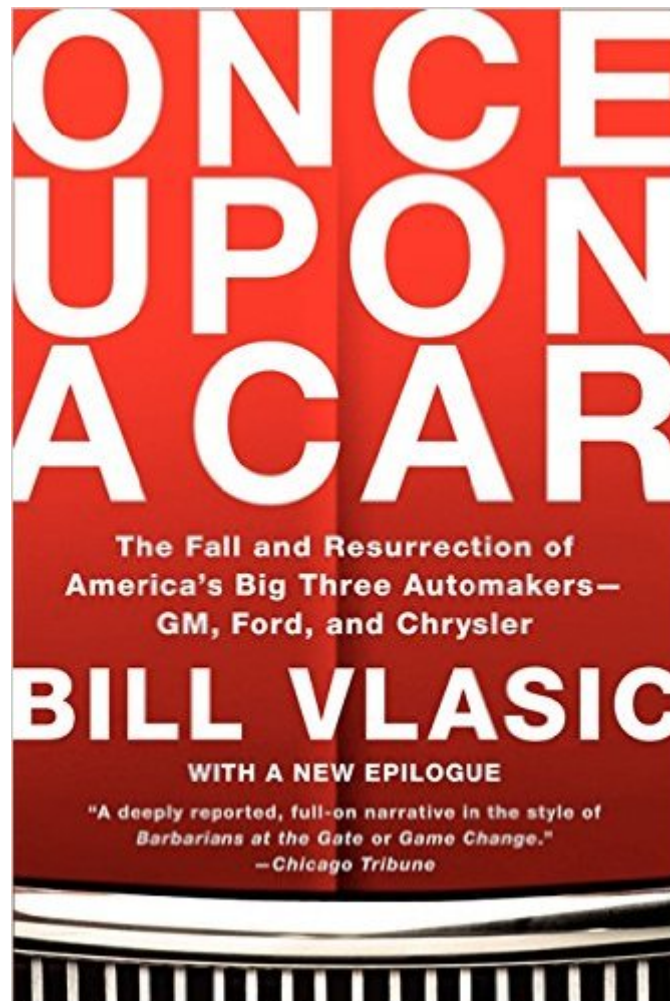


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Once Upon A Car: The Fall And Resurrection Of America's Big Three Automakers--GM, Ford, And Chrysler



Synopsis

Once Upon a Car is the fascinating epic story of the rise, fall, and rebirth of the Big Three U.S. automakers, General Motors, Ford, and Chrysler. Written by Bill Vlasic, the Detroit bureau chief for the New York Times and acclaimed author of Taken for a Ride, this eye-opening, richly anecdotal work is more than a riveting and insightful business history. It offers a clear-eyed view of the present day automobile industry and of Detroit, the city that spawned it, going far beyond the corporate and federal maneuverings to explore the impact the car companies' failures have had on the overall economy, and more importantly what they have done to people's lives. Relevant and thought-provoking, Once Upon a Car is an unforgettable journey deep inside this quintessentially American industry.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

For a book billed as a "uniquely American story of success, failure and redemption", Vlasic does a remarkable job in narrating the "failure". While referencing the past success and mostly hope as bookends, Vlasic provides an informative and entertaining look into the events that shaped the stories of the American automobile industry. Narrating this story with the CEOs, other key execs, investors (activist and passive) as the key actors, Vlasic is able to provide a backdrop devoid of any need for political overtones or editorial liberties or an 'academic' analysis. That lack of analysis may deter some readers who may find the almost complete focus on the key players (see 's own review for a snapshot of the key 'actors'). Another key insight a reader will glean is the role of labor unions and the power (right or wrong) in directly impacting the fate of the very companies that employ

them. In a rare editorial comment, Vlasic points out that there is "nothing inherently better in American workers than...." and almost goes on to make the case of how unions may have been over-reaching. Through the intertwined narration of the Big 3's trials and tribulations, a reader will be able to discern almost three unique management styles ranging from a benevolent leader who knew when to step down (Ford), a degree of detachment bordering on indifference. The stark contrasts in the management styles and personalities is a treat for any reader and could easily form the basis of leadership case studies. A neutral observer would end up having a more positive view of Bill Ford and to some extent both Bush and Obama (how Bush didn't want the incoming president to be faced with the crisis and how Obama imposed conditions on bailout). Ford comes out looking as a better-run company.

By the time I'd gotten about a quarter of a way through Bill Vlasic's "Once Upon a Car," I was ready to throw my Kindle across the room. It wasn't because of the writing -- Bill Vlasic, who knows the U.S. auto industry about as well as anyone who doesn't actually WORK for one of the Big Three, was spot-on with his analysis in so many ways. No, the reason for almost wrecking my Kindle was because I couldn't believe the stupidity of the entire industry, from the UAW, to management at the Big Three, to mega-investor Kirk Kerkorian, who seemed to be dabbling in the industry for the sheer joy of making mischief. In this book, Vlasic tells the full story of why Chrysler and GM imploded (and why Ford came close to doing so) when the Great Recession hit. He starts with General Motors, nicely outlining the very insular and out-of-touch culture of that organization then moves onto Ford's slow turnaround. He handles one of the highlights -- the breakup of DaimlerChrysler -- with enough drama to keep readers riveted. Vlasic fills out his tale-telling with interviews with many of the principals. For example, thanks to his positioning of Dieter Zetsche with DaimlerChrysler (and Mercedes-Benz), I no longer think that the Germans were soulless creatures, determined to "Germanize" Chrysler into becoming Mercedes-Benz/US. He added color to these people whom most of us know from the press. Vlasic even lends a sympathetic brush to Rick Wagoner of GM -- though Wagoner was so hopelessly out of touch with his actions, he was, at least, humanized. Why only three stars? A couple of things. First, I was a little taken aback at the portrayal of Alan Mulally as Ford's savior. Vlasic brushes by the fact that Ford was in just as much trouble as GM and Chrysler by 2008-2009.

This is an excellent book and anyone with an interest on how and why the American auto industry fell and rose again should read this book. Vlasic expertly and professionally gives you an insider's

perspective of what was said during all those corporate meetings, and gives you a look on how those executives were feeling at the time (a period from 2005-2011). If you want to know why Daimler dumped Chrysler, why some executives left #1 Toyota for jobs at Ford and Chrysler, how Alan Mulally got recruited by Bill Ford, how Kirk Kerkorian and Jerry York played (or tried to play) a role in the resurrection of the Auto Industry, how mergers between companies were contemplated and abandoned, and why Rick Wagoner got ousted as CEO of GM, read this book. What you might also like about this book is that not only does Vlasic interview the top players and CEOs within the companies but he also interviews blue collar line workers to get and show their perspective on what was going during this major shake up in the American auto industry. What you receive is a well-rounded picture of what happened during this time in history. The thing I liked the most about this book is that it is a professionally written book and is written like a story or a fly on the wall during the fall and resurrection of the Auto Industry. So many books I have read on the subject are just one person pontificating on his opinion of what happened. What Vlasic does is he tries to give a complete and unbiased account of what happened. Some have stated that Vlasic is too pro-Ford, or too pro-Mulally.

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