

Henry Ford

Henry Ford (July 30, 1863 – April 7, 1947) was an American industrialist and a business magnate, the **founder** of the Ford Motor Company, and the creator of the development of the assembly line technique of mass production. He developed and manufactured the first automobile that many middle-class Americans could **afford**. In doing so, Ford turned the automobile from an expensive vehicle into a practical means of transport that would profoundly impact the 20th century.

■ Biography

Henry Ford was born on a farm in Greenfield Township, Michigan. In 1891, Ford worked as an engineer at the Edison Illuminating Company of Detroit. After his promotion to chief engineer in 1893, he had enough time and money to spend time on his personal experiments on gasoline engines. These experiments culminated in 1896 with the creation of a **self-propelled** vehicle which he named the Ford Quadricycle[•]. In October 1901 Ford designed, built, and successfully raced a 26-horsepower automobile. After this success, with some stockholders of the Detroit Automobile Company, he formed the Henry Ford Motor Company on November 30th, 1901, where he was chief engineer.

■ Model T and assembly line

Model T was introduced on October 1st, 1908 and it was the first car produced in mass production. The car was very simple to drive, and easy and cheap to repair. It was so cheap at \$825 in 1908 (the price fell every year) that by the 1920s, a majority of American drivers had learned to drive on Model T.

Always on the **hunt** for more efficiency and lower costs, in 1913 Ford introduced the assembly line into his plants, which enabled an extraordinary increase in production. Sales passed from 250,000 in 1914 to 472,000 in 1916^{••}. By 1918, half of all the cars in the United States were Model Ts.

to afford: *permettersi*
founder: *fondatore*
to hunt: *essere a caccia di*

legacy: *eredità*
self-propelled: *semovente*
shift: *turno*



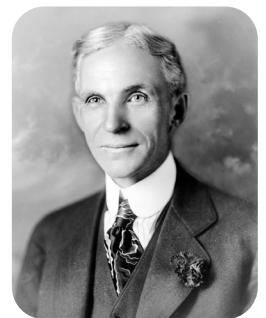
■ Fordism

Fordism is a term used to describe the system of mass production that started in the early 20th century by the Ford Motor Company.

Fordism has been analysed along four dimensions:

- **industrial paradigm**, which involves mass production and low-skilled labour;
- **economic growth**, which involves a cycle of mass production and mass consumption;
- **mode of regulation**, which involves a compromise between organised labour and big factories where workers accept to work under certain rules (for example long **shifts** on the assembly line) in return for higher wages;
- **form of social life**, because Fordism was linked to mass media, mass transport, and mass politics.

The Fordist mode of growth became dominant in capitalism during postwar reconstruction, but in the 1970s its crisis started also because of the working-class resistance to its alienating working conditions^{•••}.



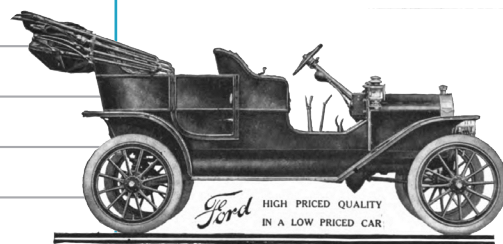
To create the Quadricycle, Ford mounted a gasoline engine on the back of a carriage.

In 1916 the price of the Model T dropped to \$360 for the basic touring car.

Famous Charlie Chaplin's film *Modern Times* (1936) perfectly depicts the alienating condition of assembly-line workers.

1 Write the event for each date.

July 30 th , 1863	
1891	
1893	
1896	
November 30 th , 1901	
October 1 st , 1908	
1913	
1918	



2 Read the text and match the beginnings to the endings.

Henry Ford's Legacy

Ford did not invent the assembly line, but in borrowing the conveyor belt and production processes from industries such as meatpacking, he did revolutionise it. Rather than workers needing to move around the factory and the vehicle as they built it, the vehicle was built as it literally moved along the production line. The introduction of increased wages, leisure time, and access to the affordable Model T are often cited as influential in the creation of America's middle class. Ford famously increased wages for his

employees, paying them enough that they were able to afford to buy his cars and also creating a workspace that was more likely to retain workers for longer. The term "Fordism" speaks to the impact of Ford's industrial innovations and refers to the contemporary era's feverish pace of mass production and consumption in the postwar era. It is no coincidence that Aldous Huxley chose Ford's name to signify a sort of religious figure in his 1932 science fiction novel, *Brave New World*.

Adapted from: <https://www.investopedia.com/henry-ford-5225035#>:

- | | | |
|---|--------------------------|---|
| 1. The conveyor belt was borrowed by other types of industries... | <input type="checkbox"/> | a. enough to let them buy his cars. |
| 2. In the assembly line process, ... | <input type="checkbox"/> | b. to keep people at work longer. |
| 3. A better workspace was created... | <input type="checkbox"/> | c. of religious figure in a famous novel. |
| 4. Ford increased workers' salary... | <input type="checkbox"/> | d. and introduced in the factories by Ford. |
| 5. Fordism refers to the impact Ford had... | <input type="checkbox"/> | e. on mass production and consumption. |
| 6. Henry Ford was so important that he is depicted as a sort... | <input type="checkbox"/> | f. the vehicle moved along the production line. |

3 Say if the sentences are true or false, and correct the false ones.

- | | | |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| | T | F |
| 1. The first car Henry Ford invented was aimed at the American upper class. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. Henry Ford was born in Detroit. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. Henry Ford designed a race car. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. Model T was easy to drive and simple to repair. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. The use of the assembly line caused a rise in the price of Model T. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

