

## THE COMPANY FROM THE SOUTH SIDE OF CHICAGO

*Written & Submitted by Tech Editor, Ron Couturier  
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It was the summer of 1958 and I had just completed my third year of high school. I had a summer job working for my uncle who owned a plumbing and heating wholesale supply business. My job was driving a '56 Dodge pickup truck delivering plumbing and heating parts that his company sold to contractors in the tri-state area of New Hampshire, Maine and Massachusetts. I had been saving money for quite some time to buy my first car. I remember, at the time, I dreamed of owning a sporty MGTD, but financially that was out of my reach for the time being. By the end of summer I was eager to buy my first car.

I kept reminding my dad that we needed to go looking for my first set of wheels. My dad told me that he had an uncle who owned a car dealership. His uncle sold Studebakers and had a used car lot at the dealership. On the lot he had cars he had taken in on trades for new Studebakers. Final, one evening in September, we were headed to his uncle's dealership. My dad had called his uncle earlier that day and his uncle told me he would stay open late so we could look over the cars he had on his lot. My dad told me we would get a "good deal".

Well, as it turned out, my first car ended up being a 1953 Nash Rambler convertible. The color was a putrid light mustard yellow. It was powered by a 184 cubic inch L-Head six that put out 85 horses. Those little Nash Ramblers had the ugly side rails that stayed in position when the convertible canvas top was slid back. The car could be described as an inverted bathtub with longitudinal roll bars that ran from the windshield back to just ahead of the trunk. But, as my dad said as we were leaving the lot that night, "it would be cheap on gas and the price was right". A couple of days later, when I had a chance to look at the car in daylight, I discovered that it had more than a mild case of cancer, But, as my dad had said, "it would be cheap on gas, and of course, the price was right".

I kept the car for about fifteen months and then traded it back in at my dad's uncle's dealership. The trunk had become useless due to corrosion. I now kept the spare tire in the back seat. The car had become a real rust bucket from the many harsh winters it had endured. My next trade/purchase resulted in a much more masculine set of wheels, a gorgeous 1952 Mercury Monterey two-door hardtop, with a 255 cubic inch V8 under the hood. This time maybe not so good on gas but, of course, you guessed it, "at a good price".

I had big ideas for this machine. My first purchase for my Mercury was from an automotive mail order company called Warshawsky located in Chicago, Illinois. I purchased two items, a "fake continental kit" and two cheap plastic gold letters (my initials) which I proudly placed on the upper portion of the continental kit. Today, we know this automotive accessories supplier as the J. C. Whitney company. The company actually began in 1915 as the Warshawsky company, which was at the time, a scrap metal yard located on the south side of Chicago. The company was founded by a Lithuanian immigrant named Israel Warshawsky. Israel Warshawsky bought out failed auto parts manufacturers, salvaged junk cars, and sold every usable part on them. Despite tuff times, during the great depression, the company grew because people couldn't afford new parts for their cars.

By 1933, Israel began publishing a catalog for his inventory of salvaged auto parts. At the time you could buy Ford Model "A" cylinder heads for \$3.15. In 1934, Israel's son Roy joined the company after graduating from the University of Chicago. In 1937 Roy came up with the idea of expanding out with a nationwide catalog which would incorporate new parts and accessories. He placed an ad in **Popular Mechanics Magazine** for sixty dollars. The ad paid off as the response to the ad was overwhelming. Roy's dad, Israel, passed away in 1943 and Roy took over the business. Although the company had always been known in Chicago as Warshawsky & Company, Roy gave the catalog a different name: **J. C. Whitney & Company**. To this day no one really knows why Roy picked that name. In 1973 John Armstrong was hired to computerize the company. The company had become the largest direct mailer of aftermarket auto parts and accessories in the U. S. Roy retired in 1991 due to illness.

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In 1995, Tim Ford arrived at J. C. Whitney to be the company's president. By 1955, when Ford joined the company, years of customer and vendor confusion had finally caught up with the company. "Customers would order from J. C. Whitney and end up getting a box from Warshawsky Co." "We got in here and transitioned" the Warshawsky customer case over to J. C. Whitney over a year-and-half-to-two-year time frame by putting both names on the catalog. Eventually, the Warshawsky name was dropped from the catalog. The Warshawsky family owned the company for 87 years before selling 100% interest in the company to the Riverside Company created Whitney Automotive group, which owned other companies such as [CarParts.com](http://CarParts.com), [StylinTrucks.com](http://StylinTrucks.com), and [AllBikeSupershop.com](http://AllBikeSupershop.com). In 2010, J. C. Whitney merged with the U. S. Auto Parts.

*Happy Motoring.....Ron Couturier*

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