

TERRIFIC TEN
REMARKABLE RACES
IN INDY 500 HISTORY
APRIL 17 — JUNE 30, 2013

Exhibit Narrative

by Brent Abercrombie and Laura Williams

Take a drive down memory lane with the Indiana State Library this April 19th through June 30th as we highlight the Indianapolis 500's greatest races. **Terrific Ten: Remarkable Races in Indy 500 History** is a free exhibit that examines ten noteworthy years from the race's history: 1911, 1936, 1946, 1964, 1965, 1977, 1982, 1992, 2006, and 2011.

Each year represented something memorable and defined a particular era in racing history. Highlighting resources available at the Indiana State Library, as well as a few items on loan from the library's avid racing fan and collector Ron Rose, the Indianapolis 500 exhibit details the history of the race through old photographs and newspaper articles. Each article depicts a noteworthy event from the 500's past.

Utilizing articles from the Indianapolis Star, available at the State Library, the exhibit begins with the inaugural race held May 30, 1911. This contest saw Ray Harroun, driving his unique Marmon "Wasp," emerge victorious after six hours and forty-two minutes. The race proved to be wildly popular and cement the city of Indianapolis as a racing destination. As years went by, the Indianapolis 500 brought newfound fame to drivers and created traditions that continue today. Following his third 500 victory in 1936, Louis Meyer began the ceremonial drinking of a bottle of milk after victory.

The Indianapolis 500 embarked on a new era in racing beginning in 1946. The 500 race was on a four year hiatus during World War II. There was concern that the race would not start up again or reach the previous height of popularity it had before the war. In 1945, Eddie Rickenbacker sold the track, now in a dilapidated condition to Tony Hulman with the intent to restart the race the following year. George Robson won the 1946 race, but the big story was that the popularity of the race was back. Although many, including Hulman himself, had doubts that the race could retain its pre-war popularity, the event proved to be a stunning success with traffic so heavy that Hulman himself barely made it to the track in time for the start of the race.

With Tony Hulman in charge, the Indianapolis Motor Speedway regained the status as the premier racing venue in the country. The Hulman era marked the end of one era and the start of another in racing. The 1950s and early 1960s became known as the roadster, or front engine car, era. Tragedy on the tracks also tarnished the period. The 1964 race, won by A.J. Foyt, was marred by a fiery crash, which involved seven cars and claimed the lives of drivers Eddie Sachs and Dave McDonald. Widely considered the worst accident in Speedway history, the front page of the ... *continued on next page*

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Indianapolis Star shows images of the inferno. The crash raised concerns about the future and safety of racing, but also overshadowed another debate more pertinent to drivers and racing fans. Much like the music industry in the 1960s, racing was facing a "British Invasion." Drivers from the U.K., driving rear engine vehicles, became highly successful in Formula One races in Europe and looked to come to the United States to challenge American drivers in Indianapolis. The 1965 race was hyped as East versus West, with Scotland's Jim Clark winning in convincing fashion. The Scot's win, with the Colin Chapman-led Lotus team conclusively proved the dominance of the rear engine car over the front engine and was the culmination of the so-called "British Invasion," begun four years earlier.

By the late 1960s and early 1970s, the pursuit of speed records became an integral part of the month of May. By 1972, the 190 mph mark had been achieved, but breaking the iconic 200 mph barrier would prove a daunting task. Finally, in 1977, Gordon Johncock accomplished the feat in tire testing, and Tom "the Gas Man" Sneva recorded a lap of 200.535 mph in qualifying en route to winning the pole position. A new level of speed had arrived at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway.

Within the last thirty years at the Indianapolis 500, drivers have reached new top speeds and races have ended in wild fashion. The exhibit next focuses on three thrilling finishes in three different decades: eighties, nineties, and the twenty-first century. The first, in 1982, features Gordon Johncock and Rick Mears. Their historic duel resulted in Johncock's victory by a mere 0.16 seconds. A decade later, a race marked by cold temperatures and numerous accidents finished on a spectacular note when Al Unser Jr. defeated Canadian Scott Goodyear by 0.043 seconds, still the closest finish in 500 history. In 2006, Sam Hornish became the first driver to make a pass for the lead on the final lap, overtaking 19-year-old Marco Andretti on the front straightaway to win by 0.0635 seconds.

The exhibit concludes with a recap of the Centennial Indianapolis 500 in 2011, won by the late Dan Wheldon in dramatic fashion when rookie J.R. Hildebrand crashed out of the lead in the final corner. Included is a photo of over a hundred current and former drivers gathered for the 100th anniversary celebration.

The exhibit is open to the public from 8:00 AM – 4:30 PM Monday through Friday in the Indiana State Library's Exhibit Hall. Visit IN.gov/library/500.htm to learn more about this unique exhibit, including a complete exhibit narrative, online resources and collection holdings.

www.IN.gov/library/500.htm