

May 1992

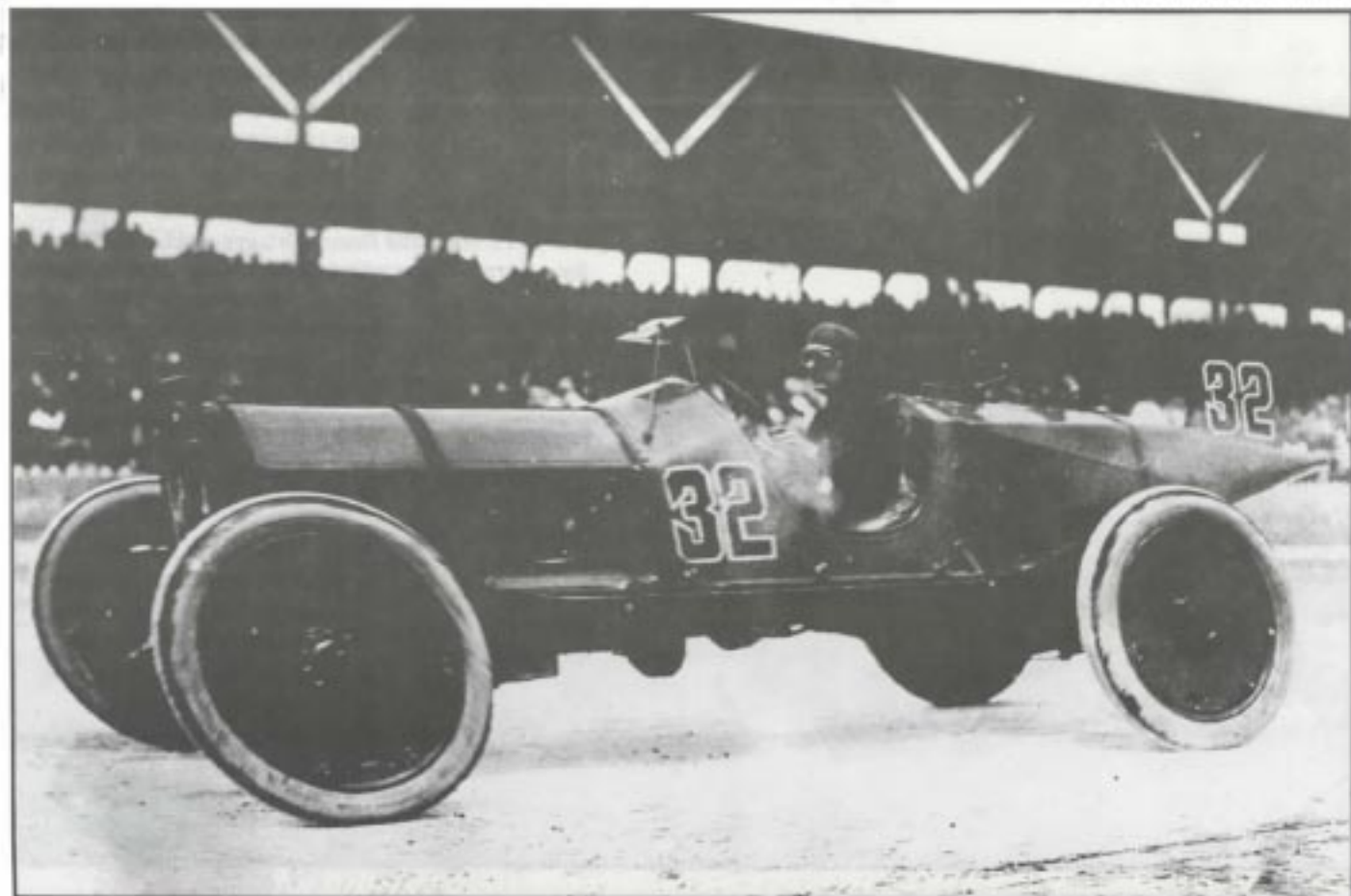


THE INDIANA JUNIOR HISTORIAN

PUBLISHED BY THE INDIANA HISTORICAL BUREAU, STATE OF INDIANA

Focus—Vroom! Speedway in May!

*Ray Harroun, at 29, was the winner of the first Indianapolis 500 Mile Race held on May 30, 1911.
The time taken to run the race was 6:42:08, at an average speed of 74.59 mph.
His winnings were \$14,250 plus a few thousand more from manufacturers.
Courtesy Indy 500 Photos.*



Focus

The Indianapolis 500 Mile Race will attract the attention of the world during the month of May. It all began in 1911, when Ray Harroun won the very first Indianapolis 500 Mile Race.

In order to give you some local history about the city of Speedway and the race, we have created a fictitious family, the Boswells, and their friend Mr. Sam Johnson. All of the information is accurate, including the fact that the old school was located where the present Dairy Queen now stands.

We hope that this early history of the race will add to the excitement of May.

Speedway Remembered

"Hi, kids!," said Sam Johnson.

"Hi, Mr. Sam."

"Are you kids here to see the Indianapolis 500?"

"Yes, we just arrived from Angola. What a long trip."

"Oh, Jaimie, it wasn't so long," said Pam. "Are you going to go to the 500, too, Mr. Sam?"

"No, I don't think that I'll be going this year. These 90 year-old bones can't take that much excitement. But I remember the very first 500 mile race. It was back in 1911. I was nine years old, just your age, Jaimie. I remember that day just like it was yesterday. My father decided that I was old enough to see a real automobile race. We didn't own an automobile, but some folks in our town did. We still had the old horse and buggy. I was surprised that my father wanted to take me because it was so expensive. It cost \$2.50 to sit in the grandstand."

"Wow, only \$2.50," said Jaimie, "that's nothing!"

"You must remember, Jaimie, that \$2.50 was a lot of money in those days. My father earned less than \$12.00 a week.¹ Heck, the box seats were \$7.00. I thought that was a small fortune. We took a picnic lunch because we knew that the race would last all day."

Pam was playing with Sparky, Mr. Sam's dog. "Tell us more about that first race, Mr. Sam," said Pam.

"I've never seen so many people," continued Mr. Sam. "There must have been 80,000 people who came to the track to see that race."

The starting lineup of the 1911 500 Mile Race. Drivers paid a \$500 entry fee. Cars were positioned according to entry dates.

Courtesy Indy 500 Photos.



"My dad says that there will be more than 400,000 at the track this weekend," said Jaimie; "80,000 is nothing."

"Well, 80,000 was a lot of people in 1911, Jaimie. There were 3,000 hitching posts in the infield. That's where we left Sadie, our horse. Some folks drove in their new automobiles, and others came by train and interurban.

The tracks ran right by the race track. In fact, that's one of the reasons that the track was built here. Of course, it wasn't called Speedway then."

"What was it called, if it wasn't Speedway," asked Pam.

"Actually, Pam, there wasn't a town then, just a few farms, a church, a school house, and lots of land."

Pam was curious. "Why would people want to build a race track in the middle of a farming area?"

"That's a good question, Pam. The main purpose of the track was not to race but to test new parts and equipment for the automobile. Mr. Fisher, the man who built the track, was interested in developing such a place. He knew that he would need lots of flat ground to test the new automobiles, and it had to be close to Indianapolis. The old Pressley and Munter farms were perfect. The ground was level, close to the city, and the railroad and interurban tracks were close-by. He also knew that he needed a new factory location for his business,



*The city of Speedway, circa 1920s, corner of 16th Street and Winton Avenue.
Courtesy History Committee of the Speedway Civic Committee.*

Prest-O-Lite. Mr. Fisher had some problems in Indianapolis," Mr. Sam chuckled; "his company exploded regularly." "Exploded," cried Jaimie, "did he make dynamite?"

"No, his company made carbide gas headlights for automobiles. This gas had a tendency to explode. Mr. Fisher needed to relocate his company in an area which was not heavily populated. This farmland was just the right place."

"Who won that race, Mr. Sam?" asked Pam.

"Ray Harroun won that race, driving a bright yellow Marmon roadster made right here in Indianapolis."

"Did he win a lot of money?" questioned Jaimie.

"It may not sound like a lot of money to you, Jaimie, but Harroun won \$14,250 for taking the checkered flag."

Alan and Janine Boswell came into Mr. Sam's yard to collect their children. It was time to go to

continued on p.4



Ray Harroun wearing his leather helmet and glass goggles.
 Courtesy Indy 500 Photos.

Speedway Remembered, continued

the Indianapolis Motor Speedway Hall of Fame Museum. Mr. Boswell was anxious for Jaimie to see Ray Harroun's bright yellow Marmor. But first they took everyone to Dairy Queen for lunch.

"Did I ever tell you that my school stood on the very spot where the Dairy Queen stands now?" Mr. Sam had not quite finished telling the children about Speedway. "There was an old grist mill where we used to play, and then we would play hide-and-seek near the covered bridge on the pike. . . ."

¹Phillips, Clifton J., *Indiana in Transition: The Emergence of an Industrial Commonwealth, 1880-1920*. Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Bureau and Indiana Historical Society, 1968, p. 327.

Sources: Bloemker, *500 Miles To Go*; Devaney, *The Indianapolis 500: History Committee, The Story of Speedway*.

Activities

- The Indianapolis 500 and the automobile industry had a great influence on the development of the city of Speedway. Investigate the reasons for the development of your city or town. What were the early businesses that brought people together to live and work? Are these companies still in business in your town?
- Plan a photographic expedition of the business district of your town. Take photographs of the exteriors of the buildings. Ask for permission to photograph the interiors of these businesses. Place these photographs in a scrapbook with dates, descriptions of the pictures, and names of some of the employees. Your scrapbook could be an important source of history for your town.
- Develop a brief business history of your town by using *Local Businesses: Exploring Their History* (Kerr, K. Austin; Loveday, Amos J.; Blackford, Mansel G. *The Nearby History Series*. Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1990).

A Very Brief History of Automobile Racing

Automobile racing became popular in the United States during the early 1900s. Automobiles were still new and exciting to most people. The first races were more to test the endurance of vehicles, and a way for automobile manufacturers to advertise their cars to the American public.

In the beginning, as in Europe, races were held on open roads, usually between two cities. There were drawbacks to this practice. Spectators could only watch parts of the race, depending on where they stood. Nor could sponsors of the races make any money from the spectators. How can you charge someone for standing beside a road? Also, the races stopped normal traffic, and many people were displeased at the inconvenience.

Sponsors began to hold their races at county fairgrounds, racing on the dirt horse tracks. Crowds could watch the entire race, and the sponsors could control the gates, charging the public an entrance fee. The daredevil drivers and the ever increasing speeds thrilled the growing

number of race fans. The soft dirt tracks were not the best for automobile racing, however; and, eventually, tracks were designed and built especially for the automobile.

As the sport of automobile racing developed, so did safer cars and equipment, like the rear-view mirror and the seat belt. In addition, many products for cars, such as fuels, oils, tires, and other items have been continually improved for better performance.

Source: Butterworth, The Album of Automobile Racing, pp. 12-14.

Activities

- May is race month in Indiana. Compile your own 1992 history of automobile racing by collecting racing stories and news information from magazines and newspapers during May.
- Investigate the number of safety features found in automobiles that are a direct result of automobile racing.

Track Facts

- When the track opened in 1909 the surface of the racetrack was crushed limestone and oil. (Bloemker, p. 43)
- The very first racing event held at the new track in 1909 was a balloon race. The second event, that same year, was a motorcycle race. (Bloemker, pp. 45, 49)
- The first automobile racing event was held in 1909. After three days of racing, two drivers, a mechanic and two spectators had died. (Bloemker, pp. 60, 65)
- In 1910, the track was resurfaced with 3.2 million bricks, earning the track the nickname, "the brickyard." (Bloemker, p. 69)
- Tires used on the first race cars were nothing more than a larger version of a bicycle tire placed on wooden rims. (Butterworth, p. 32)
- Aviation Week opened on June 13, 1910.

Orville and Wilbur Wright attended. The "wind machine," a car with an airplane propeller installed, raced airplanes that flew directly above it around the track. Walter Brookins, flying a Wright biplane, established a new world's altitude record of 4,384 feet. (Bloemker, p. 77)

• During World War I, racing was suspended, and the track was used as an aviation repair depot for the American Army Air Corps. The straightaways were used as landing strips. (Butterworth, p. 54)

• In 1992 the Indianapolis Motor Speedway will host the 76th Indianapolis 500, but the first 500 race was held 81 years ago. The track was closed during World War I and World War II. (Devaney, pp. 38, 139)

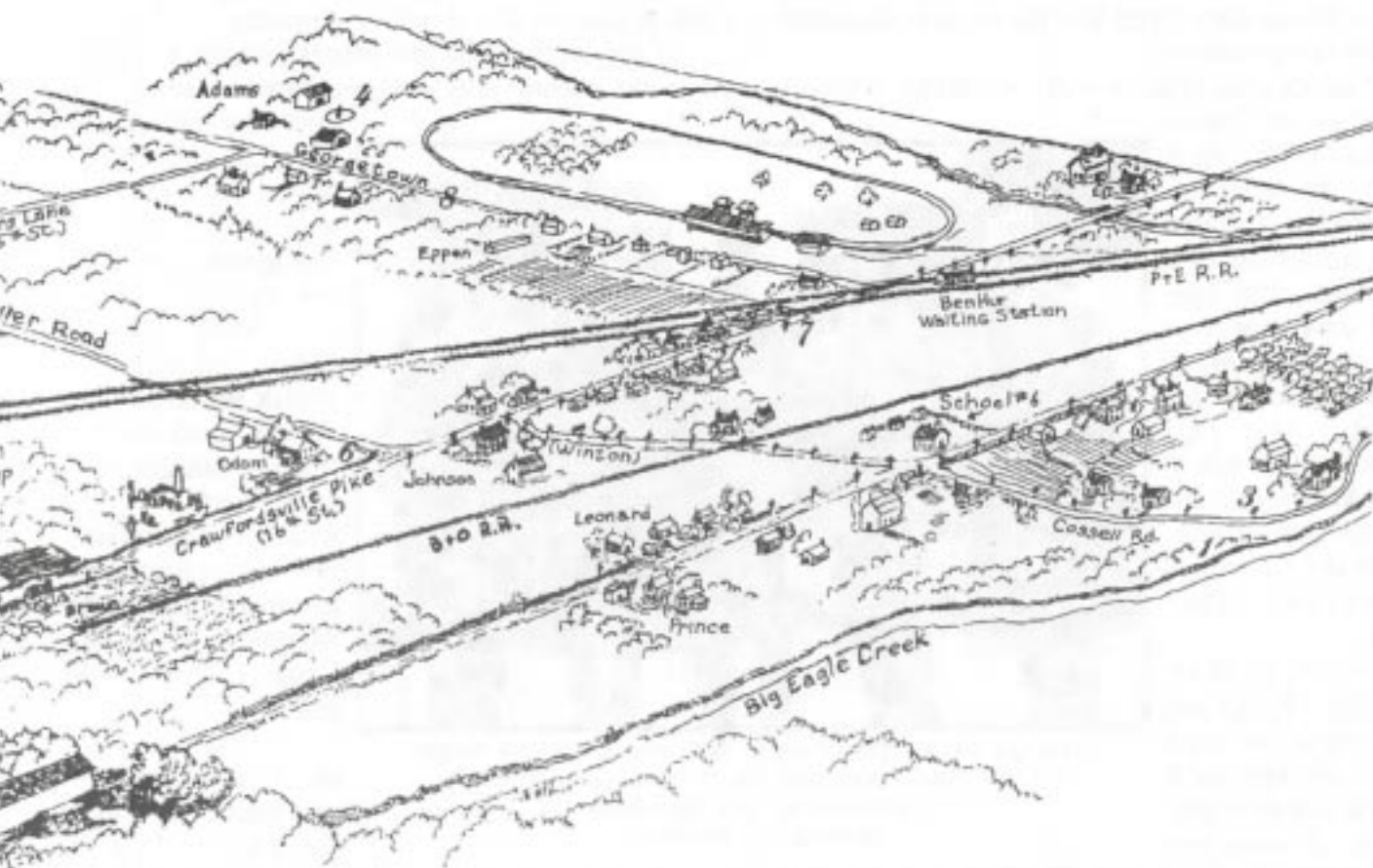
Speedway

Questions About This Map

- List the railroads found on this map. These railroad lines use abbreviations. What do they stand for?
- Give the street names for the location of School #6.
- Describe what you would see if you traveled from 10th Street and High School Road to School #6.
- Give directions to someone from out of town who is looking for the track. They are starting at the corner of 10th Street and Striebeck Road.
- This map was drawn in 1976 from information supplied to the artist by Orville Adams, Lawrence Leonard, and Frank Downing. Locate their homes on this map.
- Look up the term **circa**. Where do you find that term on this map? What does this mean in reference to this map?
- List the roads that are **parallel** to the track. List the roads that are **perpendicular** to the track. Look these terms up first.
- Using the railroad map found on pages 6-7 of the March issue of *The Indiana Junior Historian*, or any other map showing railroads in Indiana, trace the route of these railroad lines through the state. Name the counties through which these lines travel.



in 1910



Speedway Area
circa 1910
as remembered by Orville Adams
Lawrence Leonard & Frank Downing
Drawing by Pat Baldwin

Map reproduced with permission from the artist.

Father of the 500

A.J. Foyt, Mario Andretti, and Al Unser are just a few of the names that come to mind when you think of the Indianapolis 500. Then, of course, there is Tony Hulman, a major contributor to the later success of the 500. Another man, however, came before Hulman. Carl Fisher was the man who conceived and built the Indianapolis Motor Speedway.

Carl Graham Fisher was born in Greensburg, Indiana, on January 12, 1874. As a child, he was described as a daredevil and a bit of a show-off. His eyesight was very poor and consequently schoolwork was difficult. He quit school at the age of 12, taking a job selling candy on trains. He found he was a natural-born salesman.

In 1891, when Carl was 17, he took the \$600 he had saved and opened a bicycle repair shop, which he soon expanded to sell bikes as well. Bicycling was fast becoming a national craze, and he made a good living. Hoping to do even better, he promoted his little shop by doing wild stunts. One such stunt was riding a bike between two buildings on a tightrope. Needless to say, he got the public's attention and sales boomed.

Carl saw the new internal combustion automobile as the transportation of the future, and he wanted to be part of it. He abandoned the bicycle and opened the Fisher Auto Company. It was the beginning of his lifelong passion with the automobile. As a promotion for his new business, he began to race the cars he sold.

In 1904 Carl was approached by P.C. Avery, who had invented a carbide gas headlight for automobiles. Fisher saw the potential, and he and his friend, James Allison, formed the Prest-O-Lite Company. There was a slight problem with his new business, however, since the cylinders of gas exploded with regularity.

Carl, now a wealthy businessman, decided to build a race track where new automobiles could be tested and raced against each other. He knew that the public would pay good money to watch such races.

Fisher and other investors, Frank Wheeler, Art Newby, and James Allison bought the farmland for \$72,000. Construction of the track began in 1909. In mid-August of 1909 the first races took place.

Originally, the track was open on Memorial Day, Fourth of July, and

Labor Day with series of races run over three days. It was not long before the public became bored, seeing the same cars and drivers. Attendance began to fall. Fisher came up with the idea of having only one race a year. The race would be 500 miles, with the best cars and drivers in the world. It would be spectacular! The first 500, held in 1911, was a tremendous success, drawing over 80,000 spectators.

As interest in the Indianapolis 500 grew, so did the town of Speedway. Fisher's business, along with other companies that had settled in the surrounding area, prospered. Allison Engineering (General Motors), Esterline-Angus, and



*Henry Ford, first from the left, visits with Art Newby, Frank Wheeler, Carl Fisher, and James Allison, partners in the Indianapolis Motor Speedway.
Courtesy Indy 500 Photos.*

Electric Steel were all successful companies that employed hundreds of people who commuted daily from Indianapolis or lived in Speedway.

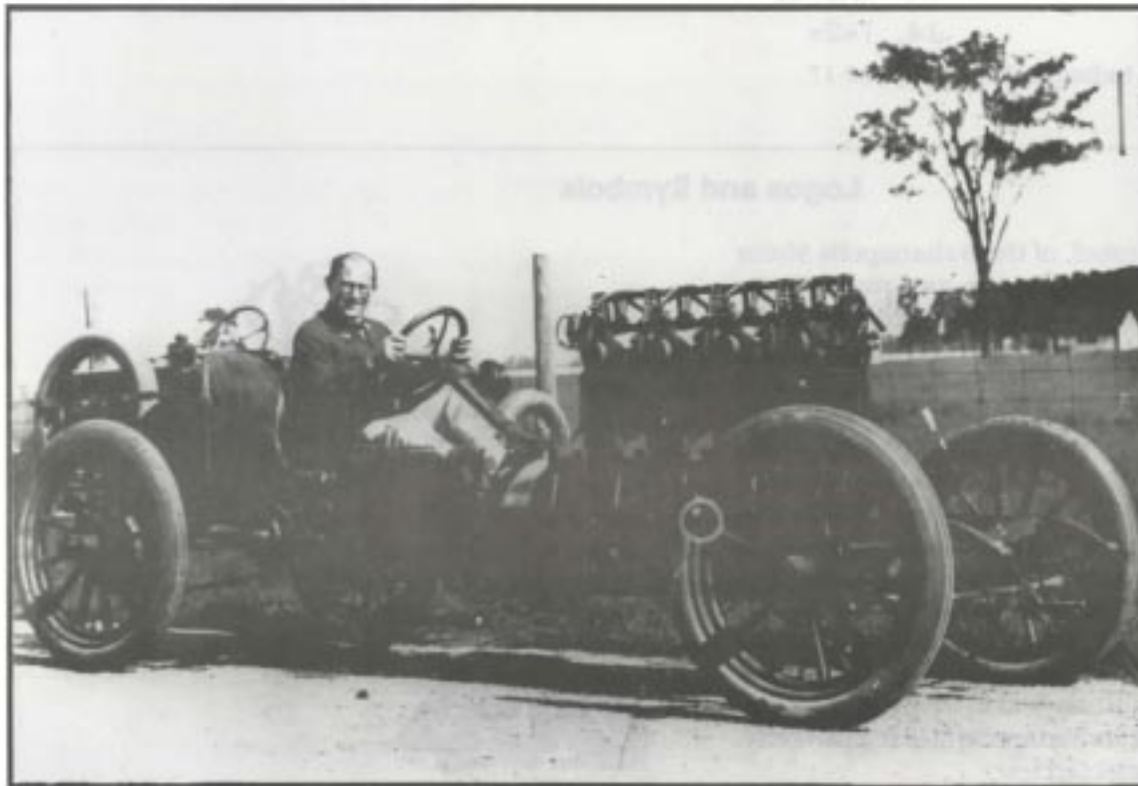
Fisher and his partners eventually sold their shares in the 500. Fisher went on to invest his energy, money, and business genius in a piece of swampland in Florida. This area is now known as Miami Beach.

Today a school and a street in Speedway bear Fisher's name, and a monument to him stands in Miami Beach. Fisher is rarely mentioned, however, when race fans gather in May. Few are aware that the Indianapolis 500 Mile Race exists because of him.

Source: 500 Souvenir Book (1983), pp. 4-5.

Activities

- Carl Fisher, Henry Ford, Ransom Olds (Oldsmobile), and the Chevrolet brothers are a few of the men who manufactured and raced their own cars. Write mini-biographies of these automobile and racing pioneers.
- Eddie Rickenbacker and Tony Hulman are the next two chapters in the story of the Indianapolis 500. Research the lives of these two men to add to your history of the Indianapolis 500.



Carl Fisher is shown here in his custom-built race car, the Premier Comet. He entered the car in the prestigious International Road Race. When he learned his car was over the official 2,200 weight limit, he had 474 holes drilled in the frame. It still weighed 200 pounds too much. Courtesy Indy 500 Photos.

Activity

Adding Up The Facts

There is more to count at the 500 than laps! Add the sums below and fill in the corresponding numbered blanks to learn more about the first 500 race.

The first Indianapolis (1.) _____ Mile Race was held on May (2.) _____ (3.) _____. There were (4.) _____ drivers, each having paid an entry fee of (5.) \$ _____. Moments before the race began, at (6.) _____ a.m., the cars were in (7.) _____ rows, (8.) _____ cars across. Every car, except one, carried (9.) _____ men, the driver and the mechanic. It was the mechanic's job to make repairs, and keep an eye on the traffic. Ray Harroun, age (10.) _____, drove the only car without a mechanic. His car was number (11.) _____, a (12.) _____ cylinder Marmon. To watch the

traffic approaching from behind, Ray placed a mirror on his cockpit, thereby inventing the rearview mirror! During the race, many of the cars had an average speed of (13.) _____ mph. Because of the rough brick surface, the rubber tires lasted only (14.) _____ or (15.) _____ laps. One driver made (16.) _____ pit stops! Harroun kept his speed at a steady (17.) _____ mph. He only needed (18.) _____ pit stops. Harroun went on to win the race. It took him almost (19.) _____ hours. He won (20.) \$ _____ in prize money.

1. $492+8=$

8. $4+1=$

15. $1+3=$

2. $15+15=$

9. $1+1=$

16. $9+5=$

3. $641+1270=$

10. $16+13=$

17. $48+27=$

4. $29+11=$

11. $18+14=$

18. $2+2=$

5. $317+183=$

12. $1+5=$

19. $6+1=$

6. $3+7=$

13. $56+24=$

20. $9430+4820=$

7. $2+6=$

14. $1+2=$

Source: Devaney, *The Indianapolis 500*, pp. 12-17.

Logos and Symbols

The logo, or symbol, of the Indianapolis Motor Speedway includes wings, a tire, and racing flags. This symbol, minus the flags, was used during the very first 500 race, but little else is known about this famous logo.

Why do you think that wings were included in the design? Could they represent speed, or perhaps refer to the Speedway's early aviation connection?

How would you design the logo? Would you keep the same elements, or include symbols of speed and racing from the 1990s? Design your own Indianapolis Motor Speedway logo.

The logo for the 1992 race is indicated to the right. Create a logo for the 1993 race. Send your logos to the Indiana Historical Bureau, and we will share them with the Indianapolis Motor Speedway. We will publish a selected few.



An Apple for Everyone



Selected Sources pertaining to Speedway and the Indianapolis 500 Mile Race.

- Bloemker, Al. *500 Miles To Go: The Story of The Indianapolis Speedway*. New York: Coward-McCann, Inc. 1961.

Bloemker's book is a standard source of information on the 500. For adult or interested student reading.

- Butterworth, W. E. *An Album of Automobile Racing*. New York: Franklin Watts. 1977.

This book offers students easy reading and quick information about automobile racing.

- Devaney, John and Barbara. *The Indianapolis 500: A Complete Pictorial History*. Chicago: Rand McNally & Company. 1976.

This is a good year-by-year account of the 500 beginning with 1911.

- Dolan, Edward R., Jr. *Great Moments in the Indy 500*. New York: Franklin Watts. 1982.

This year-by-year account is written for students and is a good source of information.

- Fisher, Jane. *Fabulous Hoosier: A Story of American Achievement*. New York: Robert M. McBride & Company. 1947.

This biography of Carl Fisher was written by Fisher's wife.

- History Committee of the Speedway Civic Committee,

compilers. *The Story of Speedway*. [Speedway, Ind.]: Speedway Civic Committee. 1976.

This is an excellent source for the local history of Speedway and serves as a good model for other communities wishing to compile a history.

- Hungness, Carl; Fox, Jack; Blackwell, Justyn, eds. *500 Souvenir Book*. Speedway, Ind.: Carl Hungness Publishing. 1983.

This souvenir book includes some wonderful articles and photographs of 500 history.

- Robinson, Scott. *Indy Cars*. Mankato, Minn.: Crestwood House. 1988.

Easy to read student book on the basics of Indy car racing.

Other Resources

- The Indianapolis Motor Speedway Hall of Fame Museum is open every day except Christmas, from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Admission is \$1.00 per person/under 16 are free. Over 70 cars are displayed with race engines, helmets, goggles, trophies, and old photographs. For an additional nominal fee, conducted track tours are available. Located at 4790 West 16th Street, Indianapolis, IN 46222. Call (317) 248-6747 for more information.

- **Special thanks to:** the Indianapolis Motor Speedway Corporation—Robert L. Walters, Director of Public Relations,

and Ron McQueeney, Director of Photography; Donald Davidson, United States Auto Club; the Speedway Public Library; the Speedway Civic Committee.

Note to Teachers

The September and October issues of *The Indiana Junior Historian* will focus on Woodland Indians of Indiana.

Woodland Workshops will be held at the Minnetrista Cultural Center in Muncie, June 21-26.

The Minnetrista Council for Great Lakes Native American Studies will sponsor a bus trip to Tulsa, Oklahoma in September for its annual conference.

Call 317/282-4848 for more information about the workshops and the conference.

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The Indiana Historical Bureau was created in 1915 to celebrate the centennial of statehood. It is the duty of the Historical Bureau to edit and publish documentary and other material relating to the history of the state of Indiana, to promote the study of Indiana history, and to work with others engaged in such pursuits. The Historical Bureau provides books, educational resources, and programs for students and teachers. Several are listed below. The Bureau also directs the Historical Marker Program and the care of the Governors' Portraits Collection.

- **BROADSIDES** produces supplemental educational materials based on primary sources for teaching Indiana history. Student packets encourage active participation and skills development with possible integration in various grades and subjects. An extensive teacher guide provides ready information and teaching resources.
- **Indiana Close Up** is a high school local government program affiliated with the national Close Up Foundation. This participatory annual event encourages study and discussion through the Jefferson Meeting on the Indiana Constitution.
- **Indiana History Day** encourages students grades 4 - 12 to research and prepare papers, exhibits, performances and media presentations on an annual historical theme. An emphasis on original research and interpretation allows students to experience the excitement of discovering or developing skills and interests that enrich their education and their lives. It is part of the National History Day network.
- **REACH**—Resources Educating in the Arts, Culture, and History—is a dynamic program that utilizes art and objects to stimulate dialogue and provide hands-on experiences, exploring not only the arts but also the culture and history of Indiana. Its arts-in-education basis encourages on-going planning for involving community resources in the school.

The Indiana Junior Historical Society is a network of history clubs for students in grades 4 - 12. Locally sponsored clubs initiate and participate in activities which encourage the study of Indiana history, often outside the classroom. The Indiana Junior Historical Society program is administered by the Indiana Historical Society, 315 West Ohio Street, Indianapolis, IN 46202; 317-232-1882.

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The publication is provided free to school media centers and public libraries throughout the state.

Classroom sets of back issues are sold for 20¢ per copy beginning with the September 1991 issue. Individual subscriptions are available for \$7.50.

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