

1926 MINERVA AF TOWN CAR

Custom Coachwork designed by Paul Ostruk, Inc.

Chassis No. 56543 Engine No. 56544 AI

- 5,952cc, Sleeve-Valve inline 6-Cylinder Engine
- Zenith Dual Barrel Carburetor
- 70bhp at 2,800rpm
- 4-Speed Manual Transmission
- 4-Wheel Drum Brakes with Dewandre Servo Assist
- Leaf Spring Suspension



**Rare American delivery Minerva
Believed to have covered only 20,000 miles from new
Carefully maintained older restoration. Long term ownership**

Swiftly back on its feet following the German occupation, Minerva returned to making large, luxurious motor cars and in the 1920s enjoyed considerable success in the United States where it found favor with film stars, politicians and industrialists alike. One key component of that success was Paul Ostruk of New York who maintained a strong agency for the marque as part of his “The Consolidated Foreign Motor Car Co.” in the mid to late 1920s.

A Czech émigré who had arrived in America in 1908 he quickly learned both the craft of coachbuilding and the tastes and whims of the wealthy. While working at the coachbuilder

A.T. Demarest he met with and subsequently teamed up with Emerson Brooks. Brooks was a respected designer for another prominent coachbuilder, J.M. Quinby & Co., he was also the treasurer for the Automobile Club of America, the New York Institution which had begun its days in the infancy of the horseless carriage and could count the great and the good among its membership. Brooks was extremely well-connected, and the partnership was well founded for he could tap the elite for sales while Paul Ostruk would organize hand tailored coachwork for their cars.

Early activities by the Brooks-Ostruk company commonly consisted of taking Pierce-Arrow or Packard frames and building bodies of a more European flavor for them, even disguising the radiator with their own design. It was a recipe which was rather popular in the inevitable culture of one-upmanship, and when their custom bodied cars debuted the New York Auto Salons they sold for considerable premiums.

With a background of these concepts, Ostruk also found that he could acquire Minerva chassis for relatively favorable terms compared with some of their American contemporaries, and when clothed with the coachwork he organized they too proved rather popular with his clientele. The unashamedly bold stance of the Minerva, with its Art Deco beacon of a Goddess on its radiator must have cut quite a dash in East Coast high society! Ultimately this would lead to an agency for Minerva, until the depression set in and challenged both companies. By 1923, the coexistence with Brooks had run its course, and Ostruk would form Paul Ostruk & Co. New York.



Minerva, the Roman goddess of wisdom, medicine, commerce, handicrafts, and poetry

Predating the famed eight-cylinder AL, the majority of Ostruk Minervas were built on the largest horsepower six-cylinder cars, such as the AF presented here, with its 5,343cc power plant. Its coachbuilding plate proudly proclaims, 'Custom Coach Work Especially Designed for Paul Ostruk Co. Inc., New York, USA', but what this disguises is the fact that by this time most of his coachwork was being handcrafted at some of the finest coachbuilders in the New York area. Firstly, Locke & Co., and later with Raymond Dietrich and Tom Hibbard's LeBaron plant. Not surprisingly they incorporated the latest in design styles and were of very high quality.

Jacques Vander Stappen purchased the AF from Seymour Rappaport of Teaneck, New Jersey roughly 30 years ago in May 1988, as detailed in the extensive file of correspondence with the car. On its sale, Mr. Rappaport wrote to its buyer stating, "The car has 17,000 original miles, was driven only by a chauffeur (sic) for the first year and thereafter only by me." He did not record whom the chauffeur's master was, but it was likely one of Ostruk's typical high-

brow clients, who perhaps laid it up after that modest mileage and moved on to another upper crust automobile.

Mr. Rappaport's tenure would seem to have begun in the 1970's, as an old title document lists him as its keeper already by 1973 and photos depict him retrieving it from a garage where it may well have slumbered for more than 40 years. Notes on file detail minor water damage from the leaking garage roof to one rear quarter panel as the only more major aspect that required his attention when he restored it. In the rebuild the car's two tone grey livery that the car had been found in was replicated returning it to its former glory of the Roaring Twenties. Post restoration and through these two last owners that mileage has risen to a still modest 20,000 according to its speedometer reading.

In Mr. Vander Stappen's ownership the car has continued to be cherished and displayed in his private museum, albeit in recent times it was not regularly used and should be properly recommissioned before road use.

Clearly owing much to European coachwork of its day, and with marked similarities to the D'leteren AL in this same collection, Paul Ostruk's tailored American rendition of this style is an undeniably regal motorcar. Particularly appealing details of the car are its polished aluminum dashboard, hammered door handles and trim pieces. Its rear compartment features occasional seating stowed behind marquetry panels, as well as a plethora of wooden cappings and trim all surrounded with tasteful mottled grey fabric upholstery.

In new ownership it would surely be welcomed to Concours lawns in Europe or America.