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New Program at Stanford Focuses on the Automobile

By *PHIL PATTON*

Stanford University has founded a program for the study of the automobile. Called [Revs](#), the program is a multidisciplinary approach intended to combine the Silicon Valley university's high-tech credentials with cultural analysis of the car in literature, film and music.

It will be kicked off with "Celebrating the Automobile," a daylong symposium on Thursday that will focus on a test specimen: a green, 4.25-liter 1933 Bentley that once belonged to the English sporting figure Eddie Ramsden Hall.

The program is directed by [Clifford Nass](#), professor of communication, who also directs the Communication Between Humans and Interactive Media Lab. The goal is to study multiple aspects of the automobile in classes and research.

[Thursday's symposium](#), according to the organizers, will bring together "devotees, experts, collectors, archaeologists, social scientists, engineers, designers, humanists, legal scholars and racecar drivers." The participants will assemble what they call an "auto-biography" of the Bentley, examining the car from perspectives that include "archaeology, psychology, engineering and design." More generally, the cultural, historical and technological significance of the automobile will be discussed.

The eclectic group of speakers includes a Le Mans Series auto racer, [Duncan Dayton](#), and a professor of classical archaeology, [Michael Shanks](#).

"Our primary goal for the Revs Program at Stanford is to create a vital and much-deserved intellectual community around the car as technological and aesthetic artifact and cultural symbol," Professor Nass said. The Revs program links the Stanford School of Engineering as well as the Design School. Participants include David Kelley, one of the founders of the design firm IDEO and the head of Stanford's design school.

The executive director of the Revs program is Sven Beiker, a BMW alumnus who teaches at the Stanford School of Engineering. "Over the last few decades, as our cars have grown more complex, more computerized and more connected, Silicon Valley has become increasingly important for automotive innovation," he said.

The core financing for Revs comes from Miles Collier, a well-known automobile collector, painter and retired businessman.