Author Discusses Village's Role in Shaping Auto Industry

by Ross Raybin

The state of Michigan is rich with history concerning the automotive industry, but not many people know that one race, in a village that no longer exists, played a key role in making the industry into what we know today.

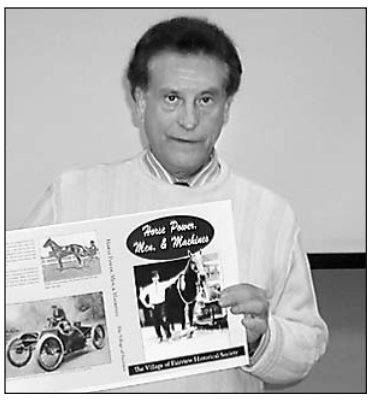
The Village of Fairview used to sit between Detroit and Grosse Pointe Park and was the site of a race that helped shaped the automotive industry.

"On one track (within the village limits), we essentially have the genesis of the Big 3," said Nick Sinacori, local historian and author of "Horse Power, Men and Machines."

Sinacori spoke about his book, which was released last fall, at the Clinton Macomb Public Library on Jan. 14. While the book is focused on the history of Fairview, it also includes a look at the early years of the automotive industry within the village.

The date was Oct. 10, 1901, and a race between Henry Ford and Alexander Winton was scheduled to take place at the Detroit Driving Club.

"Ford was a nobody at the time and Winton was the car of the day," said Sinacori.



Nick Sinacori

Henry Ford was driving a vehicle called "Sweepstakes" and Winton was riding in a vehicle that went by the name, "Bullet."

According to Sinacori, shortly after the race began, Winton's vehicle malfunctioned and Ford ended up winning the race. Two years later, he would go on to start the Ford Motor Company.

At the time of the race, however, Ford was working for the Detroit Motor Company and had borrowed a vehicle to use during the competition.

"He borrowed the car without the authorization of the Detroit Motor Company," said Sinacori, "The vehicle he raced in that day went on to become the prototype for Cadillac."

Cadillac was formed in 1902 and went on to become General Motors in 1908. Further down the road, in the 1920's, GM acquired the Winton Engine Company, the man Ford defeated in that fabled race.

The Dodge brothers, Horace and John, also frequented the track and went on to become a part of Chrysler.

All this rich automotive history took place in a small village which no longer appears on area maps and not many people are even aware existed.

That's why Sinacori was invited to speak about his book, by the Greater Clinton Township Historical Society, at the Clinton Macomb Library.

He used slides and other illustrations to try to give audience members an impression of what Fairview was like during its time, which ran from 1701 to 1926.

Before being absorbed by Detroit and Grosse Pointe, the city's boundaries were Bewick Street to the West, Mack Avenue to the North, Cadieux to the East and the Detroit River to the South.

The village was the home of the Detroit Driving Club race track. That's where the race between Ford and Winton took place. It was also a popular horse racing track.

In 1957, the track was turned into a residential area.

In that residential neighborhood is where Sinacori resides and where his interest in the Village of Fairview was sparked many years ago.

"I started this book when I was 16 years old," he said. "I'm now 62."

"Horse Power, Men and Machines" focuses on the village and all its rich history, including its hand in the shaping of the domestic auto industry.

"I thought that the history was going to disappear unless it was recorded," said Sinacori.

The book is available in both hardcover and paperback and can be purchased at the Jefferson East Business Association and at the Grosse Pointe Historical Society.

Sinacori has another speaking engagement, similar to the one at the Clinton Macomb Library, planned for Thursday, Jan. 31, at the City Kitchen restaurant in Grosse Pointe. Reservations are required in order to attend. For more information, contact the Grosse Pointe Historical Society at 313-331-7939.

WSO Concert Will Showcase Rossini, Beethoven Works

The Warren Symphony Orchestra (WSO) will be presenting a concert on Sunday, March 17, at 3 p.m. at the Warren Woods Tower High School, 27900 Bunert Road, Warren.

The WSO's concert will present the work of four iconic composers and the featured piece will be the famous Beethoven Symphony No. 5. Other pieces will include some Rossini's opera "The Italian in Algers" as well as Antonin Dvorak's "Seranade No. 2" and "Musica Celesti" by Aaron Jay Kernis.

Music Director Gregory Cunningham, who is in his third year with the WSO, said the concert highlights four masterworks of composers who were innovators in the history of symphonic music. He said the work is a diverse sampling of compositions for orchestras of many sizes and instrumentations.

The concert will also feature a lecture by Dr. Jessica Payette, assistant professor of Musicology at Oakland University. Tickets are $23. Seniors and students will receive a discounts. Call 586-754-2950 for more information.

Storied Drivers Franchitti, Jones Honored By BorgWarner at World Congress

BorgWarner presented Dario Franchitti with his third BorgWarner Championship Driver's Trophy during the 2013 Automotive News World Congress held in Detroit on Jan. 16.

Known as the "Baby Borg," the personal keepsake sports a sterling silver visage of the 2012 Indianapolis 500 winner, a duplicate of the image displayed on the prestigious and historic BorgWarner Trophy.

Team owner Chip Ganassi also accepted a BorgWarner Championship Team Owner's Trophy, his fourth since 2000.

As a special honor, Parnelli Jones was presented with a Baby Borg commemorating the 50th anniversary of his Indianapolis 500 victory in 1963.

"From the turbochargers that boost every engine in the IZOD IndyCar Series to the prestigious Borg-Warner Trophy, we are proud to be part of a century-long tradition of achievement, competitive performance and technology leadership at the Indianapolis 500," said Timothy M. Manganello, executive chairman, BorgWarner.

"Dario, Chip and Parnelli are part of an elite group of champions who have made the trip to Victory Lane not once, but several times. We are pleased to present these prestigious symbols of their achievement."

A unique replica of the BorgWarner Trophy, the BorgWarner Championship Driver's Trophy is awarded each year to the winner of the Indianapolis 500. The sterling silver trophy is 14 inches high, weighs five pounds and rests on a beveled black marble base. The base is inscribed with the winner's name and year of victory, and includes a handcrafted, three-dimensional sterling silver image of the winner, a duplicate of the image affixed to the full-sized Borg-Warner Trophy.

BorgWarner established the driver's trophy in 1988 to provide the driver with a personal keepsake of the victory.

In 1998, the company also established the BorgWarner Championship Team Owner's Trophy as a companion to the driver's trophy. The team owner's trophy is presented to the owner of the winning Indianapolis 500 racing team and recognizes the significance of the team owner's role in the Indy Racing League. Like the driver's trophy, the team owner's trophy is a replica of the Borg-Warner Trophy but features a band of art deco racing cars accented in gold to symbolize the importance of teamwork in the automotive business.

BorgWarner Executive Chairman Timothy M. Manganello (left) presented the BorgWarner Championship Team Owner's Trophy to team owner Chip Ganassi to recognize his 2012 Indianapolis 500 victory.

Chrysler's Conner Ave. Plant Readies for Production of SRT Viper

After nearly two years in hibernation, Chrysler's Conner Avenue Assembly Plant in Detroit is rumbling to life as it opens its doors to produce the next-generation SRT Viper.

"With no plans for the future, Conner Avenue was on life support when it closed in the summer of 2010," said Doug Gouin, head of Viper Operations.

"Now, with a transfusion of passion, determination, world-class manufacturing and an all-new vehicle, the plant has been revived. You can feel the energy and excitement about what is happening inside when you walk through the door."

With the decision made to reopen Conner, Chrysler began in the fall of 2011 to implement world-class manufacturing, Fiat's production system that Chrysler adopted when the two companies joined forces in June 2009.

As part of the journey, every inch of the nearly 400,000-square-foot facility has been refurbished and improved, including the lobby – where a historical Viper timeline now hangs – to the 14 restrooms, to the shop floor, which is now hospital-clean, bright and more organized to increase the efficiency of each plant operation.

"Our goal is to be the best manufacturing plant within the Chrysler Group in the fastest time," said Gouin, who can make such a statement because he's already seen rapid change take place at Conner.

"A year ago, Conner had the worst score in the company on an I.T. audit. At the next audit, after 12 months of focused attention and sheer determination, Conner scored 94 percent, the highest score in the company. This is the kind of progress I expect to see throughout the plant as we move forward."

With all of the improvements, the Conner Avenue Assembly Plant now looks like a modern, state-of-the-art facility, even though it bows to its coach builder philosophy.

The plant still maintains the handcrafted build process for the Viper as when it began production in 1992.

Once the plant idled, all of the employees were redeployed to other Chrysler Group facilities, but hoped that they would have the chance to return to their home plant. About 60 of them jumped at the chance when the opportunity arose.

In preparation for the launch of the next-generation Viper, every job on the line was rebalanced so the daily build could increase by four vehicles to a total of 12 per day. As a result, each operator has 100-200 elements he or she must complete during each 32-minute cycle.

"The changes we made to each operation along the line will help improve the overall quality and efficiency of the build," said Gouin.

The SRT Viper begins to take shape on the chassis line. The frame is shipped to Conner from an outside supplier in Kentucky to begin its five- to six-day journey down the assembly line.

With a nod to modern production techniques and a focus on quality, Conner now has its first robots on the floor. The five robots that make up the Net Form & Pierce cell move the frame in and out five times during the 32-minute cycle, punching holes and creating features in the Viper frame to create the dimensional environment needed to hang panels such as the hood, deck lids, doors and fenders.

Along the chassis line, the operators turn the steel frame into a fully functioning, driveable "go cart." Operators install all of the components that make the Viper run, like front and rear suspension, rear brakes, exhaust, fuel tank and the V10 engine.

As before, the Viper V10 engine is assembled at Conner along six stations with room for expansion, but now its all-important pistons are also built up onsite. Pistons for the previous-generation Viper came already assembled from Chrysler's Saltillo, Mexico, Engine Plant. In order to ensure the maximum performance quality of each engine, all V10s are now 100 percent dyno-tested before finding a permanent home mounted inside the new vehicle.

Once the rolling chassis and its V10 engine are validated in the rolls station, it continues on to the final line, which is where the body panels, seats, window glass, and other interior and exterior components come together in sequence to form the easily recognizable Viper shape performance car fans know and love.

Employees at Chrysler's Conner Avenue Assembly Plant work on the chassis of the next generation SRT Viper. On the right, the rolling chassis is placed on the aligner to ensure proper camber alignment. Nearly 150 employees hand build 12 of the legendary American muscle cars each day.