

Homecoming: The Marques of 1911

Main: This oft-reproduced but nonetheless stunning photograph from 1911 shows the second row roll off for the start of the inaugural "500." Populating that row is a pair of Pope-Hartfords, a pair of Cases and the lone Westcott in the field.

With the 100th Anniversary of the Indianapolis 500 fast approaching, it seemed only fitting to “call home” the 24 manufacturers that participated in the inaugural “500” in 1911.

STORY BY: **DONALD DAVIDSON**

Of the 24 automobile manufacturers that were represented by the 40 cars competing in the inaugural Indianapolis 500 on May 30, 1911, only three companies were not American. Each owned by wealthy American sportsmen, there were a total of six cars from overseas, an ex-Grand Prix Mercedes being joined by a trio of Fiats and a pair of Benzes.

The highest finisher among the foreign cars was one of the Fiats, driven by David Bruce-Brown. It led all but a handful of

laps during the first half and finished third, edging out the **Mercedes** of Spencer Wishart which was rumored to have cost Wishart's father a princely \$60,000. Caleb Bragg, who later became an executive with the Bendix Corporation, dropped out early with his **Fiat**, while Eddie Hearne in the third car was flagged off at the end, still running but many laps behind.

Longtime friends Bob Burman (holder at the time of the world land speed record at 147 mph, set at



1911 MANUFACTURERS

Daytona Beach) and Billy Knipper shared the **Benz** cars, both of which were still running at the end but many laps behind due to mechanical delays.

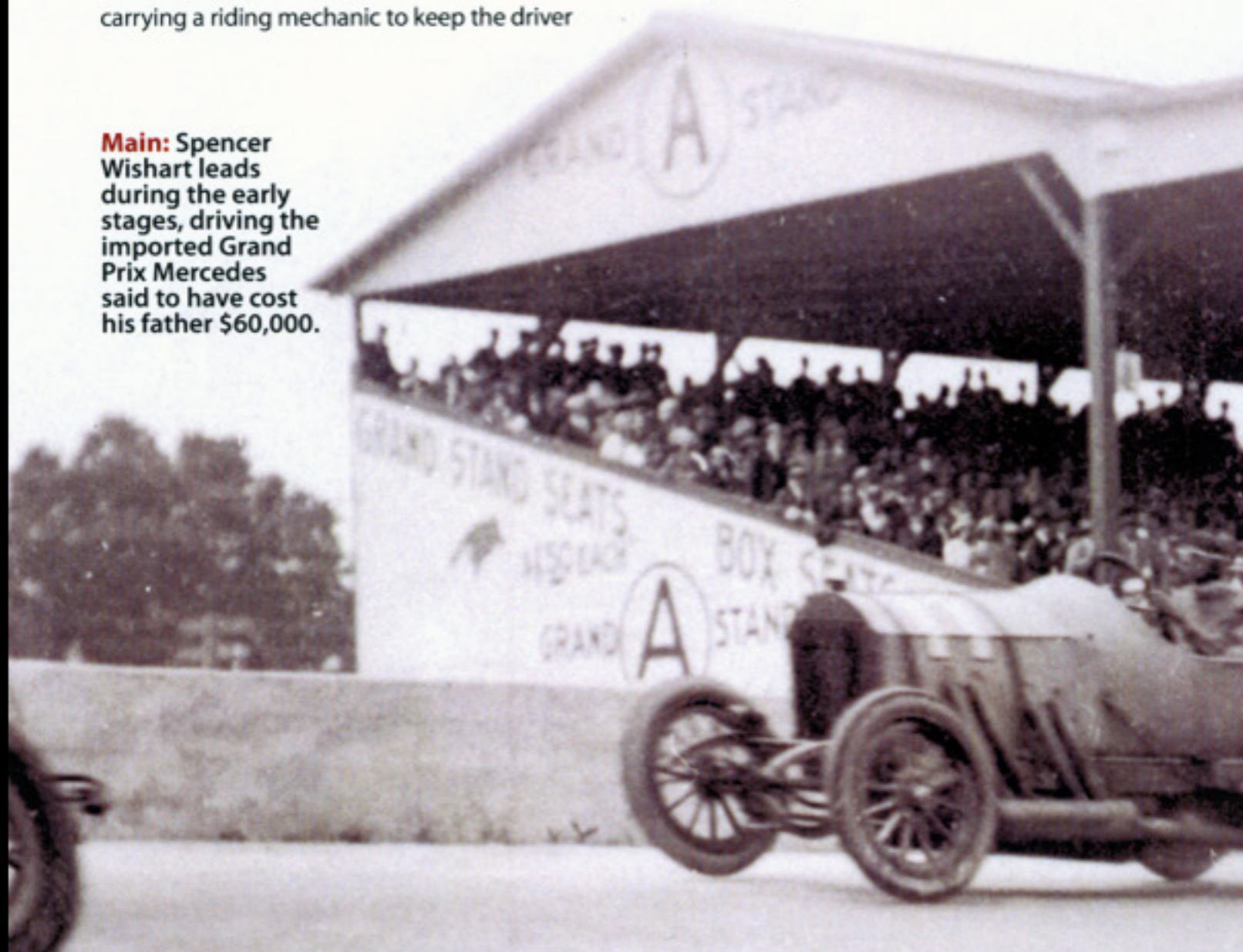
Of the 21 American manufacturers represented, nine were from the state of Indiana, three of which were headquartered within five miles of the track.

Triumphant, of course, was the famed six-cylinder streamlined single-seat **Marmon** "Wasp," built by the engineering department of Nordyke & Marmon at the corner of West Morris Street and Kentucky Avenue. Because of complaints during practice that the car posed a potential safety hazard—by not carrying a riding mechanic to keep the driver

apprised of passing cars and such—driver/engineer Ray Harroun rigged up what is believed to have been the very first rearview mirror ever to be used on an automobile. Harroun stepped out of the cockpit for a few laps near the halfway point for a rest, turning the car over to Cyrus Patschke, an East Coast driver who was an expert at long-distance events. Patschke also shared the wheel of the more conventional Marmon of Joe Dawson, which finished fifth, Marmon being the only manufacturer in 1911 to have two cars finish within the top 10.

Also from Indianapolis were a trio of stripped-down **Nationals**, one of which (driven by Johnny Aitken) went into the

Main: Spencer Wishart leads during the early stages, driving the imported Grand Prix Mercedes said to have cost his father \$60,000.



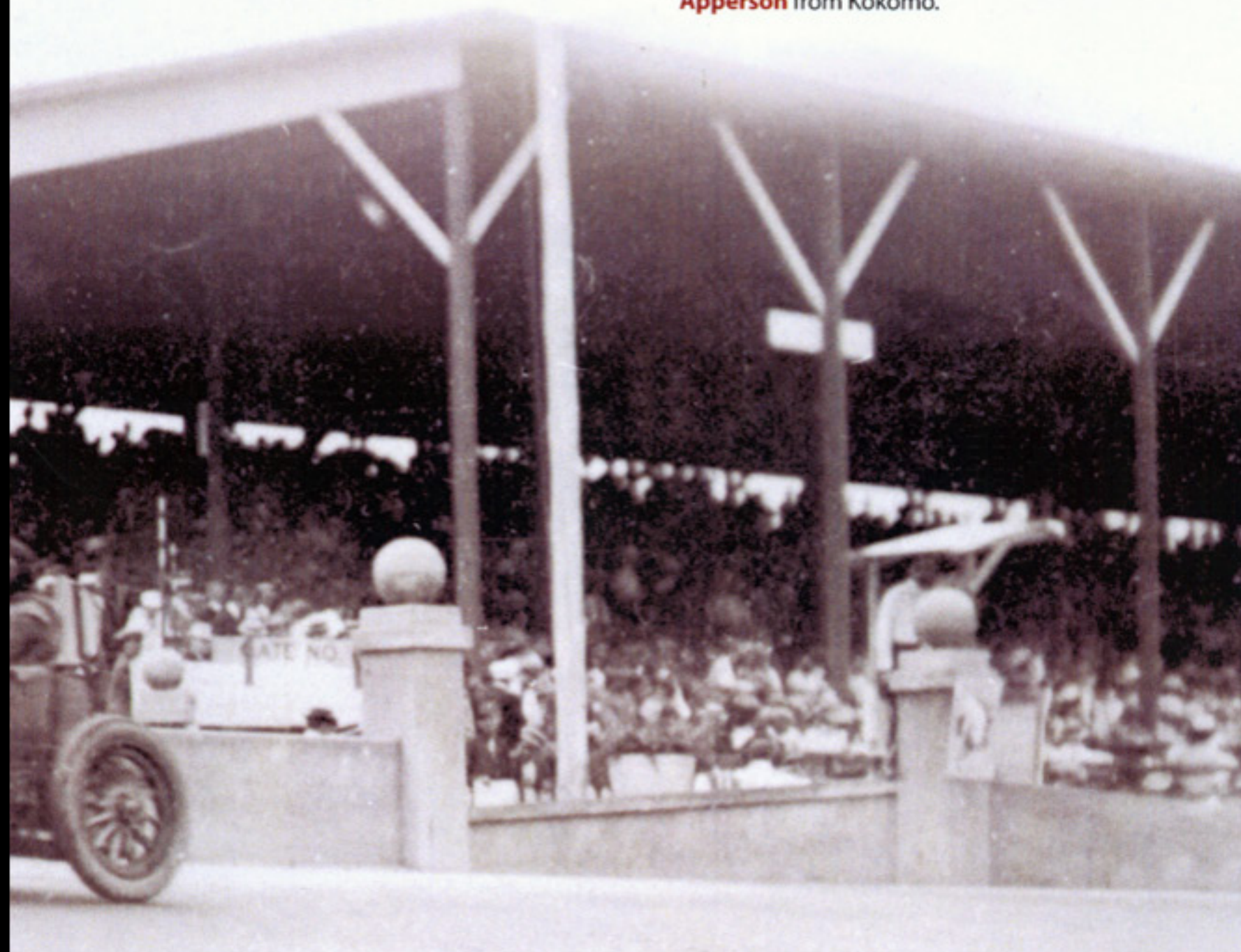
history books by leading the first four laps. Aitken dropped out late in the going, but Charlie Merz managed to finish seventh and Howdy Wilcox was still running when the race was called after 12 cars had completed the 500 miles.

Also still running at the end was the **Cole** of Johnny Jenkins, the Cole headquarters in which it was built surviving to this very day on East Washington Street.

A famous slogan was inspired for a brand-new local company when Norwegian-born Gil Andersen finished 11th, driving a prototype built under the direction of Harry

Stutz. The fledgling **Stutz** firm was still a couple of months away from being able to make its products available to the public, but this successful debut provided Stutz with the catchy tagline he had been seeking: "Stutz: The car that made good in a day."

From outside of Indianapolis but within the state of Indiana were five other makes, namely **Amplex**, with two cars from Mishawaka (one of which placed eighth), a **McFarlan** from Connersville and an **Inter-State** from Muncie, both of which were still running at the end, plus two others which were taken out in an accident just before halfway, a **Westcott** from Richmond and an **Apperson** from Kokomo.



The highest finish by an American firm not based in Indiana was second by a **Lozier**, one of two in the race entered by a company which had just relocated from Plattsburgh, N.Y., to Detroit. Strictly a stripped-down production car (just as the track founders had originally envisioned for all entries), driver Ralph Mulford drove his Lozier down from Detroit personally early in the month and then drove it back a couple of days after the race was over. Teddy Tetzlaff, who would finish second in a Fiat the following year, crashed the other Lozier early in the race.

Finishing sixth was one of two **Simplex** cars from New York City, this one driven by Italian-born Ralph de Palma, who within a couple of years would stand out as the

most acclaimed of all the early "500" drivers. Coming home ninth was Fred Belcher aboard a lone, chain-driven **Knox** from Springfield, Mass., while 10th position (the last spot offering prize money) was claimed by Harry Cobe with one of the three **Jackson** cars from Jackson, Mich.

Just outside of the first ten, finishing 11th and 15th, were a pair of **Mercers** from Trenton, N.J., while other makes still running at the end were a **Firestone-Columbus** from Columbus, Ohio (shared by Lee Frayer and his 20 year-old protégé, future World War I flying "ace" Eddie Rickenbacker), a **Velie** from Moline, Ill., a **Pope-Hartford** from Hartford, Conn., and a **Cutting** from Jackson, Mich.

Main: The aftermath of a multicar accident just before the halfway mark shows the #18 Fiat of Eddie Hearne, and in the foreground, Harry Knight's Richmond, Ind.-built Westcott #7. Off to the right can be seen the tail of the Blitzen Benz with which Bob Burman had recently set the world land speed record at Daytona Beach.



The balance of the field was made up of three **Case** entries from the J.I. Case Threshing Machine Co. of Racine, Wisc. (none of which finished), a pair of **Buicks** (one driven by Arthur Chevrolet), Harry Grant's 1909/1910 Vanderbilt Cup-winning **ALCO** from Providence, R.I., and a second Pope-Hartford.

It is difficult to fully appreciate the sacrifices that some of the teams had to make in those days simply to reach the track. Perhaps the loudest applause of all should go to the hardy members of the Pope-Hartford team who were faced with quite an ordeal. Embarking on an over-the-road trip which took five days to complete, they actually

drove their two cars to the track. Loading them down with toolboxes and spares, they started out from Hartford, Conn., and traveled to New York City, where they took part in a sendoff lunch and some promotional opportunities. The following morning, they headed for Indianapolis and, after making overnight stops in Buffalo, Cleveland and Columbus, Ohio, were met on the outskirts of Indianapolis on East Washington Street (the old National Road) by Frank Fox, the local Pope-Hartford "agent" who was to drive one of the cars in the race.

A day or two after the race, the hardy crew then loaded everything back onto the two cars and drove them back to Hartford. •

