

Nicholas Joseph Cugnot Encyclopedia Article

Nicholas Joseph Cugnot

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Nicholas Joseph Cugnot

1725-1804

French military engineer who built the world's first true automobile—a large steam-driven tricycle. While serving in the Austro-Hungarian army during the Seven Years War, Cugnot began to plot out ways to haul artillery. After the war's end, he built two steam-propelled tractors, the second of which is now preserved in the National Conservatory of Arts and Crafts in Paris. This cumbersome carriage was a tricycle mounted with a single front wheel that performed both steering and driving functions. Although its two-piston steam engine operated for only 12 to 15 minutes before running out of steam, it proved the feasibility of steam-powered engines.