

Homage to Monsieur Armand Peugeot

Pierre Godefroy Armand Peugeot, known throughout his life as Armand, was born on 18 June, 1849 in Valentigney. He was the only son of Emile (1815-1874) and grandson of Jean-Pierre II (1768 -1852). It was the latter who, in association with his brother Jean-Frédéric in 1810, turned the family-run Sous Cratet grain mill at Hérimoncourt into a steel foundry and rolling workshop, producing ribbons of thin steel for the manufacture of saw blades and springs for the clock making business. The company quickly evolved, manufacturing the finished products itself. Jean-Pierre II's sons, Jules and Emile took over the reins, setting up three new factories and continuing to diversify and increase output. When markets collapsed during the 1848 revolution, the two brothers bought out the other partners and in 1851 created "*Peugeot Frères*", with all members now directly descended from Jean-Pierre II' bloodline. Armand's destiny was mapped out for him.

After completing his secondary education in Paris, Armand did not study at Centrale Paris as is often claimed, but left for England, where he trained as an engineer in Leeds, one of the birthplaces of the English metalworking industry. He also undertook work experience in a company before rejoining the family business at the end of 1871. He became an associate partner alongside his father, his uncle Jules and the latter's son Eugène II, five years his senior.

On 10 June, 1872 he married [*Sophie*] Léonie Fallot in Paris.

In 1877 the young cousins took over management of "*Peugeot Frères*", Eugène heading general management and Armand the technical department. They shared management of the factories: Hérimoncourt for Eugène, Valentigney and Beaulieu for Armand. From 1878, the firm's Board of Directors renamed it "*Fils de Peugeot Frères*".

During his time across the Channel Armand also took an interest in all the technical innovations of the time, notably steam engines and velocipedes. Attracted by this new concept of mobility Armand launched the manufacture of chain-driven bicycles and tricycles at the end of 1885. From 1886 onwards, he set up dedicated workshops to build velocipedes in Beaulieu, and in 1887 opened his first shop in Paris. In 1892 Armand even sacrificed his own garden to allow more space for the "cycle workshop"! The range of cycles quickly developed and output, which had already reached 10,000 units in 1890, doubled in 1900.

This visionary also took an early interest in "horseless carriages". "*Pioneer*" rather than "*inventor*", Armand set himself up as a "*future manufacturer*". Having been witness to events, Robert Peugeot (1873-1945) wrote in February 1938: "When my uncle, *Monsieur Armand Peugeot*, decided to turn over part of his factories to the manufacture of automobiles...he foresaw with remarkable prescience the enormous possibilities of a new mode of transport with which the Peugeot company was going to equip our modern civilization. Far from wanting to limit sales to a small wealthy clientele, he foresaw the varied adaptations to all classes of society, to all professions and for all uses. "

In May 1879, Armand discovered steam with the "*Mancelle*", a car made by Amédée Bollée and sons, but was not inclined to launch production of such a machine. The Serpollet instant steam boiler was finally chosen at the end of 1888 to power a tricycle built under partnership and later catalogued as the Peugeot-Serpollet "Type 1". This vehicle was displayed at the Paris Universal Exhibition in 1889. Following the exhibition the Fils de Peugeot Frères received numerous medals for their products and for the many institutions "set up with the aim of improving employee conditions in their factories." Armand also received the Legion of Honour from the Board of Trade and Industry on 28 October, 1889. In the face of public and press indifference to the steam tricycle, Armand turned to a petrol engine designed by the German Gottlieb Daimler, who had awarded the French manufacturing rights to Ets Panhard & Levassor, producers of wood saws in Paris. The first petrol-driven Peugeot quadricycles were tested between 1890 and 1891. On 6 and 7 April,

1891 journalists were able to see the first two-seater Peugeot quadricycle (Type 2) at Beaulieu. Still in 1891, a four-seater evolutionary design (Type 3) was launched. Its "chassis" was made of steel tubes which allowed the circulation of water to cool the engine: a 565 cm³ Daimler V-twin, rear-mounted to avoid inconveniencing passengers.

In September 1891, 206 cyclists entered the first "Paris-Brest-Paris" race organized by the Petit Journal, and the "Type 3" followed the event. Driven by its engineer designer Louis Rigoulot, who was accompanied by mechanic Auguste Doriot, it left Valentigney and arrived in Paris under its own steam, before returning to its birthplace in Franche-Comté. The vehicle covered 2,045 km at an average speed of 14,710 km/h: the achievement was a world first. After servicing, the quadricycle was delivered on 2 October, 1891 to an industrialist from Alsace, who was the first catalogued buyer of a Peugeot car. The "Type 3", with 64 units produced from 91 to 94, is clearly the highest-selling first series-production car of the period.

On 5 January, 1892 Armand Peugeot wrote: *"the manufacture of cycles is the company's biggest success to date. I am convinced that the automobile is destined for enormous growth. If we are bold and clever enough we will be able to turn Peugeot into one of France's largest industrial concerns"*! The next day he outlined his vision of how self-propelled automobiles should be developed and their production organised to his Board of Directors.

During the « Horseless Carriage Competition » covering the 126 km from Paris to Rouen organised by the Petit Journal on 22 July, 1894, the six Peugeots entered crossed the finishing line and the Fils de Peugeot Frères shared first prize with Ets Panhard & Levassor. The first prize was awarded to "the car meeting the following requirements: to be safe, easy to handle by drivers and not cost too much to drive"! As it was timed, the world's first "true" race took place between 11 and 13 June, 1895, from Paris to Bordeaux and back to Paris again, a total of 1,200 km. The three Peugeots entered finished in the first four places. Paul Koechlin and his Peugeot « Type 7 » Phaeton took first place.

Following his presentation of a well-structured project concerning the future of car production to the Board of Directors in May 1895, Armand declared the following November: *"...for a company like ours, clearly at the forefront of a new movement, it would be an act of folly and unforgivable weakness to pull back now"*. Despite this, on 4 December the majority of the Board of Directors, led by Eugène II, voted to cease car production! Armand remained convinced of his position and decided to split the company's activities. He raised funds for the creation of *"SA des Automobiles Peugeot"*, registered in Paris on 2 April, 1896. Its capital was opened to public subscription and Armand, who held 43.7% of shares, was nominated President. An agreement defined terms and non-competition conditions between the two Peugeot entities. Armand would not be allowed to *"manufacture, sell or conduct any activities connected to velocipedes, bicycles, tricycles and quadricycles, with or without engines, equipped with velocipede saddles."* In return, the cousins agreed not to *"manufacture or sell automobiles, specifically any engine-powered vehicle equipped with bodywork and seats."* An act of transfer was established for machine tools and patents and agreement reached over the exchange of staff between the two companies.

Armand inaugurated the first "car factory" at Audincourt on 12 April, 1897, and a "Type 14" rolled off the production line the very same day, fitted with the first Peugeot-designed engine, a flat twin conceived by in-house engineer Gratien Michaux. This power train freed Armand Peugeot from making royalty payments to Panhard or Daimler and from meeting the demands of the latter.

A lack of local labour to produce his cars prompted Armand to set up a second factory in Five-Lille, which became operational at the beginning of 1899 and concentrated on the production of large models. This relocation was the first cultural revolution for the company.

The Union of Automobile Manufacturers was set up in Paris in 1898. Armand Peugeot became its first President, as well as that of the International Union of Automobile

Manufacturers. In the same year, the Automobile Club de France organised the first "*International Automobile Exhibition*" in Paris. Armand presided over the Organising Committee, exhibiting 12 versions of his cars: of the 269 exhibitors present he was the only one to offer such a wide range of cars almost all of which were available with bodywork fitted as standard. On 7 February, 1900, Armand declared that "*one needs to be in Paris to follow the daily progress of our industry*": the setting up of a showroom at 83 Boulevard Gouvion-Saint-Cyr followed soon after, and the company's head office was transferred there at the end of the year. In 1900 alone, Peugeot produced 500 cars.

In 1901/1902 the new Peugeot models made a clean break with links to the horse-drawn carriage style. A new technological direction was also taken: the engine moved to the front under the bonnet, the number of cylinders increased, transmission was now via propshafts rather than chains, worm and peg steering columns were fitted with a steering wheel, shock absorbers appeared... However, the axing of outdated models, too large a model range and the cost of technological progress weakened the company's financial results. It flirted with bankruptcy and was forced to implement drastic cuts, including abandoning competition, which was considered too expensive. With these measures in place the success of the new models and an increase in sales volumes led to a return to profit in 1903. In 1905 production reached 1,261 cars and a year later Peugeot once again became France's largest car manufacturer with a total output of 2,966 units.

In the family firm, the sons of Eugène II, encouraged by Robert (the second), were also tempted to try their hand at automobile manufacture, from 1904. Still bound by the constraints of the agreements reached in 1896, "these men" as Armand referred to them, finally reached an agreement with him in 1905 to produce light cars under certain conditions. Convention dictated that these cars should not compete with models Armand was producing. Armand should cease production of his "Bébé" (Type 69), however, a successful small model of which 400 units were produced in 1905 alone. To delineate the output of the two companies it was agreed that the cars produced by the "Fils de Peugeot Frères" should be sold under the registered trademark "Lion". The first cars were sold in 1906 and quickly achieved both commercial and sporting success. However, the cost price was undermined by all the licenses and patent fees that had to be paid to "SA des Automobiles Peugeot" and, aware of the confusion for customers created by having two "Peugeot" car brands, Robert entertained, from 1908, the idea of a merger with Armand. (In May 1895 Armand had already recommended the merger of the cycle and car activities in his paper "The Car Question", designating Robert as his successor at the head of this new combine!) Sense prevailing, the merger resulted on 16 February, 1910 in the creation of "*SA des Automobiles et Cycles Peugeot*". Armand was made President and represented the new company professionally, but the responsibility for operational running fell to Robert. The other activities of the family-run group remained under the wing of "Fils de Peugeot Frères". "*In 20 years Armand Peugeot had turned a small family-run business from the Franche-Comté region into a world-beating automobile maker*", concludes historian Jean-Louis Loubet today.

The visionary Armand Peugeot, acting as President of the Union of Automobile Manufacturers, informed the War Ministry in December 1912 that "*the automobile is now an integral part of national defense. You can rely on the manufacturers at all times. When the country needs us it will find us ready.*"

With a product range extending from light cars to utilitarian vehicles, the new car company was better placed to meet market needs: its production rose from 2,352 units in 1910 to 9,338 units in 1913! It was the year that Armand decided to retire (aged 66) and to hand over the Presidency of the company to Pierre, Eugène II's eldest son. But it was Robert who remained "at the helm". Louis Renault succeeded Armand Peugeot as President of the Union of Automobile Manufacturers in 1913 and of the Motor Show Committee in 1914.

Armand also played an active role in local affairs: Valentigney town councilor from 1881, then Mayor from 1888 to 1900. He was responsible for creating a fire brigade, a nursery school, the first telegraph office, a tramway and electric street lighting... From 1882 to 1910 he also served as an active and hard working regional councilor for the district of

Audincourt. Armand was also President of the Valentigney Presbyterian Council from 1883 to 1904: it was his decision to build a new temple on land he owned. Refusing any public aid, he contributed financially to the temple's construction.

A passion for nature and being drawn to new experiences led Armand to create the "*Ferme des Buis*" at Valentigney in 1893. Of its 100 hectares, 30 were given over to experimenting new methods of farming, unfortunately thwarted by the absence of much hoped-for artesian wells! A herd of 20 Holstein milk cows were imported from Holland: a cheeky move in the Montbéliard region! The President of the Republic decorated Armand Peugeot with the Officer's Cross of the Legion of Honour on behalf of the Ministry of Agriculture. This agricultural experiment made a serious dent in the personal assets of its founder. A craving for new undertakings brought Armand more bad luck: the import of wool from Argentina and Australia or of bananas from Panama, the chartering of a tuna boat which sank on its second voyage, a stake in the Brasseries de la Meuse, or the forming at Boulogne-sur-Seine in 1904 of a company "*Armand Peugeot et Tony Huber*" to build marine engines... Often criticised, but nevertheless long-lasting, the building of a seaside resort in Brittany is worth mentioning. In 1883 Armand discovered the enchanting site of Morgat in the Finistère region: its tiny sardine fishing port, grottoes and a beautiful beach surrounded by unspoiled heath land. Captivated by (in his words) "*this wild and magnificent countryside*", he decided to invest his own money in the purchase of land and to set up a company to build villas and two hotels. Today this charming holiday destination is described in leaflets by the Crozon peninsula tourist office as "*the seaside resort built by industrialist Armand Peugeot*". Armand was not content simply to be the creator of Morgat, he was also responsible for adding engines to its fishing boats, such as "*le Comtois*", which took tourists on excursions.

Armand and Léonie's only son, Raymond, died in January 1886 aged 13, after an operation to have his tonsils removed led to infection and meningitis. Tragedy struck again when his sister Elisabeth died at the age of 14 from typhoid fever brought on by eating rotten oysters. The next three daughters, Madeleine, Germaine and Marie-Anne, all married. None of their husbands worked for Peugeot, however, much to the regret of Armand who, in the absence of a son would have liked to have had a son-in-law to succeed him.

Armand has often been described as a free-thinker, unpredictable and a risk-taker. To counter this we can talk of a visionary spirit, intuitiveness, strength in his convictions, altruism, pacifism and affection for those around him, parents, friends and colleagues at every level. Thus he played a crucial role in putting an end in 1899 to the first strike of the Fils de Peugeot Frères workforce, the family company he had left three years previously. Used to a paternalism which had worked for him up to then, he deplored the spirit of conflict that was taking root at the end of the century. During a speech given at the Social Museum in Paris in 1895 he declared "*management should lead by example – it is one of its duties, but also in its best interests.*"

Armand Peugeot passed away at his home in Neuilly on 4 February, 1915, after a short illness. He was buried on 7 February in the Père Lachaise cemetery. On his headstone the epitaph reads "Fear Nothing – Only Believe": perfectly illustrating the life of Armand who "never feared committing himself when he believed in something." At his funeral, Louis Renault – his successor at the Union of Automobile Manufacturers – described his role in the advent of the automobile industry thus: "*He didn't just steer his company in this new direction. He led by example, encouraging his competitors to follow him into this unknown territory, having understood that there would be room for everyone in this industrial sector: that creating a spirit of healthy competition would turn our beloved France into the world's market leader... before falling into eternal slumber he was at least able to gauge the enormous progress made by an industry of which he was one of the founders... and could have said in all truth: my life was not in vain.*"

When Detroit's "Automobile Hall of Fame" honoured the memory of Armand Peugeot in October 1999, he was described as having "left his mark on the history of the automobile on a worldwide scale."

Today, among automobile pioneers, Peugeot is the oldest manufacturer in the world still active with descendents of one of the founders of the company (*in 1810*) still having an active role in the company and in its capital.

There are questions one could ask: "If Armand had not been born, would Peugeot have ever manufactured automobiles?" or "If Peugeot had never manufactured automobiles, would it still exist today?" It is pointless to dwell too long on these questions as we will never know the answer!

There is only one obvious conclusion: thank you, Monsieur Armand!

Henri Auger