

A (Very) Short History of the Garage Door Opener

They're a common modern convenience now, but it wasn't too long ago that garage door openers didn't exist at all. Heck, cars themselves are a very recent invention in the grand scheme of things. Like cars, garage door openers are very much a product of the 20th century.

T-Boned



We all learn in school that, although not the first practical car, the Ford Model-T was the commercially mass-produced vehicle that took off in a significant way. This was the car that really pushed aside horse-drawn carriages as a prime form of personal transport.

It may be hard to imagine now, but since no one up to that point actually had a car, people didn't have garages as we know them. So I guess there was this awkward time where people sort of just parked their model T cars wherever they could find room.

Mr. Johnson

Spotting this wide open gap in the market, one Mr. C.G. Johnson invented the sectional overhead door we all know today in 1921, thirteen years after the first Model T rolled off the line.

The door proved popular and in 1926 Johnson's Overhead Door Company added the electric garage door opener to its product catalog. Now, you didn't have to get out of your car to open the garage!

It's Electric

These early electric garage door openers were remote operated, but not wireless. There would be two wired switches. One a keypad on a post outside and the other a switch inside the garage.

Although they were invented early in the 20th century, electric garage door openers didn't become all that popular until long after. In an issue of Popular Science dated February 1931, it is documented how two widely separate teams came up with the idea of a radio-controlled garage door opener.

Both remotes were built into the cars themselves. One used a rather forward-thinking code pulse system, while the other simply generated white noise on the right frequency to activate. The code-pulse system even had a safety feature that would stop the door if something got in the way.