

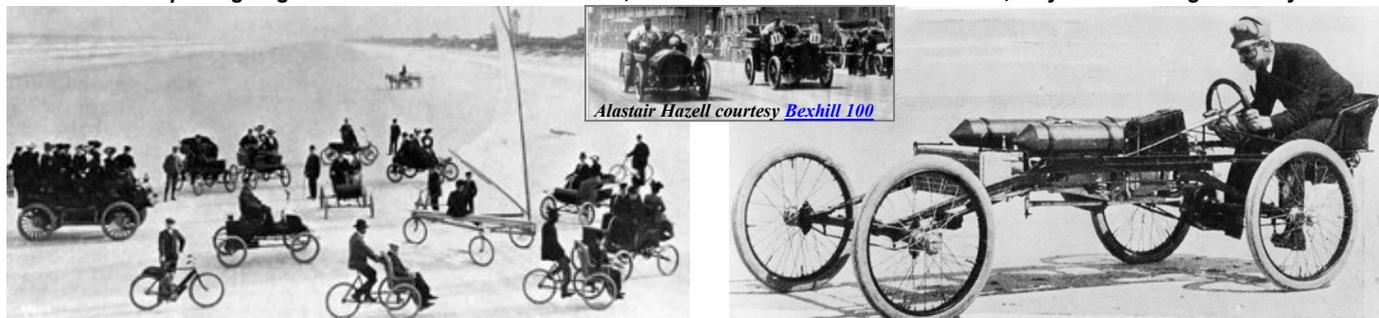
Racing roots!

"The first drag race" ---- it was 1902

To me, it all began the first time a car was beaten by another, its driver asking "What can I do to make it go faster?"

That was the birth of hot rodding, following on naturally from that first, albeit illegal, drag race!

As a child I was aware of speed records set on Daytona Beach by the likes of Sir Malcolm Campbell and on becoming a NASCAR fan soon learned of their stock car racing roots on the beach. But in 1979 my eyes were opened wide when I got a copy of William Neely's excellent book *Daytona USA* (used copies are out there on the web for NASCAR fans – and two new copies of this "official history" for \$527.49!), the two images below are from my oft read copy. The first Oldsmobile sold was the sight-seeing bus carrying fans to witness this first racing event of any renown after Ransom E. Olds and Alexander Winton turned up to race "their eponymous vehicles against the stopwatch on the sand in Florida in 1902, at [the invitation of the managers](#) of the Ormond Beach Hotel." Looking far more dragster-like than those sporting huge leather chairs at Bexhill on Sea, the Olds Pirate is seen on the beach, maybe even "staged" ready to race!



In his 1997 book "Racing on the Rim," author Dick Punnett writes of that same event, "It was the first 'official drag race' on the beach, from a standing start. Winton let Thomas have a 50-yard head start that stretched to 100 yards before Winton's Bullet hit top speed and nipped the Pirate at the finish line by 1/5th of a second." With what I'd call a close race, [Ormond Beach](#) had earned its title as the "Birthplace of Speed." That first race between Messrs Olds and Winton was not very well attended, however, on March 26, 1903 the first sanctioned timed trials were held, and thus began the legend of Speed Weeks that continues to this day. Alexander Winton in his Bullet and HT Thomas driving the Ransom E. Olds Pirate raced again two days later in the Ormond Challenge Cup. Click that link to enjoy some 1905 beach races, including this four-wide shootout with the outrageous Stanley Steamer rocketing away from the three big-motored behemoths like Slam'n Sammy! It was, I believe, the first machine some years later to exceed 200kph. The shot at left is from Mr Neely's book with the mad finish line scramble from the Ormond Beach clip, and check out the length of that crowd line - wow!



This quote is from an evocative feature on racing roots by the late Shav Glick, renowned sports writer with the Los Angeles Times...

One February afternoon in 1902, two young tycoons in the embryonic automotive industry--Alexander Winton and Ransom E. Olds--got to arguing about who had the fastest machine in town. "[How about a race on the sand,](#)" a friend suggested. So Winton, in his Bullet, and Olds, in his Pirate--the original Oldsmobile--lined up side by side on the beach and, at the wave of a hat, roared off down the sand.

Onlookers clocked them at an outrageous 57 mph. after racing so closely that the match was declared a dead heat. The excitement generated by Winton and Olds was not lost on the city's promoters. By the next February, the Florida East Coast Automobile Assn. had been organized to promote a series of beach races. The promoters called the racing period Speed Weeks. (Courtesy [latimes.com](#)) A great read, click it and enjoy! The legendary CJ Pappy Hart, who opened the first commercial drag strip at Santa Ana on June 15 1950, once said drag racing on the streets had been going on "ever since there was cars!" Yes sir, I'll agree with that, but they were outlaw races, unlike [the first legal drag race](#) held in 1949 at Goleta, California. Click the link to read Robert C. Post's take on this iconic event in an excerpt from his incredible "High Performance: the culture and technology of drag racing, 1950-1990," of which Don Garlits said, "This book will be the bible of drag racing for future generations." And that's a fact! The last paragraph from the excerpt reads..."Clandestine drag racing had been going on for some time, of course, but what was unique about this particular event is that officials of the Santa Barbara Acceleration Association had sought, successfully, to have the California Highway Patrol confer approval: The races at Goleta were not against the law." As the excellent "[We Did it For Love](#)" nostalgia drag racing site suggests, "If you only own one book on drag racing, make sure it's "High Performance" by Robert C. Post. Published by the John Hopkins University Press - and from \$10 on ebay and amazon...

The first Winton car was sold on March 24, 1898; two decades after Scotsman Alexander Winton arrived in New York City, building the first of three Bullet race cars in 1902. Mention was made earlier this year in Eurodragster of a 1903 race in Northern Ireland, and Alexander Winton is seen at left with his Winton bullet 2 at the [1903 Gordon Bennett trophy](#) in Athy, but he failed to finish due to mechanical gremlins. Click the link for more aged racing images. The photograph below shows Tom Medley, later of Hot Rod magazine fame, shooting some action during that legendary race in 1949 at Goleta, California which went down in folklore as "The day drag racing began."

A blown coupe running on nitro won the big match race! Since then, we've come a long way baby! **Mike Collins**

