Chevrolet, In Retirement, Sees His Name Carrying On

Noted Driver And Designer, Now 61,

Built Two Winners Of Indianapolis Auto Classic

[By the Associated Press]

Detroit, May 25—You see his name in huge letters on hundreds of flashing electric signs, on thousands of highway billboards and on the name emblems of millions of today's motor cars, but you rarely see or hear of him now. . . .

On May 20,, 1905, he drove a Fiat racing automobile over a measured mile at Sheepshead Bay, New York, in 52.8 seconds for a new world's record. It was Louis Chevrolet, starting a career that was to make him one of the greatest of all racing automobile drivers.

Oldfield Second

Second best in that race at Sheepshead Bay was Barney Oldfield, famed. in his own right as a racing car pilot but destined rarely to finish better than second in competition with Chevrolet.

Today Louis Chevrolet, who designed and built the first of the millions of automobiles that carry his name, is living in retirement. the roaring road he once ruled far behind.

He probably won't see next Thursday's Indianapolis Speedway race, but he'll be intensely interested, for despite all his record-breaking races, he regards as one of his outstanding achievements the designing and building of two successive winners of the Indianapolis classic—in 1920 and 1921.

Driven By His Brother

The 1920 winner, a small-motored Monroe-Frontenac, was driven by his brother, Gaston, at 88.50 miles an hour. Six months later Gaston was killed at the Los Angeles Speedway in a collision that forced his car through a guard rail and into a gully. In 1921 Tommy Milton drove Louis Chevrolet's eight-cylinder Frontenac to victory.

The 1905 race at Sheepshead Bay was Louis Chevrolet's introduction to motor car racing in the United States. A machinist who learned his trade at the bench, he had come from France five years earlier to join the technical staff of the American branch of the De Dion Bouton Motorette Company in Brooklyn.

In his home in Lakewood Boulevard on Detroit's East Side, Chevrolet today has numerous trophies. and scrapbooks filled with clippings and photographs that tell the story of the fame that was his on the track and road until the early 1920's, and later in the effort he made "to build up another name in the designing and production field."

Scores Of Victories

Scores of victories and scores of records, from one up to 200 and more miles, were his in those earlier days . . . Uniontown . . . Ormond . . . Daytona Beach . . . Indianapolis . . . Los Angeles . . . Morris Park, N. Y. . . . the Vanderbilt Cup and dozens of other events . . . all knew Chevrolet and saw him pile up records.

As kingpin of the track and road racers of those days, Chevrolet, 6 feet tall, weighed more than 210 pounds; his round-face was set off noticeably with a black, handlebar mustache.

Today, 61 years old, stooping slightly and recovered from a severe illness of a few years ago, he weighs 175; the mustache, now gray, is closely cropped. his face has narrowed perceptibly and he makes frequent use of a pair of shell-rimmed spectacles, resting low on his nose.

Chevrolet smiles as he talks about his jousts with Barney Oldfield.

"He beat me only once after that first race in 1905," he relates, "and then because my car broke down."

There were many breakdowns in the early days; 36-inch wooden front wheels that couldn't stand the stress of high-speed turns often flew off; there were cracked cylinder heads; fires, collisions, skids, broken steering gears.

Louis Chevrolet figured in many of them, but the worst that happened to him was a dislocated left shoulder suffered in the 1910 Vanderbilt Cup, when his car turned over and his mechanic was fatally injured.

Numerous Patents

Chevrolet obtained numerous patents on refinements he incorporated in some of his earlier models of motor cars. One was a flexible steering wheel, common to most of today's models; he developed the "fronty-ford" engine head, an overhead valve arrangement for Model "T" Fords entered in small-car races, and a number of other engineering improvements.

Chevrolet designed and built the first Chevrolet car in 1911, with the cooperation of William C. Durant, who had just lost control for the first time of General Motors.

"He was planning a comeback and told me, 'We're going to need a car,'" Chevrolet says, "so I built it."

Doesn't Drive Any More

The company was taken into the General Motors group when Durant temporarily regained control in 1915.

Chevrolet doesn't drive any more; neither does he indulge in his favored pastime of trapshooting; but, as of old, he smokes innumerable cigarettes. On the occasional trips he makes East or to Florida for the winter months Mrs. Chevrolet handles the wheel.

"It was hard work at first for me to sit in the car with someone else driving," the veteran racer explains, "but I'm getting used to it."

CREDITS SAFER CARS OF TODAY TO EARLY RACES

Crashes in bygone meets led to mechanical improvements, says retired speed king

By DAVID J. WILKIE

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Built, Drove Autos

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Breakdowns Were Many

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It was all distinctly worth while, however, says the veteran racer.

"We are driving a safer automobile now because of what those boys went through a couple of decades ago. The car makers learned much from what happened in those road races and on the mile tracks," he asserts.