



Driver George Schuster, left, and mechanic George Miller photographed with the Thomas Flyer after their victory in the 1908 New York to Paris Auto Race. All photographs courtesy of the GreatAutoRace.com.

On a frosty February 12, 1908, six automobiles lined up in New York's Times Square. In an age when the *London Daily Mail* stated, "the motor car is the most fragile and capricious thing on earth," the cars' drivers were setting out on a race from New York to Paris. Cheered on by a crowd of 250,000, the cars headed up Broadway, and the 1907 Thomas Flyer, built by the E.R. Thomas Motor Company in Buffalo, New York, was soon in the lead, followed by a Zusto from Italy; a German Protos; and from France, a Montobloc, a DeDion and a tiny Sizaire-Naudin that dropped out the first day.

Not only were paved roads few and far between; many parts of the world had no roads at all. Only nine men had managed to drive automobiles across the United States, none had attempted the feat in the winter and the fastest

trip had taken fourteen days. The Thomas Flyer was a stock Model 35 powered by a four-cylinder engine producing seventy horsepower, outfitted with a larger fuel tank, spare tires and running boards. The original driver was Montague Roberts, a "dashing automobilist" of the day. Riding with him were George Schuster, a mechanic who worked for Thomas, and T. Walter Williams, a reporter for *The Times*, the event's co-sponsor along with the Parisian newspaper *Le Matin*. Calling the race "insanity," Williams quit in Chicago, followed by automobilist Roberts — claiming prior commitments — in Cheyenne, Wyoming. After breaking down in Iowa, the Montobloc retired from the race. When several more drivers bowed out, Schuster climbed behind the wheel of the Flyer in San Francisco with an eight-day lead over the four cars still in the running.

WORLD RACE 2011

by Bertram Kalisher and Stuart Leuthner



Executive director Jerry Price and the multi-fueled Corvette on display at the Indianapolis Convention Center. "Much like the 1908 race proved the automobile could travel around the world," Price states, "the 2011 race will prove new technology will improve the human race."

The competitors planned to traverse the frozen Bearing Strait, but conditions proved too risky and the automobiles ended up traveling by ship, first to Japan, and then to Russia. Once in Asia, the Siberian tundra tested men and machines to their limits and the remaining French car gave up the ghost in Vladivostok. It was now spring and the endless mud often slowed progress to feet rather than miles per hour. Bridges had to be built with the help of locals, teams of horses pulled the cars out of the quagmire and finding fuel was a constant problem.

The Protos actually reached Paris three days ahead of Schuster in the Flyer, but the Americans were declared the winner when the Germans received a one-month penalty for various shortcuts and shipping the car from

Idaho to Seattle by rail. The Flyer had covered 22,000 miles with a winning time of 169 days, beating the Germans by twenty-six. The Zust arrived forty-eight days later.

As hoped, the race sparked interest in the automobile and its environment. Asphalt was invented in 1910, and two years later, ground was broken for the Lincoln Highway, America's first transcontinental highway. Although the motor car was now seen as a legitimate form of transportation, the Thomas Motor Car Company would not survive to enjoy the triumph of the machines. The company went into receivership in 1912, and the last cars rolled out of the factory in 1919. The winning car was ul-

WORLD RACE 2011

timately purchased by William Harrah in the 1960s. Assisted by George Schuster, the Flyer was restored to the exact condition the car was in when it entered Paris and can be seen today, along with the bronze-and-marble winner's trophy standing over six feet high and weighting more than 1,600 pounds, at the National Automobile Museum in Reno, Nevada.

The 1908 New York to Paris race had a lofty goal — to prove the viability of long distance automobile travel at a time when the technology was brand new. The World Race 2011 has a similarly lofty goal — to prove the viability of sustainable and alternative fuels. Tracking the route followed by the Thomas Flyer more than a century ago, the teams will leave New York on Thursday, April 14. Crossing the U.S., they will pass through Buffalo, Detroit, Warsaw, Indianapolis, St. Louis, Kansas City, Denver, Salt Lake City and Reno, arriving in San Francisco on April 27, where the cars will be loaded aboard ship for the trip to China.

Leaving Beijing on June 3, the cars will head west, crossing into Kazakhstan on June 25. Five days later, they will be in Russia — a ten-day leg — arriving in Vilnius, Lithuania on July 13. After motoring through Poland, the Czech Republic, Germany, Switzerland and France, the teams, if all goes as



The Thomas Flyer thunders into Buffalo followed by local motorists. When Schuster and the winning car returned to Buffalo, the city held a hero's welcome party that drew a crowd of 10,000.

planned, will arrive at the finish line in Paris on July 21. Along the way, the participants will have an opportunity to tour many of the world's most interesting cities and sample the regional cuisine.

Team Price will be competing with a 2007 Chevrolet Corvette modified to burn six different types of fuel: propane, butane, gasoline, ethanol, methane and alcohol. Jerry Price of Plymouth, Wisconsin, is the team's owner, lead driver and technician. Ed Gaven and Richard Goshert will act as navigators. Roy Geigel and Steve Parker will drive a 2010 Toyota Highlander hybrid, the only vehicle in the world equipped to run on natural gas. The Price Team hopes the race will convince the auto industry to produce vehicles that can burn two or three different fuels. Not only would drivers no longer be captive to one fuel; the technology will lead towards energy savings and a cleaner environment.

Other teams include Jack and Mary Crabtree driving their 1929 Ford Model A Speedster; Janet and Ed Howle in "Stewball", their 1967 VW Beetle; a 1935 Ford Phaeton entered by Clay Miller and Blake Garrison; Jon and Jake Auerbach's Hemi-powered 1951 Chrysler New Yorker, and Dennis Barfield, Thomas E. Jameson, Sr., and Howard Street driving the 1916 Studebaker.

Also, along for the entire trip from New York to Paris, Jeff Mahl, the great grandson of George Schuster, will relate the experiences of the early automotive pioneers.



Mary and Jack Crabtree with their 1929 Ford Model A Speedster.

Janet and Ed Howle with "Stewball," their 1967 VW Beetle.



Jeff Mahl, George Schuster's great grandson, photographed with the restored Thomas Flyer.

Teams representing Russia, Germany and France will also join the event in China.

Chronos has been named official timekeeper for the World Race 2011 New York to Paris Race. In future issues, we will provide our readers with updates, interviews with team members, images taken along the route and a summary of the race after its conclusion. If you would like more information about this exciting event, please call Jerry Price at 920-207-1293, Doug Grimes with MIR Corporation at 800-424-7289, or on the web at www.worldrace2011.com



The racers faced towering snow drifts and endless mud, referred to as "gumbo". In this photograph, the Thomas Flyer is in the process of being pulled out of a drift in up-state New York.



The multi-fueled Corvette carries the logos of many of the World Race 2011's sponsors, including Chronos, the event's official timekeeper.