

NATIONAL SPRINT CAR HALL of FAME & MUSEUM

HARRY HARTZ



Harry Hartz (Bruce Craig Photos)

Harry Hartz was born in 1896 and grew up in the Los Angeles (Calif.) area. And, beginning in 1914, he drove a chain-driven cycle-car in support events for the championship car races of the day.

He received his first big break in racing when he signed on with Fred and Augie Duesenberg just after World War I as a mechanic and a riding partner for Eddie Hearne. He was a fine mechanic, but Hartz eagerly sought to be a driver in his own right. Hartz made his debut at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway in 1921 as Hearne's riding mechanic.

"Handsome Harry" accomplished his goal when Hearne left the thrifty Duesenburg's following the 1921 racing season. Harry rewarded the brothers with a fine second place finish in the '22 Indy 500 behind Jimmy Murphy.

His record at the Indy 500 was superb, as Hartz was second again in '23 driving the Cliff Durant Special, fourth in '24 with Durant's Miller and chief mechanic Anthony "Tony" Gulotta, fourth in '25 with his own 121-cubic-inch Miller, and second in '26 in his 90-c.i. Miller Special. His mechanical failure at Indy

in 1927, and his subsequent 25th place finish, was extremely disappointing as Harry's goal as a racer was to be around at the finish. Said Harry, "If you're not running then, you can't make a dime."

On the board tracks, daredevil Harry Hartz started 69 major events, finished in the 'top five' 46 times, and he won seven championship events: Fresno (Calif.) in 1923, Culver City (Calif.) in '25, and thrice at Atlantic City (N.J.) and once each at Rockingham (N.H.) and Charlotte (N.C.) in 1926.

Without a doubt, '26 was the high point of his career, with Hartz winning the American Automobile Association (AAA) national driving championship over Frank Lockhart and Peter DePaolo. That same year, he won a 300-mile race on the Atlantic City board track at an average speed of 135 miles per hour. That was the fastest speed on any track in any race in the U.S. until 1957 when Sam Hanks won the Indy 500 at an average of 135.601 m.p.h.

Harry Hartz' driving career came to an abrupt halt on October 12, 1927 at the Rockingham Speedway in Salem (N.H.). While fighting for the lead with Frank Lockhart, Hartz suddenly swerved to avoid a slower Leon Duray. Harry's car hit a hole in the track, lost its right front wheel and flipped three times. He was severely burned and critically injured, and was forced to spend the next two years in hospitals. He also suffered heavy financial losses in the stock market crash of 1929.

However, Harry Hartz returned to open wheel racing in '29 as a car owner, supervising the construction of the Miller-Hartz front-wheel-drive car. He tried a comeback as a driver in 1930, but after practicing and one qualifying attempt, he wisely turned the car over to Billy Arnold. Hartz was the Indy 500-winning car owner that year as eventual national champion Arnold put the car in victory lane. French-American Jean Marcenac was their mechanic.

In 1931, Arnold again drove the car for Hartz at Indy, however he crashed out of the race while leading (with its errant wheel killing a child in a nearby yard). Fred Frame finished second that year, though, in Harry's back-up car, a Duesenberg.

Frame won the "500" for Harry in 1932 aboard the Miller 182 c.i., Louis "Curly" Wetteroth-built machine, after Arnold again crashed over the wall with riding mechanic "Spider" Matlock. After winning the race, Hartz and Frame pooled their resources to form a team.

Frame's car broke in the next year's "500," finishing 29th. Also, in 1933, driver Les Spangler and riding mechanic G.L. Jordan died aboard a Miller-Hartz entry at Indy.

In 1934, driver Pete Kreis and riding mechanic Art Hahn were killed when the Hartz car left the track in practice and crashed into a tree outside the wall. Frame came back and finished eleventh for Hartz in '35.

Ted Horn finished second for Hartz in 1936 at Indy, third in '37, and fourth the following year when the car came back as a singleseater.

Herb Ardinger was the driver in 1939, but the Hartz-Miller car suffered mechanical failure and finished 17th. In 1940, Mel Hansen finished eighth in Harry's final car-owning effort at Indy.

He worked for the Studebaker Corporation for many years and was later affiliated with Chrysler. He was one of the founders of the Indianapolis 500 Old-Timers Club in 1961 and served as its first president. He was an official for both the American Automobile Association and the United States Auto Club and was a vice-chairman on the technical committee of both groups. He was married to his wife Ann and worked as a car salesman.

Harry Hartz liked to hang out with movie stars in the off-season and he was the technical director on the movie "The Crowd Roars" with Jimmy Cagney and Joan Blondell. He used a cane in later years and had a noticeable limp as a result of his Rockingham accident. However, it did not diminish his cheerful disposition, nor did it ever take away his "boyish" grin and sense of humor. Harry later had a serious passenger car accident, from which he never fully recovered. He passed away on September 26, 1974, at the age of 78.