

# YESTERYEAR AT THE UNIONTOWN SPEEDWAY 1917

An excerpt from the book, *Yesteryear at the Uniontown Speedway*,  
by Marci Lynn McGuinness

## May 10, 1917 Grand Opening Race

The grand stand was finished and the track in fine form as Uniontown prepared for the Grand Opening Race of their new speedway board track. It was scheduled for May 10 and the following column appeared in the Uniontown Morning Herald May 4:

### Greatest Set of Drivers and Cars in Country Here for Races

By Barney Oldfield

"I am glad to get to Uniontown. For many years I have heard of the big little city so full of sportsmanship, but having no track here until recently. I have not raced here during my 17 years at the wheel of racing cars.

I have been here only six hours but in that short space of time I have been shown such evidence of fellowship that I feel quite at home and know I shall be sorry when the time comes to leave.

For constructing such a magnificent racing plant as the Uniontown Speedway Association has built, you deserve all the credit in the world and I know that the racing fraternity appreciates what has been done for the motor sport here. Every one of the boys feels obligated to put forth his best effort to give the crowd a run for its money. You have a greater set of cars and drivers here than any speedway can boast of this year. Half of them are here like myself just to show Charlie Johnson and the Uniontown people that good sportsmanship must be rewarded.

I never pick myself to win a race, consequently I will have to talk about the chances of the others. I believe the race lies between DePalma, Chevrolet, and Eddie Hearne if the dope counts for much. DePalma's new Packard is lightening fast and if it goes through without trouble he ought to cop the money. Chevrolet knows the track and his car and it has a world of speed. Hearne has a fast car and is a great driver. He has always dealt out surprises in the big races and I am never surprised at what he pulls at the finish of a speed battle. But no matter who is evolved winner they can all say after he gets the checkered flag, "Well, he was certainly going some."

At this time Barney was a famous driver and all-around character, referred to as "the daddy of them all" in the grand opening race program.. He was rarely seen without a cigar and had been wowing race fans for two decades when he came to Uniontown. He

had laid low for a few years but came to Indianapolis in 1916 surprising thousands when he became the first American driver to finish in the record breaking grind. He then went on to win the Los Angeles to Phoenix 671 mile Desert race scoring several non-stop records. Oldfield was given his start as a driver when Henry Ford built a race car and hired him to drive. Ford was not making much profit selling cars and wished to bring in prize money. Oldfield drove the #999 to win the money several times.

Tryouts for the big race were held May 3. This day Louis Chevrolet set a new record of 99mph on the oval track, only to outdo himself at 100mph during qualifying trials May 7. Drivers were required to average a speed of 85mph in order to compete in the races.

During the trials, pilot "Dutch" DeLloyd Thompson of the New York National Guard, was hired to entertain crowds with his death defying antics. There was a "scenic fort" built in the speedway's infield. Numerous "bombs" were fired from the fort into the sky at the military "tractor". As Thompson turned loop the loop he fired one shell that failed to explode as a spark head flew off, propelling itself through the covering of the plane's engine. This made it necessary for the daring pilot to cut the engine and volplane from 3,000 feet above the earth. He did this gracefully, showing his nerve and "cool" as a top notch pilot. Charlie Johnson asked "Dutch" if he could entertain at the grand opening race the next May, and he said that he would be proud to do it.

The list of entries for the Universal Trophy were as follows:  
Event No. 1 Class E, Non-Stock, 300 Cubic Inches Piston Replacement, or under, 100 laps, 112 1/2 miles.

Number	Car	Driver and Mechanician
1	Frontenac Special	Louis Chevrolet, Charles Kirkpatrick
2	Mercedes "	Louis Fountain, H.P. Miller
3	Frontenac "	Joe Boyer, Jr. Roscoe Searles
4	Packard "	Ralph DePalma, James Steaks
5	Duesenberg "	Eddie Hearne, Lewis Lecoca
7	Newman "	Billy Taylor, M.L. Spence
9	Hudson "	Ralph Mulford, Ernest Olsen
12	Hoskins "	Dave Lewis Russell Burns
14	Hudson "	Ira Vail, Barney Newgard
15	Pugh "	J.A. Meyer, G. Frazier
17	Crawford "	H.E. McCord
21	Olsen "	Milt McBride, L.C. Raynor
24	Johnson "	Art Klein, Wiler Monahan
27	Delage "	Barney Oldfield, Waldo Stein
42	Erbes "	Andy Burt, M.J. Hudoc

Event No. 2, Class E--Special Invitation Dealer's Race. Non-Stock without regard to piston displacement limitation. 100 laps, 112 1/2 miles.

List of entries Dealer's Race:

Number	Car	Driver - Mechanician
28	Murray "	C.W. McFarland, Charles Seitz

31	Peerless "	I.P. Fetterman,P.W. Robinson
32	Buick "	M. Hudoc,D.W. Hickey
33	Packard "	W. Monahan,C.M. Williams
34	Haynes "	H.L. Robinson,E.F. Marsh
35	Oakland "	J.P. Snyder
37	Haynes "	N.P. Fetterman
41	Haynes "	F. McCarthy,R.M. Shoff
22	Murray "	H.E. Wynn,L.E. James

The afternoon before the races Ray Hazen, mechanic for Driver C.M. Ewan of Kentucky, was injured when their Crawford shot up the incline of the speedway course during qualifications, broke through the top guard rail and teetered on the top of the steep track's edge. It then spun like a top down the track crashing into the lower guard rail. Hazen, of Kansas City, was thrown out onto his head when they hit the upper rail. He rolled down the track just next to the wild car. He sustained a concussion and many minor injuries. They were disqualified because of the car's extensive damage.

Mr. Ricker (referee) addressed all the drivers the night before the races in the lodge room of the First National Bank Building and told them what was expected of them and that the rules would be strictly enforced. The morning of the races the weather man promised fair skies and the Uniontown Speedway Association announced, "Nothing but a downpour of rain this afternoon can cause a postponement of the grand opening classic of the Uniontown speedway."

## WORLD'S GREATEST DRIVERS COMPETE FOR FINE TROPHY

The following are biographies of some of the drivers. Oldfield, DePalma, Chevrolet, Klein, etc., have been discussed earlier:

J.A. Meyer had driven his Pugh at Sheepshead Bay three times, taking 3rd in a special 5-mile race. He was expected by the "wise ones" to finish strong as he was an enthusiastic driver, a glutton for work, and his good nature endeared him to fans.

Milton F. McBride drove an Olsen Special in last year's race with considerable credit and was touted as a real contender.

"Smiling" Ralph Mulford was stock champion and one-time winner of the Vanderbilt Cup. He was known to wear white linen during the races, along with his smile.

Eddie Hearne was a well known driver who participated with credit in many of the professional events for years. In 1910 he won the Fox River Cup Race at Elgin in his Mercedes and finished eighth in the Vanderbilt Cup Race. He then went on to win the Fernbank Road Race in Cincinnati and a variety of dirt track events. His fans and friends considered him a strong contender.

Ira Vail was merely in his second season of racing, but had a reputation as he won almost every dirt track race he ever entered. He was a wealthy Brooklyn fellow who had raced motorcycles at Brighton Beach Motor dome and raced in the 100 mile contest at the Providence Speedway just months before.

Walter W. Longstreth 26, was from Rosemont, PA. He was known in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and New York to be certain to finish "in the money".

Louis Fountain was Ralph DePalma's mechanic for many years. Here he gained invaluable experience as an up and coming driver. This was his third big race and he was respected throughout the racing circuit.

W.E. Taylor, hailing from the west coast, had won in the top three or five in a variety of national races, both dirt and road.

### Schedule of Events

8AM - Two late entrants, Wynn and Robinson will qualify for Dealer's race.

8:15 - noon Practice runs by the big drivers at the discretion of Referee Ricker

Noon - Course closed.

1 o'clock - Dealer's Race 112 miles

2:50 - Aeroplane flight by DeLloyd Thompson

3 o'clock - Universal Trophy race

At 6PM the special trains which brought thousands of fans from every small town imaginable between Uniontown and Pittsburgh and into West Virginia, will run their return trips.

Folks were advised of two entrances to the park. Grand stand and box ticket holders could park free by the grand stand after taking the Country Club Road route. All others were to use the main entrance on the National Pike. It cost \$1.00 for adults. Children under 12 got in free, and the day's program could be had for a mere 15 cents.

The new Technical Committee Chairman this year was Chester Ricker from Indianapolis. John Donahue assisted Rosboro as Referee, Zed Springer assisted Neil Whalen as Starter, Searight Marshall was Director of Scoring, William Pickens of Chicago, was Manager of Publicity, Jess Johnson served as scoreboard manager, and all other officials were the same as the first race the year before.

Members of the Keystone provided Police protection with Chief Williams and the Hook and Ladder, and Union Hose companies under the direction of Robert Seese, assisted by Edwin Howard.

Keystone members: Ray Keener, captain; George Mathews, Earl Deane, C.M. Wiley, C.C. Scott, George Ashman, Mason McLaughlin, and Arthur Bradley.

Chief Williams - George Little, captain; Ray Fields, J.R. Benson, Albert Griffith, Bowman Roth, Lloyd Bixler, William Thompson, and Charles Doran.

Union Hose - F.B. Wood, captain; M. Raffle, L. Harford, J. Onttko, S. Hill, George Cook, F. Swartz, and U.G. Markley.

The D. M. Bierer Rifle Club Band sang the Star Spangled Banner and My Country Tis of Thee just before gun shot at the starting line.

## UNIVERSAL TROPHY TO "DARK HORSE" IN A NO-STOP RUN

Oldfield, DePalma, and Hudson Team Frequently Forced to Pits  
and Suffer Irretrievable Delays

### HOW THE BIG RACE WAS RUN

Billy Taylor of Los Angeles, California took the Universal Cup from Louis Chevrolet when engine trouble caused the Frenchman to fall behind a full two laps. Although he came back on the track at ferocious speed, he could not make up the boards that had been lost. Taylor was virtually unknown in the east, but because the famous speed kings had their problems, Taylor won the Universal Trophy and could keep it permanently if he won it two more consecutive times. Taylor drove a beautiful Stutz car owned by oil man Fred Newman, of Oklahoma. He drove the entire 112 miles without a stop on an average of 89.25 mph, completing the course in 1 hour, 15 minutes, and 38 seconds. The Hudson team of Ira Vail and Ralph Mulford had trouble not long after the race began, Mulford's car getting "out of whack " and Vail had to replace tires and work on the engine. Chevrolet got a lap ahead of DePalma and Vail, keeping the lead for 80 laps.

Billy Taylor wowed the crowd in his red racer when he shortened the gap between himself and the famous Louis Chevrolet. Eddie Hearne closed in on Taylor in the last quarter and for 15 to 20 laps there was a great race with Chevrolet holding a 1 lap lead. That is when Chevrolet hit the pits for engine repairs.

Taylor had run many west coast races over the last 7-8 years, but this was the first race he had ever won. Newman had hired him just three months before this race and this was the first time he had raced the new Stutz car. After the races Newman said he would provide Taylor with the best in race cars because he had a barrel full of money to spend and Taylor was the best.

When Taylor crossed the tape on his 100th lap, Oldfield was on his 89th, DePalma on his 79th, Vail his 71st, and Mulford on his 90th lap respectively. The other drivers completed their laps and it was an entire 10 minutes before the last car was given the checkered flag.

### The Race Results

#### Universal Trophy

- 1 Billy Taylor
- 2 Joe Boyer
- 3 Eddie Hearnes
- 4 Louis Chevrolet
- 5 Dave Lewis
- 6 Art Klein
- 7 Jimmy Myer
- 8 Ralph Mulford

9 Barney Oldfield  
10 Milt McBride  
11 Ralph DePalma

### Dealer's Race

1 I.P. "Red" Fetterman  
2 Fred McCarthy  
3 H.E. Wynn  
4 H.L. Robinson  
5 M.J. Hudoc

In the first 50 miles of the dealer's race Wilmer Monahan in Charlie Johnson's Packard and Charles McFarland in his Murray gave the fans some thrills. Monahan then left the race during the 60th lap and McFarland was ruled off the course for "hogging" the upper guard rail. After Monahan wore his car out, Fetterman began pushing his racer harder and took over the race from the 80th lap on. He won by half a lap and ran out of gas just after he crossed the tape. McCarthy claimed that Fetterman had only made 99 laps but was overruled by the referee and told he could file a complaint if he wished.

In the Morning Herald the day after the race Uniontown Speedway President Charlie Johnson wrote: "I am very glad that such a huge crowd witnessed the running of Thursday's Speedway events for they saw the realization of the hopes and plans of the officials of the Speedway Association. The greatest lot of famous motor drivers piloting the mightiest lot of racing cars ever seen on a speedway battled for the supreme speed honors. And there were no accidents to mar the sport, proving that the track is absolutely safe after it was completed and that the unfortunate accident last December was not the fault of the course. When fifteen such cars and drivers as started Thursday can go through such a grueling contest without the semblance of an accident there is not much more to be said in praise of the most spectacular and fastest "less than two miles" speedway in the world.

"The name Uniontown has been printed thousands of times and will be printed many thousand more times in papers all over the country as a result of the speedway auto races. Such publicity can not be bought. The people here need never fear that they can mention the name of their city while traveling and fail to hear the other fellow remark about this being the city "that has the speedway.

"The city was full of people Wednesday night, Thursday, last night and will be crowded for a couple more days. That's the material benefit the city derives from the speedway.

"The ticket sellers and our auditors were busy all last night and will be busy a part of today counting the money. There was a lot of it, certainly not less than \$50,000.00 and the race will show a handsome profit. From an investment alone, the speedway will pay handsome returns to the stockholders."

Dutch Thompson put on a spectacular show in his biplane. He hails from Washington County and many of his fans were there to cheer him on as he did six somersaults at an altitude of 3,000 feet. There were 40,000 people at the speedway this day when they announced that Thompson would hold a government aviation school in Uniontown.

The Uniontown Speedway Association immediately planned a Dealer's Race for the fourth of July. The afternoon before the holiday, during trials, Car #45 of the Mercer team swerved up the track on the south west turn. It then crashed into the guard rail at 86mph, turned around twice and came to a stop at the inner rail. Driver Boettcher stayed

in his seat, but mechanic Desautel was thrown out of the car onto his head as it slid down the steep embankment. Desautel scraped his arm but was not seriously injured. The men assured fans that the car looked worse than it was and that they would be in the race the next day. A twisted rear end and bent frame were the problems they had to solve overnight.

Dave Lewis, sole survivor of the Trinity Lewis-Galvin-Hughes who were among the star attractions in December's fatal opening race, quietly drove the Hoskins onto the track. Hughie Hughes was on his way to driving the scarlet racer to fame when his life was cut short. Lewis meant to make Hughes proud and did when he entered the fastest qualifying time to date, 99 8/10mph. Even though he had set a record, Lewis knew he could do better and asked permission to run an exhibition lap to break the lap record held by Louis Chevrolet. He beat the Frenchman's record of 100mph by a fraction -100 1/4mph- and the crown was passed to the veteran driver. The "dope" around local hotels and garages had bets on Eddie Hearne to win, with Ralph Mulford, and Louis Chevrolet second and third.

The race for July 4th was postponed because weather observer Pennywit "pulled a bone" in his forecast, predicting rain showers. Twenty thousand fans and speedway officials moaned and groaned as the sun shone beautifully over Hopwood throughout the day.

I am sure the facts that the Fayette County Court requested that "no liquors be sold" on the Fourth of July in hotel bars and fireworks sales had been halted, called for the most quiet Independence Day in the history of the county seat. According to the papers, "mountain parties and other aversions will hold sway."

Joe Boyer won the three heat professional race, beating out Cooper and Vail. Boyer was driving Chevrolet's Frontenac. It was in the last heat that the four drivers really showed who the race was between. Vail's Hudson blew a tire at the beginning of the race. This was changed in 12 seconds while Cooper gained 1 1/2 laps on the Hudson. Vail pushed his racer to 106mph and caught Cooper on the 6th lap. They stayed together for 10 more laps, almost catching Boyer because his right rear tire was almost burned completely off. He had to slow down, especially on the curves, and limped across the finish line a full 1/4 mile ahead of his opponents. Vail failed to catch up after losing ground when changing that tire and Cooper lagged behind because he believed the other cars were inferior and would not stand the pressure. Wrong. Boyer won \$1,500.00 in the champion event.

I.P. Fetterman won the dealer's race in his Peerless setting a record average speed of 92mph. This record was taken from Chevrolet. Wilber Monahan blew a tire and spun around three times on the southwest bank, but luckily no real accident occurred. Fetterman won \$1,250.00 in the dealer's and Australian Pursuit races. Denny Hickey did well in this race, but could not keep up with Fetterman's Peerless.

Dutch Thompson wowed the crowds once more with his flying antics and the speedway association went on to plan a fall classic race as they were on a roll.

## HENDERSON AND MILTON PUT UP GOOD RACE

## CHEVROLET AND MECHANICIAN HURT

The 150 lap Autumn Classic held October 28 had to be postponed twice because of bad weather. This lessened the crowd by thousands, but drivers put on a show with Duesenbergs leading the way. Eddie Hearne crossed the finish line with his teammate Tommy Milton just behind him. Denny Hickey of Dawson, Pennsylvania came in 3rd in his Hudson, an up and coming driver everyone agreed. Milton had been leading the way but blew a tire in the 145th lap and had to drive like a demon to catch Hearne.

The starting line up was as follows:

Eddie Hearne, #45 Duesenberg  
Tommy Milton, #7 Duesenberg  
Dennis W. Hickey, #59 Hudson  
Jimmy Meyers, #48 Pugh  
Ora F. Haibe, #81 Pale  
Ira Vail, #14 Hudson  
Fred McCarthy, #41 Hudson  
Dave Lewis, #12 Hoskins  
Jack Conway, #56 Hudson  
Ralph Mulford, #9 Frontenac  
Pete Henderson, #8 Duesenberg  
Gaston Chevrolet, #44 Frontenac  
Barney Newgard, #29 Johnson  
Gil Anderson, #55 Miller  
Andy Burt, #42 Erbes

The initial laps were turned at an average speed of 93 1/3mph. Haibe was already out of the race from motor trouble in the 4th lap. Ira Vail took a long lead on the 11th and burnt up the track trying to keep it. On the 15th lap Vail was followed by Hearne, Hickey, and Henderson with speed mounting to an average of 95 3/5mph. Newgard went out in the 16th when a connecting rod broke on the Johnson Special. Vail was still leading in the 20th lap, completing 3 laps consecutively at over 100mph. Lewis' flat tire in the 22nd was changed in 10 seconds, Haibe went back to the pits, and Anderson also had motor trouble. After 25 laps the race was between Vail, Milton, Mulford, Hearne, Henderson, Hickey, and G. Chevrolet in that order. The speed was 96 4/5mph and this was faster than any previous race. Chevrolet skidded into the pits during the 34th lap to change a tire, which he did in 15 seconds, but not before he spun the Frontenac around twice. Vail pulled into the pits in the 37th lap and got out of the car. He had taken ill with stomach problems and was quickly replaced by driver Eddie Devoe who failed to recoup the lead. Mulford was leading in the 40th and Chevrolet gave his overheated motor a shot of water in the 46th. Milton took the lead in the next lap when Mulford took to the pits with engine trouble that took him out of the race. Hickey was at this point driving a powerfully heady race. At the 50th Milton, Henderson, Hearne, and Hickey were giving the crowds a show when Hickey went into the death curve in a pocket. He was surrounded by five racers when he blew a tire. The papers touted his driving as "an exhibition of the most skillful driving ever seen at this speedway" because he righted the vehicle, worked it down to the pole, and drew up to the pits amid thunderous applause. Hickey had just escaped death. He had yet another flat tire three laps later and Milton had the lead. The pace was now 93 3/5mph with Henderson and Hearne following the Duesenberg in their

Duesenbergs. Milton blew a tire in the 72nd, spinning three times and making a quick change. When he went back in Henderson led the way. At lap 100 the three Duesenbergs were four full laps ahead of the other cars. Nine cars out of the 15 starters remained. Henderson blew a tire on death curve on the 122th lap. The car skidded, spun around several times, and came to a crashing halt against the inside guard rail. This demolished the car, but no injuries occurred.

On lap 135 Gaston Chevrolet hit the fence along the back stretch of the track at 100mph. Chevrolet and his mechanic Barbonini, were thrown out of the Frontenac. They had many injuries, but none were thought to be life threatening. Fans raced to the scene as the big scoreboard blocked the view of the wreck from most spectators. Milton blew a tire in the 145th lap and Hearne went on to cross the finish line first.

There were Championship Heats run this day, also, with Fred McCarthy driving the Connellsville Hudson to take home the trophy in #59 for Mr. Stickel.