



### MISSION STATEMENT

A) To discover, identify, gather, preserve, and display documents, records, items, etc. pertaining to eastern auto racing facilities, competitors, personalities or events.

B) To assist writers to publish and/or research articles regarding historical eastern auto racing topics.

Our organization collects & displays articles dealing with any eastern auto racing facilities for any racing enthusiast to enjoy. Please consider either joining our organization or contributing to our projects.

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**EARHS**  
P.O. Box 333  
Orefield, PA 18069



## Eastern Auto Racing Historical Society

Newsletter

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### SPRINT CAR RACING AT ALLENTOWN

For many years the annual Saturday afternoon sprint car racing program was the anchor event for the Allentown, PA Fair's grandstand entertainment. The half-mile at Allentown has a long history of auto racing, playing host to the sprint cars, stock cars, and midgets over the years. In addition, Agricultural Hall on the fairgrounds presented both micro-midget and three-quarter (TQ) midget racing indoors on a flat concrete oval for several winters during the 1960's. Of all the events presented, however, the sprint car programs were the longest running and most historically significant.

The Allentown Fair half mile was constructed as a horse racing track in 1888 and the current 7500 seat concrete, brick, and steel grandstand was added in 1911.

The first recorded auto racing event at the Allentown Fairgrounds took place on July 31, 1915 with Joe Lambert taking the first 5-mile event in his #11 Stutz and Geroge Jessup claiming the final two 5-milers in a #7 Chevrolet.



**8-time Allentown Fair champion, Ira Vail**

When racing resumed after World War I, Ira Vail drove his Philbrin-Duesenberg Special to fast time of 33.6 seconds and the victory in the 5-mile feature during the first fair program of auto racing at Allentown on 9-27-19. Vail was the dominant driver over the next seven years, winning on 9-25-20, 9-22-23, 11-29-23, 9-27-24, 9-25-25, 9-26-25, and 9-26-26.

The 1921 Allentown Fair Sweepstakes was won by Bob Hoffman and Larry Beals drove his Hiss to win the 10-mile feature on 9-23-22. A special 4<sup>th</sup> of July event was won by Tom Dawson, defeating a strong field of thirteen entries, which included Indianapolis veteran, Russ Snowberger. Bob Robinson won the 9-24-27 event in a Miller after Vail retired as a driver.





**The 1928 Allentown Fair lineup.**

In 1928, Ray Keech, famous for his world's land speed record set on the sands of Daytona Beach, FL where he drove a 36-cylinder Triplex Special at an average of 207.55 m.p.h., drove his Duesenberg Special to tie the Allentown 1-lap record set by Vail four years earlier at 30.5 seconds. This was the same two-man car Jimmy Gleason used to lead the 1928 Indianapolis '500' for many laps. Although Keech won both the dash and the third heat, Herman Schurch won the 10-mile feature driving the Hollywood Special, which he towed east from California.

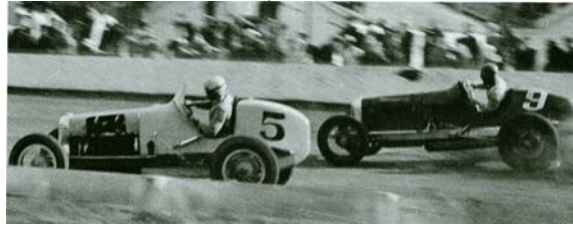
Zeke Meyer won the 1929 race in his beautiful #16 Miller, a car that took second place on the board track at Woodbridge, NJ in both 100-mile races won by Lou Moore.

In 1930 sprint car racing was attracting larger fields with quality cars and longer races were the order of the day. Ten cars started the 9-20-30 Allentown Fair feature event with 20 miles the new distance. Fred Frame drove his light green #4 Miller to take the win at Allentown. Frame won his share on both the board tracks and dirt tracks, including a 100-lap event on July 4<sup>th</sup> at Langhorne. Had points been awarded in 1930, Fred Frame would surely have been national champion.



Billy Winn scored two consecutive wins at Allentown in 1931 and 1932, driving his famous #36 Fronty on 9-26-31 and moving to the Murray Tire Special #1 to claim the 9-24-32 event. Winn lowered the Allentown track record to 29.1 seconds on 9-23-33, but Johnny Sawyer put the Burd Piston Ring Special #36 into victory lane.

September 22, 1934 found another mid-western driver in victory lane over a field that included Doc MacKenzie and Chet Gardner. Floyd Davis, who was to share victory in the 1941 Indy '500' with relief driver Mauri Rose, drove the blue #24 Bagley Cragar to victory. This car was used by Doc McKenzie to win the 1935 sprint car title.



**Winner Bob Sall (5) and Tommy Hinnershitz (9) duel at Allentown during the 1935 Fair Sweepstakes.**

Local favorite Bob Sall scored a popular win at Allentown on 9-21-35 in his revamped #5 McDowell Special. Johnny Ulesky surprised the crowd by setting fast time of 29.0 seconds in his #3 Blackbird Special. Frank Beeder, in the Bagley Cragar #1, won the Allentown Fair Sweepstakes on September 26, 1936 and repeated at the wheel of Ben Shaw's #48 Curtiss Special on September 25, 1937.

The 1937 sprint car champion and winner of two consecutive events at Allentown was fatally injured, as was fellow driver Roy Lake, during the running of the 1938 Allentown event on September 24<sup>th</sup>. Duke Nalon's spectacular drive to victory at the wheel of Pop Dreyer's #25 was overshadowed by the double tragedy.

Reading, PA's Joie Chitwood was on the warpath on September 23, 1939 as he notched his only Allentown win at the wheel of the Hank O'Day Offy. The O'Day sprinter would return to Allentown's victory lane with Tony Willman at the wheel on July 6, 1940. It still carried the #2, but sported a beautiful cream and blue paint combination. The Fair held its race on September 21 and Ted Horn crossed the line first in his #1 Riverside Tire Special. Joie Chitwood, in the #5 Peters Offy, had fast time at 26.4 seconds. Horn repeated at Allentown in 1941 when many drivers left the AAA sanction in favor of the Central States Racing Association (CSRA).



**Ted Horn in Allentown victory lane, 9-21-40.**



World War II brought an end to all racing for 1942-44, but the end of hostilities on September 2, 1945 allowed time for Jimmy Wilburn to dust off his gold colored Offy #39 and claim victory at Allentown in one of the first post-war events.



**Jimmy Wilburn won the first post WWII Allentown main. (end of Part I)**

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