

# Yesteryear at the Uniontown Speedway 1921

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

## Big Farm Power Test at Speedway Monday

Almost 2,000 people from southwestern Pennsylvania, Maryland, and West Virginia were guests of Henry Ford and 22 Allied Ford dealers in the northeastern United States for the first combined demonstration of farming machinery ever held in Fayette County, May 23, 1921. Farming motorists from all around came to view and test every kind of farm equipment that had yet been invented to aid in crop growing..

Four railroad cars of equipment was shipped from Washington, Pennsylvania, where Ford had held a similar demonstration. This included plows, harrows, discs, thrushers, saw mills, stone crushers, pulverizers, feed grinders, shredders, hay bailers, and corn pickers. There were more than fifteen companies represented in addition to the Ford Motor Company with its Fordson Tractors.

The demonstration began at 9am with a dinner being served free of charge to all on the grounds at noon.

At this time tickets were being sold for the Universal race coming up in June. A full row of box seats had been added to the covered section of the grand stand.

## Mulford Breaks All Records In Paige Stock "6"

Under official sanction and supervision, Smiling Ralph Mulford drove his Paige Cat to break records for the 5, 10, 15, 20, 25, 50, 75, and 100 mile marks May 20, 1921 at the Uniontown Speedway. The Crichton Timing System was used as it was regarded as the best. Representing the A.A.A. were G.E. Edwards, chairman of the technical committee; A.H. Means, secretary of the contest board; and F.H. Rosboro, Uniontown Speedway Association board representative.

Mulford's trial was devoid of thrills other than his right rear tire burning off about halfway through the day. Other than that Mulford displayed the utmost skill with his driving. It was said then, that every Paige on the showroom floors could run as well - all that was needed was a Mulford to tune the motor and be behind the wheel. After breaking all those records, the Paige Cat qualified as the speed champion and the handsomest car in America. They were made by Santos.

The headlines for the sixth annual Universal Trophy Race Saturday, June 18, 1921 read:

# BIG CROWD HERE FOR GREAT RACE

## MILTON RULES AS FAVORITE

Under overcast skies, thousands poured into Uniontown as ticket sales broke records. The crowd was so intense that special traffic rules were put in force by local police as follows:

Fayette Street from the intersection of Morgantown and Fayette Streets, was open to east bound traffic only on race day from 11am to 2pm.

The National Pike was closed to west bound traffic during the same hours between the W.A. Stone home and the Fayette/Morgantown Street intersection. Autos traveling west were diverted at the Stone home to the Country Club Road. The Derrick Avenue route to the track was closed to east bound traffic at the Barton Mill Road from 11am to 2pm. No cars were permitted further east than the Barton Mill Road.

Talk among the fans was that Milton's Frontenac had a new cylinder block that was not yet broken in and the car had just arrived the night before. Milton had won the Indy 500 the past Memorial Day with a new block which had only 30 miles on it, so bets were going his way. The odds were: Milton, even money to win; Murphy 1 to 2; Hearne 1 to 3; Sealres 1 to 3; and Mulford 1 to 4.

Hotels and restaurants were swamped both in town and the mountains, but by now were well prepared for race crowds and gladly served them. One well known but unidentified establishment baked 900 loaves of 25 slice bread for the day. Over 50,000 meals would easily be served in the city throughout the day.

An after race banquet was planned at the Summit Hotel where crowds would throng immediately to take a dip in the pool and get some relief from the heat and humidity. A 100 seat dinner was served to drivers, mechanics, pit crews, A.A.A. officials, and Speedway Association directors at 9pm with the usual dance following.

The race's weather was insured by Lloyd's of London, through Chisholm & Kunkle and the race could only be called off by the insurance company fifteen minutes before the scheduled events.

At this time, the Volstead Act had not yet been passed. Some were trying to change a section of the bill making it possible to have beer prescribed as medicine. This did not go over as it was assumed physicians would be swamped with the "ill".

Neil Whalen was the starter and Frank Rosboro referee for the 200 lap/225 mile race. Frontenacs were driven by Thomas Milton, Ralph Mulford, Jules Ellingboe, Allon Soules, and Joe Thomas. Wonderlich, Jimmie Murphy, Roscoe Searles, and Eddie Miller ran Duesenbergs. Frank Elliot was in a Leach Special and Eddie Hearne went for the money in a Revere Special.

## Searles in Duesenberg wins Universal Race

Searles "smashed through to victory with the greatest burst of sustained speed ever registered on the local track." His #6 Duesie was Milton's #10 from the year before. His time for top money was two hours, eighteen minutes and 19:42 seconds, stopping just once to adjust a disconnected spark plug. If it had not been for that one stop, Searles' average speed of 97.75 mph would have broke 100mph. Top prize was \$5,000.00 and possession of the Universal Trophy. He had qualified at 101.4mph.

Eddie Hearne came in 2nd in his Revere; Eddie Miller took 3rd in his Duesenberg; Tommy Alley came in 4th in a Frontenac. Tommy Milton took eighth place . It was said that the only man happier than Fred and Augie Duesenberg that day was Mack Rush of the Motor Square Garage. Mack handled both the Duesenberg and the Revere.

Only one accident occurred throughout the day. In lap 128 a broken steering knuckle caused Chicago's Jules Ellingboe's Frontenac to take a terrific spill at the start of the north turn close to the National Pike. The racer swerved into the inside guard rail, leaped over the six foot bank into the infield, spun around twice, ran back onto the track, and finally collapsed on the inside apron. Ellingboe and mechanic Wallace Butler were thrown from the car causing them serious, but not fatal, injuries.

By this time most cars were using Oldfield (Firestone) tires, whose high quality kept racers on the track and away from the pits for tire changes. A record low of three tire changes was set at the speedway this day. One dangerous hole developed along the outside edge of the straightaway, just in front of the first section of the grand stand. Neil Whalen had a time steering drivers away from the hole.

Because of the threat of rain, attendance was healthy, but under par compared to the Autumn Classic of 1920. After the race, the mountain was packed with cars up and down the pike, along Jumonville Road, and the Summit parking lot had over 300 autos there! Seventeen extra state policemen were on hand to control additional traffic.

An hour after the race, a shower ensued and Lloyds of London was in the clear. Just after the rain a West Virginia Essex (Major Jimmy Miller of Wheeling) and a Uniontown Ford worked their way onto the track from the infield and began tearing around the track at top speed. On his fourth lap, Miller was flying past the grand stand when he attempted to climb the steep embankment on the north curve up to the white line. To do this a car had to be going a solid 85mph to stick. The Essex began sliding sideways on the wet boards going into a spill, turning two circles, and finally crashed into the lower guard rail. The Major was merely surprised, but the poor Essex was badly damaged.

The Ford who was nameless in the newspapers, did the identical stunt and landed close to Miller. The thousand or so fans who still remained at the track, had a good laugh and the mystery still remains on how the fellows escaped injury.

## Fetterman Takes Top Spot Labor Day

It seemed that this was a strange race. Tommy Milton drove a Frontenac and Roscoe Searles was behind the wheel of Milton's Leach Miller. Later in the race the Frontenac went to the pits permanently and Milton drove relief for Hearne in his Disteel-Duesie and put on "a spectacular display of driving."

Searles averaged 103mph for the first seven miles of the 225 mile race. Tire wear prevented Jimmy Murphy from winning when he and Fetterman were in a heated duel as were Searles and Milton. Howdy Wilcox, protégé of Louis Chevrolet, was hanging with the leaders the first hundred laps. During private trials days before, he had clocked 7mph faster than Milton. In the 89th lap he went to the pits with a flat, telling Chevrolet he was going to "cut loose then and there". On his third lap he was clocked at 105mph and was on the verge of jumping to the lead when Murphy and Searles went in for tire changes.

Just then Joe Thomas in his Duesie #5 skidded off the top boards coming out of the north turn and spun around in the direct path of Wilcox's Frontenac. When Thomas was thrown out of the car, Wilcox went through the barrier backwards from jamming on his

emergency brake to miss hitting the man and the car. He got turned back around in the infield and broke through the rails on the other side of the track front forward. None of the men were injured. Pates Boyle, a Uniontown man who wanted to taste speedway thrills and compare them with his aviation experiences, was riding with Wilcox. He commented that it was easier to ride the clouds of Germany or the waves of the Atlantic in a fast motorboat, than the jarring hillocks of the local track.

Red Fetterman, Pittsburgh's new speedway race star, was approached by two of the largest financial backers in the racing game later that evening at the Summit Hotel. They told him that he was assured all the support money could buy for the 1922 season.

Estimated profits for the race were \$25,000.00.

# Yesteryear at the Uniontown Speedway - 1922

## Racing Drivers Tell Radio Fans About Big Race

The week of June 11 - 15, 1922 marked the first time in history that racing drivers talked to their fans via radio. The broadcast was staged at the Pittsburgh Post studio of the Westinghouse KDKA station in Pittsburgh. World famous race stars who were entered to drive in the June 16, seventh annual Universal Trophy cup race entertained with their stories and predictions.

I.P. "Red" Fetterman, Pittsburgh native and winner of the 1921 Autumn Classic, was lead on man. Tommy Milton told thousands of fans that he was about to run the most difficult race of his career on the Uniontown track. Harry Harris, Jimmy Murphy, and the master of them all, Barney Oldfield, kept the "listeners in" close to their radios.

## Federal Court Issues Injunction

### Restraining Brownfield Interference with Races

It was reported that the June 17, 1922 Universal Trophy cup race would be cancelled. The Uniontown Speedway Association had declared bankruptcy and the last race had been backed financially by Pittsburgh car dealer and Uniontown Speedway Association Vice President, Frank D. Saupp. Since so many of the races through the years had been postponed because of rain, most of the crowd that would come to town for the big race had to leave, and days later when the race would be run, profits were low because of their bad luck. Although they had planned to redo the track, this never happened as funds were not up to expectations.

Mrs. Mary Brownfield, owner of the land where the speedway was built, requested an injunction from the local courts against the defunct speedway association on grounds of default. Luckily the speedway association had filed for an injunction of their own. They slapped the Mr. and Mrs. I.H. Brownfield with a restraining order disallowing their interference with the big race. This was the day before the race and drivers were relieved to get their cars on the track for qualifications and test drives before competing the next day. Mr. Brownfield had gone to the track the day before, disrupting workmen and

ordering everyone off of the premises. The speedway association was then operating under a lease from their attorney, Dean Stugis.

Ticket sales were going well, but the track itself was still in need of major repair. There were fourteen entries for the Universal Trophy cup 225 lap race. In addition to the \$3,000.00 trophy, \$12,000.00 in cash and accessory prizes were offered. Five new drivers were to run their first race this day. Harry Hartz, who came in 2nd behind Jimmy Murphy in that year's Indy 500, was here to run this track for the first time, also. He had watched many speed shows at the famous track and was looking forward to trying out the boards.

Jimmy Murphy led qualifications with 109.46mph. Tommy Milton registered 108.26, and four others ran their laps at over 100mph. They were: Frank Elliot, 106mph; Harry Hartz, 105 1/2mph; Jerry Wonderlich and I.P. Fetterman ran at 101 1/4mph. To get those speeds in one lap is doing some on a track that was then littered with holes and splintered. To do 200 laps on wood in that kind of shape took nerve and skill.

Murphy's time was a track record. He had his start as a driver here and was not aware that his would be the standing record that would go down in history (and into a book called Yesteryear at the Uniontown Speedway). The weatherman called for rain throughout the day, but fans were in place and drivers ready to go.

## MURPHY WINS BIG RACE

### New Records on Local Speedway in Big Event

Hartz, Elliot, and Milton Eliminated after many Thrilling Speed Brushes  
Two in Non-Stop Runs

They came in like this.

1. Jimmy Murphy, Miller-Dues. (Murphy Special)
2. Ralph Mulford, Frontenac
3. Jerry Wonderlich, Duesenberg
4. I.P. Fetterman, Duesenberg
5. Ora Haibe, Frontenac
6. Harlan Fengler, Miller
7. Arthur Chevrolet, Frontenac
8. Ernie Olsen, Duesenberg
9. Benny Hill, Miller
10. Harry Hartz, Duesenberg
11. Tommy Milton, Leach-Miller
12. Frank Elliot, Leach-Miller
13. Leon Duray, Frontenac

Jimmy Murphy set yet another track record at the last race run on the old board track. His average speed was 102.2 for \$5,000.00. Mulford took 2nd with an average speed of 100.75mph and Wonderlich took 3rd with a speed of 100.25. Murphy took the lead in the 114th lap from Hartz, when the latter was forced into the pits for a tire change. The Los Angeles driver kept that lead until he piloted his Murphy Special across the finish line a full two laps in front of Mulford. He had such a great run going, the speed pilot drove his racer a full extra lap after Neil Whalen flagged him at the finish.

During the 72nd lap, Milton was leading the race with an average speed of 101 1/2mph. He then went through the lower guard rail at the precise spot where his car burned three years before, putting him in the hospital with severe burns for two months. This time he was much luckier. Coming out of Death Curve his right rear wheel collapsed and was thrown across the track, landing under the grand stand within inches of the spectators seated there. The tail of the Leach Special was smashed and axles bent, but Milton and mechanic, George Steel, came out smiling and waving to 10,000 screaming fans. As Milton's big grey car rammed its tail into a locust post of the guard rail, Starter Neil Whalen said, "I have seen a lot of accidents, but that is about the luckiest"

Hartz then took the lead until the 114th lap when Murphy showed no mercy. Hartz again returned to the pits in the 166th lap, this time to repair a broken oil line, and Murphy took the race from there with record breaking speed. Smiling Ralph Mulford paced himself throughout the race and made only one pit stop. As drivers beat their cars at extreme speed, Mulford hung tight, slowly moving into that runner-up position. Fetterman and Wonderlich both drove non stop for 225 miles. Although Fetterman all but fainted during the last 30 laps, his mechanic did some gymnastic driving to bring the Pittsburgh driver into the money for \$1,000.00.

The threat of rain again kept spectators away and a mere 10,000 folks cheered the stars on to their victory. The intake of cash obviously did not put the speedway association in the money, and even though Frank D. Saupp assured the press that an Autumn Classic would be held that year, none was.

## Speedway Will Collect \$2,500 Rain Insurance

Because it rained in Wheeling the day of the race and their insurance policy stated that it could not rain in Uniontown, Pittsburgh, Cumberland, Fairmont, and Wheeling, a check was issued in payment from the Lloyds Insurance Company.

It was rumored that Charlie Johnson, President of the Uniontown Speedway, took off with the proceeds of the last race and went to a southern country to retire.