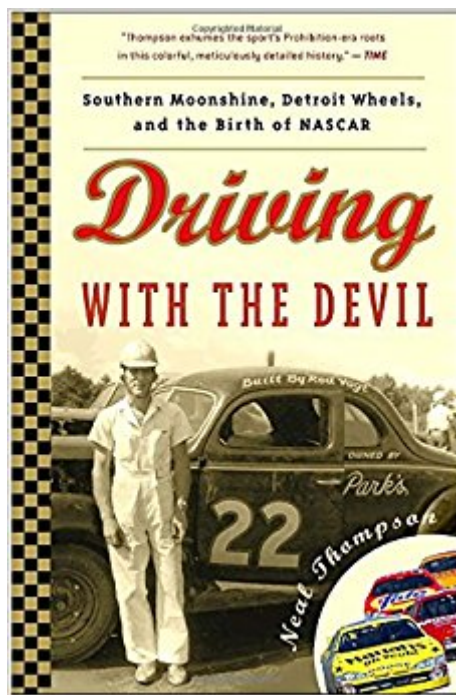




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Driving With The Devil: Southern Moonshine, Detroit Wheels, And The Birth Of NASCAR



Synopsis

“Moonshiners put more time, energy, thought, and love into their cars than any racer ever will. Lose on the track and you go home. Lose with a load of whiskey and you go to jail.”

• Junior Johnson, NASCAR legend and one-time whiskey runner

Today’s NASCAR is a family sport with 75 million loyal fans, which is growing bigger and more mainstream by the day. Part Disney, part Vegas, part Barnum & Bailey, NASCAR is also a multibillion-dollar business and a cultural phenomenon that transcends geography, class, and gender. But dark secrets lurk in NASCAR’s past. *Driving with the Devil* uncovers for the first time the true story behind NASCAR’s distant, moonshine-fueled origins and paints a rich portrait of the colorful men who created it. Long before the sport of stock-car racing even existed, young men in the rural, Depression-wracked South had figured out that cars and speed were tickets to a better life. With few options beyond the farm or factory, the best chance of escape was running moonshine. Bootlegging offered speed, adventure, and wads of cash—if the drivers survived. *Driving with the Devil* is the story of bootleggers whose empires grew during Prohibition and continued to thrive well after Repeal, and of drivers who thundered down dusty back roads with moonshine deliveries, deftly outrunning federal agents. The car of choice was the Ford V-8, the hottest car of the 1930s, and ace mechanics tinkered with them until they could fly across mountain roads at 100 miles an hour. After fighting in World War II, moonshiners transferred their skills to the rough, red-dirt racetracks of Dixie, and a national sport was born. In this dynamic era (1930s and ’40s), three men with a passion for Ford V-8s—convicted criminal Ray Parks, foul-mouthed mechanic Red Vogt, and crippled war veteran Red Byron, NASCAR’s first champion—emerged as the first stock car “team.” Theirs is the violent, poignant story of how moonshine and fast cars merged to create a new sport for the South to call its own. *Driving with the Devil* is a fascinating look at the well-hidden historical connection between whiskey running and stock-car racing. NASCAR histories will tell you who led every lap of every race since the first official race in 1948. *Driving with the Devil* goes deeper to bring you the excitement, passion, crime, and death-defying feats of the wild, early days that NASCAR has carefully hidden from public view. In the tradition of Laura Hillenbrand’s *Seabiscuit*, this tale not only reveals a bygone era of a beloved sport, but also the character of the country at a moment in time.

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Customer Reviews

Thompson's raucous account of NASCAR's early decades raises from obscurity the "motherless, dirt-poor southern teens... in jacked-up Fords full of corn whiskey" who originated the sport that's now the second most popular in America. Stock car racing grew up in the 1930s South, when moonshine runners, having perfected the art of daredevil driving while escaping "revenuers" hunting for untaxed whiskey, transferred their skills to the event booming in Atlanta and Daytona Beach. Loosely defined as races where the cars were totally unmodified—•even though they were actually supercharged beyond recognition—•stock car racing was a rawer, more redneck endeavor than AAA-sanctioned events like the Indy 500, which were the realm of rich enthusiasts driving specially built vehicles. Thompson (*Light This Candle: The Life and Times of Alan Shepard*) celebrates entrepreneurial ex-con Raymond Parks, wizardish mechanic Red Vogt and driver Red Byron instead of the better-known promoter Bill France, "the P.T. Barnum of stock car racing," whom Thompson blames for moving NASCAR from its whiskey-soaked past to mainstream, logo-strewn present. The author is clearly in love with his subject, and the enthusiasm of this breathless, nostalgic account will be contagious to Southern history buffs and historically minded NASCAR fans. (Oct.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

This is a colorful, multifaceted history of the hell-raising origins of stock-car racing in the 1930s and 1940s. Thompson fastens onto what might be considered the original stock-car racing team, an Atlanta-based trio--Raymond Parks, Red Vogt, and Lloyd Seay--who worked in the moonshine business, which depended on fast cars for escapes from lawmen. Recounting their biographies, and those of a host of bootlegging competitors, Thompson instills the outlaw milieu--Seay, the 1941

stock-car champ, was murdered in a bootlegging dispute--of the early days. Ad-hoc races, such as one held on a beach in Daytona, Florida, developed into regular events; its impresario, Bill France, disdained the bootleggers from Georgia and eventually outmaneuvered Parks and Vogt to control NASCAR when it was organized in 1947. Thompson believes that the modern NASCAR organization downplays its beginnings in white lightning. His fascinating corrective should inveigle the fans of one of the most popular sports in America today. Gilbert TaylorCopyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

I'm afraid that Mr. Thompson knows very little about cars. Perhaps he knows something about the men in the 1930s who built and raced them, but his ignorance about cars, in general, is appalling. For example, he tells us that Duesenbergs were "foreign", implying that Minnesota, Indiana and New Jersey hadn't been admitted to the Union yet. And that it was a one man company, in which case that one man's name was Freda Daugie. According to Thompson, Red Vogt initiated the practice of banning rags from engine assembly areas, ignoring the fact that Ettore Bugatti had done so when Vogt was in elementary school. The 1932 Ford V-8 was the greatest innovation since windshield wipers, according to the author. Actually it was a lousy engine, plagued by lubrication trouble, overheating, (Ford's 4 cylinder cars had NO water pump, so old Hank was a little puzzled here), and vapor locking. The 1932 engine only had 5 hp more than the Chevrolet 6 of the same year. V-8s were nothing new, dating back to 1916-1918 in Cadillacs and Oldsmobiles. Ford's own Lincolns were moving up from V-8s to V-12s. Admittedly the flathead Ford engine improved immensely in succeeding years (a stock 1939 Ford was capable of a blazing speed incompatible with its brakes and suspension) but arguably the greatest virtues of the flathead were price and an ability to deal with "hot" fuel, often illegally. We learn that in the late 1940s, Ford V-8s had to compete with V-8 engines from Chevrolet, Oldsmobile and Hudson. Chevys and Hudsons actually had in-line 6s, "splash-lubers" without pumped oil to their bottom ends. We are told that some drivers objected to the name Nascar because it might evoke the Nash, "no racing car". Actually a Nash did win a stock car race and that the master, Curtis Turner, came close to winning the PanAmerican Road Race in one. His effort

was stymied, in part, by Bill France's panic at sharing a car with a truly great driver in Turner, who had none of the caution of the good old Georgia boys. Oldsmobiles get a lot of credit from Thompson for their post-WWII success in late-model racing, but ignores the substantial rivalry of the great Hudson Hornets whose lower centers of gravity compensated for their primitive engines. Thompson also refers to the early Watkins Glen and Sebring races as "Grand Prix" events. Neither was. Watkins Glen was an amateur SCCA sports car race and Sebring included factory teams, but of sports cars, not Grand Prix cars. Sadly, the cars that compete in the major NASCAR events today are purpose-built all-out racing cars without a single "stock" part. The small local dirt track racers today are closer to the spirit of the Seays and Byrons. Thompson should have, at the least, had the book fact checked instead of relying on the readers' ignorance. Better yet, he should have left the writing to a better-informed person.

This book does exactly what the title states. It is a well researched chronicle of the early history of stock car racing in the south. As a racer and racing history buff since the 60s, I always understood that there was more to racing than NASCAR and the France family. Mr Thompson has done a great job of presenting the early history of stock car racing, a very difficult task, I'm sure, because first hand information is nearly impossible to obtain and the France family has worked since the beginning of NASCAR to distance themselves from the moonshiners who started the sport. Most of the history in the mainstream media is a revisionist version and refers to NASCAR's "modern era". As to the negative reviews about technical facts not being accurate, there are many volumes out there that cover the technical aspects of stock car racing. I am talking about thousands of pages. This book is exactly what it is represented to be. If you want technical information, it is available elsewhere.

I've never been to a live NASCAR race but I really enjoyed this book. I sort of new about the historical link between moonshine running and stock car racing but author Thompson fills in all the details and all the characters in this well researched piece of work.

I have never watched a NASCAR race and definitely have no intentions of doing so in the future. I do, however, drive a '37 Ford Coupe and lived in the northern suburbs of Atlanta for a decade. These facts made the book very interesting for me. From that perspective I could fully appreciate the courage and tenacity of the men who ran Highway 9 out of Dawsonville through Cumming to

Atlanta in '37 - '40 Ford Coupes at speeds of 100 MPH delivering moonshine to a growing and thirsty Atlanta. Like most great books, this book deals with three distinct subjects that co-exist in time. The first subject is moonshining in North Georgia in the pre-WWII days. The second is the politics and economics of Atlanta emerging as a center of influence in the New South. The third is the birth of stock car racing that would evolve into NASCAR as we know it today. What ties these subjects together are people with drive and vision, risk takers both physically and financially. This book is a well-crafted book first and foremost about the people: (1) who ran the moonshine and raced the back woods tracks; (2) who built the cars that ran shine on Wednesday and raced on Sunday, (3) who built businesses on moonshine, engine tuning, racing and entertaining. This book was very informative in all of the subject areas. It was an enjoyable read from start to finish.

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