



*Women may not have gained the right to drive until 1900, but it didn't hold them back from making significant contributions to automotive history throughout the 20th century.*

### **Bertha Benz**

Born in an age when women were generally denied access to education, and during a time when “car” wasn’t commonly used in everyday vocabulary, Bertha Benz established herself in automotive history. Not only was she the wife of Karl Benz, the engineer of Mercedes-Benz fame, she was also his business partner. In addition to drumming up publicity for what is widely considered to be the world’s first production automobile, the motorwagen (built in 1885), she is credited with devising the world’s first brake pads. At the time, brakes were made from wood. When they began to wear down and fail, she asked a local shoemaker to install leather soles.

### **Mary Anderson**

While riding a streetcar around the turn of the century, Mary Anderson noticed that the driver could hardly see through his

front windshield. The front window split into several parts so the driver could move the snow- or rain-covered section out of his sight, but the poorly designed system also exposed everyone in the vehicle to the inclement weather. Anderson began sketching an improved wiper device on the spot and became the first person to ever patent a vehicle window-cleaning device. Though her device is the predecessor of today’s windshield wipers — a crucial part of any vehicle — she never profited from her invention.

### **Alice Huyler Ramsey**

In August 1909, at the age of 22, Alice Huyler Ramsey became the first woman to drive coast-to-coast, from New York to California. At that time, only 16 men had completed a coast-to-coast drive and Ramsey was the first woman to ever attempt the feat. She completed the 3,800-mile journey in 59 days — a particularly notable feat considering only 152 of those miles took place on paved roads. In 1960, AAA named Ramsey the “Woman Motorist of the Century” and in 2000, she became the first woman ever inducted into the Automotive Hall of Fame.

Photos this page (clockwise from top): Alice Huyler Ramsey; Alice Huyler Ramsey; Mary Anderson; Bertha Benz

