

Sears- Roebuck announced its new arrival during November, 1951. The advertising staff quickly touted it as America's only new car for 1952 – a real stretch of the facts.

Despite the Korean War, the 1952 American family was doing quite well. The median family income was \$3,900 and every third home had a television, probably tuned to The Jackie Gleason Show or getting "Just the facts, mam" from Jack Webb and Dragnet. The movies passed out funky glasses so we could see images leaping from the screen in "3-D." Just as the small Henry J/Allstate took center stage, the original compact company, Crosley, shut the gates.

The Henry J was a good choice for the retailer Sears. They already had brand name batteries, spark plugs, tires, tubes and a network of service centers ready to install them. The Allstate was simple and basic – just what America needed.

To keep their dealers happy, Kaiser slightly fluffed the Allstate's appearance. An extra bar was added to the grill, the hood ornament was changed and chrome strips graced the tops of the front fenders. The Allstate badge was a United States map with the letters "Allstate" stretching from coast to coast. Despite this ploy, the car sales were concentrated in the southeastern states. The deluxe Allstate had a working decklid, a glovebox, and armrests. Like the Henry J, they were all two-door models riding on a 100-inch wheelbase.

Both four and six-cylinder Willys engines were available. For its 2300-lb. weight, the 68-hp four banger gave the Allstate a respectable response. The 80-horse six scorched the pavement! An overdrive option was offered with the three-speed standard transmission. To the chagrin of the Kaiser-Frazer dealers, the \$1,395 price of the 1952 Allstate Basic Four was less than their Henry J.

Sears should have stuck to selling clothes, tools and appliances. Their second auto venture also crashed with a sickening thud. By early 1953 the misery was over. In all they sold slightly less than 2,400 cars. [1952 – 1,566; 1953 – 797] The curtain fell on the Henry J a year later when the 1,200 units sold were all leftovers. Swamped by debt, the entire Kaiser organization failed in 1955. Their demise was not all due to bad cars. As he departed the car scene, Edgar Kaiser was quoted as saying, "Slap a Buick nameplate on it and it would sell like hotcakes!"

America wasn't quite ready for a downsized car. The Ford Falcon, a decidedly better vehicle, was six years away.

And think about Sears. Their first car venture lasted two years longer than the second and they sold 1,200 more of their motorized buggies than they did the Allstate! Real progress!
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