FORM AND FUNCTION FOLLOW HIM

His dreams solidified into dream cars such as the Excalibur and the Studebaker Hawk G.T., and his childhood sketches of fantastic trains transformed into the svelte stainless-steel transcontinental Olympian Hiawathas flashing down twin rails from Chicago to Seattle.

Among his creations are the clothes dryer, the freezer, the Evinrude outboard motor, the steam iron, the 1950 Harley-Davidson, the Lawn Boy rotary-blade power lawn mower, various trains, trucks, and boats — and the peculiar Oscar Mayer Wienermobile. And at 80, Brooks Stevens (right), the founding father of industrial design and member of **Le Club** in **Milwaukee,** is rather pleased with himself. After all, nearly 600 companies around the world have adopted his works during his career that has spanned more than half a century.

Success did not come easily for Stevens. In the infancy of industrial design, many companies refused to recognize product styling as an essential part of the manufacturing process. It took designs such as the Lawn Boy mower and the Allis-Chalmers farm tractor (its teardrop gas tank and fenders were so attractive that owners often drove them to church on Sunday) to convince them. A decade later, the products he styled were filling homes and highways across America.

But Stevens had a private struggle as well. Stricken by polio when he was 8, Stevens faced a lifetime of braces and ever-present pain. "I was ensconced in braces from the hips down," he says. My father finally said, 'This is absurd.'" He and his father reasoned that he wouldn't get any stronger if he went through life supported by steel. "So my father dumped me in the swimming pool and said, 'Go as long as you can.'" His father promised him a Model T if he could swim a mile by his 16th birthday. Six months later he had his car.

Some of Stevens's most striking contributions have been automobiles. He designed Packards, the Jeepster and Jeep Station Wagon (which exists today as the Cherokee), the Volkswagen 411 and 412 (precursors to the Rabbit series), and many more. Stevens laments that current cars don't have the style automobiles once did. "You used to be able to tell one car from another," he says. "Now you can't. We have to give these things some real identity again."

Stevens also is responsible for developing the philosophy of planned obsolescence, design tactics that update everything from car bodies to suit lapels each season. Such tactics persuade consumers that last year's model won't do when a newer version is introduced. "It's the desire to own something a little newer, a little better, a little sooner than is necessary," he says. "No prudent manufacturer today would think of entering the marketplace without styling new merchandise."

Of the products he created, Stevens says he has no favorites. "My favorite was whatever I was working on at the moment," he explains. "Every product had a different problem, a different challenge. You got into it, and you loved it once you saw it working." He's happy with his legacy of products. "We made life a lot more pleasant, comfortable, and aesthetically pleasing to millions of people all over the world by improving the things they had to buy in order to live." ●

B. ARTIN HAIG STUDIOS

"I'm not at all upset with the idea of 'keeping up with the Joneses,'" says industrial designer Brooks Stevens (above), a member of *Le Club* in *Milwaukee.* "I think that's a worthwhile goal."

PICTURED BELOW ARE JUST A FEW OF THE MANY PRODUCTS DESIGNED BY PIONEER INDUSTRIAL STYLIST BROOKS STEVENS. FROM LEFT: THE JEEPSTER, FOR WILLYS-OVERLAND; THE FIRST CLEAR BEER BOTTLE AND "SOFT CROSS" LOGO FOR MILLER BREWING COMPANY; AND THE INIMITABLE OSCAR MAYER WIENERMOBILE.

BROOKS STEVENS DESIGN