



Pumper 8, a 1927 Gotfredson-Bickle photographed in 1932. (Walt McCall Collection)



Pumper 30's 1927 Gotfredson-Bickle pumper in 1954. (Alan Craig Collection)



The 1928 Gotfredson-Bickle City Service Ladder Truck. (Walt McCall Collection)

HISTORICALLY SPEAKING; TORONTO'S GOTFREDSON-BICKLES

By Walt McCall

In 1926, Bickle Fire Engines Ltd. of Woodstock, Ontario entered into an arrangement with the Gotfredson Corporation of Walkerville (now part of Windsor) to mount Bickle fire apparatus bodies and equipment on medium and heavy-duty Gotfredson truck chassis made in the Gotfredson plant. More than 30 Gotfredson-Bickle pumpers, combination hose trucks, city service ladder trucks and quads with their distinctive cast aluminum radiators were built in the Woodstock plant between 1926 and 1928. The Toronto Fire Department purchased more Gotfredson-Bickles than any other city – six in all -- in 1927 and 1928.

On November 16, 1926, the City of Toronto issued a purchase order for five Gotfredson-Bickle triple combination pumpers at a contract price of \$5,134 each, or \$25,670 in all. Powered by 145-horsepower *Sterling Chevron* six-cylinder engines, the pumpers were equipped with 800 Imperial gpm Bickle rotary gear pumps and 40-gallon soda and acid chemical tanks and rode on hard rubber tires on cast steel spoke wheels. Delivered in February and March of 1927, the pumpers underwent their acceptance tests on Toronto's waterfront before being assigned to fire stations. Prior to the T.F.D.'s revised numbering system that numbered the apparatus for the halls they were in, the Gotfredson-Bickle pumpers were numbered Engines 8, 9, 10, 13 and 126. Their original assignments were to Stations 9, 22, 24, 25 and 26.

But there were problems under those high, impressively long Gotfredson hoods. By 1933 no fewer than 19 of the *Sterling Chevron* crankshafts had broken. By 1935 all five pumpers were repowered with six-cylinder Waukesha RB engines. The Gotfredsons' hard rubber tires were replaced with pneumatics in the mid-1930s, and windshields installed by the Ordnance St. shops.

A 1940 Toronto Fire Department apparatus roster shows four of the Gotfredson-Bickles in front-line service as Pumpers 22, 24, 26 and 31, and a decade later, in 1950, still running as Pumpers 24, 26, 30 and 31. All of the 1927 Gotfredson-Bickle pumpers were eventually replaced by new American-LaFrance 700 Series pumpers, starting with Pumper No. 9 and Pumper No. 22 in 1949. Last to go was Pumper No. 30 in 1954. None, unfortunately, escaped the scrapyards' torch. But despite the earlier motor problems the Gotfredson-Bickle pumpers were in active service from 22 to 27 years.

In 1928 Toronto took delivery of a Gotfredson-Bickle city service ladder truck. Like the pumpers purchased the previous year, the big double-bank ladder truck rode on solid tires and had no windshield. Lettered No. 3 under the old numbering system, the Gotfredson ladder truck was placed into service at Fire Station No. 28 on Montgomery Ave. In 1931 it was moved to the new Station 34 on Yonge St. at Wanless Ave. The Gotfredson was later reassigned to Station 8 on Bellvue Ave. at College St. where it ran as H&L #8 until it was replaced by a new ALF 700 Series 100-foot aerial in 1956. Gotfredson's American parent company failed in 1928 and the Canadian subsidiary plant in Walkerville ceased truck production. The last Gotfredson-Bickle was a pumper delivered to Kingsville (which still owns it today) in late 1928. Ironically, the former Gotfredson plant on Walker Road in Windsor was destroyed in a spectacular fire the night of July 30, 1985.