

The History of Cars

Today, millions of people rely on cars to travel to work, visit family, and explore the world. However, the automobile did not appear overnight. It is the result of centuries of innovation, engineering, and determination.

The first attempts to build self-propelled vehicles date back to the 18th century. In 1769, French engineer Nicolas-Joseph Cugnot designed a steam-powered vehicle that could transport heavy military equipment. Although it was slow, difficult to control, and impractical for everyday use, it demonstrated that vehicles could move without horses.

A major breakthrough came in the late 19th century with the invention of the internal combustion engine. In 1886, German engineer Karl Benz patented what is widely recognized as the world's first practical gasoline-powered automobile, the Benz Patent-Motorwagen. Around the same time, Gottlieb Daimler and Wilhelm Maybach were also developing powerful engines that would shape the future of transportation.

Despite these inventions, early automobiles remained expensive luxury items that only wealthy people could afford. This changed dramatically in 1908 when American entrepreneur Henry Ford introduced the Model T. More importantly, Ford revolutionized manufacturing by improving the moving assembly line. Instead of skilled workers building an entire car, each worker performed one specific task as the vehicle moved along the production line. As a result, production became faster, costs decreased significantly, and ordinary families were finally able to own cars.

The rapid increase in automobile ownership transformed society. Governments invested heavily in highways, bridges, and road systems, while suburbs expanded because people could now commute longer distances. At the same time, industries such as oil production, tourism, and fast food experienced tremendous growth. However, this progress also created new challenges, including traffic congestion, road accidents, and environmental pollution.

Throughout the 20th century, manufacturers competed to produce safer, faster, and more comfortable vehicles. Seat belts, airbags, anti-lock braking systems (ABS), and electronic stability control became standard safety features that saved countless lives. At the same time, advances in technology introduced automatic transmissions, air conditioning, navigation systems, and eventually GPS.

During the last few decades, concerns about climate change and fossil fuel consumption have encouraged the development of electric and hybrid vehicles. Although electric cars were invented long before gasoline cars became popular, improvements in battery

technology have finally made them practical for everyday drivers. Companies around the world continue investing billions of dollars in cleaner transportation technologies.

Today, the automotive industry is entering another period of transformation. Artificial intelligence, sensors, cameras, and advanced software are making self-driving vehicles increasingly possible. While fully autonomous cars still face legal, technical, and ethical challenges, many experts believe they could eventually reduce accidents caused by human error.

The history of cars demonstrates how one invention can completely reshape society. From slow steam-powered machines to intelligent electric vehicles, automobiles continue to evolve, reflecting humanity's constant desire to travel farther, faster, and more efficiently.

Vocabulary

Word	Meaning
self-propelled	able to move by itself
breakthrough	an important discovery or development
patent	official legal protection for an invention
assembly line	a production system where products move while workers complete different tasks
commute	travel regularly between home and work
congestion	heavy traffic
fossil fuels	fuels such as oil, coal, and natural gas
autonomous	able to operate without human control
reshape	to change completely

Reading Comprehension

Part A – Multiple Choice

1. What was the main limitation of Nicolas-Joseph Cugnot's vehicle?
 - a) It was too expensive to produce.
 - b) It only worked on railways.
 - c) It was slow and difficult to control.
 - d) It used electricity instead of steam.

2. Why was Karl Benz's invention considered revolutionary?
 - a) It was the first electric car.
 - b) It was the first practical gasoline-powered automobile.
 - c) It could drive itself.
 - d) It was designed for racing.

3. What made the Model T affordable for ordinary people?
 - a) It was made from cheaper materials.
 - b) Henry Ford invented a smaller engine.
 - c) The moving assembly line reduced production costs.
 - d) The government paid part of the cost.

4. Which industry is NOT mentioned as growing because of automobiles?
 - a) Tourism
 - b) Oil production
 - c) Fast food
 - d) Air travel

5. According to the text, why are self-driving cars considered promising?
 - a) They eliminate the need for roads.
 - b) They could reduce accidents caused by human error.
 - c) They are less expensive than bicycles.
 - d) They require no electricity.