

THE FIRST AUTO

Warner Brothers production and release, featuring Barney Oldfield, speed motor driver. Story by Darryl Francis Zanuck, scenario by Anthony Coldeway, directed by Roy Del Ruth, titles by Jack Jarmuth. Assistant director, Ross Lederman; cameraman, David Abel. Running time, 75 minutes. At the Colony, New York, June 27, on grind run.

Barney Oldfield.....	Barney Oldfield
Rose Robbins	Patsy Ruth Miller
Hark Armstrong.....	Russell Simpson
Jim Robbins.....	Frank Campeau
Dave Doolittle.....	William Demarest
Steve Bentley.....	Paul Kruger
Elmer Hays.....	E. H. Calvert
Banker Stebbins.....	Douglas Gerrard
Bob Armstrong.....	Charles E. Mack

If you can associate an early century Ford model with a dramatic idea you'll enjoy "The First Auto." The feat was a little too much for the premiere audience, who took the screen story very quietly. This in spite of the festive nature of the premiere, attended by Barney Oldfield in person, a benefit performance and the presence of a number of vaudeville and musical comedy stars who took part in the Vitaphone bill that preceded the picture.

The combination of so fundamentally funny a subject as early automobiles, the costumes and so-

cial absurdities of the period of 1895 and the trick costumes that go with the period, and a dramatic theme of the conflict of the old and the young generation are hard to reconcile. Certainly they don't blend in this production.

It is funny in the wrong places. When intense in its melodrama it is almost a travesty.

You couldn't blame any audience for being confused. Ancient Fords are one of those things that are arbitrarily funny. For screen uses it is a convention that it must explode or collapse; its uses for anything but low comedy is unthinkable. Here the grotesque first attempts at auto making (and they have assembled a marvelous collection) are used for comedy relief, but in the background the horseless carriage is the basis of the domestic motif. That's where the hopeless incongruity comes in. It can't be done.

It is conceivable that the introduction of the automobile and the consequent effect upon the institution of Old Dobbin had its dramatic side at the time, but it isn't dramatic any more. It's just funny. The story deals with a father who is a lover of horse flesh, owner of fast steppers and proprietor of a livery stable. His son goes in for the new fangled devil wagons, and father and son are separated. The old man goes broke in the livery stable business. Brooding over his loneliness and failure he goes a bit off in mind.

When son comes back to the old town to drive in an automobile race, the father is tricked into doctoring his car so it will explode on the track, not knowing the driver is his own son. The car does explode, but the boy survives and the near-tragedy brings the old man back to a sense that progress is inevitable.

For the finish this hater of gas buggies steps into view out of a Rolls Royce, to be an interested spectator at an aviation meet, where he learns that the fliers can go up to 200 miles an hour. The closing gag finds him looking for his son, only to learn that he has gone to a horse show.

There are several first rate comedy relief passages, genuine in their fun and cleverly devised. But the serious drama spoils the whole affair because this material has no business in the story. Technical production first rate. Something of the atmosphere of the early century is caught in a fine view of a public square, with crowds moving about and a steady stream of 1905 cars passing.

The picture has been well managed in several particulars. It has some very amusing satire on the social habits of the post-Victorian period; its types are picked and played with much skill. But the mortgage-on-the-farm style of melodrama puts the damper on the whole affair.

A comedy set of titles might save these passages and help the whole picture, for joshing is the only treatment possible. **Rush.**

OLDFIELD IN THE PADDOCK.

Auto Driver Will Play Important Part in Brighton Beach Races.

Since Barney Oldfield quit automobile racing various rumors have been circulated as to his occupation. It was announced yesterday that Oldfield had accepted a position with the Firestone Tire Company as team manager. It was while performing his duties as acting manager that Oldfield clashed with the A. A. A. officials at the Milwaukee meet, held a few days ago, and was ejected from the paddock by the referee, A. R. Pardington. While reports from Milwaukee stated that Oldfield was ejected, it was learned that Oldfield was requested by the referee to leave the paddock and he complied with the request. Oldfield says he will hold forth in the paddock at the forthcoming Brighton Beach meet unmolested in the interests of the firm he represents, and that he will remain there or else Burman, Knipper, and the other drivers who use his equipment will not drive.

"My suspension covers my racing," said Oldfield. "I cannot compete in a contest which has the sanction of the A. A. A., and I do not desire to do so. I sold my racing outfit many months ago, and will never drive a racing car again. However, no association can prevent me earning a livelihood as team manager. My duties compel me to attend race meets. A life may be at stake through defective tires, and it is my duty to see that the drivers using our equipment have the benefit of my services. At Milwaukee, after Burman drove his sensational mile, which lowered my record, when he piloted the distance in 50:12, he was preparing to make another trial against the records when I discovered, just as he was about to go out on the track, that he had picked up a couple of horseshoe nails on his first attempt. As I called his attention to this I was requested to leave the paddock. What might have happened had Burman driven a couple of more miles in record time I am unable to conjecture. It is my duty to be in the paddock during the time that my drivers or those using our equipment are in the races!"

E. A. Moross, who is directing the meet at Brighton, was asked if Oldfield could prevent Burman and the drivers using his tires from taking part.

"Burman has been entered at the Brighton Beach meet and will surely drive, as will Knipper, with the 110 Benz, the Jenatzy Mercedes, the National, the Prince Henry Benz, and Knox all using the same equipment," said Moross. "These drivers are not interested in Barney's troubles with the A. A. A. The meet has been sanctioned by the American Automobile Association, and Barney will without doubt be compelled to abide by its rules. However, this matter will be up to the officials of the meet. In the interest of the drivers using the equipment which Oldfield represents, this is liable to cause some friction, but it will not go to the extent of canceling their entries which have already been made."

Fred J. Wagner will act as starter. The referee has yet to be announced.

BICYCLE RACES

Grand Circuit Held Fifty Years Ago

NATIONAL RACES HERE

Did you attend the National Bicycle races held by the League of American Wheelmen Association in Wauseon, August 1, 1895, just fifty years ago? It was a great day for Wauseon and Fulton county and made the town and county known from ocean to ocean. It was brought here through the efforts of the Wauseon Bicycle Club, among its most active members were Clive C. Handy, now an attorney of the New York Central railroad company with offices in New York City, Barney Oldfield, of national fame as a bicycle rider and a racing automobile driver, now of California, Orra L. Bailey, of Toledo, Fred J. Bell, former mayor of Wauseon, now deceased, and a score of others.

In its efforts this Bicycle Club had the united support of the citizens of the town and the community. It had to have to induce a national organization of that size to hold its races in Wauseon. Wherever there was a bicycle club Wauseon was listed as the "Greatest town on earth in matters of cycling considering its size."

Fight to Win

The Wauseon Bicycle Club joined the League of American Wheelmen and filed an application for the League to hold its national races here. Little attention was paid to the application at first. The national board said the town was too small and could not meet the requirements. The answer given by the Club was come on and see. The Wauseon Club would not take "no" for an answer and the Board appointed a committee to visit Wauseon and see what the conditions were.

The first thing considered was the race track of standard size and in satisfactory condition? The track was on the old fair grounds which were located south of Linfoot street and west of Ottokee street, extending to the D. T. & I. railroad. The race track met every requirement.

Hotels and Prizes

Were the hotel accommodations adequate to take care of the racers, their managers and the officers of the League?

There were the Eager House, Hotel Blair, the Clinton House and the Snellbaker House—four hotels. That satisfied the committee.

But the big obstacle was saved till the last. There were two classes of races, "A" and "B"—twenty-five races in all. To furnish the required prizes for each race would take \$1,500 in cash. The cash was produced.

Then came the question of holding a national race in Wauseon which was only 35 miles from Toledo, which city was scheduled for races. Besides Toledo the other towns in Ohio where the League was holding national races were Dayton and Steubenville.

At this crisis Ed Eager a great bicyclist, living in Toledo, and active in the Club there, remembered his boyhood town and that his father, Zina Eager, owned the Eager House, threw his influence for Wauseon.

(Continued on last page)

Wauseon's Barney Oldfield

Editor's Note: William D. Scott, a retired Toledo University professor, researched and wrote this interesting story on Wauseon's famed race car driver, Barney Oldfield. Professor Scott's widely circulated column, 'The Human Condition', often appears in the Republican.

by William D. Scott

The human condition has always demanded heroes to worship and when one is found he is elevated to the status of a demigod worshipped by millions of ordinary people leading ordinary, humdrum lives. Such a hero was Barney Oldfield, born in a log cabin two miles northeast of Wauseon, Ohio in 1878, and christened Berna Eli Oldfield. Wauseon is a short 34 miles directly west of Toledo in northwestern Ohio and is a typically pleasant midwestern town.

But Oldfield was far from typical. He elbowed and jostled the giants of the 'Gay '90's' while carving his own niche in history as 'Speed King of the World', and he made the giants like the jostling and the jostler, too. So much so, that tips on stocks from the Morgans and Vanderbilts and the like made him a millionaire until the stock crash of 1929.

Henry Ford, once Oldfield's partner, always credited Oldfield for making the automobile a desirable object for the average family man to own, and though Ford was far from being the first automobile manufacturer, he was one of the shrewdest. But even with his untold millions, Ford never lost his affection for Oldfield, nor did Harvey Firestone whom Oldfield helped become an industrial king.

Oldfield hobnobbed with 'Diamond Jim' Brady, Tom Mix, Jack Benny, Groucho Marx, Lillian Russell and other famed beauties.

Jim Jeffries, world heavyweight champion, once chortled that he saved Oldfield's hide out of the ring as often as he saved his own in the ring. Back to back, Jeffries and Oldfield took on all challengers and Oldfield

actually gave out about as much punishment as Jeffries.

Speed, though, was Barney's one consuming interest. So well did he serve this goddess that she rewarded him with money and cars and posters plastered all over the world. their shiny finishes depicting Oldfield's rugged good looks and black hair.

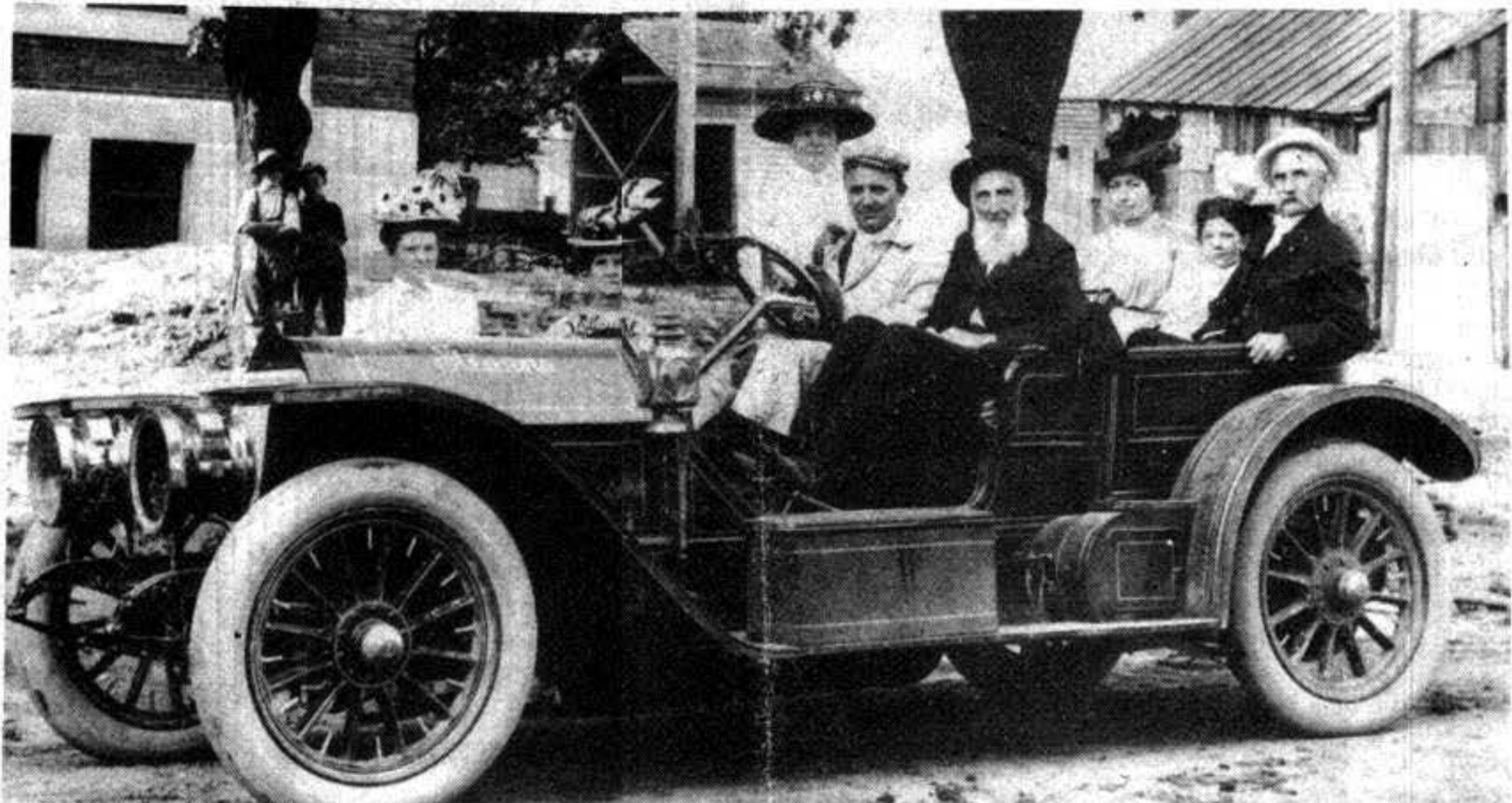
Barney Oldfield was the first man to drive an automobile a mile a minute, a record comparable to the runner's dream of the 4-minute mile, finally achieved by the English medical student, Roger Bannister. And he was the first to reach the then unbelievable speed of 131.7 mph., and he did it at Daytona Beach in 1910, long before the average citizen was ready to forsake his trusty horse and buggy.

Curiously enough, though, Oldfield never won the 'big one' - the 'Indianapolis 500' - and he never defeated the cold, robot-like Italian, Ralph DePalma. DePalma never achieved Oldfield's speeds, but always found ways to beat the timer's clock when racing against Oldfield. Ways like putting extra gas tanks on his car to avoid pit stops and slower speeds to avoid chewing up tires which Oldfield did by the dozens. If Oldfield ever really disliked anybody it was DePalma and his shifty scheming which went against the grain of the frank and open Ohio boy.

Actually, though, DePalma was never really in Oldfield's class and you must scratch your head to recall him while you must shake your head to forget Oldfield's name. Yet despite the dizzy heights of fame Oldfield claimed he never forgot his humble beginning; his days as a bellhop in Toledo hotels; his days as a soda jerk in his father's ice cream parlor in East Toledo. Small boys thronged around him by the hundreds and he did his best to shake their hands and admonish them to listen to their parents - something Oldfield did only as often as he had to.

Never has America had a more gritty, down-to-earth ambassador than Barney Oldfield and we owe him a lot. When he died at 68 in 1946 it was as though a giant sequoia fell amidst lesser trees.

was quite a character



WAUSEON'S LEGEND - Barney Oldfield, who made and lost millions and caroused with the likes of Henry Ford and Jack Benny, is pictured in this 1907 photo with his family. Barney is seated next to his grandfather, Gilbert Oldfield, who is behind the steering wheel. Other members of the family are from left: Alice (Yarnell) Hill, Barney's aunt; Sarah (Yarnell) Oldfield,

Barney's mother: Bessie (Goodby) Oldfield, Barney's wife; Ella (Oldfield) Gould, Barney's aunt; Ella Gould's daughter; Henry Clay Oldfield, Barney's father. Photo compliments of the Fulton County Historical Society. Given to the historical society by Mr. and Mrs. George Kress.