



BARNEY OLDFIELD'S
BOOK for the MOTORIST
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BY
BARNEY OLDFIELD

With a Sketch of
Barney Oldfield's Life
by Homer C. George



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Barney Oldfield

INTRODUCTION

IN every line of human achievement some one name stands out as pre-eminent. And the rule holds good in the world of sport. Baseball has its Tyrus Cobb; John L. Sullivan is the immortal hero of the prize ring; Vardon the commanding figure in the history of golf.

In automobile racing, the name which has become a household word in every civilized country is that of Barney Oldfield. Others have equalled, and even surpassed, his speed achievements, but he was the pioneer, and to him belongs the enduring glory. As the first great American driver, Barney Oldfield was the first man who dared risk his life to crowd a mile within the fleeting compass of sixty seconds; the first, at a later period of automobile development, to realize the terrific speed of 130 miles an hour. The fact that others have broken Oldfield's records cannot dim the luster of his fame. Many a discoverer crossed

the ocean after Columbus, in faster and better ships.

The story of Barney Oldfield's life is a romance and an inspiration. It is romantic, because it is as full of incident and color as a novel of adventure. It is inspirational, because it shows how a boy of humble origin can rise to fame.

Barney Oldfield was born of sturdy but humble farming parentage, in a little loghouse three miles from Waseon, Fulton County, Ohio. At the time of his birth, January 29th, 1878, his parents were struggling under the burden of a mortgage, on a quarter section of poor farmland which yielded meager returns for their toil. For eleven years, Oldfield remained on the home farm, living the slow, laborious life of the farm youngster of that period, rising at dawn to do the chores, little dreaming that fame and fortune were waiting for him in later years.

At the age of eleven he and his parents moved to Toledo. For four years he attended public school and helped support the family by carrying newspapers. He is still remem-

bered as a newsboy by some of the old inhabitants, who bought the *Toledo Blade* and the *Toledo Bee* from the future racing champion, then an unknown barefoot urchin.

When his summer vacation came in 1892, Oldfield worked as a water boy with a railroad section gang. At this period he developed the love of speed which was to be his guiding influence through life, saving forty-five dollars to buy a solid-tired bicycle, the "Advance," on which he practised with the ultimate hope of becoming a racer. On going back to school that fall, he found that practical things interested him more than learning, and he decided to give up his studies. Willing to take whatever came first to hand, provided it gave him an honest living, Oldfield donned a white apron and jacket and waited at table in the Toledo Insane Asylum. A little later the white apron was discarded for a bellhop's brass buttons and uniform, and for a while he chased up and down stairs with ice water in the famous old Boody House. Then he switched over to the more modern Monticello Hotel, where he became elevator boy.

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But an elevator, while it offered a certain amount of risk, was not an ideal speed vehicle for Barney Oldfield, and with the tips he collected, he managed to purchase a "Dauntless" bicycle, equipped with pneumatic tires.

And thus, for the first time, Barney found himself riding on air. He had found his true vocation. To satisfy his craving for speed, he used to rise at dawn, when the streets were deserted, and burn up the boulevards at a pace which seemed to justify his hopes of later becoming a racer.

In the spring of 1894, he purchased a real racing wheel, the "Royal Flush," and made his debut as an amateur rider in an eighteen-mile road race, held on May 30. He won second place, and second time prize. This encouraged him to enter other races, but he got more spills than trophies. One of his accidents resulted in two broken collar bones.

Dividing his time between running the elevator and riding the bicycle, he became an experienced rider, and in 1895 participated in the Ohio state championship races at Canton, riding a "Dauntless" and finishing second in

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the three leading events, winning two silver medals and a gold watch.

By this time Oldfield was a husky youth of athletic build, with sound mind and muscle, and something of a local reputation. He forsook the hotel job and went to work as a bicycle repairman and salesman. It was at this time Barney Oldfield developed an ambition to become a pugilist. Dan Bailiff, a Lima heavyweight, undertook to train him with an idea of making him an aspirant for middle-weight honors, but Barney overworked himself and fell a victim to typhoid. By the time he was cured, the fighting bugs had also been eliminated from his system.

In 1896 Oldfield signed a contract with E. C. Stearns and Company to join its team as a paid amateur and ride one of its yellow bicycles. He was a decided success, and captured most of the open prizes for which he competed. The result was that for the next three years, first as an amateur, and then as a professional, he followed the bicycle racing game, becoming one of the big figures in the Middle West and, subsequently, in the East.

Successively he rode a "Racycle," "National Chainless" and "Tribune."

In 1902, Oldfield met Tom Cooper, who was destined to play an important part in his life. Cooper, a former bicycle champion, had forsaken the bicycle game and formed a partnership with Henry Ford, then an almost unknown electrician and mechanic in Detroit. They two were engaged in their historic, though then derided efforts, to build the two high-powered racing automobiles subsequently known as "999" and the "Red Devil."

When Cooper offered Oldfield a job as head mechanic, Barney saw his chance to break into the automobile game, and immediately answered the call, having foresight enough to realize that the motor was destined to supersede the bicycle as a speed and racing vehicle.

The "Red Devil" and "999" were ghastly failures in their first tryout, and Ford, in disgust, sold the two cars, together with the shop and equipment, to Oldfield and Cooper for \$800. They rebuilt the cars and shipped them to Cleveland to make their *début* in a

meet promoted by Carl Fisher and Earl Kiser. The "Red Devil" wouldn't run at all, and old "999" was so balky and headstrong that she required a crew of three men to keep her going. "Spider" Huff acted as driver, Cooper rode as mechanic, while Oldfield perched on the rear of the car, blowing pressure into the gasoline tank, with no other pump than his own lungs and a rubber tube. In this comic manner did Barney Oldfield enter the field in which he was destined to win worldwide fame. They got twenty-five per cent. of the gross receipts for entering the race, but as they won no prizes, the meet netted them only a few dollars.

Nothing daunted, with borrowed money they worked old "999" over, and shipped her to Detroit. It was then against the law to drive an automobile through the city streets, so they towed her behind a borrowed horse out to the Grosse Point track.

While awaiting the day of the race, Oldfield got an opportunity to experiment a little on his own hook, and discovered that he could get more speed out of "999" than either Huff

or Cooper. So they decided he should drive against Alexander Winton and his famous "Winton Bullet." The promoters of the race offered a purse of \$200 on the side to any car that made a mile in that race, in faster time than the "Bullet."

The race was run on October 23, 1902. "I confess that I was a trifle timid and a little bit frightened," Oldfield said afterwards. "I remember how a friend of mine came to the car just before the start and said,

"'You'd better be careful, Barney; you know you are liable to be killed.'"

"I thought a moment, and then remembering that my pockets were empty, I managed to reply,

"'Well, I might as well be dead as broke.'"

And Barney Oldfield, competing against the fastest known car and an experienced racing driver, not only won the race, but the \$200 purse as well. His fastest mile was one minute and four and four-fifths seconds. His time for the five miles was five minutes and twenty seconds. His success won him immediate fame for it was due more to his daring

and ability as a driver than to the superior excellence of the car.

On December 1 of the same year, on the same track, Oldfield beat the Winton time record, driving a mile in one minute and one and one-fifth seconds. William Parrett had promised him \$250 if he would break the record in "999" using Diamond tires, but Parrott held up the money until the record was accepted as official by the American Automobile Association.

Fame alone wouldn't buy grub, and Oldfield went to work as a mechanic at two dollars a day with the Yale Automobile Company. A short time afterwards he became a bicycle salesman, making a living until the following spring, when he went to Detroit to join Cooper and overhaul "999" and the "Red Devil" for the coming season.

On Memorial Day Oldfield drove "999" on the Empire City track at New York, winning over Charles Wridgway in a "Peerless," and making his fastest mile in one minute and one and three-fifths seconds. This was officially recognized as the world's record, his

previous exploit for Parrett never having been accepted as official. Oldfield won forty per cent. of the gross receipts that day and was presented with a silver championship trophy. Oldfield immediately went back to Ohio with this prize money and paid off the mortgage on his father's house.

The famous "Ford Feud" race between Oldfield and his old partner, Tom Cooper, followed shortly afterwards. At Indianapolis Barney won the five-mile event easily, and, as the track was fast, the promoters and officials asked him to try to establish a new time record. Carl Fisher went into the grandstand and collected a purse of \$250 which was to go to Oldfield if he covered a mile in less than sixty seconds.

"Hang the money on the post," said Oldfield, "and I'll make one minute flat look sick."

He drove the mile in fifty-nine and three-fifths seconds, being the first auto driver in the world to establish a mile-a-minute record, one of the exploits which looms large in the

catalogue of deeds which contributed to his lasting fame.

In subsequent races in Ohio, Indiana and New York, he brought the mile record down to fifty-five and four-fifths seconds, and in August defeated Frank La Roche, driving a French Darracq, in two straight heats of a five-mile race, establishing a new world's record of four minutes and fifty-five seconds for five miles.

At this point in his career, Barney and old "999" parted company. Alexander Winton, returning from Europe after an unsuccessful attempt to win international honors in the Gordon-Bennett trophy, persuaded Barney to sign a contract to drive the "Winton Bullet." He went to Detroit, and driving the "Bullet" defeated Tom Cooper again, subsequently entering a free-for-all ten-mile contest in which he met with his first automobile racing accident, blowing a tire on the seventh lap, crashing through a fence and killing a spectator. The driver, however, escaped with a few cuts and bruises, while the car was not seriously injured.

A Pacific coast trip followed, and after driving exhibitions at various western points, on November 22 he lowered the world's one mile record to fifty-four and four-fifths seconds, driving the "Winton Bullet" at Los Angeles.

Next followed Oldfield's historic triumph on the sands of Daytona Beach, in Florida. He competed against William K. Vanderbilt, Foxhall Keene, Samuel B. Stevens, Henry L. Bowden, and other millionaire amateur sportsmen who had spent a great deal of money for expensive foreign cars and some of whom drove with daring and ability. But Barney conquered them all, including even the "Fiat" and "Mercedes."

Incidentally, on the sand straightaway, the fastest track he had ever known, he established a new competitive one-mile straight-away mark of forty-three seconds.

Laurel-crowned and world-famous, Barney returned to the dirt track in the spring of 1904, and drove in exhibitions at New Orleans, Philadelphia and other points. Going to Boston for the Memorial Day meet, the

"Winton Bullet" ended its career by catching fire and disappearing from mortal ken in a blaze of flame, like Elijah's chariot.

The ill-fated "Green Dragon" came next. Oldfield's contract to drive this car, which had been an unsuccessful contender for the Gordon-Bennett trophy, was made with M. P. Mooers, engineer of the Peerless Company. Oldfield drove it in only two meets. In the first he defeated Earl Kiser and Charles Grant driving "Wintons" at Detroit. In the second he pitted it against Alonzo Webb's "Pope-Toledo" in a race on the World's Fair track at St. Louis. Oldfield became blinded by dust and went through the fence. Two spectators were killed, several others injured, the "Green Dragon" completely demolished, and Oldfield himself was laid up in a hospital with broken ribs and a punctured lung.

But after a month's enforced idleness, Oldfield was ready to challenge the world again with a new "Peerless Green Dragon." After defeating Alexander Winton and Earl Kiser at Cleveland, he went to New York and scored his first big international victory, defeating

They and Bernin, French racing stars, and Sartori, the great Italian driver, in two straight ten-mile heats, and establishing a new ten-mile record of nine minutes and twelve seconds.

Another western tour followed, and when Oldfield shipped the "Green Dragon" back to Cleveland for a winter overhauling, he held all the world's dirt track records. He had defeated all comers, and was the greatest speed king in the world.

For three splendid years he continued his triumphant career, driving the "Green Dragon," and never meeting defeat. His first defeat came in Chicago when Webb Jay, driving old "Whistling Billy," beat him under the wire in a ten-mile race won in the comparatively slow time of nine minutes and forty-nine seconds. Later, in St. Paul, Oldfield had the satisfaction of getting revenge on Webb, but was beaten by Earl Kiser with a "Winton Bullet" in a five-mile race. It was in this meet that Oldfield received two thousand dollars appearance money, the largest bonus ever given a driver up to that time.

The last serious accident Oldfield ever suffered came soon afterward on the Grosse Point track, Detroit, when another car crashed into the rear of the "Green Dragon." It went through the fence, but Oldfield escaped with bruises and scalp wounds. Later, with his head swathed in bandages, in the same car which had been repaired and improved, he established a new world's five-mile record at Cleveland, covering the distance in four minutes and forty-five and three-fifths seconds.

In 1905, Barney Oldfield, by this time a famous figure in the sporting world, became an actor, and supported Elsie Janis in "The Vanderbilt Cup," a musical play produced at the Broadway Theater. He had the satisfaction of seeing his name shine in enormous electric lights on the "Great White Way." The show was a great success and played to S. R. O. for ten weeks.

In the spring of 1906 he made a southern racing tour, and then, the San Francisco earthquake breaking into his racing plans, he went on the road with "The Vanderbilt Cup" for ten successful weeks.

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The year of 1907 he spent as an exhibition driver, and in 1908 decided to retire from the game. While attending the automobile show in New York, he sold his two cars, the "Green Dragon" and the "Blue Streak," and attempted to enter the automobile industry, but was unsuccessful. He couldn't get hold of a business proposition that looked big enough.

The lure of the track called him back the following year and he accepted a contract to drive a ninety-horsepower "Stearns," owned by Harlan W. Whipple, president of the American Automobile Association. He was defeated by the Italian, Ralph de Palma, at the wheel of an "Allen-Kingston," on the Readville track, Boston. Realizing that Whipple's "Stearns" was not suitable for dirt track racing, he had two special "Stearns" cars built, defeated De Palma in a race at St. Paul, and gave exhibitions in the west. On these cars he used "Firestone" tires for the first time.

After trying a six-cylinder "National" in 1909, he switched his allegiance to a foreign car, and bought the 120 horsepower "Benz" which was to prove the most consistent racing

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car he ever owned. In the first race in which he drove it, he defeated De Palma and Len Zengle, and set a new world's record for ten miles. By the time the 1910 season opened he had smashed practically all track records in the "Benz."

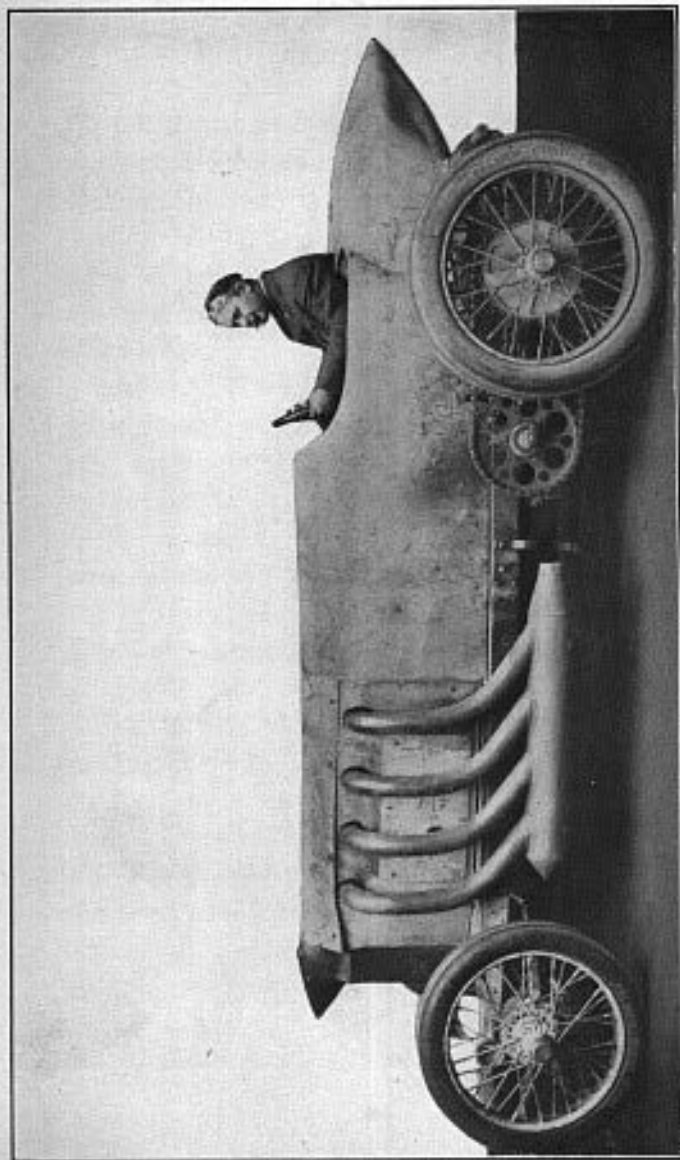
In the spring of 1910, on the Daytona-Ormond Beach, driving a second "Benz," the historic 200-horsepower "Blitzen Benz," he astounded the world by establishing four new international straightaway records, in by far the lowest time ever made. His average speed for the flying kilometer test was 132.04 miles per hour. The wonderful nature of this performance is more obvious in the light of the fact that up to that time Oldfield had never driven as much as 100 miles per hour. In practice driving later he traveled at the rate of 150 miles an hour.

Driving this car he won races and broke records all over the country and reached the zenith of his brilliant career. At the Indianapolis Speedway on May 30 he shattered the American records for a kilometer and a mile,

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making these distances in 21.45 and 35.63 respectively.

Then came the unfortunate Jack Johnson incident which temporarily cast a shadow over Oldfield's fame. The negro prize fighter, after knocking out Jim Jeffries, had imported a "Renault" roadster, and announced to the world that he was as great a driver as he was a prize fighter. Oldfield challenged Johnson and the negro accepted. The American Automobile Association contest board informed Oldfield that he would be suspended if he competed in such an event. Barney ignored the warning, defeated Johnson at Sheepshead Bay, and was blacklisted. For more than a year he was an outlaw in the automobile racing world. Tired of fighting the association, he finally sold the "Benz" and accepted a position in the sales department of the Firestone Tire and Rubber Company, in which he had invested most of his racing profits. Oldfield sacrificed himself, in racing against Johnson, in order, as he believed, to uphold the supremacy of the white race in the sporting world.



Barney Oldfield in the Blitzen Benz with which he lowered so many world's records

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He felt that if he did not defeat Johnson, the negro would become too arrogant a factor in sporting circles.

Oldfield's subsequent comeback in 1912, when he was finally reinstated by the American Automobile Association, is one of the most splendid chapters in his history.

Inside of a year he won back all his lost prestige and reached new heights of fame. His consistent and sensational driving, on tracks and in road races, made him the big factor in the 1914 season, and his services were in such demand that he was on the payroll of three companies, the Mercer, Stuz and Maxwell. Driving cars of these makes he was always great, though not always victor. Added to his splendid showings in the Vanderbilt Cup race, the Indianapolis speedway contests and other classic races, he scored the greatest victory of his sensational career in the fall of 1914 when he won the most tortuous road race in the annals of the world, the famous 696-mile Cactus Derby. For three days he set the pace and led the field from

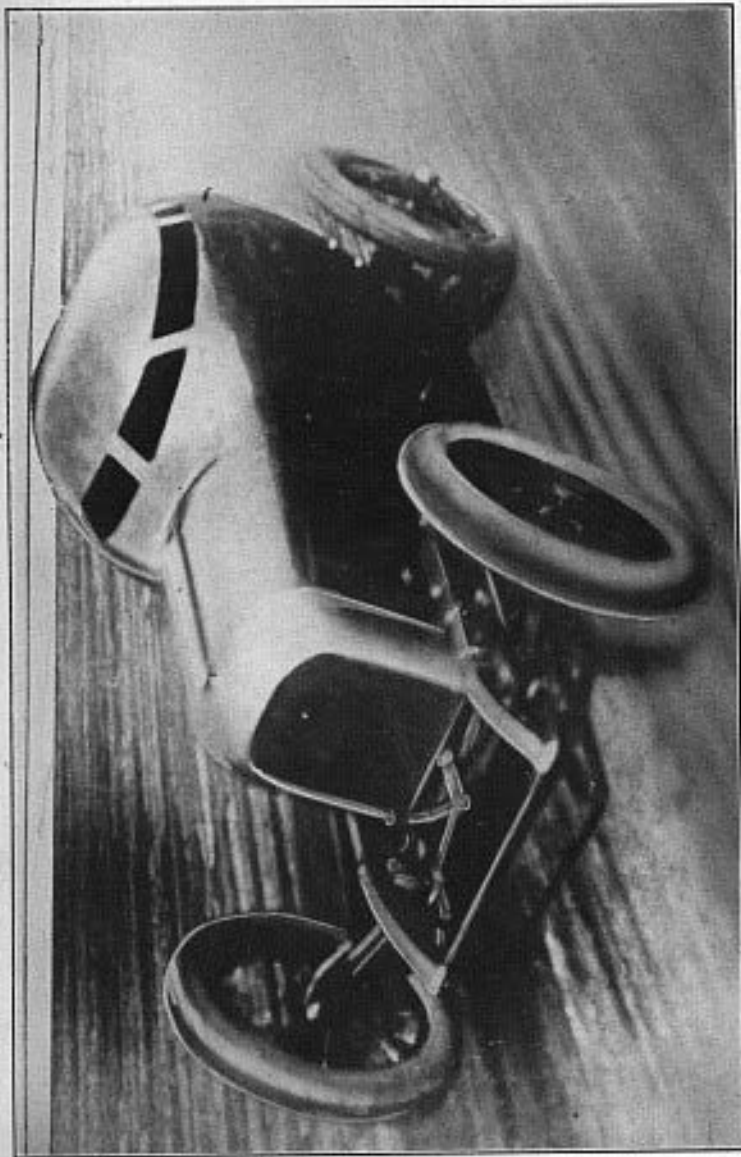
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Los Angeles to Phoenix, finally establishing his right to the title of "Master Driver of the World."

Two weeks later in the Corona road race he established a new world's non-stop record of 301 miles, sharing honors with Eddie Pullen who carried off first money.

When the 1917 racing season opened Barney created a sensation by bringing from California his "accident-proof" car which was immediately dubbed the "Golden Submarine." This car was touted as a possible three-miles-a-minute speedster. It was entirely enclosed, shaped between an egg and a submarine. The body was electrically welded aluminum, supported by rigid steel braces, and its chief distinction came through a claim that it could overturn without injury to driver.

The "Golden Submarine" was built in Los Angeles by Harry Miller, a skilled engineer. Barney assisted in the designs and in the manufacture of the car. It is a high-speed four cylinder type engine, built entirely of aluminum—in so far as possible. It cost Barney more than \$15,000 and was one of the finest



Barney Oldfield's "Golden Submarine" in action

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and most wonderful special racing jobs ever turned out in America. It was given its baptism in competition at Chicago over the Speedway, but was so new and green it did not show as well as expected. It had early speed and gave promise of developing into all that had been claimed for it.

At the start of the race over the Chicago Speedway Barney got away in third place. Ralph De Palma was in second and took the lead in the first lap. Barney was at his heels, but in the third lap Oldfield rushed past DePalma and took command. His golden car streamed along in front for several miles, making ten in 5 minutes, 43.5 seconds, an average speed of 104 miles per hour. He suffered tire trouble and lost the lead, finally retiring from the race in the twenty-fourth lap through broken valve spring caps. Barney had his second car, a "DeLage," in this race with Durant driving and took third money with it.

In the race run at Cincinnati on Memorial Day Barney was unable to start the "Golden Submarine," but drove his "DeLage." After

being in front most of the time and fighting De Palma and Chevrolet for the lead mile after mile, he was forced to drop back because of troubles. At the sixty-mile post Barney was in the lead, but his car went back on him until it was a hopeless task. The "Golden Submarine" was started in other speedway events, but never developed the speed it showed at Chicago.

But on the mile dirt tracks Oldfield came into his own during the season. He was matched with Ralph De Palma for a series of races and started them with an easy victory at Milwaukee. De Palma turned the tables at Detroit, but at Providence Oldfield came back and beat the Italian in the hardest, fastest races ever run on that course. During the match races between De Palma and Oldfield many world's records and track marks were broken by the two stars. Oldfield won four out of six of the match events, De Palma getting the verdicts at Detroit and Atlanta and Barney at Providence, Milwaukee, Indianapolis and St. Louis.

On August 9, two days before the match

with De Palma at St. Louis, Oldfield took the "Golden Submarine" out and, under a special sanction with electrical timing, broke all the world's dirt track records from one to fifty miles. In the match with De Palma he broke the competition records also. The full list of records set by Oldfield at St. Louis follows:

1 mile ...	:45	10 miles...	7:56.2
2 miles...	1:30.4	15 "	...12:00.8
3 "	... 2:17.6	20 "	...15:52.2
4 "	... 3:05.6	25 "	...19:57.6
5 "	... 3:53.6	50 "	...40:47.6

Following the series of victories over De Palma, Oldfield started at Uniontown in the fall races. He was leading the field by a big margin when he smashed his car and narrowly escaped death. In Atlanta Barney had a narrow escape from death when a wheel collapsed and his car skidded back and forth across the track, being finally brought to a standstill up against an inside fence. The infield of the Atlanta track is a lake and had Oldfield not kept his car in control he would have been drowned by going through the inside fence and into the water. He was driv-

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ing the "Golden Submarine" and its door was jammed in hitting the fence so that it had to be pried open before he could get out.

Barney was challenged by Louis Chevrolet for the dirt track title late in the fall and defeated the Frenchman after several hard races at Birmingham, Chattanooga, New Orleans and Los Angeles.

More recently Barney Oldfield has devoted more time to business than to racing or exhibition driving. As a business man he is making a success just as he did in the world of speed. The small fortune he earned at the wheel is well invested. He owns stocks that have a value well into six figures, and has a café in Los Angeles, in partnership with Billy Kipper, which is proving a good paying investment. As an automobile expert he also writes frequently for newspapers and magazines.

Barney Oldfield will go down in history not only as a daring and successful driver, but as one of the greatest race track generals who ever lived and a practical automobile expert who has few equals.

HOMER C. GEORGE.