

II. Speedway

THE INDIANAPOLIS motor speedway opened—and immediately closed.

From the first green flash of the starting flag, that pioneer race was one of sheer horror. It started bravely enough, with crowds cheering as Carl led the first contestants onto the track in his own white car. Then he stood on the outer rim, below the stands, watching the glorious day he had planned turn to a carnival of death. Every minute held dramas of tragedy, mutilation and death. Cars skidded off the buckling track and burst into flame. I watched Carl's face grow whiter from my box in the stand. One car leaped the low retaining wall, crashed into the grandstand and killed two spectators.

The race had been scheduled for three hundred miles. But the death list mounted until, at two hundred and thirty-five miles, Carl ordered it stopped.

He had planned for a race series lasting three days. Now, in closing Speedway, he announced that the races of the future would be for one day only—a five-hundred-mile Memorial Day classic.

Hardly anyone was surprised when Carl, having stopped the first race, proceeded to rip up the entire race track to build a new Speedway. But prudent Hoosiers were convinced that Carl Fisher was throwing good money after bad. Even if the track was made safe, they said, it would fail. Who would drive fifteen miles out of Indianapolis to watch automobiles race against death in a cornfield? The few automobiles in 1910 were mere buggies powered by gasoline—and they still had on their dashboards rudimentary appendages that were buggy-whip sockets!