

CORK MOTOR SPORT

The Carrigrohane Straight

Described by international racers as the 'magnificent Straight', the 'Carrigrohane Straight' Road captures the imagination of people, drawn to stories of the early speed trials of 1903 to the glamorous international motor-racing events of the 1930s and on to the world record-breaking speed trials of the 1980s. The Carrigrohane Straight is one of only a few roads in Europe where speed trials can be run, as it is within 1 degree of flatness over the 2.25 miles, while the 'Straight' and the Model Farm Road together, form a perfect natural circuit for motor racing.



(by Michael Holland in *The Cork Examiner*, 16 May 1936)

The first Irish Ordnance Survey (OSI) Map shows work in progress on the 'New Line' which stretched from the western edge of the city to Carrigrohane and Leemount Cross. The section as far as Leemount Cross may not have been completed until the years of the Great Famine.



First edition OSI Map (1837-1842) showing 'New Line' of Road in progress



The Muskerry Light Railway just passing the station at Carrigrohane
(Cork Camera Club Collection, Cork City Libraries)

From the 1880's to 1934, the Muskerry Light Railway (often referred to as the Muskerry Tram) ran along the Carrigrohane Straight to Blarney, Donoughmore and Coachford.



Aerial view of the Carrigrohane Straight
(Cork Examiner, 16 May 1936)

In 1927, the Carrigrohane Straight became one of the first concreted road surfaces in Ireland or Britain. Cork Corporation and County Council, who both controlled sections of the Straight, laid mesh steel covered with concrete, which was considered the most suitable material for this marshy area, so prone to flooding. That same year, the 'Muskerry' collided with a steamroller, when the road was being resurfaced, but fortunately no one was seriously injured. The train tracks were removed in 1935, just in time for the Cork Motor Races of 1936.



The 'Muskerry' Crash, 6 September 1927
(Courtesy of Irish Examiner Archive)



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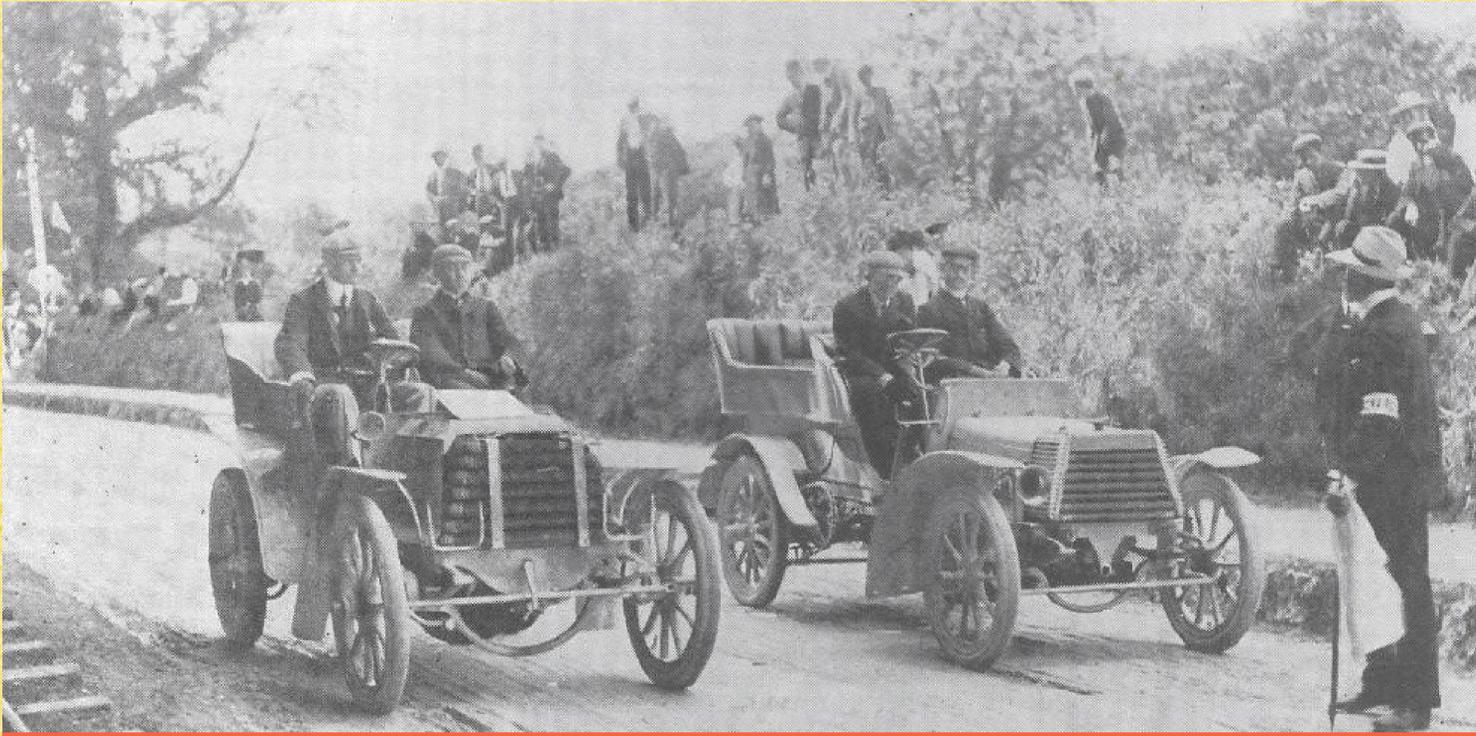
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CORK MOTOR SPORT

1903 and 1930



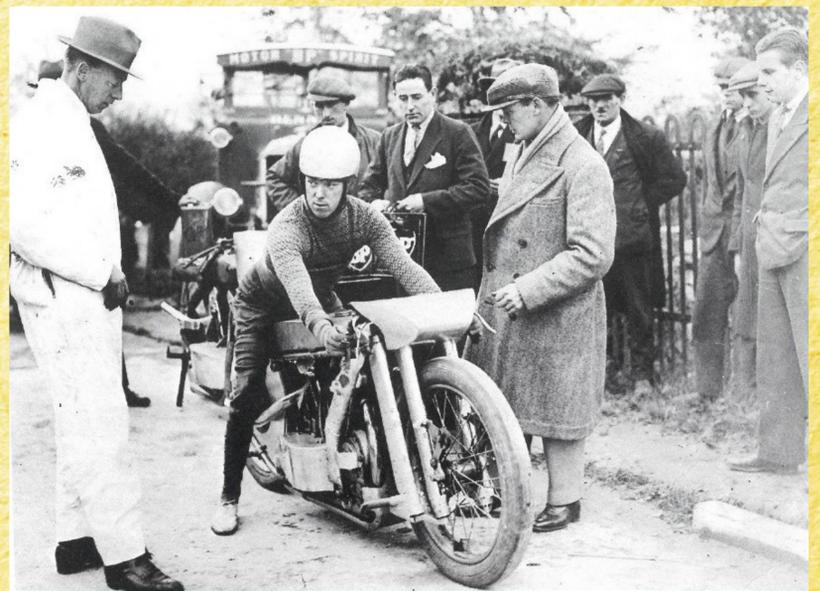
Cork Speed Trials, Saturday 11 July 1903

RIAC Guinness Segrave Archive (from *An Irish Roadside Camera: Ireland's Earliest Motorists and their Automobiles 1896-1906*)

The first motorcycling record at the Carrigrohane Straight was set unofficially by Glenn Curtiss in 1903, when on Saturday 11 July, Cork played host to a Gordon Bennet Cup speed trial, along the Carrigrohane Road, as part of the Irish Automobile Fortnight, which saw thousands turn out for the event.

This photograph shows the race between the Hon. C.S. Rolls – of Rolls Royce fame – in a 20hp Panhard and the Hon. John Scott Montagu in a 22 hp Daimler, as they await the starting flag, next to the railway line that ran alongside the Carrigrohane road. Montagu won by a margin of three yards.

The first motorcycle speed meeting at the newly concreted Carrigrohane Straight took place in 1929, when Joseph S. Wright, one of Britain's foremost motorcyclists, broke the world's motorcycle record, at a speed of 152 miles per hour. The following year he lost the speed record to Jacob Ernst Henne (BMW) of Germany. As the British were very keen to regain the record, the Cork District Motor Club suggested the Carrigrohane Straight as the perfect venue. Wright returned to Cork to attempt a new record on 6 November 1930. French officials also arrived in the city with special electric timing apparatus. Riding a 1,000 cc QEC Temple JAP-engined motorcycle and wearing a streamlined helmet with his clothing strapped down to reduce wind resistance, Wright regained the world record with a speed of 150.74 miles per hour.



J.S. Wright regained the World Speed Record at the Carrigrohane Straight, 6 November 1930

(Courtesy of Irish Examiner Archive)

After the race, the Lord Mayor of Cork, Frank J Daly, hosted Wright and representatives of the motorcycle manufacturer, JA Prestwich & Co. Ltd at a celebratory dinner. In his speech, the Lord Mayor stressed that 'the government of the Free State was most anxious to foster and cater for anything that would help the Saorstát to keep its place amongst the nations of the earth'.



Camera crews prepare to film the attempt by JS Wright to break the world speed motorbike record on the Carrigrohane Straight 6 November 1930

(Courtesy of Irish Examiner Archive)



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CORK MOTOR SPORT 1936

In 1935, the exciting idea of holding Motor Races in Cork was championed by a committee of Cork citizens under the leadership of the then Lord Mayor, Alderman Seán French and R.H. Tilson, chairman of the organising committee. Approval was given by the Royal Irish Automobile Club (RIAC) and the Irish Motor Racing Club (IMRC) – one of the oldest motor clubs in the world – agreed to act as race promoters. The Government Roads Department and Cork County Council invested in bringing the circuit up to the required standard to hold the event. There was tremendous local interest in seeking to make the event a success with Cork's business community happy to invest and the Ford Car Company making space available to the drivers to store and work on their cars.

MOTOR RACE THRILLS.
THOUSANDS WATCH THE EARLY MORNING TRIALS.
OVER 130 M.P.H. ON STRAIGHT.
Course Covered In A Little Over Four Minutes.
THE TRAFFIC ARRANGEMENTS.
Hundreds Of Civic Guards To Be On Duty To-morrow.
(from The Cork Examiner, 15 May 1936)



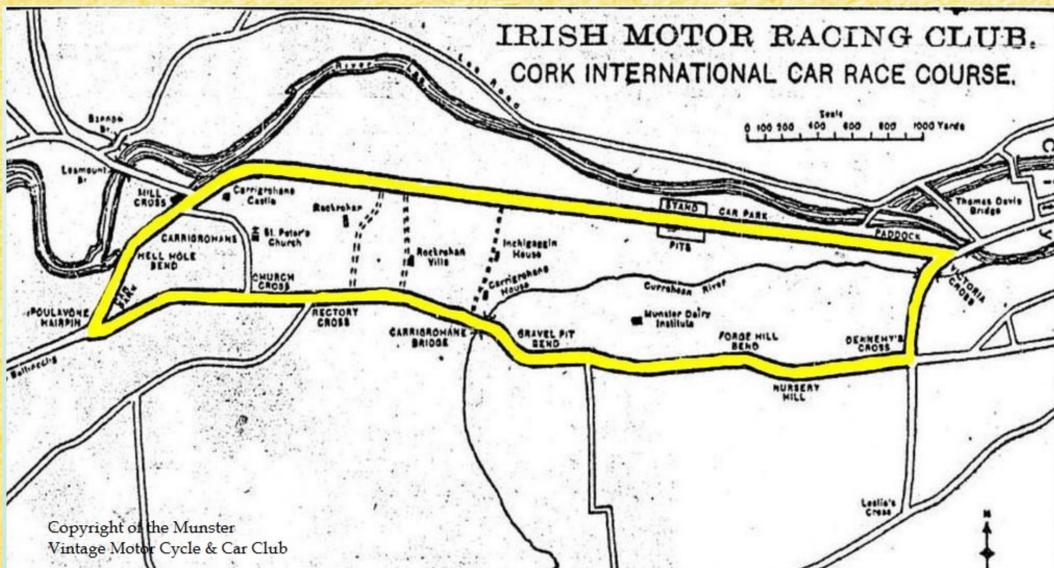
On Saturday 16 May 1936, Cork held its first motor race. There was a carnival atmosphere in the city as local restaurants and shops decorated their premises with flags and bunting and hotel accommodation was quickly booked out. The 7 a.m. practice sessions were not too early to prevent thousands of spectators from turning out to watch world-class drivers including: Austin Dobson from Surrey, in his Alfa-Romeo - thought to be the fastest car ever seen in Britain and Ireland and capable of speeds up to 180 miles per hour; Reggie Tongue from Manchester; The Duke of Grafton from London; Toohey, Manders and Colley from Dublin; and Prince Bira (Birabongse Bhanudej) of Siam (now Thailand) in his blue Maserati.

'The entire City of Cork seemed to have been given over to the business of motor-racing . . . Long before daybreak a solid stream of traffic, intermingled with snarling racing cars, was on the way out to the course'.

Dublin racing driver, Dudley Colley (Green Dust: Ireland's Unique Motor Racing History 1900-1939)



Off to the Races! Crowds make their way to the Cork Motor Races
(Courtesy of Irish Examiner Archive)



Pits and Grandstand, Carrigrohane Straight just before the Cork National Motor Race – 16 May 1936
(Courtesy of Irish Examiner Archive)

The distance of the Carrigrohane Circuit was 201 miles, or thirty-three laps of the circuit. The roughly D-shaped 6.1 mile circuit ran towards the city, along the 2.2 mile Carrigrohane Straight to Victoria Cross, before turning right to Dennehy's Cross and right again along the Model Farm Road, then heading west down the narrow and twisting back stretch to the Poulavone Hairpin Bend, before passing Hell Hole Corner, and back on to the Carrigrohane Straight.



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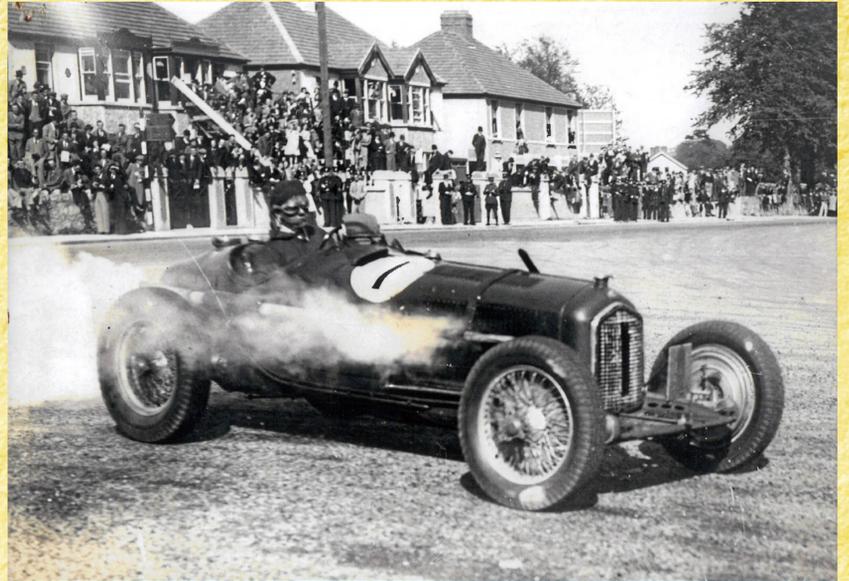
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CORK MOTOR SPORT 1936



Prince Bira rounding the corner at Victoria Cross
(Source: Ernie McAllister)



Smoke coming from C.E.C. Martin's Alfa Romeo at Victoria Cross
(Source: Ernie McAllister)

Reggie Tongue and Prince Bira set the fastest pace from the start, fighting it out for the top spot. With ten laps to go, Bira suffered a broken fuel pipe, leaving the coast clear for Tongue to win in an English Racing Automobile (ERA) at an average speed of 85.53mph in 2 hrs, 12 mins. 22 secs. There were nine finishers in all, with only five cars having trouble-free runs. The Londoner, Cyril Mervyn White, the sole driver involved in a crash, was fortunate to walk away with only minor injuries, when his car turned a complete double somersault at Inchiagaggin.



Watching the Cork National Car Race from Dennehy's Cross
(Source: Ernie McAllister)

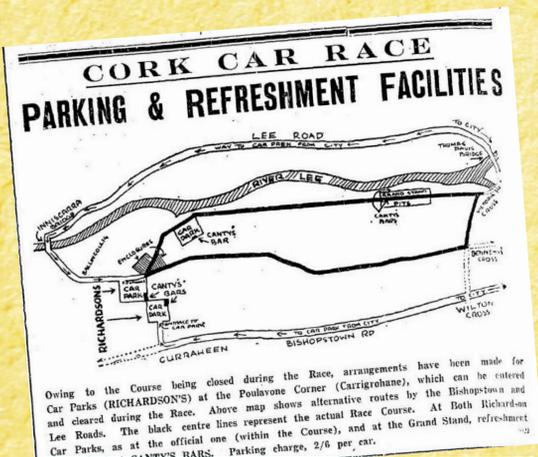
RESULTS - 1936 (May 16th)

Place	Driver	Car	Handicap	Time	Speed
1	R E Tongue	1,488 cc ERA s/c	2 laps	2hrs. 12mins. 22secs.	85.53mph
2	A Powys-Lybbe	2,336 cc Alfa Romeo s/c	2 laps less 1 min.	2hrs. 15mins. 45secs.	84.05mph
3	A Dobson	2,905 cc Alfa Romeo s/c	1 lap less 2 mins.	2hrs. 16mins. 25secs.	86.95mph
4	J Toohy	933 cc Ford	9 laps less 3 mins.	2hrs. 20mins. 46secs.	63.65mph
5	I Peters	1,496 cc Frazer-Nash	6 laps	2hrs. 27mins. 46secs.	66.74mph
6	A W MacRobert	1,087 cc MG s/c	4 laps less 1 min.	2hrs. 29mins. 20secs.	71.41mph
7	C H W Manders	995 cc Alder	8 laps less 1 min.	2hrs. 31mins. 58secs.	60.48mph
8	D C MacLachen	1,089 cc Riley	6 laps	2hrs. 31mins. 59secs.	64.89mph

Lap Record - C R Martin (2,904 cc Alfa Romeo) 91.31 mph

NEW RECORDS EXPECTED.
RACE FEVER GRIPS THE SOUTHERN CAPITAL.
FANS DEFY MORNING RAIN.
Big Crowds Watch Second Practice Tests On Carrigrohane Circuit.
MORE HIGH SPEEDS REGISTERED.
Dublin Driver's Ill-Luck—Extensive Arrangements Made To Convenience Big Influx Of Visitors.

Cork to-day is in the grip of "race fever," intensified interest being displayed everywhere in the Cork Motor Races, which will be decided on the Carrigrohane Circuit this afternoon. Arrangements have been made to handle what is expected to be the biggest crowd ever to see a sporting fixture in Cork, and a record influx of visitors is anticipated.



Sketch map showing the parking and refreshment spots at the 1936 Cork National Car Race
(from The Cork Examiner, Thursday May 14, 1936)



Reggie Tongue in an ERA, winner of the Cork National Car Race
(Source: Ernie McAllister)

Race Lunch
Get an early lunch at
THOMPSONS RESTAURANT
71 & 72 Patrick St.
Also open till 7.20 for teas, etc.
Tea Tents on the Course at Main Grand Stand and at Poulavone Corner.

Hungry racegoers were well-catered for by Thompsons of Patrick Street, who set up Tea Tents at various points along the course.
(from The Cork Examiner, 16 May 1936)



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CORK MOTOR SPORT 1937



CORK INTERNATIONAL MOTOR RACE
 Saturday, May 22nd, 1937
 ORGANISED BY THE CORK & DISTRICT MOTOR CLUB LTD.
 OFFICIAL PROGRAMME PRICE 1/-
 PROMOTED BY THE IRISH MOTOR RACING CLUB LTD.

Programme for Cork International Motor Race 1937
 (from Cork Grand Prix 1938-2013)

R.E Tongue, Charles Martin, Prince Bira and Cyril Mervyn White were among the cross-channel visitors to return to Cork in 1937. Fourteen drivers participated in the Cork International Motor Race on Saturday 22 May. Speeds were greatly reduced by heavy rain which began three-quarters of an hour into the race. The spectators were looking forward to the meeting of Charles Martin in his monoposto Alfa Romeo and Prince Bira in his ex-Whitney Straight 3-litre Maserati. Martin took the lead on the seventh lap. Bira tried to respond but hit a post, wrecking his Maserati. Fortunately, he was uninjured and able to walk back to the start.

'Absolutely loved racing in Ireland... nowhere did I find anything to match the Irish enthusiasm... Nobody hid behind rules and regulations and yet the organization was always perfect. The Cork circuit was top-class. The long straight was just right for the faster cars... The back section of the circuit was also exciting with lots of bends and a gradient.'

British driver, Charles Martin

The winner of the Cork International Motor Race 1937 was HB Prestwich of Cheshire, who averaged 76.33mph in his 1,087cc MG Magnette.



Always a winner!
TANORA
 Good to the last lap!
 MANUFACTURED ONLY BY JOHN DALY & CO. (LIMITED) CORK.

Local businesses were keen to be associated with Cork Motor Races
 (from Evening Echo 22 May 1937)

THE CORK INTERNATIONAL MOTOR RACE - 1937
 So successful was the 1936 Cork National Motor Race, which was watched by greater numbers than any other southern sporting event, that a second motor-race series was planned for the following year. Cork County Council widened the Carrigrohane Straight by nine feet over its length, further improving the already top-class road-racing circuit. Cork and District Motor Club (formerly the Cork Motor Race Committee) and the Irish Motor Racing Club (IMRC) organized and promoted the event, which was granted international status and listed as the Cork International Motor Race on the 1937 International Calendar of Motor Sport.



Crowds awaiting the start of the Cork International Motor Race, 22 May 1937
 (Courtesy of Irish Examiner Archive)

CRASHED AT 60 M.P.H
CORK CAR RACE DRIVER SERIOUSLY INJURED
AN UNLUCKY CORNER
EARLY MORNING CROWDS SEE FAST SPEEDS IN FIRST PRACTICE.

Mr. C. Mervyn White, one of the drivers entered for Cork Car Race, to-morrow, crashed in a sensational manner during the first practice yesterday morning, and sustained serious head injuries. He is at present lying in the Mercy Hospital, Cork, in a serious condition. He is semi-conscious. At an early hour this morning his condition was reported as unchanged.

The crash occurred only a few yards from the point at which he turned a double sweep in last year's race. He then had a miraculous escape from death, sustaining only slight concussion, and was able to drive to the pits.

(from The Cork Examiner, 21 May 1937)

The previous year, C. Mervyn White had experienced only minor injuries when his car crashed, but in 1937, his luck ran out when he was involved in another crash at the first practice session on Thursday 20 May. This time his head was injured badly when he was thrown from the car, dying four days later in the Mercy Hospital on 24 May.

CARS, ENTRANTS, DRIVERS and HANDICAPS

No. in Race	ENTRANT	DRIVER	CAR	Handicap Laps Mins	No. in Race
1	C. E. C. Martin (Surrey)	Entrant	Alfa Romeo, 3200 c.c. (S)	0 0	1
2	Austin Dobson (Surrey)	Entrant	Alfa Romeo, 2900 c.c. (S)	1 -2	2
3	A. Powys-Lybbe (Bradfield)	Entrant	Alfa Romeo, 2336 c.c. (S)	2 -1	3
4	Mervyn White Services, Ltd. (Glafont St. Peter)	C. Mervyn White	Bugatti, 2270 c.c. (S)	2 -1	4
5	"B. Bira" (London)	Entrant	E.R.A., 1488 c.c. (S)	2 0	5
7	G. F. A. Manby-Colegrave (London)	Entrant	E.R.A., 1488 c.c. (S)	2 0	7
8	R. E. Tongue (Eccles)	Entrant	E.R.A., 1488 c.c. (S)	2 0	8
10	E. K. Rayson (London)	Entrant	Bugatti, 1990 c.c. (S)	3 -2	10
11	L. R. Briggs (Whiteabbey)	Entrant	M.G., 1087 c.c. (S)	4 -1	11
12	Sir A. W. MacRobert, Bt. (Surrey)	Entrant	M.G., 1087 c.c. (S)	4 -1	12
14	D. L. Briault (Finzer)	Entrant	M.G., 746 c.c. (S)	4 -1	14
15	The Duke of Grafton (London)	Entrant	Squire, 1496 c.c. (S)	5 -3	15
16	P. M. Dwyer (Cahir)	Entrant	Bugatti, 3255 c.c.	5 -3	16
17	H. C. McFerran (Belfast)	Entrant	Bugatti, 1900 c.c.	6 -3	17
18	C. G. Neill (Belfast)	Entrant	Bugatti, 1990 c.c.	6 -2	18
19	Ivo Peters (Bristol)	Entrant (Res.: F. Griffith Hughes)	Frazer Nash, 1496 c.c.	6 0	19
20	E. W. H. Dobson (Stockbridge)	Entrant	Riley, 1089 c.c.	6 0	20
21	D. C. MacLachlan (Cork)	Entrant	Riley, 1089 c.c.	6 0	21
22	F. O'Boyle (Dublin)	Entrant	Riley, 1089 c.c.	7 -3	22
23	W. Sullivan (Belfast)	W. T. McCalla	Sullivan Special, 847 c.c. (S)	8 -2	23
24	D. Yule (Dublin)	Entrant (Res.: K. D. Cox)	C.M.Y. Special 952 c.c. (S)	8 -2	24
25	T. O'Shaughnessy (Dublin)	Entrant	Talbot, 2276 c.c.	8 -2	25
26	Irisher Adler Remastall (Dublin)	C. H. Manders (Res. R. B. S. LeFanou)	Adler Einsitzer 995 c.c.	8 -1	26
27	H. Walter Furey (Bangor)	Entrant	M.G. 1287 c.c.	8 -1	27
28	F. H. French Davis (Dublin)	Entrant	Fiat, 995 c.c.	8 -1	28
29	Smithfield Motor Co., Ltd. (Dublin)	J. Tooleay	Ford, 893 c.c.	9 -3	29
30	John Carr (Belfast)	Entrant (Res.: J. D. Barbour)	Austin, 747 cc. (S)	10 -3	30

Line-up for The Handicap Motor Race, 1937
 - Note: Corkman, J.A. Thompson, driving a Ford Special
 (from Cork Grand Prix 1938-2013)



CORK MOTOR SPORT 1938

The **Cork Motor Derby 1938**, which took place over two days on 22/23 April, attracted many of the leading drivers of the day from some of Europe's top racing teams, such as Bugatti, Maserati and Alfa Romeo and an estimated 70,000 spectators. A few days earlier, the ship carrying the cross-channel and continental competitors and their cars arrived in Cork. The Irish Hospitals' Sweepstakes Trust sponsored the event, which was organised under International Formula regulations giving it the status of a modern-day Formula One race. It included three races: the 50-mile Cork National Motor Handicap for the Frank O'Boyle Trophy; the 75-mile Cork International Light Car Race for cars of up to 1.5 litres and the 200-mile Grand Prix.



Racing down the 'Carrigrohane Straight'
(Courtesy of Irish Examiner Archives)



DUBLINER DUDLEY COLLEY, winner of the National Motor Handicap Race 1938 in a 1,496cc Frazer Nash
(from *The Cork Examiner*, 22 April 1938)

Again, record crowds descended on Cork to see old favourites like Prince Bira and Charles Martin, along with the debonaire René Dreyfus and Cork's first woman competitor, Dorothy Stanley Turner. The National Motor Handicap Race was won by Dudley Colley of Dublin in a 1,496cc Frazer Nash. The most popular winner was Prince Bira who won The Light Car Race in his 1,488cc ERA R12C, 'Hanuman', breaking the lap record three times in succession. The Cork Grand Prix, also on the Saturday, was won by René Dreyfus in a 4500cc Delahaye 145, with Prince Bira second in 2992cc Maserati 8CM and Louis Gerard in a 298cc Delage.



René Dreyfus signing autographs after winning the Cork Grand Prix.
(Source: RIAC Archive in Cork Grand Prix 1938-2013)



Prince Bira, winner of the Cork Light Car Race
(Courtesy of Irish Examiner Archive)

The Irish Motor News 124 April 21, 1938.

LIST OF COMPETITORS. CORK GRAND PRIX.

33 laps (201 miles). £1,000 first prize. Qualifying speed in practising, 70 m.p.h.

Entrant	Nation	Driver (s)	Nation	C.C.	Car
Alfa-Come	Italy	T. Nuvolari	Italy	2,992	Alfa-Romeo (4)
Aff-Corse	Italy	G. Follini	Italy	2,992	Alfa-Romeo (4)
H. Renschler	Switzerland	G. Follini	Switzerland	2,992	Alfa-Romeo (4)
F. Ashby, Ltd.	Gr. Britain	C. P. Ashby	Gr. Britain	2,991	Alfa-Romeo (4)
K. D. Evans	Gr. Britain	Entrant	Gr. Britain	2,994	Alfa-Romeo (4)
J. F. Snow	Australia	Entrant and E. L. Featherstonhaugh	Gr. Britain	2,994	Alfa-Romeo (4)
E. M. Thomas	Gr. Britain	Mrs. E. M. Thomas	France	2,984	Delage
Etienne Bugatti	France	L. Gerard	France	4,500	Delahaye
Count Heyden	France	L. S. Schell	France	4,500	Delahaye
Henri Heuss	France	R. Dreyfus	Italy	3,527	Delahaye
Count Heyden	France	G. Conotti	France	3,527	Delahaye
Count Heyden	France	J. Vial	Germany	2,900	Maserati (4)
H. Berg	Germany	Entrant	Spain	2,901	Maserati (4)
Prince Bira	Spain	R. Bira	Gr. Britain	3,000	Multi-Union (4)
W. C. Devereux	Gr. Britain	C. S. Stasland	Gr. Britain	3,000	Multi-Union (4)

LIGHT CAR RACE.

12 laps (73 miles). £250 first prize. Qualifying speed, 60 m.p.h.

Entrant	Nation	Driver (s)	Nation	C.C.	Car
F. O'Boyle	Ire	Entrant and W. H. Whitcham	Gr. Britain	1,488	ERA (4)
Prince Chula	Siam	B. Bira	Gr. Britain	1,488	ERA (4)
I. P. Connell	Gr. Britain	Entrant	Gr. Britain	1,488	ERA (4)
A. C. Dobson	Gr. Britain	Entrant	Gr. Britain	1,488	ERA (4)
The Earl Howe	Gr. Britain	Entrant	Gr. Britain	1,488	ERA (4)
A. F. Robt.	Gr. Britain	Entrant	Gr. Britain	1,488	ERA (4)
R. E. Tongue	S. Africa	Entrant	S. Africa	1,484	Maserati (4)
N. G. Wilson	Italy	Count G. Lurani	Italy	1,484	Maserati (4)
Scuderia Ambrosiana	Italy	L. Villone	Germany	1,484	Maserati (4)
H. Berg	Germany	Entrant	Gr. Britain	1,484	Maserati (4)
Mrs. Hill-Smith	Gr. Britain	R. Hanson	Switzerland	1,484	Maserati (4)
A. Hug	U.S.A.	Baron K. de Grafenfeld	Italy	1,484	Maserati (4)
I. de Pay	U.S.A.	Entrant	Gr. Britain	1,484	Maserati (4)
G. Soffici	Gr. Britain	Entrant	Gr. Britain	1,484	Maserati (4)
H. B. Frautlich	Gr. Britain	Entrant	Gr. Britain	1,484	Maserati (4)
W. Farrell	Gr. Britain	W. G. Diveritt	Gr. Britain	1,488	Talbot-Darracq (4)
A. Powys-Lybbe	Gr. Britain	Entrant	Gr. Britain	1,488	Talbot-Darracq (4)

NATIONAL HANDICAP RACE.

8 laps (48 miles). £100 first prize. Qualifying speed, 50 m.p.h.

Entrant	Nation	Driver (s)	Nation	C.C.	Car
T. A. S. O. Mathieson	Gr. Britain	Entrant	Gr. Britain	3,215	Bugatti
J. Mastia	Ire	Entrant	Gr. Britain	1,498	Frazer Nash
H. Gates	Ire	C. P. Colley and M. Burke	Gr. Britain	1,498	Frazer Nash
J. D. McChur	N. Ireland	A. M. Vicker	Gr. Britain	1,498	Frazer Nash
A. P. MacArthur	Gr. Britain	Entrant	Gr. Britain	1,498	Frazer Nash
G. W. C. McCrea	Ire	Entrant	Gr. Britain	1,498	Frazer Nash
W. T. Loberty	Ire	Entrant	Gr. Britain	1,498	Frazer Nash
C. H. Manders, Ltd.	Ire	Entrant	Gr. Britain	1,498	Frazer Nash
D. Vale	Ire	Entrant	Gr. Britain	1,498	Frazer Nash
J. A. Thompson	Gr. Britain	Entrant	Gr. Britain	1,498	Frazer Nash
Mrs. H. B. Rankin-Turnell	Gr. Britain	Entrant	Gr. Britain	1,498	Frazer Nash

List of Competitors for 1938

AFTER THE EXCITEMENT AND ROAR OF THE CARS THERE IS ONLY ONE THING TO DO—MAKE A BEE LINE FOR THOMPSONS RESTAURANT

OR THEIR CAFE, PRINCES ST. AND ENJOY A NICE TEA IN QUIET AND COMFORT.

RESTAURANT AND CAFE OPEN UNTIL 10 P.M. FRIDAY AND SATURDAY.

(from *The Cork Examiner*, 21 April 1938)

"THE GRANDEST COURSE"

NOTED FRENCH AUTHORITY SUGGESTS T.T. RACE FOR CORK

SEVENTY THOUSAND WATCH RACES

Cork entertained many thousands of visitors on Saturday, and shortly before racing began it was estimated that 70,000 lined the circuit. Count Heidn, famous French authority, was very enthusiastic on the possibilities of the course. In a special interview with an "Examiner" representative he said; "The Cork circuit is the grandest course in these islands."

"The course is absolutely marvellous," he declared, "and quite as good as any course on the Continent, and the drivers think the same."

"The course is difficult but that is what we want. It is much better than Donnington."

He added that he would be seeing Captain Phillips, Clerk of the Course for the T.T. Race, and he was going to discuss the possibility of the T.T. being held over the Cork circuit.

After the 1938 Races, Count Heidn, a famous motor-racing authority, enthusiastically praised the Cork Circuit, calling it 'the grandest course' and suggesting that it should be used for T.T. Races.

SPEED THRILLS

WONDERFUL DRIVING DISPLAYS IN CORK

"BIRA" TAKES THE HONOURS

DREYFUS WINS GRAND PRIX—AMAZING ESCAPE OF DRIVER

Seventy thousand spectators saw lap records beaten several times during the International Light Car Race and Cork Grand Prix at the Carrigrohane Circuit on Saturday.

Prince Birabongse of Siam, driving an E.R.A., and René Dreyfus, in a Delahaye, were the respective winners. Both victories were comfortably gained, the winners taking the lead in the second lap of each race and being never headed. Both drivers gave wonderful displays of skill, however, in holding their leads.

The Prince, who races under the name "B. Bira," won the Light Car Race at an average speed of 91.53 m.p.h. He broke the lap record three times in succession, his best speed being 92.86 m.p.h. His win was easily the most popular gained in Cork.

An undoubted superiority right from the start. He averaged 92.95 m.p.h., and he also broke the lap record three times, his best being 95.71 m.p.h. "Bira" was beaten by 2 mins. 10 secs. in this race, after a great effort, so that he took the honours of the day.

There were some thrilling incidents during the day. J. P. Wakefield, in a Maserati had an amazing escape when his car plunged over the banking at Half Hole bend and fell thirty bruses and shock.

While lying on the ground, however, "Bira's" car only missed him by a foot. A. C. Dobson had to drive the last three miles of the light car race while being sprayed with oil from the gear-box. He beat Villorosi, an Italian, by one-fifth of a second for second place.

(from *The Cork Examiner*, 25 April 1938)



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CORK MOTOR SPORT

Cork Grand Prix Drivers

Prince Bira of Siam

(Thailand) was a firm favourite with the people of Cork during the Cork Grand Prix years, affectionately known as 'The Prince'. He had his first race at Brooklands in 1935 driving a Riley Imp. His next car, an ERA R2B, which he named Romulus, had a distinctive blue and yellow paint colour and finished second in his very first race. In 1936 Bira purchased a second Era which he named Remus.



Source: The Autocar in Cork Grand Prix 1938-2013

He also raced his cousin Prince Chula's Maserati. In 1937, he purchased a Delage, but the car underperformed, and he regularly drove his ERA in races. 1937 was also the year that Bira was convicted of dangerous driving in Britain, fined £10 and had his licence suspended for 12 months. He was then automatically debarred from racing in England. That same year he crashed out of the Cork Grand Prix, having felt unwell prior to and during the race. Having kissed the Blarney stone the day before, he did not get the win he had wished for, although he did walk away from the crash relatively unharmed.



Prince Birabongse of Siam in his ERA R5B "Remus" at the Cork National Motor Race 16 May 1936
(Courtesy of Irish Examiner Archive)

He continued to race after the war and in 1955 he won the New Zealand Grand Prix, retiring from racing shortly afterwards.

René Dreyfus.

Born 1905 in France, René Dreyfus won his first race at his local motor club in Nice in June 1924, winning the 750cc class. René had a great association with Bugatti cars, driving a Bugatti Brescia and eventually upgrading to a Type 37A Bugatti. He took part in the 1929 Grand Prix at Monaco finishing a very respectable 5th. During the 1930 Grand Prix René fitted an extra 30 litre fuel tank on his Type 35B Bugatti and won the race thanks to avoiding a fuel pit stop. In 1931 he became a professional driver with the Maserati team but plagued with bad luck he left in 1932.



The winner of the Cork Grand Prix, René Dreyfus waves to the crowd – 23 April 1938
(Source: RIAC Archive in Cork Grand Prix 1938-2013)

The following year he returned to Bugatti and continued driving successfully until he transferred to the Alfa-Ferrari team and from there to the Talbot team until the end of 1936. His next venture was to race for Lucy and Laury Schell's private team, driving Delahaye cars.

Despite a cracked gear box releasing oil during the 1938 Cork Grand Prix, Dreyfus finished in first place averaging 92.95 M.P.H.



René Dreyfus in the Delahaye 145, winner of Cork Grand Prix, 23 April 1938
(Source: RIAC Archive in Cork Grand Prix 1938-2013)

Aubrey Thompson

Closer to home, Aubrey Thompson, whose family ran the Ford main dealership in Mallow, built the Thompson Racing Special (TRS) in Mallow in 1938. His family ran the Ford main dealership in Mallow. In the early 1930s, he served his apprenticeship with Daimler in Coventry. Whilst there, he enjoyed the friendship of Rupert Instone, son of the Daimler distributor, and Percy Maclure, the works Riley racing driver. Together they built the famous GN Martyr, which is still being raced in the UK.



(Courtesy of Irish Examiner Archive)



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CORK MOTOR SPORT

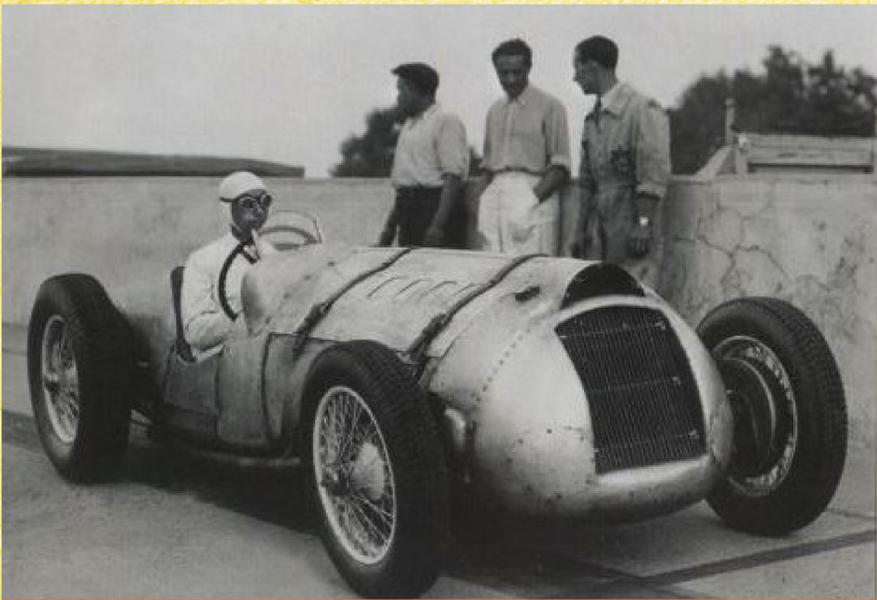
The Cars behind the Drivers



Prince Bira's ERA rounds Victoria Cross, Cork Light Car Race. 23 April 1938
(Source: RIAC Archive in Cork Grand Prix 1938-2013)

Maserati 8 CM

The Maserati 8CM was a Grand Prix racing car manufactured in Bologna between 1933-1935. The car had an 8-cylinder 2991cc engine producing between 220-240 horsepower at 5,500rpm. The earlier chassis, derived from the 4CM 1100, had to be strengthened at the front and the weight reduced by 35kg to improve handling. It had major success, winning the 1933 Belgian Grand Prix. Unfortunately, during the 1934-1935 racing season, it struggled against its rival competitors Alfa Romeo, Mercedes, and Auto Union. It was replaced by the new model V8RI with a V8 supercharged 4,788cc engine.



René Dreyfus in the Delahaye 145, August 1937
(Source: Robert Benoist in Cork Grand Prix 1938 - 2013)

Delahaye 145

The Delahaye 145 car was manufactured by the French auto manufacturer Delahaye, based on a sporting tourer. It was also very adept for racing. It had a 12-cylinder 4500cc engine. Only four Type 145 race cars were built exclusively for the Schell Écurie Bleue racing team. These were based on the earlier Type 135 and were modified with short rear suspension arms which improved their handling significantly. Although the V12 engine was considered complicated, it earned the nick name "Million Franc Delahaye" after it won the 1937-Million Franc race.

E.R.A. R12B.

Hanuman

The E.R.A. R12B. was a 1936 works car with a black colour scheme. In 1937, it was rebuilt to the C specification with a 1500 cc engine and a long-range fuel tank. In 1938, the car was sold to Prince Bira and he had it repainted in his White Mouse racing stable colours of blue and yellow. He named the car Hanuman (Hindu god) and had great success at Brooklands, Donnington and won the Light Car Race at Cork in 1938. Having won the Nuffield Trophy at Donnington, Bira crashed during practice at Rheims. The car was badly damaged, and the chassis had to be replaced using the only B type available, so the car was driven in both B and C variations. In 1946, Bira won the Ulster Trophy at Ballyclare. In 1949, its new owner was D.A. Hampshire who raced it at Silverstone taking 4th place.



Prince Bira in Maserati 8CM rounds Victoria Cross in 1938
(Source: RIAC archive in Cork Grand Prix 1938 - 2013)



J. P. Wimille in Cork Bugatti, 1938
(Source: RIAC archive in Cork Grand Prix 1938 - 2013)

Bugatti T 59

The Bugatti Type 59 is famed as the most beautiful of all Bugatti's motorsport creations and one of the beautiful racing cars of all time. The Type 59 opted for a unique shape with the width of a two-seater so that the driver could sit low next to the gearbox. The twin cam engine is a 3 litre straight 8-cylinder with louvres in the body for cooling. The root supercharged unit was said to develop some 230bhp.

1932 Ford Smithfield Special

Built by the Smithfield Motor Company in Dublin in 1932, the Ford Smithfield Special was raced by Jack Toohey. They won the Leinster Trophy in 1935 and 1936, the only car to have won so twice. They finished fifth in the Limerick Grand Prix in 1935, and fourth in Cork in 1936. The car, driven by Aubrey Thompson, finished ninth in Cork in 1937.



Aubrey Thompson of Mallow in Ford Smithfield Special, 1937
(Courtesy of Irish Examiner Archive)



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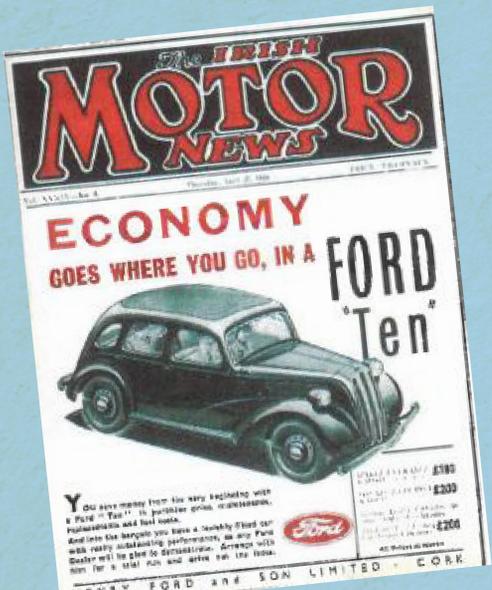


CORK MOTORSPORT

The History of Cork's Motorsport Community

Cork's motorsport history can be traced back to 1910, when the Cork and District Motor Club was formed (it was incorporated in 1923). The club was established to cater for two, three and four-wheeled motorsport in Cork.

The club's first event was in 1911: a 103-mile Reliability Trial from Cork to Killarney and back. Motorcycle Trials were held in 1914 and 1915. The "Cork 20" Rally was an event organised by the Club. It was first held in 1912. Motorcycle events began again in 1919 following the First World War and ran throughout the 1920s. In 1928, car events were also included in the Club.



The joy of the opened and uncrowded road of the 1920s is captured in the 1927 advertising for the Ford Tourer.
(Source: 100 years of Motorsport 1911-2011
Courtesy of Alan G. Verso)



Lionel (Liney) Cohen competing at the Viaduct in 1955. He describes his time in 'The Club' as most fulfilling, a place where he found refuge and made many friends, even apostles!
(Source: *Memoirs of An Irish Jew*)



By the lake at Gougane Barra, 1910
(Source: *The National: Celebrating 50 years of the Irish rally that became an international event*)

In August 1928, the club organised the Irish Mile Speed Championship motorcycle event on the Carrigrohane Straight Road, and this event was held again in the same place in 1930, when Joe Wright raised the Motorcycle Land Speed Record to 150.73 miles per hour. Club members were very passionate about motorsport, organising events which were very popular in the difficult years of the 1920s and 1930s. The Club engaged in the running of the Cork International Motor Races of 1936 and 1937 and the Grand Prix in 1938. Unfortunately, despite the large number of spectators at the 1938 races, the club incurred financial difficulties, which led to its demise.

Some members then formed the Munster Motor Cycle and Car Club Ltd in 1938 and for 21 years ran sporting events for cars and motorcycles from meeting rooms at 33 South Terrace, Cork. In 1959, the Club bought Vernon Mount House and surrounding grounds to use as the Club's headquarters.

For many years, the Club catered for "modern" car and bike events, but it also nurtured an interest in "old crock" events for both cars and motorcycles. It inaugurated the Cork Veteran Run in 1956 and the Irish National Motorcycle Assembly in 1967.

In 1996, Vernon Mount was sold, and the four sections of the Club (cars, bikes, vintage and karting) became separate entities. In July 2003, the Munster Vintage Motor Cycle and Car Club Ltd, was formed to promote veteran and vintage activities.



A Morgan is an honorary motorcycle combination
(Source: *The National: Celebrating 50 years of the Irish rally that became an international event*)



Cork Veteran Run, 1956.
(Courtesy of Mark Healy Collection)

Today the Cork motorsport community encapsulates many clubs including: Munster Vintage Motorcycle and Car Club, Munster Car Club, Cork Motor Club, West Cork Motorcycle Racing Club, Munster Motorcycle Club, Munster Karting Club and Cork Motorcycle Racing and Vintage Club.



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CORK MOTOR SPORT

Vernon Mount



Vernon Mount, front elevation, circa 1910
(Source: Irish Architectural Archive)

Hayes' wife, Elizabeth, died young in 1794 leaving him with a son and three daughters. In 1797, finding himself with major debts and no way to pay them off, Hayes placed himself at the centre of the most notorious marital scandal of the period by abducting a wealthy Quaker heiress. On the evening of 21 July 1797, Hayes ambushed Mary Pike's chaise and took her to his house, Vernon Mount, near Douglas. Mary Pike had come into a substantial inheritance from her father Samuel Pike, the prominent banker, with a fortune of some £20,000. In Vernon Mount House, a sham marriage ceremony was performed very much against her will. The abduction was ultimately unsuccessful as Mary Pike was rescued by her uncle. Hayes fled, becoming an outlaw for two years. However, he stood trial for his crime and was sentenced to hang but the sentence was transmuted to transportation for life. He was transported as a convict to New South Wales in 1802.



Abduction of Mary Pike by Sir Henry (cartoon)
(Source: Dark Times - Sir Henry Brownne Hayes/Dishonour in <http://www.vernonmountpark.ie/>)

Passing through several owners, the house was occupied as a family home until the middle of the last century. Through a succession of owners and leasees the house and its much-reduced demesne passed eventually to the Munster Motorcycle and Car Club in 1959, thus saving the house by using it as a club headquarters and incorporating a motocross track in the surrounding grounds. It remained largely intact until 2016, when a significant fire largely gutted the house, and the building was subsequently listed on the derelict sites register.

Vernon Mount (sometimes **Vernon Mount House**) is a ruined Georgian neoclassical villa which commands one of Cork's southern hills. It was built in the 1780s as a retirement home by Atwell Hayes, a brewer and Freemason. Hayes subsequently leased Vernon Mount to his eldest son, **Sir Henry Browne Hayes**, who set about decorating it in a lavish manner. Among the glories of the house were several murals and a rare ceiling canvas by the noted Cork artist Nathaniel Grogan (1740-1807).



'Minerva casting aside the spears of War' Nathaniel Grogan – ceiling painting on ground floor of Vernon Mount
(Source: Irish Georgian Society, 2008 in <http://www.vernonmountpark.ie/>)

A supporter of Governor William Bligh (of Mutiny on the Bounty fame), Browne Hayes was later pardoned and returned to Ireland, where he died in 1832 and was buried in Christ Church in his native Cork. Mary Pike, deeply affected by the abduction, never married and spent her time as a recluse. Poor Miss Pike, carried off in the night by Hayes, never recovered from her ordeal and died around the same time as her abductor in 1832, in a lunatic asylum.



Henry Brown Hayes
(Source: Australia's Rebel Convict)



Aerial View of Vernon Mount
(Source: Google Maps)



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CORK MOTORSPORT

Motorcycle and Car Events....Old and New

Munster 100

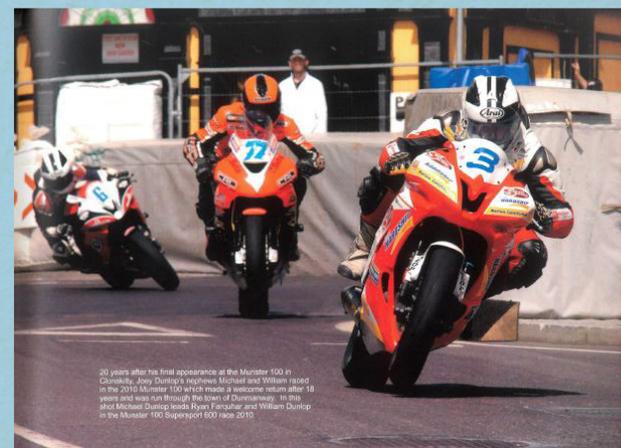
In 1940, the first motorcycle race in Cork (known as the Cork 50) took place. It was held on the Monaghan Road 1.5 mile circuit near Cork City. Due to petrol shortages and World War II, motorcycling racing did not resume until 1947. The competition later became the Munster 100 and ran from 1952-1955 on the full length 6.09 mile Carrigrohane circuit. Considered to be some of the finest years of the competition, many well-known racers took part during this period, including Cromie McCandles, Bob Matthews, Sammy Millar, Frank Fox, Ernie Lyons and three-time winner Louis Carter.

After that, the race was not held for over 20 years until 1976 when it was revived as a short circuit race at Mondello Park. The following year (1977) it was held at the Ardclloyne circuit at Kinsale, where it continued until 1985.

The Munster 100 was paused for three years until 1989 when it ran at the Clonakilty circuit to great success. The final race ran there in 1992 until revival in 2010 at Dunmanway. It is currently run by the Cork Motorcycle Racing & Vintage Club.



Munster 100 (1990) Joey Dunlop in action on a Honda RS 250.
(Courtesy of George Thompson)



20 years after racing in the Munster 100, Joey Dunlop's nephews Michael and William raced in the 2010 Munster 100, which made a welcome return after 18 years and was run through the town of Dunmanway. In this shot, Michael Dunlop leads Ryan Farquhar and William Dunlop in the Munster 100 Supersport 600 race, 2010.
(Courtesy of George Thompson)



**John Tansey/Derek Johnson
Cork 20, 1974**

(Source: 100 Years of Motorsport 1911-2011
Courtesy of Alan G. Verso)



Rally winners for the 2021 event were Derry's Callum Devine and co-driver Brian Hoy in their Ford Fiesta R5.
(Courtesy of Irish Examiner Archive)

Cork 20 Rally

The Cork 20 Rally, also known as the Cork 20 International Rally, was first held in 1912.

One of the oldest events of its kind in Europe, the name derives from the original race which spanned 20 hours.

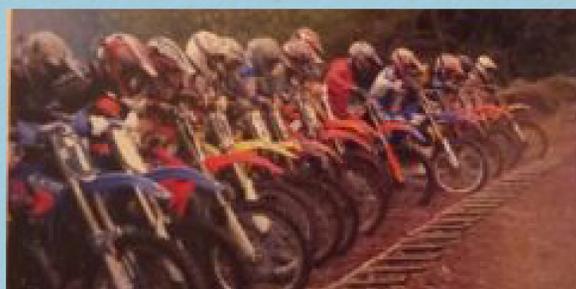
The rally is organised by the Munster Car Club and currently headquartered at Little Island, Cork.

The 2019 event was the final counting round of the Irish Tarmac Rally Championship and a counting round of the ERT Celtic Rally Trophy, Southern 4 Rally Championship & South East Stages Rally Championship each. The race consisted of 13 stages and had 187 competitors.

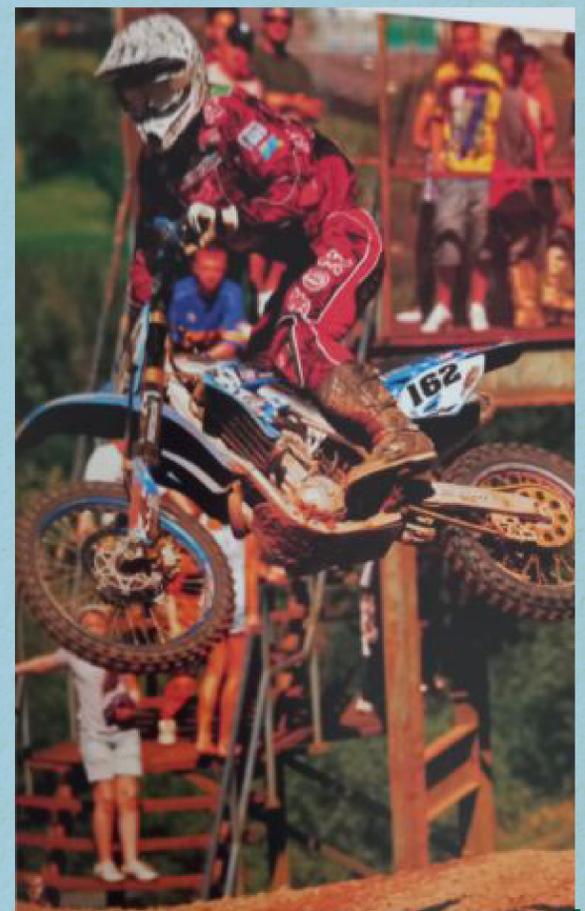
The overall winners for the 2019 event were the International Class entrants Marty McCormack and Barney Mitchell in their Volkswagen Polo R5.

Motocross

Vernon Mount motocross track is built in the grounds of the estate. The track is the former home of the Irish Motocross Grand Prix and hosted two rounds of the Motocross World Championship during the 1990s. A crowd of 30,000 attended the 250cc World Motocross Championship events at the same venue in 1993 and 1995. International attraction drew competitors from 14 countries in 1996, to compete in the 500cc Irish Motocross Grand Prix, the 500cc class being the premiership in this spectacular sport. Vernon Mount still hosts rounds of the Irish Motocross on its 1.8km track today, much to the delight of its dedicated followers.



The starting gate drops and they are away at the beginning of another race.
(Courtesy of George Thompson)



Stuart Edmonds, one of Ireland's prolific Motocross riders jumps the 'table top' at Vernon Mount.
(Courtesy of George Thompson)



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CORK MOTOR SPORT

Motorcycle and Car Events...Old and New

West Cork Rally

The first major event run by the Cork Motor Club was the West Cork Rally in 1977, which is based in Clonakilty and usually held around the St. Patrick's Day Weekend. The two-day annual event is run over 14 stages and takes in some of the most spectacular parts of the Wild Atlantic Way. An extremely popular event, the West Cork Rally attracts the highest number of overseas entries of any Irish rally and is an important event for West Cork tourism.

In 2014, the event was invited to become a part of the Irish Tarmac Championship and later was invited to be counted as a round in the 2019 *British Rally Championship*, the first to be included from the Republic of Ireland in the competition.



Local Drivers competing in the West Cork Rally, 2009 (clockwise from top left): Dunmanway's Liam McCarthy (Toyota Corolla WRC); Ballylickey's Denis Cronin (Subaru WRC) and Keith Cronin (Mitsubishi Evo9) (Southern Star, 14 March 2009)



Frank O'Mahony and co-driver Hugh McPhillips (Metro 6R4) on the Sam's Cross stage of the West Cork Rally. (Southern Star, 16 March 2019)

The first West Cork Rally winner was Cork Motor Club member Billy Coleman, with the latest winners being Josh Moffett & Andy Hayes in a Hyundai i20 R5, in March 2022.



West Cork Motorcycle Club's annual drag racing event from 2013 on the N71 at Halfway, Ballinhassig. This is the G class final (no restrictions) between Craig Mallabone on his Suzuki Hayabusa Turbo in the right hand lane and Ted Brady on Mel Nolan's Yamaha FJ Competition Bike. (Source: Joe Mallabone)

Drag Racing

Described as the highlight of the speedsport year, Cork has always had a great tradition in drag racing from the early days to present day, drawing national and international racers. For those not in the know, drag racing is an out and out dash over either a quarter or one-eighth of a mile track. Riders go against each other in an eliminator competition where the fastest two reach the final shootout. Riders are also given an E.T. (elapsed time) and a top speed for each run which helps to monitor the performance, but it is the first man, or woman, across the finishing line, that wins. Furthermore, Eibhlín Ní Luineacháin, a familiar figure on the racing circuit, adds: "Once we are on the track we are all the same, everyone wants to win and whether it's a man or woman under the helmet is irrelevant."

Entries such as the big Funnybikes, Comp bikes, Pro-Stock and Superstreet bikes provide the action at the top end of the scale, while the streetbike gives the everyday motorcycle enthusiast plenty to identify with. To join in the fun all you need is a motorcycle, a race-approved helmet, leathers, gloves and boots and the urge to go fast.



Eibhlín Ní Luineacháin a regular on the Drag Race circuit. (Courtesy of George Thompson)

75th Anniversary of Cork Grand Prix

Seventy-five years after the Cork Grand Prix of 1938, the Munster Vintage Motor Cycle and Car Club, with the assistance of Cork Motor Club, took it upon themselves to remember the Cork Grand Prix by bringing that golden era of racing back to life with a re-enactment of the Grand Prix race. A true pageant of sight and sound, the revival took to the old Carrigrohane circuit, giving all present a thrilling and visceral appreciation of one of the most prestigious events in Irish motorsport history. Six of the original cars that featured in the 1936-1938 Cork Grand Prix took part. These included an MG K3, a Thompson Racing Special (TRS) and in pride of place the "Cork Bugatti" T59/50B, driven by Tom Dark.



Kieran White's 1938 TRS (Thompson Racing Special) (Source: Munstervintage.com Courtesy of Kieran O' Callaghan)



Tom Dark in the "Cork Bugatti" T59/50B, which competed in the 1938 Grand Prix. (from Irish Examiner 24 June 2013)



1926 Alvis 12/50 rounding Victoria Cross once more in 2013. (Source: Munstervintage.com Courtesy of Richard O' Rourke)



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CORK MOTOR SPORT

Speed Stories from the Straight

Speed Weekends

The annual Munster Speed Weekends organised by the Munster Motorcycle and Car Club provided plenty for enthusiasts and casual spectators alike, running from the 1960s to mid- '80s. These well-organised weekends included Saturday's one kilometre sprint on the Straight road and Sunday's event, the Farnanes Hill climb, on the road out of Farnanes towards Coachford. The event received a very varied entry of both racing and production cars and motorcycles to compete for the various classes and categories. In 1984, notables such as: Mick Naylor in his Chevron 2,000 racing car; Miles Coll from Mullingar in a similar car; Cork Rally man, Frank O'Mahony in his Vauxhall H.S.R, and motorcycle ace Melvyn Nolan, all participated. Car speeds of between 120-130 m.p.h. were recorded that year, with Cork driver Frank O' Mahony in his Vauxhall chevet clocking the fastest overall times in his three sprints, with times of 26.95 seconds, 26.06 and 26.21 seconds, taking the top prize.



Action from the Munster Speed Weekend Farnanes Hill Climb, 1983 (R) Kenneth Hobletts from Co. Down in the Formula Ford 2000; (Middle) a motorcyclist taking a tumble as he hits the climb; (L) Jim Deane, Mallow, sideways in his escort on a deceiving left hander. (Evening Echo, 02 May 1983)

Land Speed Records

The eagerly contested land speed records brought the spotlight back on the Carrigrohane Straight. Racing legends Vivian Candy, Danny Keany and Rosemary Smith battled it out on the Straight, much to the thrill of the spectators. In 1978 two speed enthusiasts succeeded in setting up new land speed records in Cork. Rosemary Smith driving a Jaguar Chevrolet car, ensured herself a place in the history books when she set up a new record speed of 156.1 m.p.h. for a car.

While at the same venue Dubliner, Danny Keany, succeeded in smashing a 26 year old record, when he topped 161.63 m.p.h. on a Yamaha 750 motor bike.

The previous record on the same stretch of roadway was achieved by Harry Lindsay in 1952 when he travelled at 143 m.p.h.

"The fastest Rosemary's gone in her career ... is about 315 km/h, when she made the Irish land speed record in Cork in the 1970s." Rosemary Smith in interview, RTÉ.



Rosemary Smith (Source: Driven by Rosemary Smith)



Rosemary Smith getting off in a standing start on the Straight Road, 1978. (Evening Echo, 20 June 1978)



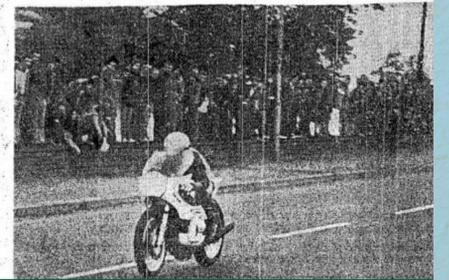
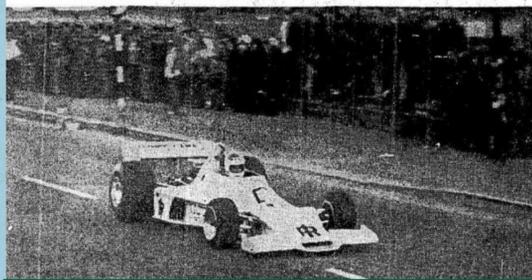
Danny Keany, on a 750 c.c Yamaha averaged 165 m.p.h. on the Straight Road bettering the record of 143 m.p.h. set up by Harry Lindsey, of Dublin on a 1,000 cc Vincent in 1952 (Evening Echo, 20 June 1978)

"Go to it", says Danny Keany (left) to Vivian Candy, who will be out to smash Danny's Irish land speed record on the Carrigrohane Straight on August 21. Meeting at the Ingersoll Rand and Yamaha reception at which the record attempt was announced. (Irish Independent, 15 August 1979)



On August 21st 1979, Vivian Candy and Danny Keany staged a highly publicised duel at dawn on the Carrigrohane Straight, marshalled by the Munster Motorcycle and Car club. Vivian Candy, a champion racing driver on four wheels, challenged Keany's record on two wheels for £500, saying: "I am the fastest driver in Ireland and it is a ridiculous situation that the current land speed record is only 161 m.p.h. and held by a motorcycle". The man on four wheels, Candy, driving a Shadow Formula One racing car, proved fastest at 169 m.p.h. This was the first time a Formula One car raced on Irish roads. Though his rival, Danny Keany, on a 750cc motorcycle claimed he still held the Irish land speed record, congratulated Candy saying he could not have been beaten by a nicer guy. Keany's time of 166.91 was a new record for a motorcycle.

Our fastest men on wheels



Driving into history Vivian Candy (left) sets a new land speed record and right, runner up Danny Keany in action on his Yamaha 750. (Evening Herald, 21 August 1979)



Vivian Candy holds aloft the Herald Cup after he had smashed the Irish land speed record at Carrigrohane, Cork (Evening Herald, 21 August 1979)

The previous record for four wheels was held by Rosemary Smith on the same road, as mentioned earlier, in 1978.

It was at the record attempt in 1979 that, then spectator Mel Nolan, challenged himself to break Danny Keany's record, and in so doing, a new chapter in the stories of speed from the Straight began.



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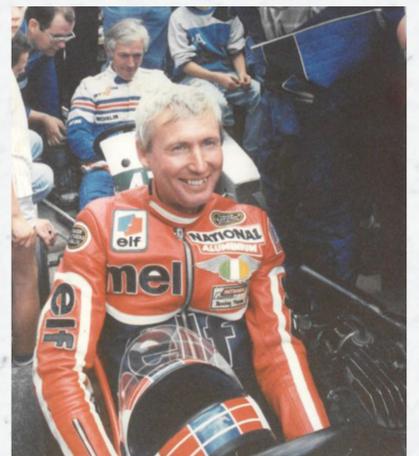
Mel Nolan 'The Flying Corkman'



(Source: Cork Motorcycle Racing and Vintage Club)

Mel Nolan began his association with motor racing at the tender age of five. Young Mel was fascinated by the revving sound coming from the Munster 100 road races, which he could hear from his house on Magazine Road. The sound, the speed, the helmets; from that moment on, Mel was hooked. The path to becoming a biking superstar had been paved.

Mel bought a Honda 50 in the early 1960s. He placed a deposit of £2.50 for a motorbike at Ross' Motorcycles on Pembroke Street. The bike cost £89. After returning home with the bike, Mel's father gave him £5 to go back to buy a helmet. It proved to be a wise move. When after clocking 42mph near Blackpool church, Mel collided with a Morris Minor, landing in a bundle behind the vehicle. Fortunately, he'd purchased that helmet!



Mel Nolan and Billy Coleman (back) at the Munster Kart Grand Prix, Vernon Mount, 1989. (Courtesy of Denis Collins)

Music and academia have also featured strongly in Mel's life. He became interested in the music scene at a young age, taking up the guitar. He travelled around the country performing during the period known as the 'Swinging Sixties'. In college, he pursued chemistry and graduated with a diploma in chemical engineering. He worked as an industrial chemist at Harrington's Paints (which subsequently became Dulux Paints) in Cork. As part of his job, Mel worked with cars and supplied paints to those who manufactured cars in Ireland. His background in engineering proved hugely beneficial to his life on the bike; the Corkonian had the knowledge and the ability to build his own racing machines.



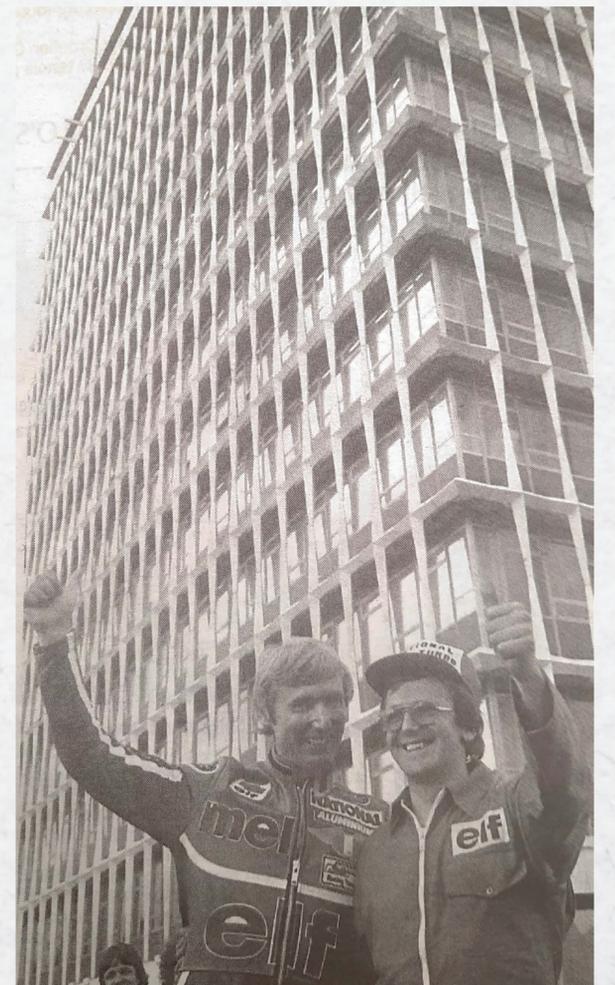
Mel (second from the left) playing guitar with the band, The Knights. (Courtesy of Mel Nolan)

Mel's appetite for bike racing increased. He became interested in following races such as those held on the Isle Of Man and he loved keeping up to date with new bike models as they were released. The local biker subsequently purchased a Honda 450. At a motor event in Ovens, he was encouraged to race his bike at the Munster Speed Weekend. Mel then joined the Munster Motorcycle and Car Club – a group he is still involved with in the veteran ranks today.



Melvin Nolan as Club President in 1986. Courtesy of Alan G. Verso (to Mel Nolan's left, Chairman of the Club).

Great camaraderie existed among the racers, even if there was fierce competition. On the day Mel took to the Straight Road on the Honda 450, a certain Denis Collins was beside him on the start line. A lifelong friendship developed from that moment on. Denis had a major influence on Mel's trajectory as a racer. From how he built his bikes, to achieving the sponsor of National Aluminium for his record breaking feats, Denis proved an invaluable ally in Mel's corner.



Mel Nolan and his manager Denis Collins outside the County Hall after he broke the Irish landspeed record on 16 July 1981 (Echo, 29 December 2020)



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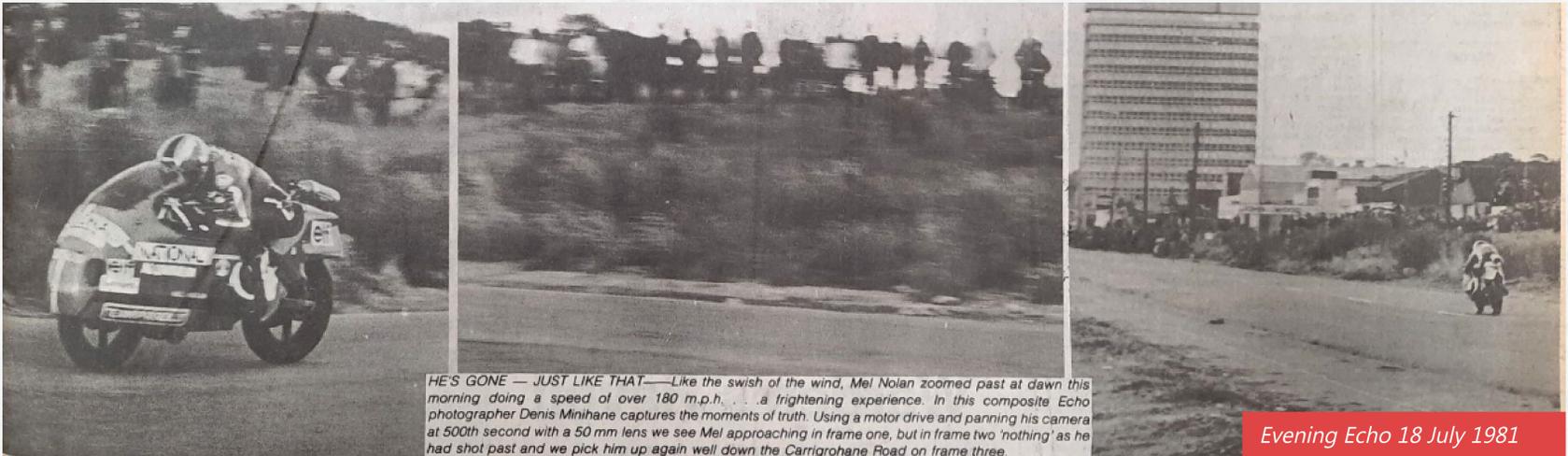
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CORK MOTOR SPORT

Breaking Records



HE'S GONE — JUST LIKE THAT—Like the swish of the wind, Mel Nolan zoomed past at dawn this morning doing a speed of over 180 m.p.h. . . . a frightening experience. In this composite Echo photographer Denis Minihane captures the moments of truth. Using a motor drive and panning his camera at 500th second with a 50 mm lens we see Mel approaching in frame one, but in frame two 'nothing' as he had shot past and we pick him up again well down the Carrigrohane Road on frame three.

Evening Echo 18 July 1981

It was at the land speed record event in 1979 that Mel Nolan set himself the challenge of breaking the new land speed record. The challenge was accepted by Danny Keany and the date was set for the Carrigrohane Straight in July of 1980. But, on that occasion, it was not to be. Keany set a new land speed record, 171.47 m.p.h., that morning on his 750 c.c. Yamaha. Undeterred, Mel returned to the Straight road the following year and made history.

Ablly assisted by his friend Denis Collins, Mel Nolan, aka The Flying Corkman, copper-fastened his legendary status in Irish Motorsport by setting a 294.56km/hr landspeed record and a 1000cc "flying mile speed record" of 290.416 km/hr in July 1981 at about 6 a.m. on the Carrigrohane Straight.



Dawn on the Carrigrohane Straight, Danny Keany and Mel Nolan prior to the Irish land speed record shootout, 1980.
(Courtesy of Denis Collins)

Mel recalls the "mist hanging over the grass in the Lee Fields", the excitement of the pre-dawn crowds as he sped his way into history on a stretch of road, almost unique in Europe, that is within one degree of flatness along 2.2 miles.

"The bike was bouncing up and down, and jumping from side to side but it went by in seconds" Mel recounts of his astonishing feats, proudly remembered by the thousands who witnessed them.



Denis Collins makes adjustments to Mel Nolan's Turbo Honda at the World Speed Record attempt on the Carrigrohane Straight, 1981.
(Courtesy of Denis Collins)



Mel Nolan setting the new Irish land speed record in July 1981.
(Courtesy of Irish Examiner Archive)

The 40th anniversary of the day Toghher man, Mel Nolan, made speed history, was marked with a presentation by Deputy Lord Mayor of Cork, Fergal Dennehy on Friday 16th July 2021. Mel urges someone to go and break his 40-year-old land speed record. In his own words: *"It's not simple... but it can be done."* To be continued...

"his brave feat that morning did so much for motorsport, not just in Cork but in Ireland as a whole, he put Cork on the motorsport map and was a sporting idol for many a Cork person."

Deputy Lord Mayor Fergal Dennehy



Denis Collins and Mel Nolan on the National Aluminium Turbo Honda Special, on the 40th anniversary of breaking the Irish land speed record and the World 1,000cc.
(Courtesy of Irish Examiner Archive)



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The National Aluminium Turbo

This motorcycle was based on the Honda CB 750 which was considered the most sophisticated production bike ever. The original CB 750s were capable of 120 mph (190km/h) top speed. The layout of the Honda became the dominant sport bike layout and it was the first motorcycle to be called a superbike. In ten years of production, over 400,000 were built and it was very popular due to its good braking, comfortable ride and excellent instrumentation.

To achieve high speed, the thinking behind the design of this turbo special was:

1. Light weight – the frame weighs only 9 lbs.
2. Good aerodynamics – efficient fairing.
3. Engine power – sufficient to achieve the goals and reliable enough to keep running.

This motorcycle was the first turbo and Nitrous Oxide powered bike in Europe.

Sponsorship was to be a huge part of racing and with the help of Noel Murphy of National Aluminium, Mel renamed his machine the "National Aluminium Turbo".



The National Aluminium, Mel Nolan and Denis Collins, Irish Land Speed Record attempt, 1980
(Courtesy of Denis Collins)

Specifications

Chassis and swing arm: Lightweight Reynolds tubing. Designed by Rob North for the Honda Formula 1 Piper team. Top and bottom fork yokes – magnesium.

Wheels: These are the original magnesium wheels to be used on racing motorcycles and were designed by Peter Williams.

Tyres: Dunlop slicks. These were only guaranteed to 170 mph but were the best available at the time.



Courtesy of Mel Nolan

Brakes: Lockheed brakes with magnesium discs.

Front forks: Modified Triumph front forks.

Oil and Fuel tanks: Hand-made from aluminium.

Streamlining: The fairing is based on a design used by Bennelli in late 1950's Grand Prix Racing. The fairing was originally made by Alistair Laurie, in Dumfries, Scotland but was later modified in Cork. The seat is from Yamaha and both seat and fairing are manufactured from fibreglass.

Engine: The engine began life as a Honda CB750 K2.

After the many modifications, carried out in Cork, the motorcycle reached a top speed of 207 mph (333 Kph).

Modifications: Capacity expanded to 998 cc by using lower compression MTC forged pistons.

Honda CB750 gearbox. Different clutches were tried including two 2 extra plate systems with heavy springs. It was geared to run 209 mph @9000rpm and was actually timed at 207 mph.

Fuel system: Three fuel systems were used.

System 1. A bendix adjustable carburettor, as used on US snowmobiles at the time was the main fuel system. The

fuel was Shell LL100 blended with Methanol.

System 2. Water injection. Under turbo pressure, water was injected into the cylinders to reduce the temperature of the valves and piston crowns.

System 3. Nitrous oxide injection. This was set up so that, at the press of a button, an extra 50 bhp was produced using the nitrous gas and extra fuel to match the gas exactly.

Ignition system: Vertex magneto, the system gives an extra 3 – 4 mph over electronic or points systems.



The last run of an era. The Cork 800 Sprint, Mel was unable to compete and Denis Collins, in true team spirit, rode the Turbo to victory in the Last Munster Speed Weekend on the Carrigrohane Straight in 1984. (Courtesy of Denis Collins)



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**The Carrigrohane Straight
where it all began...**



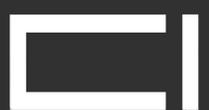
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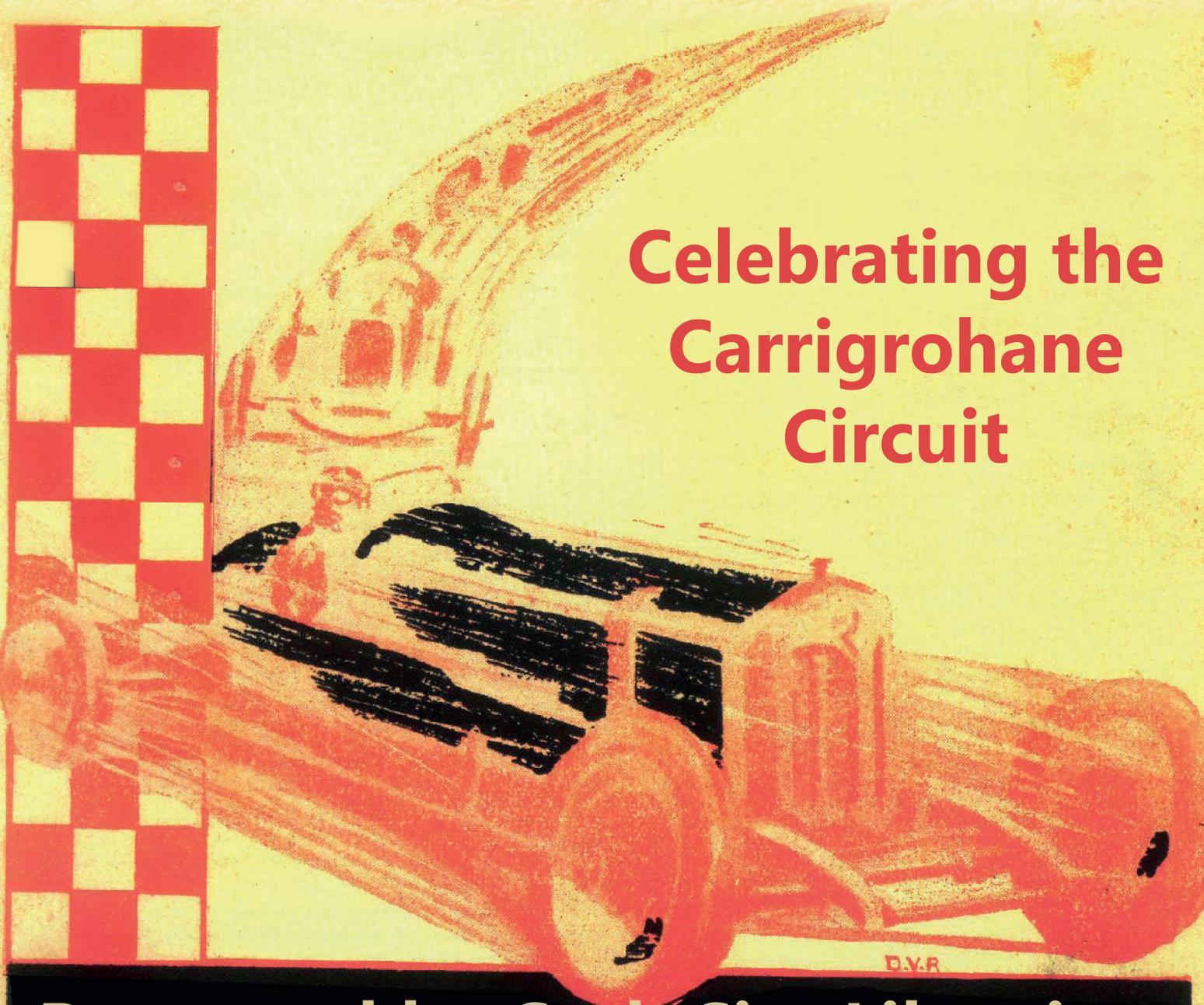
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