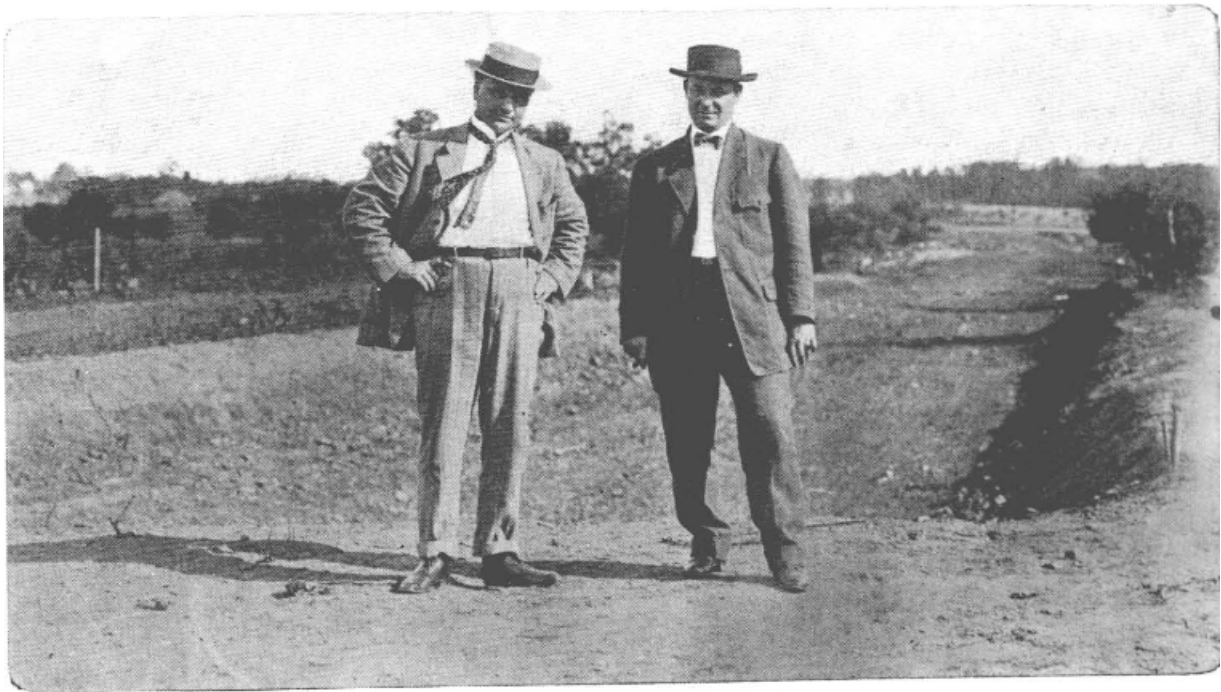


Atlanta Speedway 1909 -1910

In the summer of 1909 a group of Atlanta, Georgia business began quietly purchasing farms seven miles from downtown Atlanta, Georgia in the small community of Hapeville. When completed 290 acres of land and been purchased along with eleven farmhouses and outbuildings. The crops in the field were also purchased.

In late June of 1909, the Atlanta Automobile Association was incorporated under Georgia laws by Asa Candler, Jr. and Asa Candler of the Coca-Cola company, Edward M. Durant, insurance, Forrest and George Adair, real estate, F.J. Coolidge, paint industry and R.J. Irwin. The corporation was capitalized with \$250,000. Asa Candler, Jr. was made president and Edward M. Durant secretary. The land was taken over by the Atlanta Automobile Association.



CANDLER AND DURANT, WHO ARE BUILDING ATLANTA TRACK

Construction began immediately with a goal of holding the first automobile race in November 1909 to coincide with the Atlanta Automobile Show November 6 – 13 (the first automobile exposition show in the south) to be held in the Atlanta Auditorium Armory and the New York City to Atlanta, New York Herald/Atlanta Journal Good Roads Tour November 1 – 9.

The Atlanta Speedway was constructed as a two-mile oval. The homestretch 100 feet wide, the backstretch and curves 60 feet wide. The curves were banked 10 feet with an 880-foot radius. The surface was a clay, sand, gravel base with a special oil rolled into the track.

Grandstands to accommodate 30,000 spectators, judges and press stands erected on raised banks on each side of the homestretch were built. Bleachers located alongside of the big grandstand on a raised bank of 15 feet above the track and a double row of box seats six feet lower than the lowest street. No fences inside or outside of the track will be installed for safety reasons.

Corrugated iron garages (fireproof) located in back of the judges stand each house four cars, two entering the front and two entering the back. Living rooms of the drivers will be above the garages.



GARAGE ROW, LOCATED BACK OF THE JUDGE'S STAND

That the construction would be completed on time a crew of ten civil engineers, over 1,000 laborers, 500 mules and horses, three giant steam shovels, carpenters and masons worked three eight-hour shifts. The complex included waterworks and a lighting plant.

The track was “scientifically constructed” as to permit of a speed of two miles a minute with “absolutely no dust”. A novel system of oiling the track from a series of hydrants spaced 50 feet apart around the two-mile course. Two miles of piping was installed with sections of hose attached to each hydrant to sprinkle the entire track in less than half an hour. The Standard Oil Company provided the initial oiling of the two-mile surface.

Travel to the Atlanta Speedway was by Stewart Ave. and College Ave. and by the Atlanta and West Point Railroad and the Central of Georgia Railroad and the Georgia Railway and Electric Company.

Asa Candler, Jr. and Edward M. Durant debuted the \$300,000 (\$8,500,000 in 2019 dollars) speedway October 23, 1909 for a test run. Some of the top drivers of the day were invited for the test.

Drivers were timed two miles up to 10 miles with most timed for five miles. Barney Oldfield, Benz, .3.52 3-5, George Robertson, Simplex, .4.59 4-5, Charles Basle, Renault, .4.34 4-5, Louis Cliquot, in Asa Candler, Jr. Pope-Toledo, .4.34 3-5, and amateur Edward M. Durant, Renault, .5.00. Ben Kirschner, Darracq, traveled one mile .53.

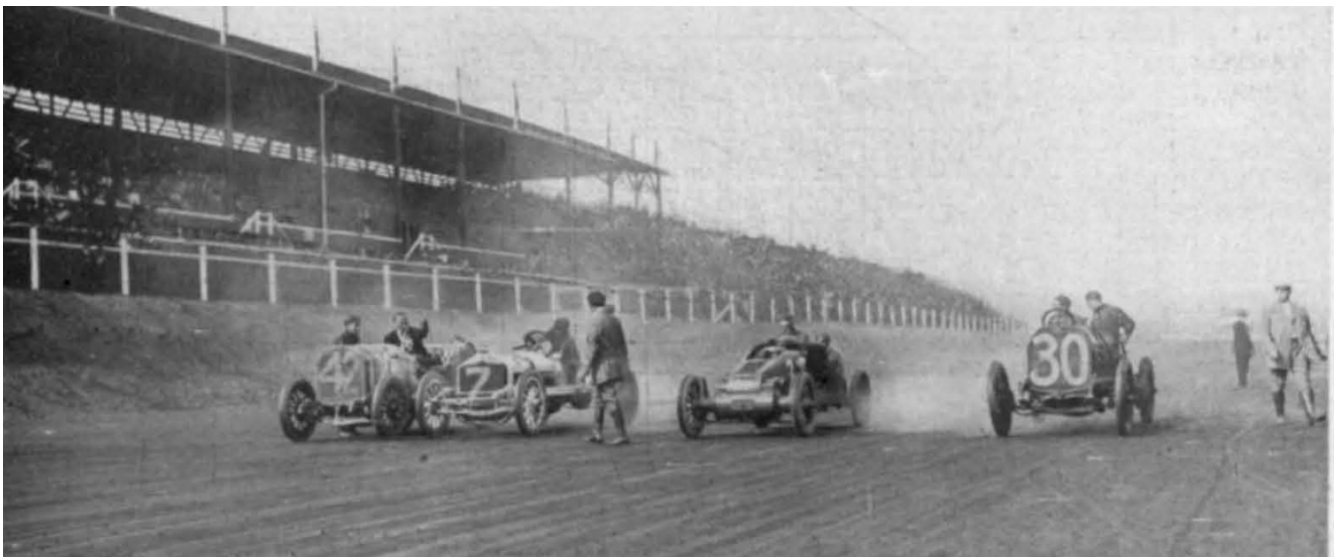


**Atlanta Trophy: Height, Six Feet;
Value, \$10,000**

“Atlanta's New Track” was the headline of the November 11, 1909 issue of The Automobile magazine. “Speed in abundance, no serious accidents” was the opening sentence for the first speed contest of the new Atlanta Speedway Tuesday November 9 – 13, 1909.

There were 34 events over the five-day race meet before record crowds. The Atlanta Automobile Show attracted a large attendance, the New York City to Atlanta Good Road Tour started with 38 automobiles with 35 arriving in Atlanta with 26 cars receiving awards for perfect scores.

Each day there were six to eight races with a main event (podium results are listed below) with Louis Disbrow, Louis Chevrolet, Ray Harroun, William Knipper, and George Robertson the big winners. Lewis Strang won events each of the five days for a total of seven races. Other winners were Arthur Chevrolet, Johnny Aitken, Joe Matson, Harry Stillman, Hugh Harding, William Oldknow, John Rutherford and Ernest Stoecker. Barney Oldfield in his Benz and Walter Christie driving his Christie finished in podium positions but did not see the winners circle.



The No. 30 of Lewis Strang's Fiat which won a race each of the five days for a total of seven wins.

The editorial in the November 18, 1909 issue of Motor Age magazine summed up the 5 days of racing at the opening of the Atlanta Speedway. “A second step (Indianapolis Motor Speedway being the first) toward the elimination of the old-time race course. Spectators has an opportunity of observing cars perform on a safe course and one in which the real merit of the car can be shown. The fact that there were over thirty-two different races, varying in length from two miles to 200 miles, were run without a single fatality is prima facie proof that speedway racing can be indulged in without needless sacrifice of life”.



The second race meet at the Atlanta Speedway was held Thursday May 5 – 7, 1910. Motor World magazine's May 12, 1910 issue described the May races as “productive of some good sport”. The races were well attended. The weather was good Thursday and Friday but a rainstorm arose during the running of the 200 Mile Atlanta Automobile Association Trophy race on Saturday May 7, 1910. Automobile Topics magazine reported the rain Saturday “the water brought the oil to the surface and the footing was treacherous”.

Over the three days there were 16 races with a special event each day won by Ray Harroun, Herbert Lytle and Tom Kincaid. Other race winners (podium results are listed below) were Ralph DePalma, William Endicott, Johnnie Woodside, John Rutherford and Asa Candler, Jr. Lewis Strang, Lee Frayer, Joe Dawson and Walter Christie all finished in podium positions but did not post wins.

Ralph DePalma won a total of three races with a win each day. Ray Harroun also won three races during the three day meet.



Event number three at the Atlanta Speedway was held as a one day event on Saturday July 30, 1910. The August 4, 1910 issue of The Motor World magazine reported “local drivers had everything to themselves.....none of the national drivers being present”. Johnny Aitken driving a Benz was the only national driver in attendance.

There were 12 events (one race ran two classes at a time and had a winner for each class) ranging from two miles to 12 miles. The podium results are listed below. William Stoddard driving a National and W.V. Church driving a Pope-Hartford and a Simplex each won three events. W.A. DeWitt driving a Flanders and K.T. McKinstry driving a Firestone-Columbus each had two wins. John Woodside driving a Renault and Harry Cohen driving an E-M-F each won one event.

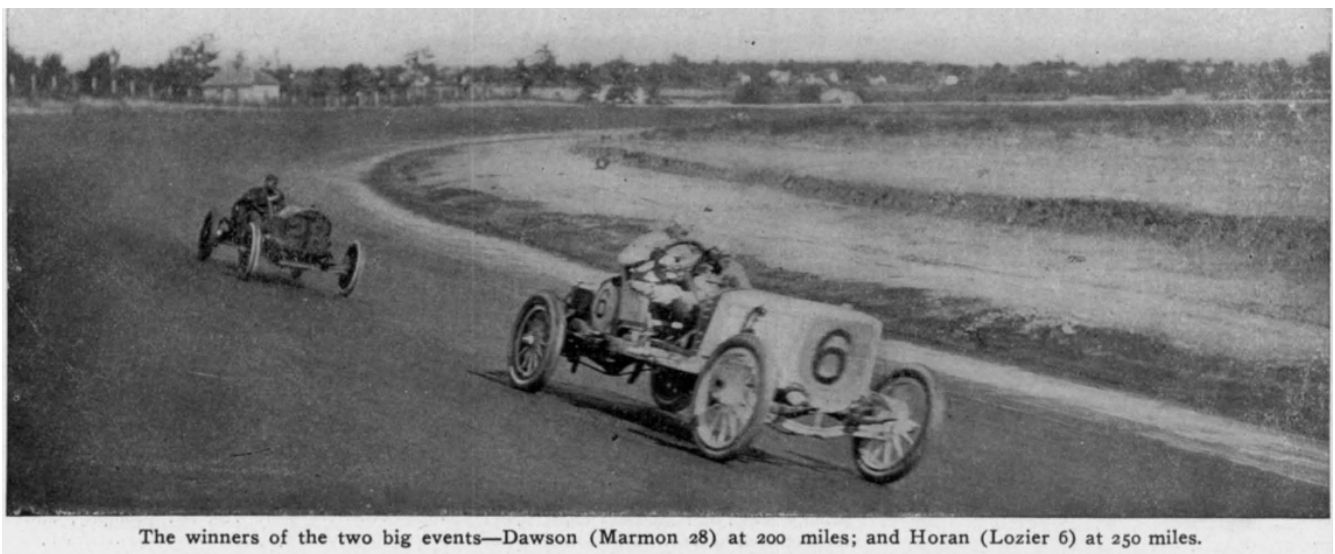
“There was some bully racing on the big two miles circular track on speedway at Atlanta” reported the November 10, 1910 Motor World magazine. The final major race event at the Atlanta Speedway was held Thursday, Friday and Saturday November 3 – 5, 1910.

The three-day program scheduled 16 races with a major event to be held each day. Since the May race the turns were widened 15 feet and a double set of posts were inserted on each side of the track. “The track was in good condition being well oiled and only slippery at one turn” reported the November 10, 1910 Motor Age magazine. Frank Gelnaw won the Coca-Cola 100 on day one. Dawson was leading the 100 when the green flag was waved for the final lap when he experienced mechanical

problems and ended up finishing third. Al Livingstone was killed in practice prior to the Coca-Cola Trophy 100-mile race.

Other winners were Caleb Bragg, Joe Dawson, Ray Harroun, E.A. Witt, Bob Burman, Ralph Mulford, William Stoddard, and Stanley Kepler. On Friday November 4, 1910 Joe Dawson won the 200-mile Atlanta Trophy, one of Dawson's four wins over the three-day event. The podium results are listed below.

When Saturday, November 5th arrived so did the rain wiping out the whole card of races. It was decided to reschedule Saturday's races to Monday the 7th. Poor weather eliminated all but the 250 Mile Free For All. Joe Horan driving his Lozier won over Bob Burman who finished second in spite of nine stops for tires.



1909 and 1910 were spectacular years at the Atlanta Speedway but it was the end of racing at that level. Atlanta Speedway big-time racing was short lived but the results showcased the star drivers and automobiles of the day. Eventually, the grounds became the beginnings of an airfield. Today it is one of the world's major airports, the Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport.

Sources for this research were from period magazines, Horseless Age, Motor Age, The Automobile, Motor, Motor World and Automobile Topics from the Horseless Carriage Foundation Automotive Research Library.

By Kenneth J. Parrotte
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