

History of the Squire SS100

Here is the detailed history of the Squire SS100 as was collected by Ed Spielman and was passed to me by Arthur R. Stahl, the director of the American Squire SS100 registry. Reproduced/edited with permission.

Ed Felbin had owned Jaguars and other foreign sports vehicles. There were many reliability problems with them. Felbin saw NBC personality Dave Garroway's white Jaguar SS-100 and thought it one of the most beautiful cars in the world. Having owned that succession of troublesome Jaguars, and others, Felbin thought a new car of classic design with elegant foreign coachwork and modern American power was a good and saleable idea. In this, before the days of 'kit cars', Felbin was ahead of his time.

Ed Felbin (a well known radio personality in Philadelphia, broadcasting under the name FRANK FORD) was one of several principals in the creation of five music fairs, among them Valley Forge Music Fair (established 1955), Cherry Hill and Long Island's Westbury Music Fair. Felbin had sufficient capital in the late 60's, early 70's to take on such an expensive project as this dream car. But Felbin, who was not very technically oriented, worked with Mike Wolf, an auto dealer in Philadelphia who sold Saabs and Fiats. Wolf was to get a profit percentage in the enterprise, though Felbin was to fund it. (Mike Wolf is since deceased.) It was Wolf who had suggested the particular Ford power components and he was the principal technical designer of the Squire SS100. (Spielman met Mike Wolf at the New York coliseum Auto Show in April, 1971, at the Squire Mezzanine display.)

Felbin and Mike Wolf, knew a man by the name of Jim Carson, a car dealer and fancier, who had an old original Jaguar SS-100 in his barn. Ed and Wolf went there and laboriously drew detailed plans and sketches of every angle of the car. Felbin went to Detroit to Ford Motor Company with Ray Heppenstall, a race driver and builder as consultant. In Dearborn they were made to sign a release to the effect that whatever idea they presented, Ford had already thought of. At Ford, Felbin and Heppenstall met with an executive named McDonald who assisted them. A deal was made for the Ford power and components on the projected new automobile. The 'Squire' name had no connection whatever to a British sports car briefly made in England decades before by Adrian Squire. Felbin's car needed an identity, a prefix before 'SS-100' to set it apart and give it an aristocratic sound. Felbin was playing golf at a 'Squire's Country Club', which proved suitable inspiration. Felbin simply removed the 's' and somewhere before the eighteenth green, the name 'Squire SS100' was born.

Felbin decided to build the car in Italy. The Italian Trade Commission in Philadelphia gave him names of potential builders, among which, was Giancarlo Ramponi. Felbin and Wolf went to Milan to see Ramponi (whose secretary was Gina Woerth). Felbin struck a deal with Ramponi, an Italian industrialist who made agricultural power-plants with imported Volvo marine engines. Thus, the notion was founded (as indicated in early Squire SS100 brochures and literature) that the cars were to be crafted by Carozzeria Ramponi. Ramponi assigned the work to an engineer, Roberto Vito. Ramponi/Vito built the Squire SS100 prototype in the town of Triuggio, Italy (near Milan), but never completed it.

After months, Felbin was concerned about the lack of activity. He visited Italy unannounced and found, to his disappointment, that no further work had been done and that the prototype had not been completed. Rather than see the project go wrong, he went to Italian authorities to find another builder to carry on with the project. They recommended Frank Reisner American creator of the small coach building company, Intermeccanica. Reisner, at time was constructing the Indra automobile at his small coach works.

A deal was struck for Reisner/Intermeccanica to construct one hundred Squire SS100 automobiles for Felbin's Auto Sport Inc. of Philadelphia. Felbin shipped 100 Ford 250 cubic inch, 6 cylinder engines with transmissions and rear ends to Reisner's shop in the town of Trofarello near Turin (across the street from the Fiat railroad yard). Ford engines and complete power units were shipped to Italy under bond. No duty would be imposed if they left the country in completed cars. Therefore, though Italian made, no Squire automobiles were sold in Italy (or a tax would have to have been paid).

According to Felbin there were one hundred power units at Reisner's shop and security was lax. Fifty of the units disappeared from the plant. The order of cars to be constructed was then cut to fifty.

Problems arose; Felbin paid for trips for himself and Mike Wolf to Italy to try to solve them. As per the original brochure, the prototype sported Borrani wire wheels, which were to have been used, but Borrani wouldn't guarantee that the chrome wouldn't crack due to natural flex of the wire wheels. Felbin contacted Dunlop who would guarantee the chrome on their wheels. Felbin bought 250 wheels (five wheels for fifty cars). They were shipped by air from England.

The U.S. government prohibited use of 'knockoff' spinners in wheels therefore octagonal hubs were made. They used expensive units that appear on no other automobile. These knockoff hubs were custom made by Reisner/Intermeccanica. Felbin had the finished prototype returned to America anticipating arrival of the other cars. Felbin took the completed prototype to the Department of Transportation. He had to make a trailer to haul the car to Michigan to Ethyl Corporation for exhaust emissions tests, which it passed. The cars had pre-approved stock Ford parts. According to Felbin, Reisner's Intermeccanica completed fifty cars that were shipped to the U.S. The first shipment of six cars went to Heppenstall for preparation before sale. Upon arrival much additional work was necessary to prepare all of the Squires for sale. Felbin contracted with a mechanic named Armando to do the additional work on the Squires to make them street legal in the USA. Later when Felbin couldn't pay Armando, Felbin gave him the Squire prototype to Armando to settle his debt.

All the Squire SS100's came to Felbin at either Baltimore or Newark. Ed Felbin recalled that a D.B. Kaufmann in Louisiana had bought one of the cars, liked it and became a Squire dealer in Kenner, Louisiana.

There was a press luncheon at Tavern On The Green in New York City when the car was first announced. Felbin showed his new Squire SS100 in Boston and in April 1971 at the New York Auto Show. He then flew the car to the Los Angeles Auto Show and to Pasadena. The International Auto Show at the Place Bonaventure in Montreal, Canada made the Squire SS100 their 'star car' and put it on the cover of their souvenir book. Pictures of the Squire SS100 appeared in Playboy magazine about February 1972.

Felbin had the car shown at Miami's Doral Country Club in May of 1972. Felbin expected production cars to arrive at his Auto Sport, Inc. by July of 1972.

Listed as having been manufactured between 1972-73, fifty Squire SS100's were actually made and shipped to America. Ed Felbin began the project in 1969-70. The entire enterprise, both in America and Italy took four to five years.

The following information came from a conversation between Paula Reisner and Ed Spielman in July 1991:

Frank and Paula Reisner were principals in the company of Intermeccanica that made the fifty Squire SS100 automobiles. According to Paula Reisner in Vancouver, the original body mold was made for Ramponi. Intermeccanica used that mold to make the bodies one at a time. Though Paula verifies that Mike Wolf was the original technical designer of the Squire SS100 automobile, Frank Reisner re-designed the chassis. Paula recalled Intermeccanica's fabrication of certain parts. The expensive brass knockoff hubs were cast in Turin then machined there. The knockoff hubs were made for the Squire SS100 only.

Each of the fifty Squire grill shells was hand-made in the old coach-built manner, panels beaten over a wooden buck. The Squire chrome headlights were made in Turin specifically for Intermeccanica and this car. The windshields and glass were custom fabricated by Saint Gobain-Vis.

Paula Reisner recalled that the torsion bars were originally Alfa Romeo but were modified by having the ends machined to a square fitting. Torsion bar bushings were machined from Teflon.

According to Paula Reisner, after so many years, all of the original molds have been lost and no spare parts are available.

The Squire SS100 Registry provided the above photos/information.

"Our group has located forty-three of the fifty Squire SS100s ever made and would like to track down the other seven. In addition, there are a few Squires for sale at what we consider a "good" deal for anyone interested in obtaining a classic car at bargain prices.

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