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CENTENARY OF HENRY FORD'S QUADRICYCLE

WARLEY, June 4, 1996 - One hundred years ago today, just before dawn on June 4, 1896, Henry Ford turned a dream into reality when he drove his first car for the very first time.

The car, which Ford built himself and called the Quadricycle, had an in-line, two-cylinder 4hp engine with two speeds - 10 and 20 miles an hour - selected by twin drive belts. With a neutral gear, but no reverse, gear changes were made by a clutch lever mounted on the floor to the right of the driver, which tightened the appropriate drive belt on to its pulley. Final drive was by a single chain.

Apart from the motor, wheels, axles and steering rod, the vehicle was constructed of wood and weighed only 500lb without fuel.

Henry Ford had worked many nights for many months in his determination to prepare his Quadricycle for the road. At last, in the early hours of June 4, it was ready. But there was a snag - the finished car was too wide to pass through the door of his workshop. Not to be deterred, Ford took a hatchet and hacked away at the door frame until he could push his Quadricycle outside and start its engine.

Then, its headlamp flickering, the little car pattered away into the grey dawn, its proud inventor at the tiller. There was just one thing missing: in his determination to finish the Quadricycle, Henry Ford had forgotten to fit the car with brakes. Now he knew it could run, there was no need to rectify the omission. Details like that could wait for the next car.

The Quadricycle was the first of many millions of cars to bear the Ford name and was also, by a matter of weeks, the second car ever built in Detroit in the US. Most people in 1896 thought automobiles were a passing fad but Ford foresaw a day when motor cars would be built in large numbers and sold at a price that the average person could afford.

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In the summer of 1899, Ford gave up the security of his well-paid job at the Edison Illuminating Company to pursue his dream of "a car for the great multitude". In 1903, Ford Motor Company was established and Henry Ford went on to become one of the greatest industrialists of our time.

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