

# *Octane*

*Fuelling the passion*

# LAND ROVER

*Farewell to the world's most versatile classic: Series I to Defender*



COLLECTORS' EDITION

**#145**

JULY 2015

# Fasteners for the fast

*Dzus fasteners made a huge impact on aviation and motor sport, earning their Ukrainian inventor a fortune*

**T**HE CLEVER LITTLE widget known as the Dzus (pronounced 'zeus') quarter-turn fastener, familiar to any enthusiast who follows historic motor racing, was the brainchild of Ukrainian immigrant Volodymyr Dzhuz, and became the panel fastener of choice for aircraft manufacturers and race car builders across the world, putting the sleepy community of West Islip, New York, on the international map.

Born in 1895 into a poor farming family, the 17-year-old Volodymyr set out alone in 1913 for the New World – and a new name, William Dzus. After a brief sojourn in Toronto he eventually made his way to Newark, New Jersey, where he landed a job as a kitchen worker, but the urge to better himself soon led Dzus into the mechanical trades, first as a lathe operator and then in his own garage business.

Ambitious and inventive, Dzus applied for several patents in the automotive field but lacked the funds to pursue them to production. In 1929 the Great Depression forced him to close his business and take a job as a toolmaker at the Fairchild Aircraft Company. It was here that Dzus had his breakthrough idea.

As he watched planes taking off and landing, Dzus noticed rattling from their engine cowlings. The panels took a beating from constant vibration and the variety of catches then in use failed to secure the panels firmly or soon worked loose, often failing completely.

Like all good ideas, Dzus's solution was deceptively simple – a helical-slotted spring-loaded pin attached to the outer panel which, when pressed 'over-centre' and turned one-quarter of a revolution, engages with a wire screwed or riveted to the inner frame.

A prototype set of Dzus's fasteners proved so effective that Fairchild tried to persuade him to relinquish the patent rights, threatening dismissal if he didn't. Wisely, and bravely,

Dzus left and set up a small production line in a garage on Hawley Avenue, West Islip, in April 1932. The merits of the Dzus fastener were soon recognised by the aircraft industry, but it was the looming threat of war that catapulted Dzus into the big-time. In 1939,

President Roosevelt ordered a massive increase in military aircraft production and the Dzus factory was turned over entirely to the war effort, supplying not only the US but all the allied aircraft manufacturers.

Legend has it that the Dzus fastener first hit

the racetrack in 1946, when brothers Ed and Zeke Justice, without the approval of their boss Frank Kurtis, modified a Kurtis-Kraft midget racer that they were working on for ace driver 'Bullet' Joe Garson. Ed had worked at Douglas Aircraft and, fresh back from wartime service in the Army Air Corp, was very familiar with the quick-change convenience of the Dzus fastener. The sceptical Kurtis was soon convinced and their use spread rapidly through the US racing and hot-rodding community and eventually to European Grand Prix and sports cars.

In 1948 William Dzus, by that time a wealthy businessman, formed the Ukrainian Institute of America to promote the culture of his homeland, housing it in one of the last remaining mansions on New York's Fifth Avenue.

He died in 1964 and was succeeded by his son Theodore. Dzus Fastener Europe had opened in Farnham, Surrey, in 1953, followed by factories in Scotland, France, Germany and Japan. On his retirement in 1987 Theodore sold the

company to the Farnham subsidiary.

After several takeovers the Dzus brand is now owned by SouthCo, but the West Islip Dzus decided to opt out and go it alone. In so doing they had to relinquish the Dzus name, creating the peculiar situation in which the original manufacturer continues to operate but under the acronym DFCI Solutions Inc.

However, in West Islip the inventor's legacy is still celebrated, with the legend 'Dzus Fastener Co' proudly displayed on the factory facade.



**‘Their use spread rapidly through the US racing and hot-rodding community and eventually to Grand Prix’**