

Attend a cruise-in these days and you'd think that teenagers driving hot rods and rocking to Bill Haley were the ones who called the tune in Fifties America. Notwithstanding the nostalgic trappings of long-lost youth, in truth, the Fifties really belonged to squares—middle-class parents who drove family cars like the Dodge Royal and danced to Lawrence Welk.

The demand for cars like the Royal goes back to the close of World War II. Optimistic in victory, Americans married in record numbers. In 1946, 2.2 million couples wed, twice the number of marriages in 1945. Consequently, population growth outpaced expectations. *Time* magazine in 1948 called it a "baby boom."

Many of these new parents set up housekeeping in burgeoning suburbs removed from city centers. Thus, cars became a necessity for husbands commuting to work, and mandatory for wives who chauffeured children and shopped.



Above: Members of the Dodge styling staff sweat the details of an interior design for the 1955 model. Their efforts and those of division engineers and marketers resulted in the plushiest and most powerful Dodges made to that time. Below: The 1957 Custom Royal Lancer typified the cars that addressed buyers' evolving desires. (Owner: Larry Martin)

