



Brooks Stevens was born June 7, 1911 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, the son of William C. Stevens and Sally Stevens. William C. Stevens was Executive Vice President and Director of Design and Development and the Cutler-Hammer Company in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, a large manufacturer of electrical motor controls. He was the inventor of the preselective gearshift for automobiles in the year 1916 and attempted to revolutionize the American automobile manufacturing industry with this novel preselective gear shifting device. The first version was electronic and actuated by push buttons under the steering wheel. A second and more advanced version utilized a lever on the continuation of the spark and gas range above the steering wheel, notched and lettered to indicate reverse, neutral, first, second and third. To further accomplish his goal of cleaning up the front compartment of the automobile, inasmuch as he had now removed the shift lever from the floor, he invented the dash pullout hand brake to complete the opening up of the front seat to accommodate three people.

At an early age Brooks Stevens accompanied his father around the country to automobile shows and observed him demonstrating these automotive innovations and trying to convince the industry that they were essential to improved driving skill and comfort. At the termination of World War I, he foresaw the advent of the increase in women drivers by the use of these simplified shifting controls. A few hardy women had accompanied the Red Cross ambulance corps in France, attempting to drive a stick shift truck by double clutching crash gears in the conventional transmission. This undoubtedly led Brooks Stevens into a natural interest in the automobile. In his father's continual pursuit of the automobile companies - the independents and the greats, including General Motors - he drove numerous experimental makes of automobile and an interest in their design was born.

Brooks Stevens attended the Milwaukee schools from the lower grades at the Milwaukee Normal School and moving on to the German - English Academy, the Milwaukee County Day School and the newly formed University School for precollege training. After his graduation in 1929, he went on to Cornell University and the study of architecture and was often chided by his professors for his interest in the automobile. One of them stated that if he spent as much time on the design of the architectural project or building to be designed as he did on the elegant Duesenberg or Mercedes touring cars used as entourage in front of the buildings, he might become a good architect.

In 1933 he returned to Milwaukee and his father interested him in pursuing the Industrial Design aspect of projects for his company and, from this initial beginning and helpful impetus, he opened his own office in 1933 with two employees. Assignments continued from his father's firm and a reputation began to develop with other manufacturers. It must be remembered that this is the period of the birth of the profession of Industrial Design

formally in the United States, with contemporary pioneers such as Normal Bel Geddes, Henry Dreyfus, Raymond Loewy, Walter Darwin Teague and others. Brooks Stevens emerged as a definite pioneer with a small number of contemporaries in Chicago, but the principal impetus and publicity relative to the profession emanated from New York City. His early accomplishments were the design of the first electric steam iron, the first efforts ever to add aesthetics of a streamlined nature to the farm tractor for Allis-Chalmers, and the first electric clothes dryer with a glass window in the door for observing the function. He also indulged in specialized truck design for the Miller Brewing Company, Schlitz, Wisconsin Ice & Coal Company, and Oscar Mayer.

This work led to the design of land yachts, a tractor and trailer unit with accommodations for seven people for William Woods Plankinton, and the design of sales cars for the Western Printing Company of Racine. H. F. Johnson of the Johnson Wax Company commissioned Stevens to design a mobile land cruiser to act as an office and home on wheels for use in South America to research the source of coranauba wax, due to the loss of oriental waxes. It is now historically the first motor home and began a new industry.

He was also heavily involved in the housewares and electric appliance industry with the Mirro Corporation, electronic controls with Allen-Bradley, medical and dental furniture with Hamilton Industries, and continual work in the toy field for many manufacturers - Roadmaster bicycles, Sears Free Spirit, Ward's Olympic, Junior Toy velocipedes and Binghamton Toys - involving toy automobiles, fire engines, tractors, trucks, etc. Involved in the household appliance field were refrigerators, freezers, vacuum cleaners, washing machines, carpet sweepers and many other appliances, including the first appliances to break the color barrier in kitchens, a pale blue interior refrigerator, and the substitution of "Mirro Blue" handles and knobs rather than the usual "telephone black" decor on aluminum ware, as well as color in cookware.

In the early '40s his work in the automobile field and publications of SAE papers involving this work brought him to the attention of Delmar G. Roos of Willys Overland Motors, famous manufacturers of the Army Jeep, and he became design consultant to this firm for all postwar products involving the Jeep station wagon, the Jeep line of trucks, and the now classic Willys Jeepster.

In the mid '40s he was commissioned by the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul Railroad to design ten complete railroad trains, including the famous Hiawathas running from Chicago to Minneapolis St. Paul and the transcontinental Olympian Hiawathas running from Chicago to Seattle. His contemporary design colleagues, such as Raymond Loewy and Henry Dreyfus, were commissioned to design the Broadway Limited and the New York Central 20th Century Limited respectively. Brooks Stevens was at an advantage in this railroad design assignment in that the Milwaukee Road built their own cars and he was able to design the train completely, from the locomotive to the aerodynamic Skytop Lounge car, as well as the intermediate dome cars used on the Olympian. In the case of his competitors, they were forced to use the standard Pullman car design configuration and cross sections, windows and surface development and could only color style the exterior and deco-

rate the interior from the standpoint of paint, trim and fabrics.

In this early period Brooks Stevens introduced design and styling to the outboard motor in conjunction with Evinrude and Johnson, and to this day continues heavily involved in work of this nature for Outboard Marine Corporation. All divisions of Outboard Marine Corporation made use of Brooks Stevens Design Associates' efforts, including the now famous Lawn-Boy rotary mower line, Cushman scooters, trucksters, in-plant vehicles and golf cars, with special versions for Jackie Gleason and other celebrities, as well as a new division which entered the early period of the snowmobile craze. Johnson and Evinrude snowmobiles were distinctive and innovative in every way and special show model snowmobiles were designed by this firm - twin-track snow coupe and a final low-slung twin-track Indianapolis style racing snowmobile which revolutionized the industry. Versions of this design are being used today in the professional snowmobile racing.

The work with Outboard Marine Corporation brought him to the attention of the marine industry and he was retained by the Chris Craft Corporation to design their postwar line of 52 foot enclosed bridge deck cruisers.

First to recognize the need for sophistication in garden equipment, Stevens styled the Lawn-Boy rotary mower now used around the world ... innovated rear-engine golf car styling for garden tractors for Gilson Brothers Company...and designed the most popular advancement in home tractor equipment in years, the "Estate Keeper" for Bolens, the first articulated garden tractor for mowing around trees.

Brooks Stevens Design Associates' German client, Gutbrod-Werke of Saarboucken, Germany, retained the design firm to redesign all of its lawn and garden equipment, including a line of institutional short wheel base, 4-wheel drive, mid-transverse engine, enclosed pickup trucks capable of accepting institutional mowing equipment and attachments for parks, schools, cemeteries, etc. This long-standing relationship resulted in Gutbrod-Werke increasing their percentage of the European market place from 43% to over 76%.

In turn, J. C. Bamford, of Uttoxeter, England, requested this design firm to redesign their entire line of hydraulically operated back hoes and mobile cranes.

In the automotive field, work progressed in a continuous manner and from 1940 through 1980 at least 46 automotive design assignments were contributed to by the Brooks Stevens Design Associates firm. Following a long relationship with Willys in the immediate postwar period, Brooks Stevens was approached by Henry and Edgar Kaiser to collaborate on the Kaiser-Frazer automobiles from 1948 to 1955. In 1950 Brooks Stevens was called to Europe on an assignment for the Alfa Romeo firm in Italy to attend the Paris Salon, and to proceed to Rome and the factory in Milano to discuss some work in connection with the 1951 1800 Sprint series. This began the European sphere of operations which lasted over 30 years, during which cars were designed and built in Europe for Paris, Geneva and New York shows, and prototypes for his many European and American clients.

The Willys relationship continued and moved to Sao Paulo, Brazil, where he was active for a number of years in the redesign of South American production vehicles. In the early '60s he redesigned the entire Jeep station wagon line for the first time since its inception and the American Motors Wagoneer was directly descended from that initial design, with only a minor change in treatment. As recently as 1979 Brooks Stevens Design Associates contributed to the downsizing of this station wagon concept and the new AMC XJ-100 Wagoneer and Cherokee models were to appear in 1984 as a result of this collaboration.

The design firm was also retained by Studebaker from 1962 to 1967 and all models of the Studebaker Hawk and conventional passenger car lines were designed under the jurisdiction of Brooks Stevens Design Associates.

In 1969 Brooks Stevens was retained by American Motors Corporation and acted as a consultant on the American Motors Hornet, Gremlin, Javelin, AMX, and the Classic Ambassador series.

Brooks Stevens was also responsible for having created an entirely new industry in the world of the automobile. The Excalibur was the first innovative attempt at creating a "contemporary classic" and creating the term as well. In short, a new old car. Many tried and many fell by the wayside in this period of time. The Excalibur was manufactured by Brooks Stevens' two oldest sons, David Brooks Stevens, President, and William C. Stevens, Executive Vice President of Excalibur Automobile Corporation in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Throughout this entire 50 year history, packaging and corporate identification have been a large percentage of the firm's design effort. Banks, manufacturers, service organizations, insurance companies, medical and dental manufacturers, marine manufacturers and a long list of retail establishments, food producers and others made use of this service. One of the more prominent would have been the complete redesign of Miller High Life beer packaging, including the redesign of the glass bottles, cans and outer packaging, and the creation of the new Miller logo entitled the "Soft Cross," which was taken from the cross-necked label of the bottle and abstracted into a red soft cross form, including a newly modified Miller signature. This has been emblazoned on a lighted mammoth revolving sign on top of the brewery for the last 30 years or more.

In the case of Briggs & Stratton, visual styling was added to gasoline engines seen in garden tractors and in stationary use. The same design firm and its abilities were applied to individualize the company's corporate jet and to follow through with pans packaging, color coded and keyed to the product line, capped by a face lift of the corporate logo. The corporate logo may be steeped in tradition, yet it may be refined and face lifted to be more contemporary and form a better application to modern products and advertising.

An automotive achievement in design for the Briggs & Stratton Corporation was the highly publicized hybrid/electric automobile, combining the use of the Briggs & Stratton 18 horsepower gasoline engine, also styled by the same designer, and an electric motor and batteries, which produced a viable gas and electric car

capable of achieving up to 164 miles per gallon of gasoline and could obtain a top speed of 72 miles per hour. The fiberglass car body for this attractive, contemporary hatchback coupe was designed by Brooks Stevens' son, Kipp Stevens, in 1979 and the prototype model was produced within the model shops of Brooks Stevens Design Associates.

The firm's relationship with Kearney & Trecker bridged 35 years and included consideration and the design of everything within the company image - corporate identity, building and plants, and the complete product line.

In the case of the 3M Company, a complete packaging program was undertaken over 20 years ago with a new corporate identity and continued over a period of six years in packaging application. This relationship with 3M continued beyond the packaging assignment to include product design in other divisions. The 3M Company is composed of 28 divisions and produces over 40,000 products.

Brooks Stevens Design Associates also engaged in architectural assignments in collaboration with general contractors and/or an architectural firm to translate his designs into finished buildings. The entire Miller brewery redesign was under his direction and a new corporate office building designed, built, detailed and furnished, with specially designed interiors, was the result of his close relationship with Mr. Frederick C. Miller, President of the Miller Brewing Company. An interesting point of design excellence and longevity is the fact that the Miller packaging as created by Brooks Stevens continued on even after the brewery was purchased by Philip Morris many years ago.

Continuing in the architectural area, Brooks Stevens was responsible for many designs for automotive show-rooms, theaters, bowling lanes, office buildings, motel concepts, and a very unique hotel and convention center complex called the Satellite Hotel, a concept developed by the designer to solve the Milwaukee convention center problem and lack of adequate hotel rooms to attract large conventions to the city. This concept was made up of a central convention center building and perimeter first floor galleria of shops with five towers, one in each corner, and with a central tower incorporating offices, banquet rooms, a sky top restaurant which revolved, and was flanked by four individual 250 room towers with central elevator facilities, plumbing, wiring, air conditioning, etc. through the central core. These four towers were each topped by an individual ethnic style restaurant - one German, one French, one Chinese, and one American - and were joined by skywalks at the upper level for individuals to move from tower to tower at this height and observe the city from an aerial view, which would include Lake Michigan. Difficulties in convincing the Common Council of this concept as being viable resulted in the Mecca substitute, which proved to be less than a great convention asset to the city. Brooks' Satellite tower concept cropped up all over the world as an architecturally viable and visually impressive type of structure. The frustration of city political government and a vacillating Common Council kept Milwaukee from having a first in the nation in a combined convention center and hotel facility.

Other architectural collaborative efforts included several complete plant designs for the Square D Company in Wisconsin and Iowa. The Milwaukee plant is now occupied by the lock division of Briggs & Stratton Corporation. The Universal Foods office building today stands directly behind the post office building in downtown Milwaukee and represents a very typical example of this design firm's work.

Brooks Stevens, "a functionalist but also an aesthete--," as a Paris news writer thumbnails him, had his designing hands in the sale of more than \$6 billion worth of widely varied products per year. With a clientele spanning three continents, Stevens prefers his own succinct description of himself, "Businessman-engineer—stylist, and in that order.

Recipient of many professional honors and proven one of the most influential minds in Industrial Design, Stevens was a frequently controversial figure. He was the unabashed author of the candidly commercial phrase "Planned Obsolescence" which, in 1953, stirred up a storm in the trade, press, and with the consumer public. Planned Obsolescence was defined as the desire to own something a little newer, a little better a little sooner than is necessary and eventually become generic, used by many manufacturers to advertise the constant improvement of their products. General Motors was a continual advocate of this philosophy.

Stevens persistently watched and helped foster the growth of the Common Market. He had a strong belief that "man can live with man all over the world, if man will trade with man. I'd rather compete with other countries in the marketplace than in the rocket place."

Brooks Stevens, a pioneer in the profession of Industrial Design and one of the ten Charter Fellows of the Industrial Designers Society of America, counseled over 300 clients in all fields of industry since 1933. These assignments came from clients all over the U.S.A., Germany, England, France, Italy, Costa Rica and Brazil. A competent staff of 14 associates and designers collaborated in these global pursuits. Brooks Stevens was quoted as being "The Seer That Made Milwaukee Famous."

In 1978 his son, Kipp K. Stevens, returned from New York City, having graduated in 1974 from Syracuse University with a Bachelor of Industrial Design degree. Upon graduation he was hired by his father's close friend and colleague Richard Teague, Vice President of Styling of American Motors Corporation, in the exterior design department. In 1975 he moved to New York city to take a design position with Raymond Loewy International and after more than a year there, he moved on to Henry Dreyfus Associates. After considerable experience with this firm in many areas, he was hired by C. L. Mauro & Associates, where he specialized in high technology medical equipment. In 1978 he returned to Milwaukee as Executive Vice President of Brooks Stevens Design Associates and in April of 1979 Kipp Stevens was appointed President and Chief Executive Officer and handles the management of the business today.

Brooks Stevens was involved with the Milwaukee Institute of Art & Design as an advisor and instructor of its industrial design classes. He also oversaw the Brooks Stevens Design Research Center, an educational resource for students and the general public desiring to learn more about Stevens and industrial design. In April of 1983 MIAD created the Brooks Stevens Chair of Industrial Design, and Mr. Thomas David was awarded this professorship. In 1985 Brooks Stevens was presented with the first Honorary Doctorate for Industrial Design from the Milwaukee Institute of Art & Design.

In October of 1985 the Milwaukee Institute of Art & Design requested an exhibit representing a 50 year retrospective, to be used as an exhibit in their new 9,000 square foot exhibition hall. This was assembled by Brooks Stevens and Kipp Stevens, who selected over 1,000 photographs from old files totaling more than 15,000 prints. This exhibit included early work from 1933 throughout the years in photographic form and the use of over 400 renderings in color, as well as a cross section of actual products from fishing reels to machine tools to motor-cycles, restricted only by objects that could be fitted through the front door and up to the sixth floor of the MIAD school building. The exhibit ran from October 20 to November 11. With the move to their new building in 1992, MIAD created the Brooks Stevens Gallery of Industrial Design, an exhibit space dedicated to the designs of Brooks Stevens. The inaugural exhibit, "Transportation," featured his designs for transportation ranging from tricycles to trains. The following exhibit, "Imagineering," dealt with his household and consumer goods designs from lighters to lawn mowers. In 1994 the gallery celebrated his 60th year in industrial design with an all encompassing exhibit showcasing all of his major clients since 1934. The Brooks Stevens Gallery of Industrial Design remains today as a revolving exhibit featuring work of Brooks Stevens, the firm, and other ID companies.

Brooks Stevens passed away on January 4, 1995 of heart failure.

"There are great men in this world who make history and great men who are history. The former are the warriors and statesmen and media darlings who get all of the headlines in the history books. But equally important – perhaps even moreso – are those rare and gifted individuals who quietly go about building and shaping and recreating day by day the world where those headlines (not to mention the rest of our lives) take place. And so much the better when, like Brooks, their genius is tempered with humility, humanity and humor." (Vintage Motorsport, 1995)