



Alan Sargent

Alan G. Loofbourrow

1912-1990

By Rupert L. Atkin

ALAN G. LOOFBOURROW, retired vice-president, engineering, Chrysler Corporation, died on December 1, 1990, at the age of seventy-eight.

Alan was born in Columbus, Ohio, on June 9, 1912. He earned a B.S. in mechanical engineering at Ohio State University in 1934, a master of automotive engineering at the University of Michigan in 1935, and an M.S. in engineering at Chrysler Institute of Engineering in 1937.

The Chrysler Corporation has prided itself over the years for its engineering excellence. Because of his outstanding engineering capabilities, the Loofbourrow name has been synonymous with Chrysler during his career with the company, which spanned more than forty years. He has been more than an outstanding engineer. He also has been one of the industry's foremost spokesmen for the engineering profession.

Throughout his career, he either invented, administered, or provided engineering support that fostered many successful innovations in Chrysler cars, as well as the engineering development in various car models themselves. These included the generation of compact cars, the 1976 Dodge Aspen and Plymouth Volare models, with their uniquely designed torsion bar suspension system. He was a prime mover in development programs resulting in advances that have been introduced into the automobile, including electronics, advanced suspension

systems, and safety, emissions control, and fuel economy features. Examples are the introduction of electronic ignition in 1972 and electronic lean burn in 1976.

Loofbourrow's involvement in all phases of automotive and engine design is reflected in fourteen patents registered in his name. His inventions in power steering, automatic transmissions, energy-absorbing steering columns, and a gas turbine car transmission are examples of the significance of his contributions to automotive engineering.

Alan was known as an articulate spokesman on behalf of the auto industry, and he earned a reputation for his firm and knowledgeable positions on controversial technical issues. He appeared as an expert witness before congressional committees and other forums to give engineering analyses of complex emissions and safety issues and alternative power plants. For example, at a time when many auto engineers and industry analysts were touting the Wankel rotary engine as a replacement within the decade for the conventional engine, he is quoted in the July 6, 1972, *Detroit News* as saying the rotary would turn out to be a "fantasy."

During World War II Alan was chief engineer of Chrysler's program in the development of the atomic bomb. He later served on the U.S. Department of Commerce's Panel on Electrically Powered Vehicles and the Munitions Board's Industry Advisory Committee on Internal Combustion Engines.

In March 1977 Alan was elected to the National Academy of Engineering. Other honors and recognition included the following from Ohio State University: in 1960 the Benjamin G. Lamme Medal "for meritorious achievement in engineering," in 1970 a Centennial Achievement Award, and in 1972 an honorary doctor of science degree. In 1965 he was given the Gold Knight Award of the National Management Association.

Alan was a fellow of the Society of Automotive Engineers, and a member of the Detroit Board of Commerce, the Automotive Organization Team, the board of the Michigan Opera Theatre, the Oakland University Library Board, the Ohio State University Development Fund Board, and the Ohio State University Indus

trial Advisory Committee for the Department of Mechanical Engineering.

Of Alan's 1934 college graduating class of nearly two hundred, he was the only one to be hired by the auto industry that year. He never regretted his choice of Chrysler where he made a lasting career. In his words: "Competing automakers had two or three times the head-count in engineering, yet we've managed to cover 95 to 98 percent of their market offerings and still be innovative. That shows we've had a pretty good bunch of engineers. We have to be selective. We can't test every possibility or approach. If you can try every alternative leading to a solution it's not very difficult to pick the right one. We have not been able to afford that extravagance."

A deep interest in the operation of mechanisms was one of Alan's major characteristics. His home workshop was complete and well-used to develop personal projects and ideas. As an ardent golfer, he developed and patented a device for improving the swing. In "retirement," he continued engineering work as a consultant, but he also became involved in real estate development, banking, and the glamorous field of treasure hunting. Thanks to his scientific perception, he recognized the leading-edge technology developed by a group of oceanography engineers engaged in searching out sunken treasure, and he helped back them financially. This program led to a discovery valued at a billion dollars.

During his later years, he encountered extensive medical problems that required many operations over a two-year period and resulted in the loss of both legs. Typical of his determination, he became involved in development of a van and other devices that allowed him to operate in many of his fields of interest with the humor, enthusiasm, and thoroughness for which he will be remembered by his many friends and associates.