

Ron Sieber, the author of *Classic Speedsters*, provides this stunning Stutz artwork from the company's 1928 Stutz Black Hawk sales brochure. The Black Hawk model followed the famous Bear Cat of the Brass Era.

Speed & a Society Lady

By Carl Jensen

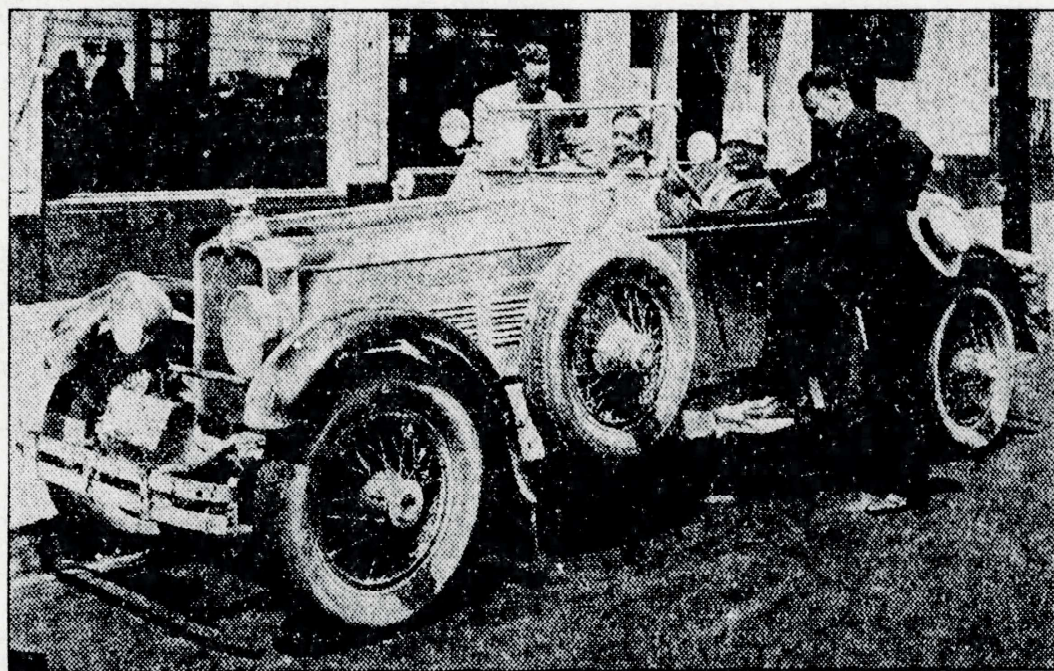
Described as a "Prominent society woman of New York," Dr. Lavia Willard readily pursued her passions. After graduating from Cornell Medical College and marrying her husband, Dr. A. H. Willard, Lavia became well known as a breeder of prize-winning English Bulldogs and as a portrait painter. But without a doubt, her greatest passion was motoring. When many ladies of such social standing might purchase the most plush luxury car or even opt to be chauffeur driven, Lavia purchased one of the fastest machines on the market, a 1928 Stutz Black Hawk. Stutz had, of course, just won the AAA stock car championship and broken the speed record at Daytona, among other achievements. Clearly, she was a knowledgeable enthusiast.

In 1928, Lavia was 46 years old and a member of the New York Women's Automobile Club. The organization ran a race from New York City to Chicago on July 2 that covered 931 miles. She finished first, arriving the next day in 22 hours and 48 minutes. Despite the fact that Lavia was likely exhausted, as she ran without a relief driver, there was a grand celebration where she received a check for \$5,000 and a trophy cup. It was an impressive amount when one considers that it was more than the price of the average house.

Something about racing this distance must have grabbed hold of Lavia because she then went on to try to set a record for crossing the country. Her first attempt at this 3,224-mile dash immediately followed in August. Upon finishing this first attempt, Lavia was convinced she could do better, so she plotted a slightly different route. Western Union confirmed her start at 5:42 a.m. on



Woman Speeds Stutz Across Country



Driving from New York City to Oakland, Cal., in five days, four hours and 26 minutes, Mrs. Lavia M. Willard, New York society woman, is believed to have set a record for feminine cross-country driving, says Iver Schmidt of the Automobile Sales Company, 259 Monroe Avenue.

Left: Lavia averaged 42 mph during the Women's New York-Chicago Race and won! The Indianapolis Star publicized her win on July 4, 1928.

Above: Lavia's first cross-country drive was only the start of her transcontinental trips. She began in New York City on August 8 and ended in Oakland, California, on August 12, 1928.

Below: A little over two months after Lavia's first coast-to-coast trip, she bested her time by 19 hours and 39 minutes.

October 15. She was getting quite serious about this as a Stutz factory technician was in the passenger seat. But she could have saved the extra weight as the reports say his services were never required. The car had no mechanical trouble of any kind. They held a speed of 70 mph for most of the run but, when possible, ran up to 95 mph. However, traffic or road conditions due to heavy rains often required slower speeds. During an interview after arriving in Los Angeles, she spoke about how terrible rain storms made some of the roads very treacherous. She felt she could have done it faster had the weather been better. When Western Union clocked Lavia in on October 19, she had bettered her August run by 19 hours and 39 minutes, with a new time of 101 hours and 47 minutes.

Still convinced that she could be faster, Lavia shaved off another two hours in her February 1929 attempt. Finally, in 1931, Lavia and her prized Stutz broke the record for a non-professional driver with 90 hours and 17 minutes.

When Lavia passed away on March 8, 1950, at age 68, her obituary was posted in several newspapers. I am sure she would have been pleased to see that in each case, they called her an "Auto Racer."

(Images courtesy of Carl Jensen, Tracy Leshner, and Ron Sieber)

WOMAN IN STUTZ IS RACE WINNER

Mrs. Willard Is First in New York-to-Chicago Contest.

[Special to The Indianapolis Star.]
CHICAGO, July 3.—Mrs. Lavia M. Willard, prominent New York society woman, won the Women's New York-to-Chicago speed contest today, the finish point being the Drake hotel. First prize of \$5,000 in cash and a trophy cup were presented to Mrs. Willard by the official timer. Mrs. Willard drove her Stutz Black Hawk speedster in the race.

The New York Women's Automobile Club, a social club of amateur women drivers, was the sponsor for this city-to-city event. There were thirty-one entries, the contestants all being of high social standing in New York. Besides the one Stutz Black Hawk driven by Mrs. Willard, the list of cars entered included five Lincolns, one Humber (English), two Renaults, three Hispano-Suizas, two Mercedes (German), two Minervas, one Chrysler, one Stearns-Knight, two Studebakers, one Fiat, three Cadillacs, four Rolls Royces, three Packards, two Auburns and one Lincoln special.

Averages 42 Miles an Hour.

The rules of the race required that each car be driven by the woman who entered it. Mrs. Willard, drove her Black Hawk without relief, making the 931-mile trip at an average of forty-two miles an hour, this average being based on the total elapsed time between the start and finish. The second car to finish was several hours behind the winner.

Mrs. Willard, who is well known as one of the most skillful amateur women automobile drivers in the country, gives a great deal of the credit for this latest performance to her car. She says that its comfort and ease of handling, as well as its speed, power and stamina, are all that she would ask of a motor car. She plans to make a trip to Indianapolis Thursday before returning to the East, so that she may visit the Stutz factory and see how Stutz cars are made.

Recently, in a speed contest on the Atlantic City (N. J.) Speedway, Mrs. Willard won \$5,000 in prize money in competition with twelve other members of the New York Women's Automobile Club in various makes of cars, both American and foreign.

SUNDAY MORNING, OCTOBER 28, 1928

Woman Better's Own Mark In Coast-to-Coast Run

Mrs. Lavia Willard Drives Stutz Black Hawk Across
Country From New York to Los Angeles in 4
Days, 8 Hours and 47 Minutes.

