

By Harry Pulfer

THE FIRST

FORD

RACE

June 4, 1896

The first car Henry Ford ever built, runs. It is the result of years of experimenting with steam, electricity and gas. He demonstrates his genius from the start, and his instinct for doing what is right. There were many more steam cars in use during the period of experimentation, and more electrics, too. Mr. Ford was a good steam man and you have to believe he was well founded in electricity too, since he worked for Edison Electric of Detroit, as the General Superintendent. He could see the BTU s locked up in gasoline and made the right decision - he would build gas cars. Only in this way could man move great loads long distances by pouring a liquid into a container.

June 6, 1899

The second Ford car runs on the streets of Detroit.

August 5, 1899

The Detroit Automobila Co. was authorized to build cars. This was the first manufacturer on record in the city that is now the capitol of the automotive industry. Henry Ford was the Designer and Engineer of this new company.

January, 1900

The first Delivery wagon is ready for testing and there are seven others in the process.

November, 1900

Detroit Automobile Co. is out of business. This company probably made twenty cars in all. Ford is now 38 years old and this is his first business failure. Watching Duryea, Olds and Winton, he notes their success is in part due to racing. He decides to build a race car.

May, 1901

Ford is building a racing car. This time he has Bartel to help him and Spider Huff, who is to ride with him to victory. He has the help of a good many other bright young men too. He has the guts or gall to decide that he can build a better, faster car than the famous men already racing. He backs his opinion with his own money, and comes up with a compact horizontal two cylinder engine with a seven-inch bore and a seven-inch stroke, and fitted into a skeleton chassis. Instinct told him how to get the horsepower up and the weight down. How right he turned out to be!

Late Summer, 1901

The Driving Club of Detroit arranges to have a fall meet at the Grosse Pointe Race Track, a one-mile dirt track used for horse racing, located near the Detroit River. This is out in the country.

October 9, 1901

Henry Ford posts his entrance fee. This is to be a twenty-five mile Sweepstakes event.

Saturday, October 10, 1901

Tremendous excitement, many businesses shut down, every car that can be run is on the track. An enthusiastic crowd is on hand and ready to view the first auto race ever held in Detroit. Ford has never driven a racing car, he has never been on the track before. People notice him take a couple of fast laps with Tom Cooper riding with him. Tom is the USA Bicycle Champion, a wealthy man, and seems interested in this new form of racing.

The First Event is a five-mile (five-lap) race for steam cars and is won by Rollin White in a White Steamer. The fastest mile is 1:52, or just under 30 MPH.

Next Event is for Electrics. It takes as long as four minutes for them to turn a lap, and the crowd booes! Top speed: 15 MPH.

Then comes the One-Mile Match Race, won by H. H. Lytle. A Ford car is dead last. This is the first Ford ever to race, it s a poor portend for the race to follow. This is probably one of the commercial cars Ford is building this year.

At this point Alexander Winton drives an exhibition race against time in his 70 horsepower racer. This is the USA Champion, a man who has gone to Europe to defend his title against their best! He beats Henry Fournier's record of 1:13 1/2 for a mile by a full second! It's a World's record for a circular track. Newsmen note clouds of dust and the loose dirt track.

Now comes the high point of the day - the Challenge Race for the big Silver Punch Bowl and \$1000.00. The race is supposed to be 25 miles but has to be cut to ten because of the late hour. Several cars were entered including Vanderbuilts \$15,000 Mercedes, and Buffam with a car rated at 120 horsepower!

But, when the race started, it is just Winton with Shanks as his mechanic, and Ford with Spider Huff as his. From the start Winton takes the lead; his experience is shown by his taking the curves very smoothly! Ford slides into the turns and has to cut the engine to regain control. Huff hangs way out to keep them from overturning!

At the three-mile mark, Winton is a good fifth of a mile in the lead. By the sixth lap, Ford is doing a bit better as he has learned control. Ford passes Winton in the eighth lap and leads to the finish. Time for the ten miles: 13:23-4/5. Fastest mile: 1:20-4/5. Not bad for a first race!

The crowd goes wild! Ford is hoisted up on their shoulders. Everyone wants to congratulate him. He has caught the attention of wealthy men. It is a very sweet victory. One Ford lost and another Ford won. It is a great day for Henry!

On this day,, Tom Cooper and a bicycle racer by the name of Barney Oldfield race against time on a powered racing motorcycle.

Ford announces he is through with racing.

Tom Cooper announces he is through with bicycle racing; now is interested in race cars!

Barney Oldfield announces he will go back to Salt Lake city for the Winton Bike Races.

HARRY PULFER

Who is he?

The preceding article was written by Harry Pulfer and you will notice his name on the front page with credit as a contributing editor. Harry is going to write a great many more stories for *The Vintage Ford* so we thought you might like to have a brief background on him.

Harry has by his own word, "been fooling around with automobiles" since 1910. He retired at the age of 64 and that was some years ago. He ran a gas station during WWII and remembers vividly the ration stamp and shortages. He was among the very first to buy and use a Chassis Dynamometer, the basic instrument that is all the rage now for engine diagnosis. He was interested in Fords from the very first because, as he explains it, "they were about all our neighbors could buy or run". Harry was a friend and companion of the Winfield brothers, Eddie and Bud, as well as Paul Fromm, Rex Mays and Ted Horn. He worked on Alger Street next door to the shop where Frank Kurtis built his famous Kurtis Kar. If you don't recognize these names you're very young!

As a kid he raced Cyclecars with Harry Hartz, Alex Pabst and Al Hetzel, and by so doing he got to meet the racing greats of the era. Harry still sees and corresponds with the remaining ones and is considered a race car Historian now.

Many years ago he started collecting car emblems, especially script, and now has the largest such collection in the world. He reproduces emblems for restorers all over the world, and works from his own data, beat-up originals, faded photos, sketches or even phone descriptions. In addition to the emblem collection, Harry has probably gathered the most definitive collection of Ford Service Bulletins in existence. Only recently one of our Harbor Chapter members received from Harry, the necessary bulletins to complete (yes, complete) his own collection! From this rich source, Dan Post gathered a great deal of the information he used in compiling "The Model T in Speed and Sport", and the standard reference work on the Model A.

The Ford Archives is indebted to Harry for a lot of information which they did not have and could not have gotten if it were not for the "pack-rat" instincts of this remarkable man. Did you know that the Ford Motor Co. made over 100 different cars under names that most of us never heard of - Palm, Renown, Matsford, TruFord and the memorable Catsford? Did you know that FOMOCO was registered with the U.S. Patent

