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May 24, 2018

We were delighted to welcome everyone to see the new exhibition at the Vermont History Center on April 27 and April 28. We met hundreds of excited people and had a great time making connections and sharing in the enthusiasm for racing in Vermont. Then we got another terrific weekend at the Thunder Road car show on May 5. We couldn't ask for a more supportive community, and we're grateful to everyone who has visited.

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Programs & Events



**Catamount Stadium Historic Marker
Dedication & Track Walk
June 9, 11:00 am to 2:00 pm
Catamount Drive, Milton, VT**

SAY YOU SAW IT IN THE ENEWS!

If you visit the VHS tent at any of our upcoming auto-themed events, let us know you get our Auto Racing Enews & we'll give you a great prize as our thanks.

SPECIAL EXHIBIT HOURS

The *Anything for Speed* exhibit will be open the Second Saturday of each month. Enjoy Free Admission on Saturday, June 9 as part of the Vermont Days celebration!

Join the [Milton Historical Society](#) and others for the dedication of a State Historic Site Marker on the grounds of the former Catamount Stadium racetrack. After the ceremony, enjoy a guided walk around the track, a meet & greet with drivers, bbq and other refreshments. VHS will be on site with our auto racing trivia and information on the *Anything for Speed* exhibit.

NEAR Night at Thunder Road June 14, 7:00 pm

Thunder Road International Speedbowl, Barre, VT

Join VHS at the track for the annual [New England Antique Racers](#) night at Thunder Road. Get a look at some great antique race cars, visit the VHS tent for auto racing trivia, and enjoy a night at the races.

Throwback Night at Devil's Bowl June 24, 6:00 pm

Devil's Bowl Speedway, Fair Haven, VT

Join VHS for a fun time at Devil's Bowl featuring vintage modified racers. Visit the VHS tent for auto racing trivia and to learn more about the *Anything for Speed* exhibit.

VHS will be closed Monday, May 28 for the Memorial Day holiday.

CAN YOU HELP?

Middlebury College recently [digitized this short film](#) from its collections showing vintage racing in Vermont. They believe it to be in Addison County, but we're stumped. Does anyone recognize the track or any of the cars?



Ads from the *Burlington Free Press*, October 1950. Note that Malletts Bay advertises itself as a "Good Safe Track."

Spotlight On: Racing Laws



On September 24, 1950, a driver at the Colchester Raceway lost control of his car and swerved off the track and into the stands. Like many tracks of its era,

Colchester probably had flimsy crowd barriers at best, and they didn't stop this car. Three spectators were injured, and the general public was outraged.

Stock car racing was not yet a popular or common sport. Dedicated tracks in Vermont had existed for only a few years, and in the opinion of most it was a smelly, distasteful sport that attracted all the wrong sorts of people. State's Attorney Lawrence Deshaw acted quickly in the wake of the Colchester accident. He argued that stock car racing on Sundays (as many tracks scheduled it) was in violation of Vermont's blue laws, which prohibited certain kinds of activity from taking place on Sundays. The laws were a Protestant holdover from an earlier time.

Deshaw announced his campaign and trumpeted it widely. He gained the support of many religious leaders around the state, and many of the state's prominent newspapers. "We believe that the majority of the people will feel that the risks involved constitute reason enough for the ban, and that they can get along without that type of sport, especially on a Sunday," editorialized the Burlington Free Press. Deshaw arrested four drivers who showed up to drive the following Sunday at Colchester.

Seemingly pleased with his new spotlight, Deshaw took his campaign statewide. He quickly targeted Stateline Raceway in North Bennington. While its administration and in-gate were based in New York, half of the grandstands and turns three and four were in Vermont (hence the name of the track). Thus, drivers could be said to violate his ban for a few seconds at a time when they swung out of the backstretch and rounded the far end of the track. He made some more splashy arrests but couldn't get the charges to stick at Stateline.

A fall of campaigning was enough to bring the matter to the attention of the Vermont legislature, however, which took up the issue in January 1951 when they reconvened in Montpelier. During testimony before the Senate General Committee, representatives of several racing associations assured legislators

that “no hot-rods or souped up cars raced in Vermont” and that it was “almost impossible for drivers to get hurt” – both claims which seem to stretch reality just a bit.

S.24, “An act to regulate motor vehicle racing,” passed that session, calling for some basic safety measures at tracks such as vaguely improved crowd barriers – but provided no real enforcement mechanism. As a direct response to Deshaw’s campaign, it specifically remanded the question of whether tracks could hold racing on Sundays down to individual towns as a matter to be determined at Town Meeting. Future legislation would follow in the decades to come, but it would be proactive, rather than reactive, as the Colchester accident and Deshaw’s campaign had brought racing and its dangers to the public’s mind – and it would stay there.

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