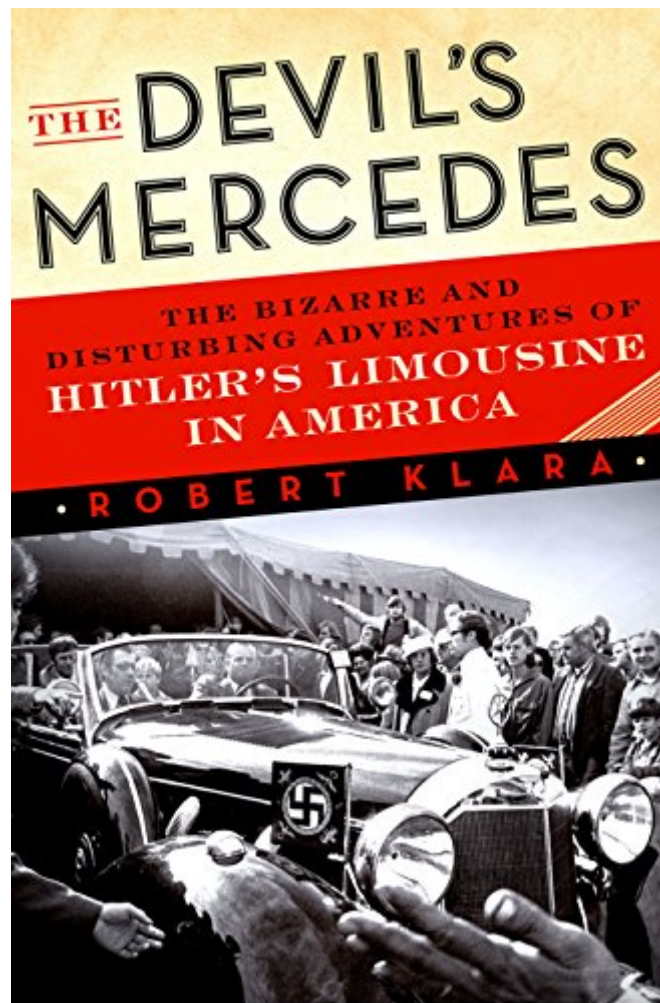




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# The Devil's Mercedes: The Bizarre And Disturbing Adventures Of Hitler's Limousine In America



## Synopsis

In 1938, Mercedes-Benz began production of the largest, most luxurious limousine in the world. A machine of frightening power and sinister beauty, the Grosser 770K Model 150 Offener Tourenwagen was 20 feet long, seven feet wide, and tipped the scales at 5 tons. Its supercharged, 230-horsepower engine propelled the beast to speeds over 100 m.p.h. while its occupants reclined on glove-leather seats stuffed with goose down. Armor plated and equipped with hidden compartments for Luger pistols, the 770K was a sumptuous monster with a monstrous patron: Adolph Hitler and the Nazi party. Deployed mainly for propaganda purposes before the war, the hand-built limousines "in which Hitler rode standing in the front seat" motored through elaborate rallies and appeared in countless newsreels, swiftly becoming the Nazi party's most durable symbol of wealth and power. Had Hitler not so thoroughly dominated the scene with his own megalomania, his opulent limousine could easily have eclipsed him. Most of the 770Ks didn't make it out of the rubble of World War II. But several of them did. And two of them found their way, secretly and separately, to the United States. In *The Devil's Mercedes*, author Robert Klara uncovers the forgotten story of how Americans responded to these rolling relics of fascism on their soil. The limousines made headlines, drew crowds, made fortunes and ruined lives. What never became public was how both of the cars would ultimately become tangled in a web of confusion, mania, and opportunism, fully entwined in a story of mistaken identity. Nobody knew that the limousine touted as Hitler's had in fact never belonged to him, while the Mercedes shrugged off as an ordinary staff car "one later abandoned in a warehouse and sold off as government surplus" turned out to be none other than Hitler's personal automobile. It would take 40 years, a cast of carnies and millionaires, the United States Army, and the sleuthing efforts of an obscure Canadian librarian to bring the entire truth to light. As he recounts this remarkable drama, Klara probes the meaning of these haunting hulks and their power to attract, excite and disgust. The limousine's appearance collided with an American populous celebrating a victory even as it sought to stay a step ahead of the war's ghosts. Ultimately, *The Devil's Mercedes* isn't only the story of a rare and notorious car, but what that car taught postwar America about itself.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"The Devil's Mercedes" is one of those rare books which completely captured my attention. It is, by turns, philosophical, whimsical, and fascinating in the extreme. It chronicles the post World War II adventures/misadventures of a number of Mercedes Benz 770K's. These heavy and heavily armored machines were the preferred conveyances of the Nazi leadership during the World War II, and fascinating as that fact alone makes them, they represent significant landmarks in the development of the automobile as well. The author chooses to follow how several of these cars came to prominence in the United States (and Canada), but along the way, he examines the growth of the Classic Car "movement" in America, the penchant of people to rewrite history through the prism of their own experiences and predilections, and the nature of good and evil. If all of that sounds a bit heavy, well it might have been, in a less skilled writers hands, but the author's insights into human nature and his deft touch with his narrative, make the story as riveting as a well crafted mystery novel. When I was a young graduate student, I had occasion to take courses in both Bibliography and Historiography, and this text is so well crafted and thought provoking that it would have been appropriate in both of them. In fact, i would recommend anyone teaching these courses pick up a copy and seriously consider it for adoption. It is accessible, well documented, and riveting, no mean feat! In the end, it is a haunting book that puts me in mind of the work of Joseph Campbell. It is about culture, history and the ways in which we rework them to form mythology, and it is about a machine, majestic and transcending its physical existence to become a touchstone or talisman. Read it!

Robert Klara has once again penned an historical masterpiece in the *Devils Mercedes*. In his three books, Robert Klara has made a train (*FDR's Funeral Train*), a house (*The Hidden White House*), and now an automobile (*The Devils Mercedes*), the central characters in three fascinating historical narratives. His painstaking and exhaustive research, coupled with his incredible writing skills, makes this book another absolute must read. His notes at the end of the book are an added bonus, and demonstrate the lengths he went to in order to preserve historical accuracy. Reading his notes was like reading another great book. Robert Klara is a gifted story teller. Realizing the extent of his research, and the lengths that he has gone to verify and validate his work, make this book even more interesting and tantalizing. Admittedly, sometimes history can be boring, but never in the hands of Robert Klara. This book reads like a fine mystery novel "yet all the while the reader knows that amazingly, all of this really took place! Especially fascinating is the fact that multiple stories and timelines are unfolding simultaneously "yet the author carefully preserves all of the mystery and final outcome to the very end. While we are introduced to many very colorful characters along the way "they play a supporting role to the cars themselves. What a gift Robert Klara has to make inanimate objects the central characters of his stories. Robert's first two books (*FDR's Funeral Train* and the *Hidden White House*) both prompted me to board airplanes to fly to the locations which he had written about in order to envision firsthand what had taken place there. His latest book, *The Devil's Mercedes*, has prompted me to travel again. Robert Klara is one of America's greatest historical story tellers. He has gained my utmost respect as a writer and conveyor of history. If Robert Klara writes it, I will be sure to read it.

Several large, menacing cars allegedly owned by top Nazis, including Hitler, toured the United States in the years following World War II. Robert Klara tells the story of these vehicles in this hugely entertaining tome. Klara is a great writer who relates this odd tale with real verve. He brings the story to life by providing context, focusing specifically on two cars, their backgrounds and their collection of owners. The level of detail really fleshes out the story, but Klara's prose is never dull. In fact, it zips right along like a Mercedes on the Autobahn. There's even a bit of a twist near the end. Klara augments the book by delving into a bit of psychology, examining the psychic toll that owning a Nazi car can take on a person. Fans of WWII history, auto aficionados and readers who enjoy quirky strange-but-true tales will love this book.

When I heard this book was coming out, my curiosity was definitely piqued, but I never expected an historical adventure to turn into such a fascinating page turner that reads more like a mystery novel. Author Robert Klara uncovers details that may have well been lost if not for his exhaustive research and reporter's instincts. While it's hard to believe that the twists and turns of this story are all true, the characters and details are so richly described that it could be re-imagined as a screenplay. Read this unusual and unbelievable story to find out how two of these enormous and sinister vehicles ended up in the US and the impact they had on their owners and the masses as it traveled across the country.

Based on the most unlikely of subjects, Hitler's personal car, this novel is part historical, part sociological and completely engrossing. The author brings to life some unlikely characters and situations to create a unique reflection on what it means to come within the vicinity of evil. Klara combines all of his gifts: well-crafted prose, remarkable research expertise and a passion for finding a powerful story where few others would dare to look. It is a welcome change of pace executed at the highest level. Highly recommend!

I read it and then ordered this copy for my brother, a car and WWII buff. He couldn't put it down.

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