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THE DRAMATIC, UNTOLD STORY OF SOUTHERN MOONSHINERS, THEIR FORD V-8s,  
AND THE CREATION OF NASCAR

# DRIVING WITH THE DEVIL

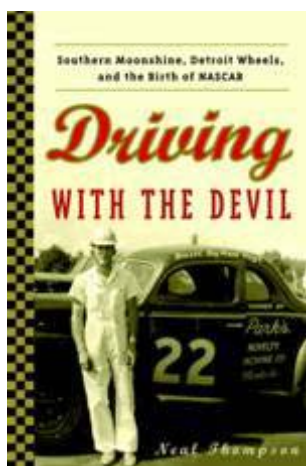
## SOUTHERN MOONSHINE, DETROIT WHEELS, AND THE BIRTH OF NASCAR

By Neal Thompson

**“A most impressive piece of work. *Driving with the Devil* nails it once and for all: a riveting report any student of Americana will cherish. It's no more about racing than *The Old Man and the Sea* is about fishing.”**  
—Paul Hemphill, author of *Wheels: A Season on NASCAR's Winston Cup Circuit* and *Lovesick Blues: The Life of Hank Williams*

**“*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.”**  
—Jack Roush, chairman of Roush Racing

**“Neal Thompson has written NASCAR's *Glory of Their Times* . . . 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*



NASCAR, with its fast-paced, death-defying thrill rides, is quickly emerging as a symbol of America itself. The sport's red, white, and blue logo is splashed across everything from cereal boxes and magazines to clothing and even leather recliners. At a time when some pro-baseball teams play before paltry crowds of a few thousand, attendance at NASCAR races averages nearly 200,000 and grows by 10 percent a year. The sport's stars are millionaire celebrities, appearing in music videos, dating supermodels, and living in mansions. Since its creation in 1948, NASCAR has evolved from rural, working man's domain into an attraction for eighty million loyal fans. Most are college-educated, middle-aged, middle-class homeowners; nearly half are women. It is a multi-billion dollar industry that, thanks to sophisticated marketing and soaring corporate sponsorship, grows beyond the South, becoming more mainstream by the day. Its fan base is nationwide, with unlikely strongholds in Los Angeles, Las Vegas, Dallas, Kansas City, and Chicago. But how did NASCAR happen at all? And why?

In **DRIVING WITH THE DEVIL: Southern Moonshine, Detroit Wheels, and the Birth of NASCAR** (Crown, October 3, 2006), Neal Thompson takes a trip down the weathered red-dirt roads of Dixie to uncover the whiskey-soaked stories of the troubled men who created a new sport for the South to call its own.

**DRIVING WITH THE DEVIL** examines how moonshine whiskey came to America, brought by Irish and Scots-Irish immigrants, and how it helped pay for the Revolutionary War and even led to the creation of the IRS. It describes how the Civil War contributed to the anti-authority psyche of the South, which led many southern men to a life of bootlegging (and, later, stock-car racing); how Henry Ford and his cars played an important, accidental role in the bootleggers' success; and how Prohibition aided the skills of stock-car drivers. Beyond painting an historical portrait of the South in the 1930s and '40s, Thompson delves into the lives of NASCAR's founding fathers. Unlike baseball and football, which celebrate their pioneers, most of the dirt-poor southerners who founded stock-car racing have died or retired into obscurity. Thompson sheds light on their stories for the first time, detailing the lives of the men who created NASCAR and whose lives shaped the sport itself.

Today's NASCAR is a churning money-maker and America's second most popular sport, with more than *eighty million* loyal fans. Yet few Americans, even NASCAR fans, know the real story of its crime-tainted origins. Thompson goes deeper to bring you the excitement, passion, crime, and the often deadly feats of the wild, early days that NASCAR has carefully hidden from public view. **DRIVING WITH THE DEVIL** is the story of how Prohibition and Henry Ford inadvertently aided in the creation of a dangerous and dazzling sport. It is the story of the new national pastime that emerged from the moonshine-laced South, and the dirt-poor young men who helped create it at a time when the best means of escape from the red-dirt farms of Georgia was a Ford V-8 whiskey car. This tale not only reveals a bygone era of a beloved sport; it reveals the character of the country at a moment in time. Most of all, **DRIVING WITH THE DEVIL** is the story of the South, and how its history, its people, and its inimitable personality paved the way for the birth of the multibillion-dollar industry that is NASCAR.



**DRIVING WITH THE DEVIL: Southern Moonshine, Detroit Wheels, and the Birth of NASCAR**

by Neal Thompson (also author of "Light This Candle: The Life & Times of Alan Shepard")

Crown Publishers • Publication date: October 3, 2006 • ISBN-10: 1-4000-8225-0

ISBN-13: 978-1-4000-8225-4 • \$25 • 432 pages

[www.crownpublishing.com](http://www.crownpublishing.com)

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# DRIVING WITH THE DEVIL

## NARRATIVE HIGHLIGHTS AND CHARACTERS

### DID YOU KNOW?

- Though Henry Ford was a notorious tea-totaler who supported Prohibition (and used to smash his son's liquor bottles), Ford's 1939 V-8 was a favorite of southern moonshiners, and became the first-and best-stock car. Ford died the same year NASCAR was born.
- The first stock car races were held in cornfields or cow pastures—impromptu contests between bootleggers to see who had the fastest whiskey car. The color of a new penny, the iron rich dirt of Georgia, North and South Carolina created a perfect racing surface.
- Stock car racing became wildly popular in the South due to a lack of professional sports teams (the Atlanta Braves didn't come until 1965, followed a year later by the Falcons).
- NASCAR was created in 1947 to bring rules and uniformity to the unruly sport, and its anti-authority drivers. The entire sport belongs, to this day, to one family.
- The sport's first champion had a leg that was so badly injured in World War II that his racing mechanic had to devise a special clutch pedal to hold his orthopedic boot.

### MAIN CHARACTERS:



- **Raymond Parks:** Owner of the first stock car racing "team," he left home at 14 to become a moonshiner's apprentice. By 21 he was one of Atlanta's wealthiest, most notorious bootleggers. After a year in prison, he began bankrolling racers and their cars.
- **Lloyd Seay:** The first star of stock car racing had the face of a "timid choir boy" but, as a moonshiner and racer behind the wheel of a Ford V-8, became fast, furious and fearless. He was shot killed by a cousin in a moonshining argument in 1941.
- **Red Vogt:** Foul-mouthed, eccentric and self-taught, the first and best mechanic of stock car racing got his start souping up Ford V-8 whiskey cars and later coined the name NASCAR, the "National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing."
- **Red Byron:** After World War II, southern racing regained its momentum thanks to this brainy, freckled and balding non-southerner with a war-crippled leg. He won NASCAR's first race in 1948 on his way to becoming NASCAR's first champion. A year later, he was again named NASCAR's champ, before disappearing into obscurity.
- **Bill France:** The tall, megaphone-voiced racer/promoter from D.C. deftly got himself named NASCAR's president in 1948, then bought out the organization's other top officers to become sole proprietor of a sport that became his personal dynasty.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Neal Thompson was born and raised in New Jersey, outside New York City. After graduating from the University of Scranton, he began his award-winning journalism career as a reporter for the Philadelphia Inquirer. For the next 15 years, he worked at newspapers up and down the East Coast - specializing in profiles, narratives and investigations - at such papers as the *Roanoke Times & World-News* in southwest Virginia, the *St. Petersburg Times*, and the *Bergen (N.J.) Record*. That was followed by five years at the *Baltimore Sun*, where he covered the military and began researching his first book, the critically acclaimed "Light This Candle: The Life & Times of Alan Shepard, America's First Spaceman." As a freelance journalist, he has written for numerous national magazines, including *Outside*, *Esquire*, *Men's Health*, *Backpacker* and the *Washington Post*

*Magazine*, and newspapers such as the *Christian Science Monitor*. Thompson teaches creative non-fiction at the University of North Carolina-Asheville's Great Smokies Writing Program. Thompson, his wife, Mary, and their two sons, Sean and Leo, live in the mountains outside Asheville, N.C., where Thompson is writing his third book, the story of a high school football team in New Orleans. "Hurricane Season: A Coach, His Team, and their Triumph in the Time of Katrina," will be published by Free Press in 2007.

**\*To learn more visit [www.nealthompson.com](http://www.nealthompson.com) or [www.myspace.com/neal\\_thompson](http://www.myspace.com/neal_thompson)**



## MORE PRAISE FOR "DRIVING WITH THE DEVIL"

"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: A Hero's Life*

"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*

"[A] raucous account of NASCAR's early decades ... the enthusiasm of this breathless, nostalgic account will be contagious to Southern history buffs and historically minded NASCAR fans."

-*Publisher's Weekly*

"NASCAR fans will love this book. Non-NASCAR fans might love it even more."

-Harry MacLean, author of *In Broad Daylight*

"[Thompson] displays all the skill of a seasoned journalist in his pacing and savvy storytelling ... his grasp of the sport's history is abundant and presentation of anecdotes exceedingly interesting."

-*Kirkus*

"Thompson mines the rich heritage of Southern culture and mixes macho adventurers, speed, grim determination, and the automobile, capturing not only the regional appeal of the sport, but also the tenor of the times. This is recommended as a revealing look at the oldest history of what has grown to be a multi-billion-dollar industry and the second most popular spectator sport in the country."

-*Library Journal*