



DRAGWAY RETROSPECT

by Dewey Ketner

Let's Not Forget: Henry Ford Was Also a Race Car Driver

In 1901, Henry Ford produced his first racing car, a two-cylinder vehicle, under his own name. This racer carried a riding "mechanic" outside of the body to counterbalance the car's weight in the turns of the track.

Brave souls, I guess. His engineering training and years of progressive success gave Ford the mindset and in 1903, the Ford Motor Co. was incorporated with the owner keeping 25.5 percent of the stock himself.

Ford gave notice to the world that transportation vehicles in the U.S. were now on the fast track of production lines, a Ford factory would soon put the world on wheels.

The 1903 sporty Model A was an immediate success at \$850 and over 1,700 vehicles were produced in the company's founding year. A major success in anybody's mind.

For 1904, Ford introduced three models: the Model B, a large four-cylinder car priced at \$2,000; the Model C at \$950; and the Model F with tourer prices at \$1,000. Public reception to the 1904 cars was great and Ford produced 3,400 vehicles in its second year.

This was, of course, Mr. Henry Ford, a man with an educated, calculating, determined and visionary mind who certainly used more than 12 percent of his great mind.

Then there was the great Ford vehicle called the 999. (Trivia note here: the car got that particular numeral/name because back

in 1893, when Ford was chief engineer for the Edison Illuminating Co., Thomas Edison sent Henry Ford to the World's Fair in Chicago to bring back word of scientific achievement and industrial discoveries. Wouldn't you know it? The train that took Henry Ford from Detroit to Chicago, was, by coincidence, No. 999.)

Anyway, this particular race car became very successful and very popular under the direction of famous driver Barney Oldfield, who'd handlebarred his way to victory over all of the top car-makers of the time, including the famous Winton Bullet.

Not to be misunderstood as only a car manufacturer, Henry Ford took over the controls of No. 999 on the frozen Lake St. Clair and set an mph record for the measured mile of 96.37.

Ford just seemed to have racing fuel for blood and in 1907 the need for speed moved him to build the No. 666 race car for the Daytona races.

And by 1909, Ford had two stripped-down Fords that beat out several higher-priced cars in the Transcontinental Race from New York to Seattle.

In 1910, Ford got even more serious, deciding against stripping down vehicles for race cars and planned for an "all-out vehicle."

Designed by Frank Kulick, the Ford-Kulick racer set records of 103 mph for the one-mile, beating out the high-powered racers of Buick and Fiat.



Henry Ford, standing, with Barney Oldfield and the Old 999 race car.

Meanwhile, in 1919, Ford introduced the Fordson farm tractor. Now the farmers could increase their production, making larger profits – and buy more cars. Cars for public transportation, race cars, tractors for the farmer, what else could Ford find to start an industry those days?

The need for speed kept setting his mind into forward-thinking mode. Now he bought the Stout Metal Aircraft Co. and started building single-motor airplanes in the 1920s.

In 1926, he added two more motors and created the Ford Tri-motor aircraft, the first with open cockpits for aircraft that size.

This was also a rugged aircraft capable of carrying a good payload and eight passengers. So durable, they became popular the world over and some are still flying today.

Henry Ford also built the first powered snowmobile, from a roadster pickup with four rear wheels fitted with cleated belts and skis on the front. One example is said to be in Holden, Mass., and another is at a Ford vehicle museum in Indiana.

So, was Henry Ford a genius? He put the mainstream of workers to work, put the working public on wheels, gave the farmer a replacement for horses, created very competitive race cars, built strong airplanes, in time of war built bombers for the U.S., used natural resources to make glass, created electric generators using powerhouses on rivers and streams, and more.

I believe Henry Ford should be considered the premier industrial manufacturer of the first 50 years of this nation's 20th century history.

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OnStar will feature its Chevrolet Volt with streaming content from the Cloud using a 4G LTE network and OnStar's Advanced Telematics operating system.

OnStar's Volt will be on display at the University of Michigan's "Focus on the Future" automotive conference, which is scheduled for Wednesday, Sept. 12 from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the Michigan League in Ann Arbor.

The conference is sponsored by UMTRI, the school's Transportation Research Institute.

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