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# Driving with the Devil: Southern Moonshine, Detroit Wheels, and the Birth of NASCAR

By Neal Thompson



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“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.

*From the Hardcover edition.*

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### Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

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.)

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From [Booklist](#)

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 Taylor*  
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Review

"Thompson exhumes the sport's Prohibition-era roots in this colorful, meticulously detailed history."  
-*Time Magazine*

"Here's the real story, not just of NASCAR, but of the new South that emerged from moonshine and speed."  
—Richard Ben Cramer, author of *Joe DiMaggio: The Hero's Life* and editor of *The Best American Sports Writing 2004*

"Neal Thompson has written NASCAR's *Glory of Their Times*. He tells the true story of NASCAR's beginnings, revealing the sport's strong whiskey roots and letting us get to know its key movers and shakers, including the triumvirate of racer Red Byron, mechanic Red Vogt, and bootlegger car owner Raymond Parks. Like *Seabiscuit*, Thompson makes a sport and an era come wonderfully alive."

—Peter Golenbock, author of *Miracle: Bobby Allison and the Saga of the Alabama Gang* and *American Zoom: Stock Car Racing—From Dirt Tracks to Daytona*

*“Driving with the Devil is a full-tilt excursion through the back roads of NASCAR’s past, when moonshiners and scofflaws pioneered the sport. This is a tale that sanitized corporate NASCAR would rather forget about, but with Neal Thompson at the wheel, it makes for wonderful reading.”*

—Sharyn McCrumb, author of *St. Dale*

*“Driving with the Devil is a treasure trove of historically relevant information that tracks the history of the American automobile industry, the culture and morality of the broader society, and the motivations and personalities of early stock-car-racing operatives. All of which have inexorably contributed to the foundation and fabric of NASCAR’s brand of stock-car racing as it manifests itself today.”*

—Jack Roush, chairman of Roush Racing

*“Driving with the Devil is a most impressive piece of work. Most Americans have the vagu...*

## **Users Review**

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#### **Trent Gibson:**

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#### **Cary Freeman:**

A lot of people always spent their particular free time to vacation or go to the outside with them family members or their friend. Did you know? Many a lot of people spent these people free time just watching TV, or perhaps playing video games all day long. If you want to try to find a new activity this is look different you can read any book. It is really fun to suit your needs. If you enjoy the book that you read you can spent all day every day to reading a reserve. The book *Driving with the Devil: Southern Moonshine, Detroit Wheels, and the Birth of NASCAR* it is rather good to read. There are a lot of individuals who recommended this book. We were holding enjoying reading this book. If you did not have enough space to deliver this book you can buy the actual e-book. You can m0ore very easily to read this book out of your smart phone. The price is not to cover but this book possesses high quality.

#### **Erik Garcia:**

Is it anyone who having spare time and then spend it whole day by watching television programs or just lying down on the bed? Do you need something new? This *Driving with the Devil: Southern Moonshine, Detroit Wheels, and the Birth of NASCAR* can be the reply, oh how comes? A fresh book you know. You are and so out of date, spending your extra time by reading in this brand-new era is common not a nerd

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