

THE GREAT RACE

by Heide Basinger

"The Great Race." Those words stir up images from my childhood. I can remember sitting in my living room in front of the Zenith television with my brother watching "Saturday Afternoon at the Movies." The 1965 movie "The Great Race", starring Jack Lemmon, Tony Curtis and Natalie Wood, was a fun, slapstick favorite of ours. I still have vivid images of driving teams in open top cars, wearing newsboy-style caps and aviator glasses. The good guys wore white; the bad guys were in black.

That same childhood excitement stirred in me when I heard that The Great Race for 2012 is coming through Michigan, making a stop in my hometown. On July 1, Jack Miller is expecting as many as one hundred racing teams. Jack is the curator of the Ypsilanti Automotive Heritage Museum and is known for being the owner of the last Hudson dealership in the world. While the teams are enjoying a private lunch with Jack, the cars will be on public display. To see them, just go to Ypsilanti's historic Depot Town. They will be parked on East Cross Street between North River and North Huron.



The original Great Race of 1908 is easily the most grueling race that automotive history has ever seen. The goal of the race was to promote the usefulness of the automobile. It was not uncommon to drive cars seasonally in warmer conditions and in the colder months use horses for transportation. That is why the race started in the winter, February 12, 1908. There were six cars representing four different countries: France, Germany, Italy and The United States. The race went from Times Square, in New York City and traveled about 22,000 miles west around the world ending in Paris, France. After driving to San Francisco, the cars were shipped to Valdez, Alaska. That leg of the course took the racers over 1200 miles of frozen land to Nome, Alaska, where a steamer took the cars across the Bering Strait to the East Cape, Siberia. From that point their chartered course led them on an eleven thousand plus mile trip to Paris, through Irkutsk, Moscow, Petersburg, and Berlin. It took 169 days to declare as winners Schuster Sr. and his team from The United States, driving a Thomas Flyer built by Mr. Schuster. The Thomas Flyer had a 4-cylinder engine and held 125 gallons of gas.



A German team had crossed the finish line first but was given second place. They incurred a 15-day penalty for shipping their car by rail from Utah to Washington. The German car, called a Protos, had a 4-cylinder engine and held 211 gallons of gas. Italy placed third with a Züst 4-cylinder car with a 132-gallon capacity. The French had three teams, none of which finished. Two cars broke down while crossing the USA and the third French team withdrew while crossing Japan. The details of how they ended up on the island country are a bit sketchy.

The 2011 event ran from Coker Tire Company's headquarters in Chattanooga, Tennessee to the Hemmings Motor News headquarters in Bennington, Vermont. It was won by a 1911 Velie. Three of the 59 entries were British cars: a 1957 Arnolt-Bristol, a 1960 Morgan Plus 4, and a 1961 Morris Minor. None of these cars completed the race.

The Great Race of 2012 is a time, speed, distance rally sponsored by Hemmings Motor News and is scheduled to travel around most of the Great Lakes. It will begin in Traverse City on Saturday, June 23. I have it on good authority that the Twin Bays British Car Club has committed volunteers to work with Hagerty Insurance, a race sponsor. The journey will take cars through the straits of Mackinac, and into Canada through Sault Ste. Marie. They will continue around Lakes Huron, Ontario, and Erie, driving through Ontario, New York, Pennsylvania, and Ohio before re-entering Michigan. The race will end at The Henry Ford in Dearborn.

If you would like more information on The Great Race of 2012, you can visit <http://www.greatrace.com/>. Check your WDMG club newsletter for a club event related to the race. We are tentatively planning a club gathering to meet the cars in Ypsilanti at lunch time.

January - February 2012