

Skip Looks Over His Left Shoulder

Writes Letter to Old Friend, Telling Many Interesting Incidents of Speed- way History.

Carl G. Fisher Corporation,
Miami Beach, Florida, U. S. A.
— May 26, 1937 —

Mr. Ray C. Thompson,
Sports Editor,
Indianapolis News,
Indianapolis, Indiana.

Dear Ray:—

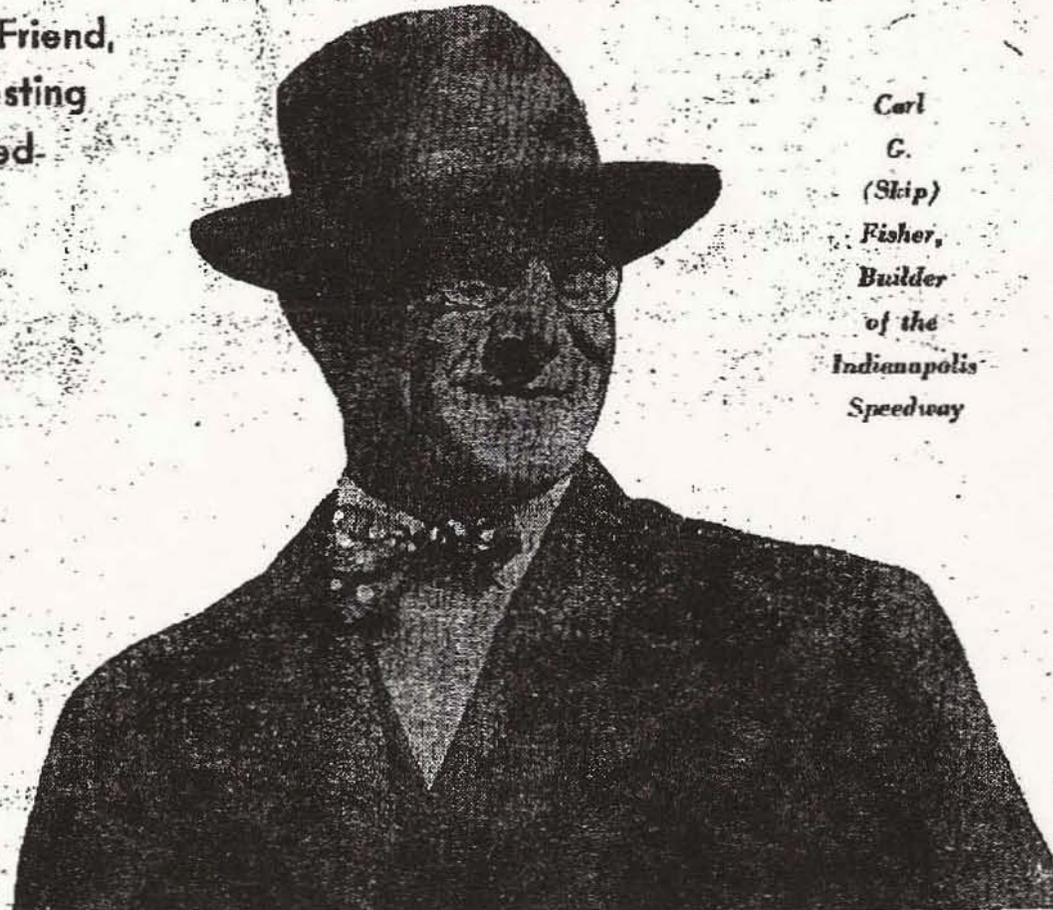
First, I want to congratulate you on being so deeply interested in a track that is twenty-five years of age on May 31st.

There are really thousands of reminiscences of the early days that are more or less interesting, and perhaps instructive, to a lot of the youngsters at least.

I remember when we put up a silver cup for any standard touring car that would go around the speedway at a mile a minute, and there wasn't a standard car in the country that could win this cup. As you know, there are now millions of standard cars on the road that could go around the speedway, with four passengers, at 75 miles an hour.

In the early days there was no automobile tire made that would last 100 miles at 75 miles per hour, especially on the rear wheels, without going to the fabric. It was the practice in those days to change the tires in every 25 to 30 miles in every 100, to be sure to have enough tires to finish a 100-mile race.

I think I can tell you a funny



Carl
G.
(Skip)
Fisher,
Builder
of the
Indianapolis
Speedway

up the various offices, grand stands and the grounds, and he found a satchel full of money under some old programs in one of our offices. Nobody ever claimed it and nobody ever claimed to have been robbed of that much money. So, that is another mystery of the speedway.

After we tore down the construction sheds at the speedway, where we were working Greeks, Italians, Poles—in fact almost

Immortality!

"I'm going to build a speedway," said Mr. Fisher. "The world's greatest."

And he did.

Then he went to Florida and saw a shallow strip of water and it touched his vision. He called for his men and his horses and he built Miami Beach.

He then went east and built

come back to claim their wages; and the only names we had on our books of these men would be Mike George, or Jim George, or George Mike, or John Mike, or something like that.

We didn't have anybody in Indianapolis who could either spell or pronounce their real names, and these men could not spell or pronounce their real names in English; so, there you are.

A strange thing for concrete and brick manufacturers and street builders to consider is that the speedway, up to the time I left Indianapolis, had grown over six feet in length, and it was only kept down to the proper length by cutting and putting in additional expansion joints, allowing the surface to get back together again and down to the standard size.

The largest part of the speedway is made out of paving brick of a very fine quality. We had to use at the last minute some standard house brick. One day in August, after the house brick had been in two years, it commenced to get very hot and fifty feet of the speedway blew up. The expansion of the more powerful brick crushed this lighter brick into almost powder. We replaced them immediately with other brick, but we put in two expansion joints to take care of this pressure.

The brick manufacturers who build brick pavements learned a lot from this trouble; also the pioneers in those days who were starting the concrete road surface. These troubles have been remedied in both brick and concrete road surface at the present time, and for several years past.

It may be interesting to know that the first piece of concrete

talk any English. There were good workmen but there were at least fifty of them whose name was Mike George.

If you would address one of them as Bill or Jim, he would change his name to Bill or Jim, thinking he was following orders. So I put edge on a stout string, which they tied around their necks, and this was the only way we could keep time on them and make out the pay roll. After the

004

FINANCE

12/06/2003 08:47 FAX 3174824501

story about the speedway and 300 goats that a friend of mine from Virginia sent to me. There were two live stock cars filled with them. We thought we had lots of pasture and that they would eat the weeds; so we turned them out.

They arrived at 5:30 in the evening. My superintendent called me at 7:30 the next morning and said "For God's sake, come over here," and I asked him what was wrong. He said "Well, it is these damned goats; come over right away." So, I landed at the speedway in a few minutes and found that about a hundred of the goats had jumped the fence and jumped on top of the telephone booth which was next to one of the grand stands, and from the top of that grand stand they jumped to the roof of grand stand A, and they were eating the tar paper off the roof; and what they didn't eat, their sharp hoofs punched holes in the balance.

So, during the first night, they did so much damage to the roof that we had to have a new roof.

A few specials that were too old to jump the fence and get on the roof, got underneath the grandstand where we have, as you know, several miles of rubber-coated ground telephone wires, which were put away for the season, and these wires were wound around big drums. The old goats ate all the rubber off of four or five miles of telephone wire.

So, realizing that these particular goats did not care for our particular kind of weeds or blue grass, we loaded them in the same box cars that afternoon and shipped them to Kingan's. I don't know just what the Kingan Company did with those goats, but I do know that some of them couldn't be handled with false teeth.

I have a good story that I will have to tell on Pop Myers:

After one of our early races, Pop had balanced the books and counted all the tickets and everything was O. K., and then the superintendent started to clean

every nationality that you can think of—we found two skeletons, although nobody had ever been reported missing and no killings had ever been reported. We had

Montauk Point. His name shall never die in Speedway history.

a great many foreigners working on the speedway who could not

talk and the day after the speedway was completed, there were hundreds of dollars of unclaimed wages of these laborers who would just leave the job and take some other job and never

A PRE-WAR TRIO HARD TO BEAT



Meet here the three mucketeers of early-day racing, back when half the cars were chain drives. At the right stands Ray Harroun, winner of the first 500-mile race in 1911 and daddy of the rear vision mirror. In the center stands Joe Dawson, another local product, who crossed the tape first in 1912 after Ralph DePalma's mount had developed heart trouble. And on the left stands Jules Goux, the wiry Frenchman, winner in 1913, and first from a foreign shore to carry away the checkered flag. All three retired from racing while the odds were in their favor. Harroun, incidentally, was the first driver to use a helmet. Dawson, it will be noted, along in his cap. Goux, always up-to-the-minute in racing gadgetry, is sporting a wrist watch, a sweater suit in the photo and oxford

that the first piece of concrete road paving laid in Indiana was in front of my house on the hill.

When I went to France in 1906, as a reserve driver for the Pope-Toledo Company, in the Gordon Bennett race, we had two very fast cars, but there was no place in America to test them over a continuous drive of more than two miles and in order to test them even the two miles in Toledo, we had to hire special guards and do the work at daylight; and even this testing was stopped because the cars made so much noise on this boulevard. So, we went to Europe with cars that were very fast but with no place to test them at high speed for a continuous run of 100 miles or so.

As a result, the Frenchmen beat the tar out of us—in fact, we didn't have either car finish, and I could see that it was a lack of being able to test the cars over a continuous speed run; and I made up my mind then to build a speedway where cars could be run 1,000 miles in a test, if necessary.

The lire people got a lot of information and experience from the speedway, and the manufacturers, engineers and everybody interested in all parts of an automobile, learned something from the speedway tests. You are familiar yourself with the general progress of the speedway, and the help it gave in those days to the manufacturers of all parts of an automobile, and undoubtedly it continues to give experience and information to automobile manufacturers, and tire manufacturers, and manufacturers of all parts that go into an automobile.

I congratulate you on the improvements that have been made at the speedway, and I hope you will have a very successful race this year.

YOURS,

Skip
CARL G. FISHER