

Tucker: The Man and His Dream

Directed by Francis Coppola

Cast overview

Jeff Bridges	.....	Preston Tucker
Joan Allen	.....	Vera Tucker
Martin Landau	.....	Abe Karatz
Frederic Forrest	.....	Eddie Dean
Mako	.....	Jimmy Sakuyama
Elias Koteas	.....	Alex Tremulis
Christian Slater	.....	Junior
Nina Siemaszko	.....	Marilyn Lee Tucker
Anders Johnson	.....	Johnny Tucker
Corin Nemec	.....	Noble
Marshall Bell	.....	Frank
Jay O. Sanders	.....	Kirby
Peter Donat	.....	Kerner
Dean Goodman	.....	Bennington
John X. Heart	.....	Ferguson's Agent

Plot Summary

Based on a true story. Shortly after World War II, Preston Tucker is a grandiose schemer with a new dream, to produce the best cars ever made. With the assistance of Abe Karatz and some impressive salesmanship on his own part, he obtains funding and begins to build his factory. The whole movie also has many parallels with director Coppola's own efforts to build a new movie studio of his own.

Historical Background

In the late 1940's, Preston Tucker intended to mass-produce a "car of the future" with advanced safety, styling, and engineering features. His goal was to create a car that could be powerful, good-looking and also safe at the same time. Of course, the big car makers at Detroit didn't think much about something new and unknown and therefore, conflict was unavoidable. The Tucker car never went into actual production because a federal investigation into the company's management practices led to its collapse.

The automobile has its engine in the rear, an area where the front passenger can crouch during a collision, and a center headlight that turned with the steering wheel. The sedan's most striking feature is its avant-garde styling, developed by Alex Tremulis and J. Gordon Lippincott and Company. Its features— including pop-up tail lights and irregularly shaped windows— give it a futuristic appearance even today. Keep in mind the manufacturing year, 1948.

Questions:

1. Preston Tucker has a vision, but what other qualities does he have that make him an entrepreneur? (3)
2. What turned Tucker's first "no" into a yes that got the vision started towards reality?
3. a) How does Tucker set up the government reps at lunch?
b) What is his main selling point during this presentation?
4. What is the difference between "people who write letters" and "people who buy stock?"
5. How does Tucker motivate and encourage the people who work for him? Give an example.
6. Why did Tucker need a Board of Directors?
7. The real Tucker car had many new innovations. What did the innovation of the seat belt imply to a car buying public at that time?
8. Tucker says, "People believe what they read in the papers even if they don't believe it."
a) What does he mean by this?
b) How does this apply to Tucker and his dream?
9. Preston Tucker extols the virtues of the free enterprise system.
a) According to him, what is the key to this system?
b) What caused Tucker's downfall given that this system was operating for him?
10. What does Tucker mean when he says, "It's the idea that counts, Abe, and the dream."
11. Preston Tucker was known to have a winning personality. One man bet one hundred dollars that "no one could spend five minutes with Preston Tucker and not like him." How did Tucker's magnetic personality contribute to his career and his company?
12. Was Preston Tucker an innovative genius or just a dreamer who did not succeed?