Ransom Eli Olds Encyclopedia Article

Ransom Eli Olds

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Ransom Eli Olds

1864-1950

American automobile inventor who designed the first successful American-made car—the Oldsmobile—in 1896. Olds's first car was a small carriage with a single cylinder, four-cycle engine and a curved dashboard, appropriately named the "Curved Dash Olds." In 1899 he formed the Olds Motor Works with backing from businessman Samuel L. Smith, and by 1904 5,000 Oldsmobiles had been sold. In 1904 Olds parted with Smith to form the REO Motor Car Company. Olds pioneered the progressive assembly method, a precursor to the modern automotive assembly line, but after several years his new company lost ground to its competitors and he turned his attention to other enterprises, including his own brand of lawn mower.