



Studebaker commissioned Raymond Lowey in 1961 to come up with a sports car to improve their image and marketshare. Raymond Loewy, who had designed cars for Studebaker back in the 50's, may be more noted for his industrial and product designs like the Nabisco logo and streamlined locomotives, but it is his design flair and uniqueness that gets all his designs noticed. His personal slogan was "Most advanced, yet acceptable." It was production problems at Studebaker that prevented Avanti sales success, such as not being able to deliver enough of them!

The decision was made to go with fiberglass to save set-up time and development costs. Utilizing the Lark convertible chassis, the Avanti went on sale in 1963 using 289 CID Studebaker engines in R1 (normally aspirated) and R2/R3 (supercharged) versions. The first owner was Roger Ward, winner of the 1962 Indianapolis 500. 1964 saw little change (most visible was the square headlight surrounds), but the writing was on the wall for Studebaker. They shut down manufacturing in South Bend IN and transferred all production to Hamilton ON. In doing so, trucks, GT Hawks, Studebaker engines and the Avanti were discontinued. The Commander / Cruiser / Daytona lines (based on the Lark) continued for another two years in Hamilton with Chevrolet 283 CID engines until all manufacturing was dissolved on March 17, 1966. So where did the 1965-2006 Avanti's come from?

Well, in 1965, Newman and Altman (large Studebaker dealership in South Bend IN) decided that due to the awards garnered by the Avanti for styling and performance, it was too good to kill. They purchased the design and rights to the Avanti and set-up shop in South Bend, utilizing the same buildings and craftsman Studebaker used. They changed the engine to a Corvette 327 and they were off and running. Now called the Avanti II, it was basically still a Studebaker but now with different displacements and options until 1982. That is when Steve Blake bought the company. 1983 remained relatively the same (dropped the II designation) except that he introduced 25 special edition anniversary cars using plastic surround bumpers. In 1984 he improved the design of the bumpers, upgraded the braking and suspension components and plunged into racing (most notably the 24 hours of Daytona) He introduced a special model called the Touring edition and started work on a convertible. All this was starting to take the toll and in 1985 he filed for bankruptcy. The company was subsequently purchased by Mike Kelley. A major change was made to replace the Studebaker designed frame with a complete GM Monte Carlo chassis and engine. A stretched version and finally a convertible were all introduced, now manufactured in Youngstown OH. In 1989, the company was purchased by John Cafaro and a four door was introduced. In 1991 production stopped, but not the desire. Jim Bunting developed the AVX with input from Tom Kellogg, one of the original designers from 1961, based on a GM Firebird/Camaro chassis. In 2000 John Seaton, John Hull and Michael Kelly make the new Avanti a reality. Now manufactured in Villa Rica GA, they introduced an XUV (extreme utility vehicle) name plated Studebaker at the 2003 Chicago Autoshow. In 2004, they had to change to a Ford Mustang Chassis and in 2006 moved production to Cancun, Mexico. Unfortunately, Mike Kelley was arrested (not related to automotive business) and Avanti Corporation was shut down. We are still waiting for the outcome of this latest saga.

Believe it or not, there are many sources for Avanti Information. One of the best places is at a car show. Most Avanti owners are very passionate and knowledgeable about their cars, and when you own a car that stands out as much as this one, you had better be ready to talk about it. Another great information resource is the Internet. See our web site to help you learn more about this car – and maybe even help you find one to own yourself!

<http://www.canadianavanti.ca/>