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Charles Howard opened a Buick dealership in San Francisco at a time when nearly everyone in the city used horses—not cars—to get around town. This image, circa 1906, depicts Howard (on the left) in his Buick racer. Online, courtesy Seabiscuit Heritage Foundation. PD

In 1903, Charles Howard arrived in San Francisco with 21 cents. Like his contemporaries, Orville and Wilbur Wright, Howard opened a bicycle repair shop. Soon, however, customers were asking him to work on more than bikes.

Owners of broken-down contraptions, called automobiles, needed someone to repair their frequently unreliable cars. Charles Howard believed there was a real opportunity for him with those newfangled vehicles.

Within two years, he had convinced William ("Billy") Durant, a Detroit car maker and future founder of General Motors, to let him open a Buick dealership. Howard started with three cars.

When the 1906 earthquake devastated San Francisco, Howard used his showroom cars as rescue vehicles when horses were injured or refused to go down the city's burning streets. Since San Francisco's horse-loving public wasn't much interested in buying Howard's cars before the quake, using those vehicles as ambulances was an excellent way to demonstrate what cars could do.

After the quake, Howard (who was a marketing genius) started to really sell his cars when he agreed to take horses in trade. His skills at valuing horses grew as a direct result of building his automobile dealerships.

Seabiscuit's future owner also knew he would have to teach people how to drive if he expected to sell anything in the early years of the automotive business.

That business was good to Charles Howard. It ultimately made him extremely wealthy. But it also contributed to one of his most devastating losses.

Charles' son, Frank R. Howard, was fifteen when he was seriously injured in a 1926 vehicle accident on the Howard family property. Because there were no nearby hospitals with life-saving equipment, Frank died. His grief-stricken father donated money to build a new hospital in the town of Willits, California.

Construction began in 1927, and the first patient was admitted in 1928. The hospital, part of the Adventist Health Care System, is still called Frank R. Howard Memorial.

To help him cope with the loss of his son, Howard developed an interest in horse racing.

After Frankie died, Howard's first marriage - which was already in trouble - ended in divorce. He fell in love with the older sister of his son's wife and married Marcela Zabala in 1932. The two shared a love of horses.

One of those horses was called Seabiscuit.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/CHARLES-HOWARD-Seabiscuit>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/CHARLES-HOWARD-Seabiscuit>

Seabiscuit - Charles Howard and His 1906 Buick

In 1905, Charles Howard opened a Buick dealership in San Francisco. At the time, far more people in the hilly town depended on horses than on cars.

The next year—when the 1906 earthquake devastated San Francisco—Howard used his showroom cars as rescue vehicles when horses were injured or refused to go down the city's burning streets.

Before the big quake, the city's horse-loving public was largely disinterested in Howard's Buicks. After the quake, people understood the value of cars.

Still ... it would take some doing on Howard's part before he could convince people to actually buy such "newfangled" contraptions. When he decided to take horses in trade, Howard's car-selling business improved. That also helped him to improve his horse-valuing skills.

Then ... Howard realized something else. Before his business could *really* take-off, he'd have to teach people how to drive.

This 1906 image depicts Charles Howard, in San Francisco, with his Buick racer. Do you see the other vehicle on the street? It's a horse-drawn carriage.

Image online, courtesy Michael C. Howard (Charles Howard's son) and the Seabiscuit Heritage Foundation.

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William Durant

Image online, courtesy the [Wayne State University](http://www.waynestate.edu) website.

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Buick Automobile

Image online, courtesy the [berkeleyheritage.com](http://www.berkeleyheritage.com) website.

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Frank R. Howard

Image online, courtesy howardfoundation.com website.

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Hospital at Willits, California

Image online, courtesy the howardfoundation.org website.

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Marcela Zabala Howard

Image online, courtesy the [randomhouse.com](http://www.randomhouse.com) website.

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Seabiscuit

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