

The History of Speed in Ormond Beach

ORMOND BEACH, Fla. - In 1903, the smooth, hard-packed sands of Ormond Beach became a proving ground for automobile inventors and drivers. These first speed tournaments in the US earned Ormond the title "Birthplace of Speed."



Records set here during speed trial tournaments for much of the next eight years would be the first significant marks recorded outside of Europe. Motorcycle and automobile owners and racers brought vehicles that used gasoline, steam and electric engines. They came from France, Germany, and England as well as from across the United States.

The Ormond Garage, the first gasoline alley before Indianapolis Speedway, was built in 1905 by Henry Flagler, owner of the Ormond Hotel, to accommodate participating race cars during the

beach races. The Ormond Garage would house the drivers and mechanics during the speed time trials. Owners and manufacturers stayed, of course, at Flagler's Ormond Hotel.

Pictured: The Ormond Garage in 1905, with Louis Ross in his steam-powered "Wogglebug" No. 4 and other racers.

Tragically, the Ormond Garage caught fire and burned to the ground in 1976, destroying one of auto history's most important landmarks as well as antique cars owned by local residents who used the Garage as a museum. Sadly, all that remains is a historic marker, in front of SunTrust Bank, built on its ashes on East Granada Boulevard.

Racing on Ormond Beach started in 1902. But the city's famous connection with racing began in 1903 when the Winton Bullet won a Challenge Cup against the Olds Pirate by two-tenths of a second. American records were set that year, and the world took notice.

The very next year, world records were set during the 1904 speed tournaments, including one for motorcycles that lasted for seven years — 67.36 mph set by Glenn H. Curtiss on his two-cylinder motorcycle. Though poorly organized, the event was a huge success, according to Dick Punnett's book, *Racing on the Rim*.

Incredibly, the flying mile world record was broken three different times by three different drivers in a 30-minute period that same year. The standing record of 92.31 mph was broken by Louis Ross in his steam-powered racer, the famous Wogglebug, at 94.73 mph.

Five minutes later that record was broken by Arthur Macdonald in his Napier with a speed of 104.65 mph. The final—but unofficial—world record for the mile race went to H. L. Bowden, who drove his Mercedes at 109.76 mph to break the previously set record. That final time was later disallowed because Bowden's car weighed more than 1,000-kg, a limit set by the Automobile Club de France.

The Stanley legacy that led to Ormond Beach's longest-lasting automobile land speed record began in 1897. That year, twin brothers F.E. and F.O. Stanley from Massachusetts built their first steam car. By the turn of the century, their Stanley-Locomobile car was selling better than gas powered cars. The Stanleys competitive nature drove them to demonstrate their car's speed and durability.

With impressive wins and near-wins behind them by late 1905, F.E. Stanley designed, built and tested the Stanley Rocket, the most aerodynamic racer of the day. In January of 1906, the Rocket was brought to Ormond Beach to participate in the annual speed tournament.

January 26, 1906, F.E. Stanley's Rocket Racer, driven by dare-devil Fred Marriott, set the mark that became Ormond Beach's most famous land speed record. The incredible speed of 127.659 mph held for four years, a remarkable achievement in a speed age where records sometimes fell within the hour.

This record confirmed the reputation of Ormond-Daytona as the first proving ground for both auto racers and manufacturers. The Marriott record was finally broken in 1910 by 4 mph, when Barney Oldfield raced his Lightning Benz at 131.72 mph.

Racing moved to Indianapolis in 1911, but it wasn't long before Bill France and friends started racing on the beach, beginning what later became NASCAR. Daytona Beach soon took over the game started by its neighbor to the north, becoming a racing juggernaut of its own, today ironically overshadowing even Indianapolis. A proud heritage by any standard.

In the meantime, Ormond is proud of its heritage as "Birthplace of Speed." In addition to the winter event that started with the 2003 Centennial, Ormond Beach has long celebrated this heritage with an annual Antique Car Show and nighttime Gaslight Parade on Thanksgiving Day weekend.

Organizations and places of business alike in Ormond Beach celebrate the city's history of speed. Historic Billy's Tap Room, located near The Casements, has many historic photographs. Woody's BBQ restaurant on Granada has a new dining room decorated with historic racing photographs and murals.

The MacDonald House, a Leisure Services facility for the city located on east Granada, is the headquarters and office for the Ormond Beach Historical Trust. The Trust maintains a small gallery with many photographs of the cars and personalities that drove and raced on the beach. It also has historic books and other items for sale.

The Stanley Land Speed Record Centennial at the Birthplace of Speed is being presented by the Stanley Museum in collaboration with Ormond Beach Leisure Services. Major sponsors include the Motor Racing Heritage Association, the Ormond Beach Historical Trust, Carrabba's Italian Grill and National Parts Depot.