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January 31, 2018

Dear History Lover,

Welcome to our monthly Enewsletter in association with the exhibit [Anything for Speed: Automobile Racing in Vermont.](#) We look forward to bringing you updates & sneak peeks before the exhibit opens, as well as additional content throughout the year it will be on display.

Feel free to forward this email to other auto enthusiasts you think may enjoy this newsletter, or [click here](#) to sign-up directly.

Upcoming Programs & Events

Mark Your Calendars: Exhibit Opens April 28 at the Vermont History Center in Barre!



On Track



Courtesy of the Rutland Historical Society

Rutland State Fairgrounds

Since this is the first installment of our racing history enewsletter, we thought we'd share something special: the earliest known video footage of auto racing in Vermont.

David Knipes, a Rutland-area historian of fairs, circuses, and carnivals, discovered this footage in a dumpster. Retrieving it, he found that it was in fact a lengthy [silent film of the 1931 Rutland State Fair.](#) He subsequently had it digitized and you can view it today on archive.org through an episode of the Rutland Historical Society's long-running public television program *Historically Speaking.*

The whole film is great fun to

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BE PART OF THE ACTION!

Thank you, [Local 22/Local 44 News,](#) for stepping up as a Premiere sponsor for the *Anything for Speed* exhibit!

Join us as we connect you to the people, the places, and of course the cars, that have driven into history.

If you'd like to help us share this important (and fun!) piece of Vermont history, [click here](#) to become a "race" sponsor or [make an individual donation](#) here.

For more information, contact Tori at Tori.Hart@vermonthistory.org or (802) 479-8516.

HISTORY PIT CREW

Do you have any other information, archival materials or objects related to auto racing at state or county fairs?

watch, but the auto racing goes from 23:15 - 23:38. (It's followed by footage of "auto polo" if you want your fill of early automobile sports!)



Click for video

Racing at county fairs was extremely common in

Vermont before World War II, and the first fair to hold races was at White River Junction in 1907. The decision was roundly panned at the time; an editorial from the St. Albans Messenger argued that "even the present-day improved cars operated by expert chauffeurs are day after day being wrecked and their passengers being killed just because of the same speed-madness that lies behind these exhibitions." The Messenger was not alone in its stance; the Brattleboro Phoenix and the Montpelier Journal also condemned the races.

They were concerned not only that the drivers of the cars would be killed but also that auto racing itself represented some kind of existential threat to fair-goers. Speed was, at its core, unwholesome, and racing cars at fairs would "stimulate the popular imagination to demand more and more of these 'thrillers' and nerve-wracking displays."

Nevertheless, racing continued at state fairs, making an appearance at nearly every country fair in the state at least once, even if it was subsequently discontinued as a poor fit for the venue and the audience in a particular locale. It continued in exhibition form well into the second half of the twentieth century, though by the 1970s it had faded from the scene - it couldn't compete with the regular races at dedicated tracks.

We're still actively collecting information for the exhibit. If you have something to share, contact [Amanda Gustin](#).

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