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## CAPTAIN EDDIE'S CAR

### Rickenbacker fans gather to appreciate WWI ace's groundbreaking vehicle

*By Frank Thomas* | THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

Milton Shilde has eight family cars. But they're not the usual suburban workhorses. Shilde doesn't use them for school and soccer runs, and they're not particularly well-suited for hauling groceries. They're Rickenbackers, built more than 80 years ago by Shilde's distant cousin, World War I flying ace Eddie Rickenbacker. "I'm a ninth cousin, twice removed," said Shilde, who lives in New York. "That's what got me interested in the Rickenbacker car."

This weekend, Shilde is showing off a 1925 Rickenbacker four-door at Motts Military Museum in Groveport. There, it joins six others for the first national Rickenbacker car meet.

Set less than 50 yards from a replica of Rickenbacker's boyhood home, the show is a big reunion for a small and scattered automotive family.

"This is the most Rickenbacker cars ever assembled in one spot at one time," said Warren Motts, the museum's founder and director.

Most know that Rickenbacker, who was born in Columbus, was a famous pilot. But few realize that he built and raced cars, Motts said.

Hardy and well-engineered, his cars were produced for less than a decade but pioneered many technologies that now are common, Motts said. One key invention, four-wheel braking, led to the company's downfall.

"All the other big dealers started a campaign to convince people that four-wheel brakes were unsafe and stopped a car too quickly," he said. "And then, once they'd run Rickenbacker out of business, they all put four-wheel brakes in their cars."

Fewer than 11,000 cars were built between 1922 and 1927 in the Rickenbacker factory in Detroit.

No one can agree on how many Rickenbackers still exist, but most say there are likely fewer than 200. Shilde owns more than anyone else.

"It took me almost two years to find a car," he said, adding that he bought his first in 1994. "Then they just started to show up, and I just kind of collected them."

Captain Eddie's star power attracts many collectors. Most preserve the cars in garages that resemble museums and drive them only on special occasions.

But Lyle Corey isn't like most collectors. He modified his Rickenbacker's engine to "add a bit more power."

"I'm not much of a purist," Corey said, adding that he needed the car to handle more-intense road trips.

That road trip? A 4,500-mile road rally across the country called the "Great Race," which he's entered five times.

And despite nearly century-old technology and a route through the Mojave Desert, Corey, from Mississippi, said his thoroughbred held up well.

"If you're on a real smooth road, it's good," Corey said laughing. "But if you're on a rough road, oh, man, it's rough."

The car show ends today. Admission is \$5 for adults, \$4 for seniors, \$3 for students and free for children younger than 5.

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### TOM DODGE DISPATCH

Roland M. Klix of Renton, Wash., prepares his 1926 Rickenbacker B-8 for the first Rickenbacker Car Rally at the Motts Military Museum in Groveport. Columbus native

and World War I ace Eddie Rickenbacker built the cars from 1922 to 1927. Seven of them will be on view at the museum today.