 2014, Eggers built a replica of Daimler's first commercial truck from 1896 – a converted horse-drawn wagon with a Maybach engine mounted under the rear of the bed. Like the truck seen on these pages, Eggers hid a modern power plant in the engine compartment and added forward and reverse gears so that the truck could be driven. That replica was sold in 2015 at a Mecum Auction.

The 1898 Daimler truck

His most recent effort duplicates a machine that many historians consider