

Pays d'art et d'histoire
du Perche Sarthois



let us **tell you the story**
of the **Automobile Club de**
France's 1st Grand Prix in 1906



1. - Circuit de la Sarthe 1906 (26 et 27 juin 1906)

The Perche Sarthois area is steeped in history and motoring is a part of its glorious past. Indeed, Automobile Club de France's first Grand Prix was held in 1906 here in Sarthe, to the east of Le Mans, where the Bollée family lived. This was a just reward for the region that had seen the birth of "l'Obéissante" in 1873, the first car designed by Amédée Bollée senior, considered to be the first motor car for private use.

In just over 30 years, the technical progress made by the inventors of this new means of locomotion and the competitive spirit that reigned over the burgeoning industry gave rise to a completely new race that took place on 26 and 27 June 1906. Follow in Ferenc Szisz'tyre tracks and retrace the 100km of the historical circuit. Rediscover the beginnings of motor racing and the precursor of one of the best known races in the world, the Le Mans 24 hours.

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The Gordon Bennett cup.
Collection A.C.O.



E. Levassor in the Panhard-Levassor during the Paris-Bordeaux-Paris race in 1895. Painting by Sammy Davis, collection A.C.O.

Introduction

The beginnings of motor racing

The end of the 19th century in France brought the emergence of motor racing. From small gatherings of a few fans, to town to town races such as Paris-Bordeaux-Paris in 1895, motoring events grew in number and in popularity. In 1899, James Gordon Bennett, owner of the New York Herald, donated the motor industry a 15,000 Francs trophy bearing his name. The world's motor manufacturers

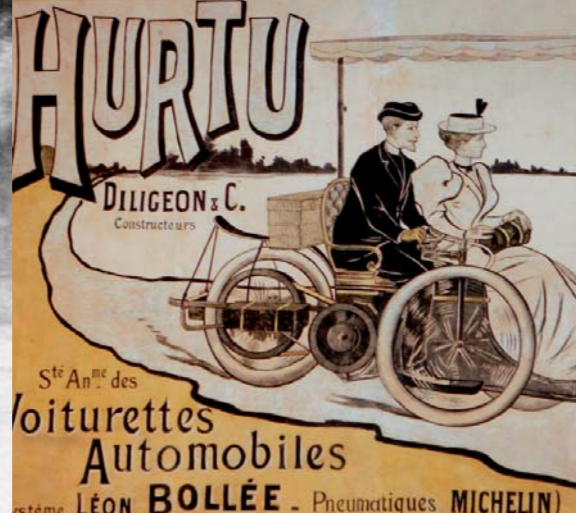
took part in the competition. The winning team got to keep the trophy for a year and their country became the next host of the race.

The Gordon Bennett Cup was won by French manufacturers in 1900, 1901, 1904 and 1905. All the same, the Automobile Club de France considered that the rules penalised the French motor industry because nations were restricted to three cars only. In the early 20th century, France was more productive than its competitor countries and would have liked to enter more cars.

So, in 1905, the Automobile Club de France decided to found a new race that restricted the number of cars to three per marque rather than three per nation. In 1906, the Gordon Bennet Cup gave way to the Grand Prix of the Automobile Club de France.



La Nouvelle, the car designed by Amédée Bollée. Collection A.C.O.



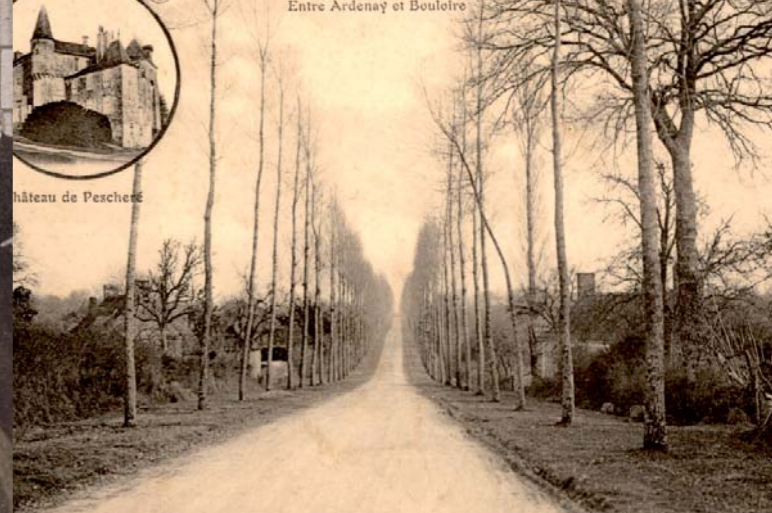
Collection A.C.O.



Paul Jamin at the wheel of a tricar designed by Léon Bollée. Collection A.C.O.



Mr Carel, Mr Durand and Mr Singher at the Automobile Club de France. Collection A.C.O.



The portion of the circuit between Ardenay and Bouloire. Coll. Arch. dép. Sarthe, 2F108975

A national call for projects to organise the first Automobile Club de France Grand Prix

In 1905, in his opening speech at the motor fair, the Minister of Trade declared himself to be “passionately interested in the efforts of a barely 10-year-old industry that provides for 150,000 workers’ families and exports some 100 million products abroad” (*Express*, 28 December 1905).

The circumstances were favourable and on 1st December 1905, the newspaper *L’Auto* launched a national appeal for circuits that could host a major motor race in 1906.

Such an event could have positive effect on Le Mans and the region. The financial impact of the 1905 Gordon Bennet Cup in Auvergne was estimated at 15 million Francs. With this in mind, M. Singher, a member of the ACF and CEO of a major insurance company in Le Mans, backed by a group of local dignitaries, tradesmen and

industrials put forward the Sarthe as candidate. The application came with financial backing amounting to 100,000 Francs.

The land of motoring

Commenting on Sarthe’s application on 15 December 1905, *L’Auto* remarked that “the local population are motoring fans” and noted that

the town council in Le Mans had no special rules concerning vehicle circulation. Journalists also picked up on the fact that several local mayors and councillors were car drivers. The “financial sacrifices” that the region was ready to make in order to host the Grand Prix were also emphasised. And of course, Sarthe was the home of the Bollée family. Indeed, in 1873, Amédée Bollée senior patented a steam-powered car called “L’Obéissante” (Obedient) because of its manoeuvrability. Encouraged by

this good start, Bollée designed more cars which met with great success. In 1878, Amédée Bollée drove from Paris to Vienna “with no significant incident to report”. In 1880 he designed an improved steam powered car called “La Nouvelle”. Amédée’s son, Léon, was also a brilliant inventor. Towards the end of the 19th century, his calculating machine and petrol driven



L’Obéissante. Collection A.C.O.

tricycle cars were very popular. As head of modern factories specialised in luxury car manufacturing, Léon Bollée became an important industrial figure in Le Mans.

Choosing the circuit

Sarthe had two major advantages: a total of 100,000 francs (of which 25,000 francs from the Sarthe council and 35,000 from Le Mans town council plus various private and public backers) and a local population of motoring fans.

On 10 January 1906, the ACF sporting committee announced that out of the 17 applications, the circuits in Sarthe and Brie were short-listed. On 14 January, after one last visit to Sarthe, the ACF made its final choice. The superb straights, wide roads and well-kept surfaces of the Circuit de la Sarthe impressed the committee

members who considered the circuit ideal for reaching record-breaking speeds. On 16 January, the Circuit de la Sarthe was selected by the ACF, by 8 votes to 3. The race was to be held on 26 and 27 June 1906. The dates were chosen to fit in with market days in the towns and villages located along the circuit. Next, the 24 local



Amédée and Léon Bollée. Collection A.C.O.



The straight continues beyond the Fourche d'Auvours. Collection A.C.O.

Railway crossing in Saint-Calais. Coll. Arch. dép. Sarthe, 2FI05599

Map of the circuit de la Sarthe. Coll. Arch. dép. Sarthe, FRAD072_1FI0060

councils and the regional council concerned had to give their authorisation. That proved a formality. The circuit was officially opened on 28 April 1906 by the Automobile Club de la Sarthe. On 15 June 1906, the Prefect of Sarthe received the official authorisation from the Ministry of the Interior to hold the race.

The circuit

The initial circuit proposed by Georges Durand was 100 km long. A round figure would make it easier to mark 200, 300, 400, 500 and 600 km records, most of which had never been precisely timed. The circuit was in the shape of a virtually equilateral triangle. It used the Paris-Nantes and Le Mans-Orleans 'A' roads as well as the D6 between Saint-Calais and La Ferté-Bernard. The Le Mans – Orleans road (N157) was said to have little traffic. The Bollée workshops used it to test drive their cars. The roads

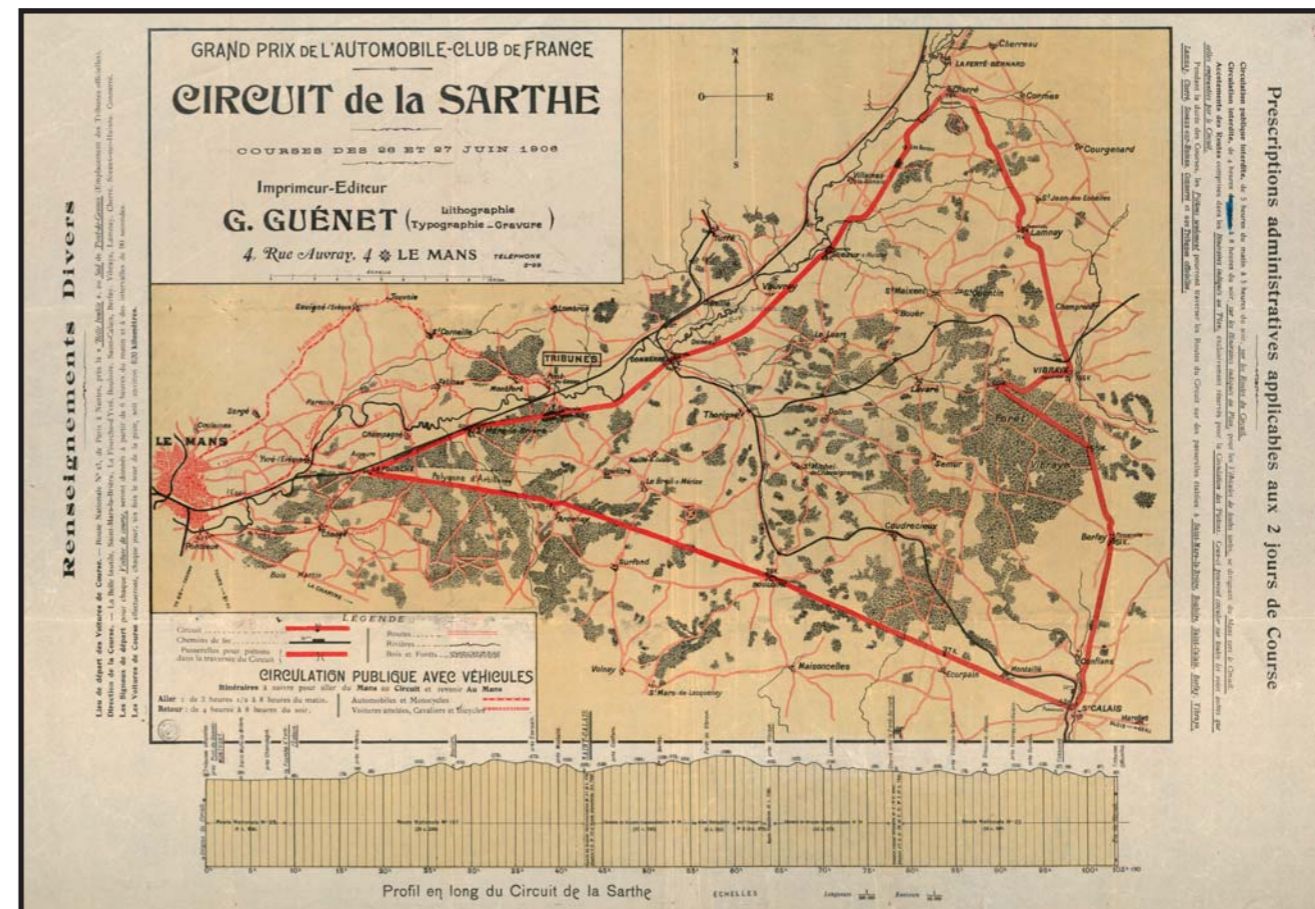
were wide and straight. There would be very little to do in the way of modifications and the traffic was insignificant. However, there were still two issues to iron out if drivers were to set speed records. The problem areas were the villages of Saint-Calais and Vibraye. The circuit committee proposed a temporary wooden road to by-pass Saint-Calais and a detour through the woods to avoid going through Vibraye. This would extend the circuit to 103 km (including 90 km of straights).

26 and 27 June 1906, the Circuit de la Sarthe

Today, you can still retrace the triangular route of the 1906 Automobile Club de France Grand Prix between Le Mans and Saint-Calais (D357), Saint-Calais and La Ferté-Bernard (D1), and from La Ferté-Bernard to Le Mans (D323). Along the way, you can find eleven commemorative panels and two postcard friezes that mark the event. Don't forget to stop and read them. They contain a wealth of information about the historic race.

The commemorative panels are located in:

- ▶ **Montfort-le-Gesnois / Soultré**, Parc des Sittelles
- ▶ **Saint-Mars-la-Brière**, rue de Paris
- ▶ **Ardenay-sur-Mérize**, voie du Baron Pierre de Caters
- ▶ **Bouloire**, rue Nationale
- ▶ **Saint-Calais**, avenue du Moulin Ars
- ▶ **Berfay**, opposite the church square
- ▶ **Vibraye**, between the D1 and la rue de la Petite Vitesse
- ▶ **Lamnay**, near the church
- ▶ **Cherré**, rue François Avice
- ▶ **Sceaux-sur-Huisne**, behind the town hall (Mairie)
- ▶ **Connerré**, rue de Paris



Montfort-le-Gesnois/Soulitré

Commemorative panel and postcard friezes of the 1st ACF Grand Prix 1906, Parc des Sittelles, near the tunnel "le Pont du Circuit".

The strategic centre of the race

On 20 March 1906, *L'Auto* announced that a village of 932 inhabitants, Pont-de-Gennes, would shoot to fame thanks to the ACF's 1st Grand Prix de France. Indeed, the village was located at the crossing point of the Le Mans-Paris "A" road and the Paris-Brest railway and was therefore chosen as the departure and arrival point for the 1st Grand Prix of the Automobile Club de France.

So the strategic centre of the race was here in what is now the Parc des Sittelles.

In 1906, the place was described as an "absolute desert" bordered by a railway line. You can see for 2 km from the site and spectators could see vehicles coming up the Belle Inutile hill from Connerré. The pine trees that lined the route were sacrificed to make way for the official

stands, the weighing area, the enclosures and the whole event village.

The ACF and ACS stands were set up on the right of the Paris-bound road. Located to the left were the vehicle enclosure, the refuelling stand, the spectator car-park, the race information board and the timing booth. A tunnel was installed to enable people to cross between the outside and the inside of the circuit. In its 19 May issue, the newspaper

Les journaux du Mans stated that the ACF had issued definite instructions for two separate 2 metre wide pedestrian tunnels to be dug under the road to enable spectators to circulate in both directions. The tunnel was exclusively for official stand ticket holders.

Access to the stands from Le Mans was via the N23 before the race and via nearby

routes during the race. Some thirty or forty thousand people travelling on the night train from Paris were to arrive at Pont-de-Gennes railway station. The journey time was 3 hours from Paris and 20 minutes from Le Mans. Fifteen thousand people could also travel to the race from Le Mans by rail, as well as tourists from Caen, Rennes, Angers, Nantes, Tours and Orleans. Proceeds from ticket sales were expected to attain 200,000 Francs.

It was said that the departure line on 26 June was very original with the hundreds of multicoloured posters that stood out against the green of the pine trees. All the national motoring press, the regional press and international press such as the *Heraldo of Madrid* and the *Daily Mail* and *Car* were at the starting line. The papers printed in Paris were delivered to Le Mans in racing cars. It was a less than 3 hours journey

from the capital to the circuit and at the time it was quicker than by train.

Les Sports published three special editions on both race days. The commemorative issues had circulation figures of over 250,000 copies each day.

★ *On the circuit: leave Montfort-le-Gesnois and the Parc des Sittelles on the D323 towards Le Mans and Saint-Mars-la-Brière.*



CIRCUIT DE LA SARTHE, JUIN 1906
Les Reporters Photographes à Montfort

Édition L. Joniaux. — Le Mans



37. - Circuit de la Sarthe 1906. - La route entre Connerré et St-Mars-la-Brière, en face la Gare de Montfort-le-Rotrou. Hameau de la Belle-Inutile : Emplacement des Tribunes officielles, de celles de l'A. C. S. et de M. Hamon, du Parc de Pesage et des Garages. On verra les Autos descendre la côte et arriver à toute vitesse.

ché J. Garczynski

The hamlet known as Hameau de la Belle Inutile, between Connerré and Saint-Mars-la-Brière. Coll. Arch. dép. Sarthe, 2FI04156



Jules VERNE

CIRCUIT DE LA SARTHE, JUIN 1906

Village de Grégoire à B au Pesage

Édition L. Joniaux. —

Grégoire 9B during scrutineering.
Coll. Arch. dép. Sarthe, 2FI01370

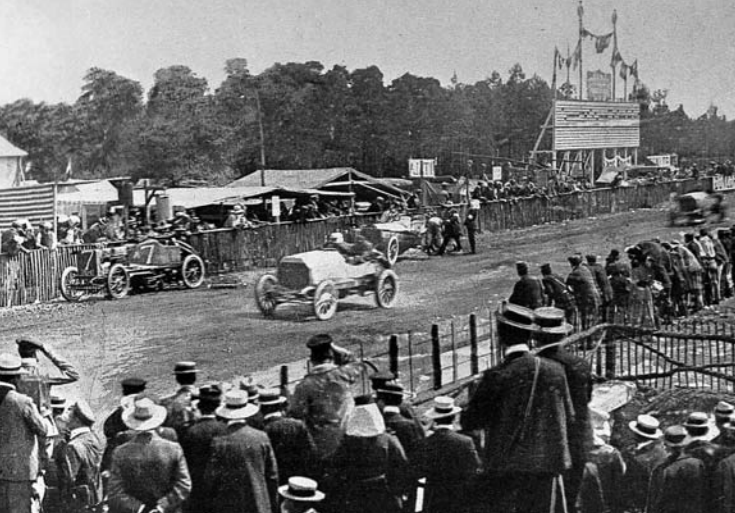


CIRCUIT DE LA SARTHE, JUIN 1906

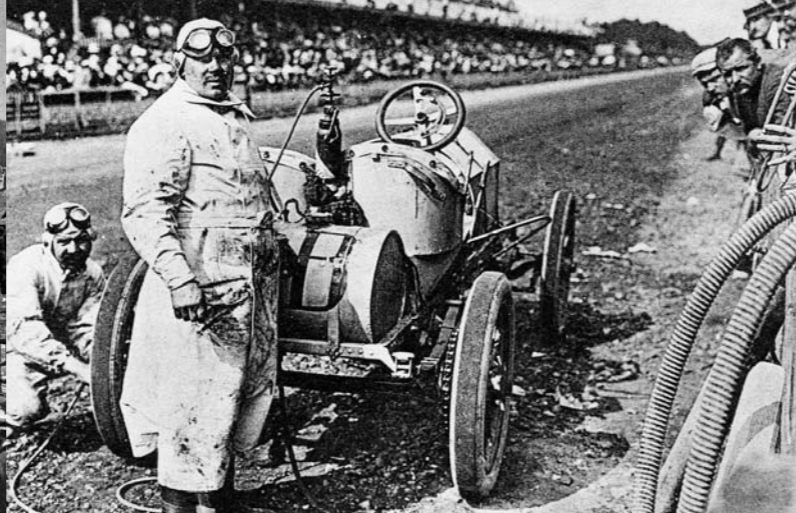
Tribune officielle

Édition L. Joniaux. — Le M

The official board.
Coll. Arch. dép. Sarthe, 2FI04368



At the start line.
Collection A.C.O.



The Mariaux Mercedes during
refuelling. Collection A.C.O.



Painting by Rabouin.
Collection A.C.O.

Montfort-le-Gesnois

Until the 1980s, Montfort-le-Rotrou and Pont-de-Gennes were two separate towns. They merged in 1986 and now form the town of Montfort-le-Gesnois. This part of the Huisne valley has long been a settlement. In Neolithic times it was a stopping place and became a proper settlement from the Gallo-Roman period. Although the name of “Roman” is not strictly correct for a bridge that has been reworked many times through the centuries, it is a sign that the site has been a river crossing point since Roman times. In the early twentieth century, there were 879 inhabitants in Montfort-le-Rotrou and 940 in Pont-de-Gennes. Today, Montfort-le-Gesnois has a population of 3103 and its vibrancy is largely due to its location near Le Mans and the D323 road that attracts businesses and facilitates transport to and from the town.

What to see in Montfort-le-Gesnois

- ▶ The “Pont Romain” over the river Huisne and the remains of the mill
- ▶ Château (private property)
- ▶ Notre-Dame de Saussay Romanesque chapel
- ▶ Saint-Gilles and Notre-Dame churches (open to the public)
- ▶ Square Victor Hemery

What to see around Montfort-le-Gesnois

- ▶ Manoir de Bois-Doublet in Saint-Célerin
- ▶ Manoir de Nuyet in Savigné-l'Évêque (private property)
- ▶ Church in Savigné-l'Évêque (open to the public)
- ▶ Church in Lombron (open to the public)

KILOMETRE 3,5

Saint-Mars-la-Brière

Commemorative panel “The château in Saint-Mars-la-Brière, head quarters of the Automobile Club de France during the 1906 race, and the Marquis de Dion”, rue de Paris.

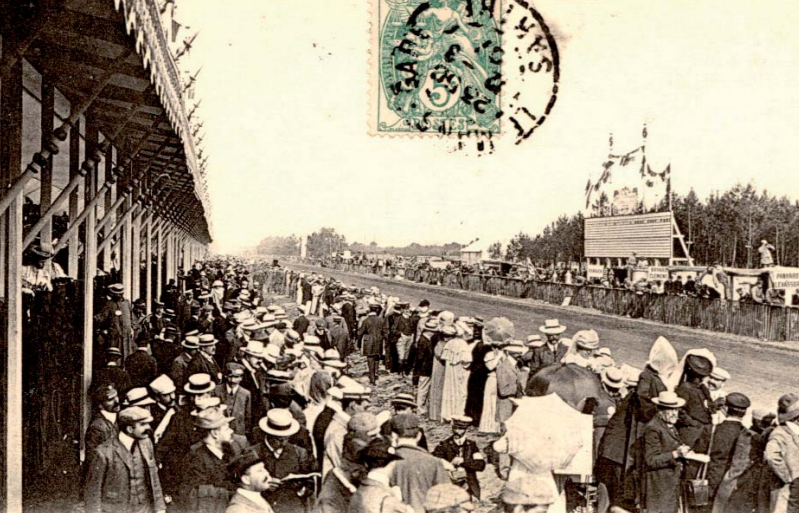
Getting ready for the spectators

Due to the lack of hotel rooms in Sarthe, the Automobile Club de la Sarthe urged local residents and authorities to offer accommodation to tourists. The race was expected to attract 300,000 visitors. However, demand was so high that prices became extortionate and the ACS had to issue several warnings that it was not in the interests of the local people to set prices too high as “visitors would be tempted to stay further afield or sleep in

their cars”. Rates for rooms in Sarthe were 50,100 to 200 francs per night. To make up for the lack of accommodation, the Automobile Club de France also offered those who wished to “sleep under canvas” and rented campsites at 1 franc per square meter, near the start and finish areas.

The ACF also set up stands near the starting line. They were 200 meters long and could seat 5,000 people. The ACS did the same and sold seats in a 4,000 person stand for 10 francs for the two days.

Prices for seats in the official ACF stands were:
 > 300 francs : box for 6 people for the duration of the race
 > 30 francs : seat in the stands for the duration of the race
 > 200 francs : box for 6 people 1 day
 > 20 francs : seat in the stands for 1 day.



The official stands.
Coll. Arch. dép. Sarthe, 2FI04367



Ferenc Szisz' Renault in Saint-Calais.
Collection A.C.O.



The plank road around Saint-Calais.
Coll. Arch. dép. Sarthe, 2FI07522



The official stands.
Coll. Arch. dép. Sarthe, 2FI06477

Stands sprang up all around the circuit and more were built in the start and finish areas. They had 2,500 and 2,000 seats respectively. A 2,000 seats stand was made in Saint-Calais. Many of them were managed privately. At Belle Inutile, the Mouton theatre, well-known in Sarthe, also set up stands. The actors staged plays after the race to entertain the spectators.

In its 14 June issue, *La Sarthe* reported that stands had been set up along side the circuit on

a big square in the middle of Cherré, between two bends. Tickets cost 10 francs for the duration of the race. On 4 April 1906, *L'Auto* announced that King Alphonse XIII and Queen Victoire Eugénie de Battenberg d'Espagne were invited by the Princess of Monaco to watch the race from her château du Haut Buisson in Cherré.

There were also stands borrowed from the horse show in Nantes set up in Champagné, near the station and in Saint-Mars-la-Brière. Some 5,000 people could sit in the numbered seats for between 6 and 20 francs for the 2 days. The town of Sceaux-sur-Huisne also erected stands along the high street. There were also stands in La Ferté-Bernard, Pont-de-Gennes and Vibraye (near the plank road). In its 20 June issue, *L'Auto* reported that there had never been as many

stands for a motor race. There were some one hundred stands along the 100 km circuit.

Eateries were also set up all around the track. They sold all sorts of meals and snacks. There was chocolate, tea, champagne - a whole array of refreshments. Hotel owners from Vendôme, Tours, Montoire and other

neighbouring towns set up stands and restaurants along the circuit. The newspapers doubted that all the stands would be full, given that there were so many. In fact, many spectators preferred to stay right by the track in the shade of the pine trees and tickets sales for the stands were disappointing.

Several tourist guide books were published to promote the event and the region. The

Automobile Club de France published a guide in French, English, German and Italian to promote the local attractions. The local tourist committees provided practical information for tourists in their area. The Automobile Club de la Sarthe asked local photographers to send in their photos of the most interesting attractions in Sarthe. On 6 May 1906, *L'Auto* reported that a smart brochure for tourists in and around Saint-Calais had been published. The brochure was published by M.E. Renard from Saint-Calais.

In June 1906, a guide to La Ferté-Bernard was published by the local committee (5,000 copies). It presented the history of the town and the area, details of monuments, a list of hotels, cafés, restaurants, mechanics. The 24 page guide was sold for 25 cents.

★ *On the circuit: leave Saint-Mars-la-Brière on the D323 towards Le Mans. After 8.5km, leave the D323 and follow Le*

Mans Centre. Take the fourth exit at the roundabout, D357 towards Saint-Calais. 600 metres after the Narais roundabout, leave the D357 and turn right towards Ardenay-sur-Mérize. After 600 metres, bear left onto voie Baron Pierre de Caters.



The Mancelle stands between Champagné and La Fourche.
Coll. Arch. dép. Sarthe,
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Stands on the edge of the circuit.
Coll. Arch. dép. Sarthe,
FRAD072_23Fil1116



Coming out of Bouloire.
Collection A.C.O.



View from Bouloire hill.
Coll. Arch. dép. Sarthe,
FRAD072_2Fil1103_00

What to see in Saint-Mars-la-Brière

- ▶ Saint-Denis-du-Tertre
Romanesque church
- ▶ Allées Itala et Gobron-Brillié,
impasse Lorraine-Dietrich

Saint-Mars-la-Brière

Saint-Mars-la-Brière developed as the 20th century progressed. By 2009 the population had grown to 2439 inhabitants, from 1244 in 1906. This growth is due to its location near Le Mans and to transport links, the D323 road, an old Royal route that dates back to 1770, and the Paris-Brest railway line which opened in 1854. This infrastructure also explains the town's early industrial development, of which the Bourray paper mill is an example.

The southern part of the town (D357 road) houses the Auvours military camp that was set up after the 1870-1871 war between the second French empire and the Kingdom of Prussia. The aviation pioneer Wilbur Wright set two world records in 1908 by flying over 100 km and for longer than 2 hours. His base was near the Auvours camp. A fresco and monument alongside the Le Mans to St-Calais road (D357) at the crossroads with the D145 commemorate the feat.

KILOMETRE 17,5

Ardenay-sur-Mérize

Commemorative panel "Baron Pierre de Caters" in Ardenay-sur-Mérize, voie du Baron Pierre de Caters

Safety

On 12th April 1906, the Prefect of Sarthe, M. Landrodie, founded by decree a committee responsible for defining the various safety measures necessary for the race. To make sure the event was incident-free, the committee decided to enlist the help of the army troops based in Le Mans, Auvours, Mamers and Nogent-le-Rotrou. They were based close to the circuit and could ensure security with a minimum of travel expenses. The team was headed by Colonel du Martray,

chief of general staff of the 4th corp, seconded by M.Thébault, captain of the gendarmerie and M.Guénin, police superintendant in Le Mans. They positioned the 7000 strong team along the circuit. Over 400 military police (gendarmes) manned railway stations and high traffic areas. 24 tents, each bearing a tricolor banner, were set up for the race marshals.

The chief of general staff ruled that gun fire would be forbidden at Auvours camp on 25, 26 and 27 June to enable spectators to cross the camp without being exposed to risk.

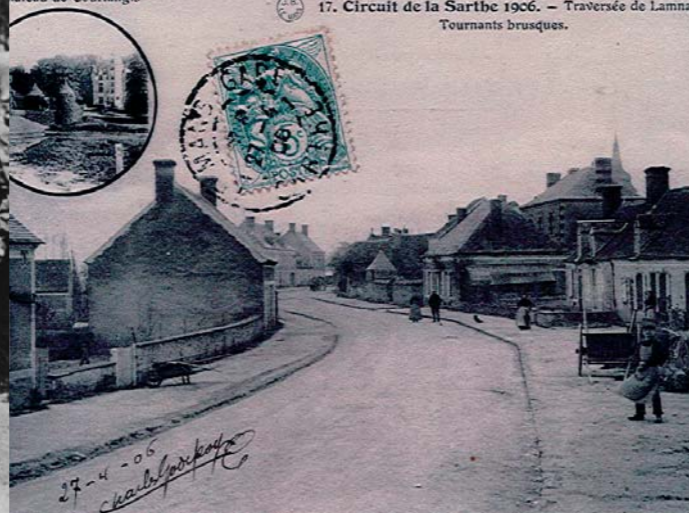
In the run up to the race, many vehicles came to visit Le Mans and the surrounding area to check out the circuit for the 1st ACF Grand Prix. On 21 April 1906 *La Sarthe* reported that Le Mans town council had received many complaints about vehicles going through town at high speeds and as a result, the deputy Mayor has issued a reminder of the decree



Fabry leaves the track in his Itala, near Vibraye. Collection A.C.O.



A driver victim of the heat and tar projections. Collection A.C.O.



Coming through Lamnay. Private collection.



The Fourche d'Auvours bend. Coll. Arch. dép. Sarthe, 2FI04123



Between Cherré and Sceaux-sur-Huisne. Coll. Arch. dép. Sarthe, FRAD072_2Fi1117_00

of 10 March 1899 which stipulated that the speed limit was 30 kmh in the countryside and 20 kmh in urban areas.

In the villages on the circuit, the ACF sporting committee organised sessions to raise awareness among the public. Film clips of the last Gordon Bennett cup were presented to local residents to give them an idea of car speeds and what to expect of the race. The films were accompanied by messages such as “it is dangerous to cross

the road during the race” and “do not let cattle or farmyard animals near the road during the competition”. On 20 June, the day before the tests, the press warned residents not to let animals stray and that there would be a fine for anyone who transgressed the rule. Residents of villages on the circuit were required by prefectorial order to shut up or tether animals from 5am to 5pm on race days.

The medical team was also getting prepared. All the doctors in Le Mans and the surrounding area met up in early May 1906. A committee of 10 doctors was set up. It was responsible for preparing a project to submit to the medical corps. Therefore, the army majors were asked to help during the race and twenty or so civil doctors manned the 10 first-aid posts. Professor Poirier and Doctor Henri de Rothschild were in charge of the ACF medical department.

Doctor Moreau was responsible for the region’s group of doctors. After the race, Professor Poirier declared that the team had treated cases of sunstroke, fractures and “race track” ophthalmia caused by tarmac being projected into the eyes. Some 150 ophthalmia cases were treated during the course of the race. A total of 350 injuries were treated, most due to the sun.

★ *On the circuit: carry on along the voie Baron Pierre de Caters and then turn right onto rue des Châtaigniers. Turn left onto rue des Freteaux and then left onto rue de la Mérisse. At the end of the road, turn right onto the D357 towards Bouloire.*

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What to see in Ardenay-sur-Mérisse

- ▶ Château d'Ardenay (private property)
- ▶ Voie Pierre de Caters

.....
What to see around Ardenay-sur-Mérisse

- ▶ Château de Pescheray (zoological park)
- ▶ Loudon ponds and woods

Ardenay-sur-Mérisse

Ardenay-sur-Mérisse has a population of 471. The village is named after its main waterway, the river Mérisse, and its lofty location: Ardenay means “high”. Ardenay hill (“butte” in French) is 123 metres high, with very sandy soil that is not suitable for farming. For a long time the hill was heathland before being planted with pine trees towards the end of the 18th century. A former medieval estate and an important attraction for Protestants in 16th century Maine, the castle of Ardenay-sur-Mérisse was rebuilt in the 18th century. The town owes much of its vibrancy to the nearby road links and its location close to Le Mans. The town is home to Cristal Roc, which set up their production site here, where Cristaline water is bottled.

The effervescence

Posters appeared in bars and hotels as soon as it was announced that the circuit de la Sarthe had been chosen by the ACF for the Grand Prix. The news was greeted with great enthusiasm. On 18 January 1906, Georges Durand stated that no resident of any village, hamlet, or town, however small, that was on the circuit could possibly not know that the ACF Grand Prix would be held on the circuit de la Sarthe. And everyone was delighted. There was said to be a

unanimous, expressive joy "a rare thing in Le Mans, whose inhabitants have a reputation for level-headedness".

Poems and songs were written about the event and published in the media. An extract of a text by Hugues Delorme in *L'Auto* on 20 January 1906: "After a spot of milder parlance Than quite a few parliaments You're coming to Le Mans ... To you we take off our hats! May you have no breakages or flats,

Come on gentlemen, only 12 laps!
"Après maints débats plus cléments
Que ceux de bien des parlements,
Vous devrez passer par le Mans...
...
La Gloire en ces lieux vous appelle !...
Sans craindre la panne ou la pelle,
Allez Messieurs : la route est belle !..."
A play entitled "Héla !! v'la l'Circuit !..." was written in March 1906 by l'Alcazar du Mans and Roger Darriet.



Jubilations on place de la République in Le Mans.
Coll. Arch. dép. Sarthe, 2FI02638



The Automobile Club de la Sarthe promotes the Grand Prix in the villages along the circuit. Collection A.C.O.



Gas balloon contests in Le Mans.
Coll. Arch. dép. Sarthe, 2FI04898



Georges Durand tells the inhabitants of Montmirail about the Grand Prix. Collection A.C.O.

At Georges Durand's instigation, the Automobile Club de la Sarthe organised conferences in all the towns and villages along the circuit, to stress "the importance of the race for local residents and the immediate benefits for trade in the area." The role played by the Grand Prix in terms of industrial progress was also mentioned. The conferences were announced via a poster campaign. Local committees were set up. They were made responsible for collecting as

much sponsorship as possible, to attain the 100,000 francs promised to the Automobile Club de France. The committees were also responsible for the entertainment during the race. Even towns from outside Sarthe took an interest in the race. Nogent-le-Rotrou, in neighbouring Eure-et-Loir, pledged 100 francs towards the appeal.

From mid February onwards, publishers in Le Mans started selling maps of the circuit and post-cards of the main landmarks. A map of the circuit

with 2 postcards would have cost you 2.20 francs. On 22 February, *L'Auto* reported that many of the region's hotels were getting booked up with tourists. On 18 March, during a reconnaissance by the ACF sporting committee, no less than 10,000 people lined the circuit to watch the drivers practice.

The automobile clubs in other regions announced that they would be at the race in June. The tourist information offices

in the neighbouring towns organised special trains so that spectators could get to the Le Mans area.

In early May 1906, *L'Auto* reported that between rain showers, owners of houses along the route were urging their builders, carpenters and locksmiths to get to work. Everywhere, in cafes and in restaurants people were getting ready for the race. Walls, fences and windows were painted, linen aired...when the weather permitted. The bare roadsides became bedecked with all kinds of signposts. Farmyards were turned into garages.



Poster campaign on the circuit.
Coll. Arch. dép. Sarthe, 2FI05977

De la Touloubre in his Bayard-Clément in Bouloire.
Coll. Arch. dép. Sarthe, 2FI07520

The flower festival in Le Mans.
Coll. Arch. dép. Sarthe, 2FI09228

Coming through Sceaux-sur-Huisne.
Coll. Arch. dép. Sarthe, FRAD072_2Fi11084_00

Parties were organised all over the place. There was a cycling race in Le Mans on 10 June, a horse race on 17 and 18 June, a concert on the place de la République on Thursday 21 June, an archaeological tour of Le Mans on Saturday 23 June, a flower festival with fireworks on Sunday 24 June, a balloon release and another bicycle race on 25 June. A grand tombola was organised by the festival committee in Le Mans on 27 June. The first prize was a

Darracq Phaéton 4 seater car worth 5,000 francs. La Ferté-Bernard also organised an automobile festival with a torchlight parade on 25 June, a concert, fireworks and a dance on Tuesday 26 June.

M. Landrodie, the Prefect of Sarthe, granted schools a holiday on 26 and 27 June. Danton, a well-known confectioner in Le Mans made sweets called “bonbon-circuit”. The Automobile Club de France hosted a ball at the Bourse du Commerce on Saturday 23 June. Dignitaries from all over the region were invited.

On 24 June, Le Mans was described as being “submerged by a flood that swells by the hour”. Cafes overflowed, advertisements were stuck all over the place. It was noisy and crowded. For two days and two nights there were cars all over the town. Le Mans did not sleep. There were many foreign visitors. Along the circuit, “what was a desert two months ago is now unrecognisable”.

★ *On the circuit: leave Bouloire via the D357 towards Saint-Calais. In Saint-Calais, at the end of rue Coursimault, turn left towards Blois/Orléans. Follow the D357 and at the end of avenue du Bourgneuf, follow the D1 towards Vibraye. The panel is on your left on the avenue du Moulin Ars, as you leave Saint-Calais.*

Bouloire

Bouloire became known as of the 11th century, when the castle was also an important place. In 1466, following the damage inflicted by the Hundred Years War, the castle was rebuilt. The back has retained its defensive appearance whereas the front that faces towards the town has a stair tower and large mullion windows that give it the look of a mansion house. In 1680, the castle outbuildings were partly destroyed in a fire that devastated the parish church and the village centre. The last remaining fortifications were destroyed when the road was built in the late 18th century. Today, the only remains are a 15th century building acquired by the town in 1854 and restored in the late 1990s. They can be seen near the 17th century church. After a progressive fall in population during the 20th century, Bouloire now has a similar population to that of 1906, with 2032 inhabitants in 2009.

What to see in Bouloire

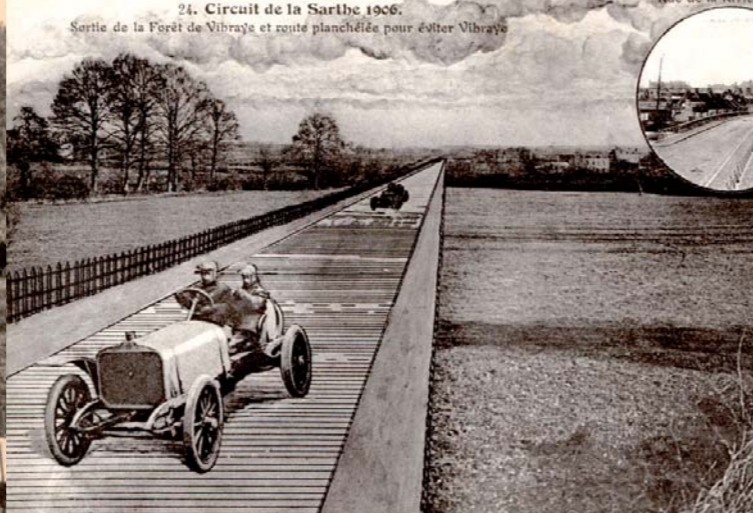
- ▶ Château
- ▶ Saint-Georges church (open to the public)

What to see around Bouloire

- ▶ Les Loges Romanesque church in Coudrecieux
- ▶ Manoir de la Cour in Coudrecieux (private property)



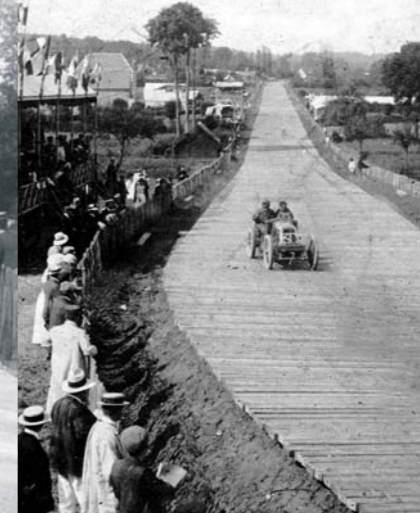
The plank road around Saint-Calais.
Coll. Arch. dép. Sarthe, 2FI08990



The plank road around Vibraye.
Coll. Arch. dép. Sarthe, 2FI05569



Setting up the bends.
Coll. Arch. dép. Sarthe, FRAD072_23FI1107



Richez' Renault 3C on one of the plank roads. Collection A.C.O.



Widening the road between Berfay and Vibraye. Coll. Arch. dép. Sarthe, FRAD072_2FI11082_00

43,5

KILOMETRE

Saint-Calais

Commemorative panel "The plank road around Saint-Calais", avenue du Moulin Ars

Setting up the circuit

Having chosen a circuit with roads in good condition, the ACF sporting committee hoped that the work necessary to set up the circuit would be easier than for previous races. Indeed, there was not much work necessary. Most of it involved building temporary wooden roads to bypass Saint-Calais and Vibraye.

On 27 January 1906, the Automobile Club de Sarthe and the Automobile Club de France

had a meeting at the circuit to discuss the work that needed to be done before the race could be held. It turned out there was more work to do than they had anticipated and work had to start in April.

At the end of March, the local authority roadworkers widened the road to 6 metres. On 15 April 1906, *L'Auto* announced that the Société Générale de Goudronnage des Routes would be responsible for tarring the road. Two teams of 8 horses, 6

drivers and 8 workers set out to do the surfacing. The coaltar was applied hot. The workers covered 25,000 to 30,000 square meters per day. The main aim was to keep dust to a minimum as in previous races dust had caused several accidents. It took more than 10 days to surface 500,000 square meters of road.

Meanwhile, the work on the plank roads around Saint-Calais and Vibraye was going well. The bends were banked up, 7,000 metres of solid fencing and 31,000 metres of wire fencing were installed all

around the circuit to ensure the safety of spectators. Footbridges were set up in Saint-Mars-la-Brière, Champagné, Bouloire, Saint-Calais, Berfay, Vibraye, Lamnay, Cherré, Sceaux-sur-Huisne and Connerré to enable spectators to cross the circuit.

★ *On the circuit: leave Saint-Calais on the D1 towards Vibraye and Berfay.*

What to see in Saint-Calais

- ▶ Notre-Dame church (open to the public)
- ▶ Documentation centre (museum, old collections, architecture and interpretation centre for the Pays du Perche Sarthois, cinema, multimedia library)
- ▶ Banks of the river Anille
- ▶ Covered market
- ▶ Short hiking trail: "Saint-Calais au fil de l'eau"
- ▶ Allée du Grand Prix A.C.F. 1906

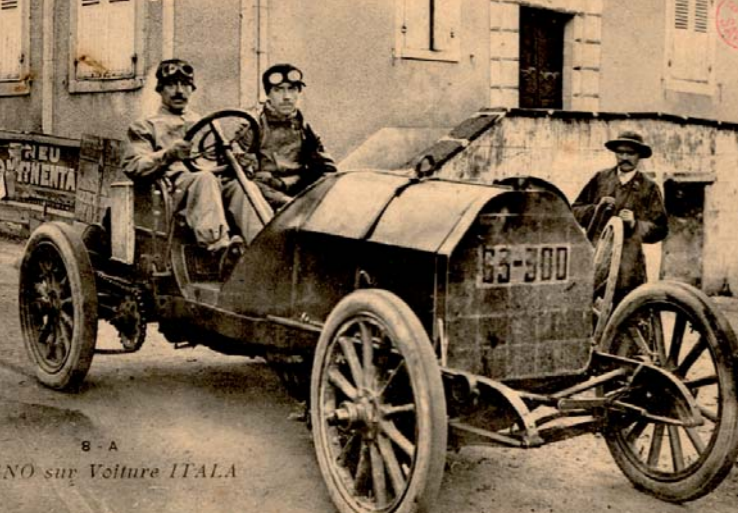
What to see around Saint-Calais

- ▶ Château de Courtanvaux in Bessé-sur-Braye
- ▶ Château de la Barre in Conflans-sur-Anille (private property)
- ▶ Château de Cogners (private property)
- ▶ Espace Hotchkiss in Ecorpain
- ▶ Place Clément-Bayard in Montaillé

Saint-Calais

Saint-Calais currently has 3482 inhabitants, 194 more than in 1906. The name of the town comes from the monk Karileph who founded a hermitage on the river bank in the 6th century. In the high middle ages, the hermitage became one of the most powerful Benedictine abbeys thanks to the protection and generosity of Merovingian kings. In town, the buildings and outbuildings took up much of the right bank of the river Anille. During the Revolution, the town became an administrative centre with large buildings and wide streets, typical of the 19th century.

On the left bank of the Anille, on the hill, between the river and the 11th century feudal fort built to counter the powerful abbey, you can see the medieval quarter that spreads from Grande-Rue towards more irregular, dense street layouts. The banks of the Anille offer a splendid view of the back of the medieval houses and castle ruins.



Itala car. Coll. Arch. dép. Sarthe, 2F102371



Fiat car. Collection A.C.O.



Gobron-Brillié car. Collection A.C.O.



Renault car. Collection A.C.O.

The cars

The Automobile Club de France decided to charge 5,000 francs per car to enter the 1906 race. The closing date for registration was 30 April and then prolonged to 15 May 1906. The registration fee doubled between the two dates. The rules stated that manufacturers could enter a maximum of 3 cars. The weight limit was 1,000kg.

By the evening of 30 April, 34 cars, representing 13 automobile marques (10

French, 1 German, 2 Italian) had registered to take part in the race. There were no British cars, although at the outset they had professed the desire to enter marques such as Napier and Wolseley. For Grégoire and Vulpès it would be the first motor race.

Right from the start, in 1906, there was already a typical motor racing style. A racing car breed had been developed in just four years. The cars were of a similar shape. Under the bonnet, the resemblance was even more striking. The cars had similar top speeds of

between 150 and 170 kmh. Of the 34 cars in the race, 14 used chain drive and the others used universal joints. The Brasier, Renault and Grégoire cars were the least powerful (from 70CC for the Grégoire to 105CC for the others). The Lorraine-Dietrich, Panhard-Levassor and Fiats were at the top end, with 130CC and even 135CC for Fiat.

General presentation of the cars:

Lorraine-Dietrich, 3 cars entered, 4 cylinder engine, 130CC, chain transmission, no

detachable wheel rims. Team HQ: château de Perquoi in Changé.

Fiat, 3 cars entered, 4 cylinder engine, 135CC, chain transmission, detachable wheel rims. Team HQ: avenue de Pontlieue, Le Mans.

Renault, 3 cars entered, 4 cylinder engine, 105CC, universal joint transmission, detachable wheel rims. Team HQ: château de Chef-raison in Changé.

Darracq, 3 cars entered, 4 cylinder engine, 125CC, universal joint transmission, no detachable wheel rims. Team HQ: hôtel de France in Montfort.

Brasier, 3 cars entered, 4 cylinder engine, 105CC, chain transmission, no detachable wheel rims. Team HQ: rue Jean Nicot in Le Mans.

Mercedes, 3 cars entered, 4 cylinder engine, 125CC, chain transmission, no detachable wheel rims. Team HQ: rue de la Mariette in Le Mans.

Gobron-Brillié, 1 car entered, 4 cylinder engine, 110CC, chain transmission, no detachable wheel rims.

Itala, 3 cars entered, 4 cylinder engine, 110CC, universal joint transmission, detachable wheel rims. Team HQ: hôtel de la Gare in Montfort.

Grégoire, 2 cars entered, 4 cylinder engine, 70CC, universal joint transmission, no detachable wheel rims.

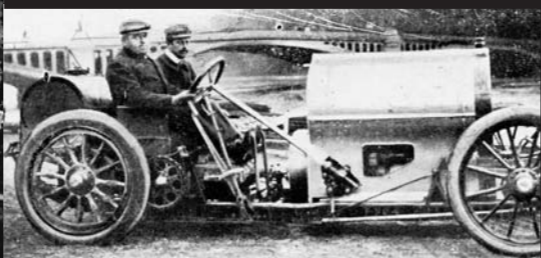
Panhard-Levassor, 3 cars entered, 4 cylinder engine, 130CC, universal joint transmission, no detachable wheel rims. Team HQ: château de la Ragotterie in Yvré-l'évêque.

Vulpes, 1 car entered, 4 cylinder engine, 120CC, chain transmission, no detachable wheel rims.

Hotchkiss, 3 cars entered, 4 cylinder engine, 125CC, universal joint transmission, no detachable wheel rims. Team HQ: château de Boisrier in Sillé-le-Philippe.



Hotchkiss car.
Collection A.C.O.



Brasier car (top). Collection A.C.O.
Vulpes car (bottom). Collection A.C.O.



Salleron (Hotchkiss).
Collection A.C.O.



Le Blon (Hotchkiss).
Collection A.C.O.



A. Clément (Bayard-Clément).
Collection A.C.O.



Szisz (Renault).
Collection A.C.O.

Bayard-Clément, 3 cars entered, 4 cylinder engine, 125CC, universal joint transmission, two with detachable wheel rims one without (Albert Clément's car). Team HQ: ferme de la Fromentinière in Champagné.

★ *On the circuit: leave Berfay on the D1 towards Vibraye. On arrival in Vibraye, at the first roundabout, take the D1 towards La Ferté-Bernard. At the junction, turn left onto the D302 towards Lavaré and Dollon. Next, take the first on*

the right, called "Rue du Grand Prix". The panel in Vibraye is near the locomotive by the tourist office.

What to see in Berfay

- ▶ Saint-Pierre church
- ▶ A wash house with a fountain
- ▶ Espace Grégoire

What to see around Berfay

- ▶ Semur-en-Vallon tourist train
- ▶ Museum of Peace in Semur-en-Vallon
- ▶ Château in Semur-en-Vallon (private property)
- ▶ Cougady water mill in Valennes (private property)

Berfay

Nestling at the bottom of the Boutry valley, Berfay has the natural resources that attract human settlers.

A stream, the neighbouring forest of Vibraye, which gradually gave way to farmland and an iron-rich soil lured the gallo-romans to the area. For many years, aside from farming, the village activity was mainly influenced by forestry. Towards the end of the 18th century, the village found itself on the route between Rouen and Tours. This was a considerable boost to local business until the beginning of the 20th century, 1906 to be exact, when the village boasted a population of 572. Today, there are 369 inhabitants in Berfay.

KILOMETRE 60

Vibraye

Commemorative panel "The forest of Vibraye", near the locomotive (between the D1 and rue de la Petite Vitessé), by the tourist office.

The drivers

When registration for the Grand Prix closed, on the evening of 30th April 1906, the Automobile Club de France realised it had succeeded. 34 cars representing 3 nations (10 French marques, 2 Italian and 1 German) had entered the competition. Of the 34 drivers, 24 were French, 4 Italian, 2 Belgian, 2 American, 1 Hungarian and 1 German. Most were professional drivers but there were also engineers, mechanics and industrials. Pioneers in motor racing

competitions, they were motivated by technical performance and progress. Some were involved in developing other means of locomotion such as aviation (Hanriot, de Caters, Wagner, Rougier...).

List of drivers in the competition with their numbers:

Lorraine-Dietrich

- 1A. Fernand Gabriel (France)
- 1B. Henri Rougier (France)
- 1C. Arthur Duray (France)

Fiat

- 2A. Vincenzo Lancia (Italy)
- 2B. Felice Nazzaro (Italy)
- 2C. Aldo Weillschott (Germany)

Renault

- 3A. Ferenc Szisz (Hungary)
- 3B. J. Edmond (France)
- 3C. Claude Richez (France)

Darracq

- 4A. Victor Hémerly (France)
- 4B. Louis Wagner (France)
- 4C. René Hanriot (France)

Brasier

- 5A. Paul Baras (France)
- 5B. Jules Barillier (France)
- 5C. "Pierry" (France)

Mercedes

- 6A. Camille Jenatzy (Belgium), and Alexander Burton (Great Britain)
- 6B. Mariaux (France)
- 6C. Vincenzo Florio (Italy)

Gobron-Brillié

- 7A. Louis Rigolly (France)



LEBRU!

Lebrun known as "Pierry" (Brasier). Collection A.C.O.



reproduction interdite

Florio (Mercedes). Collection A.C.O.



Barillier (Brasier). Collection A.C.O.



ger. Reproduction interdite

Weillschott (Fiat). Collection A.C.O.



Ferenc Szisz in his Renault 3A on the departure line. Collection A.C.O.



CIRCUIT DE LA SARTHE, JUIN 1906
M. le Préfet de la Sarthe et M. de Knif

The Prefect of Sarthe and Mr de Knif. Coll. Arch. dép. Sarthe, 2F104366

Itala

- 8A. Alessandro Cagno (Italy)
- 8B. Maurice Fabry (France)
- 8C. Pierre de Caters (Belgium)

Grégoire

- 9A. Philippe Tavenaux (France)
- 9B. Xavier Civelli de Bosch (France)

Panhard-Levassor

- 10A. Georges Teste (France)
- 10B. George Heath (USA)
- 10C. Henri Tart (France)

Vulpès

- 11A. Marius Barriaux (France)

Hotchkiss

- 12A. Hubert Le Blon (France)
- 12B. Jacques Salleron (France)
- 12C. Elliot Shepard (USA)

Bayard-Clément

- 13A. Albert Clément (France)
- 13B. A.Villemain (France)
- 13C. De la Touloubre (France)

★ *On the circuit: leave the tourist office car park, turn left onto the roundabout and go straight over, onto avenue de la Grande Vitesse. At the end of the street, turn left onto the road to La Ferté-Bernard. At the roundabout, take the D1 towards Lamnay and La Ferté-Bernard.*

What to see in Vibraye

- ▶ Saint-Jean-Baptiste church (open to the public)
- ▶ Forest of Vibraye (hiking trails)
- ▶ Rue du Grand Prix 1906

What to see around Vibraye

- ▶ Museum of mechanical music in Dollon
- ▶ Wash house in Saint-Maixent
- ▶ Cormorin forges in Champrond

Vibraye

A county-town with 2919 inhabitants in 1906, Vibraye was a vibrant town whose economic activity was based on exploiting the forest alongside which the town had grown up since the middle ages. Vibraye's buildings are almost exclusively 19th century due to a fire that destroyed the town centre in 1814. The population was 2629 in 2009. Close to this commemorative panel, you can see the old railway station, which dates back to the 19th century. Located on the Thorigné-sur-Duée to Courtalain line, the railway transported passengers and goods to Orléans and Le Mans. The growth of road transport in the mid-20th century provided stiff competition for the railways. The line was closed to passengers in 1965 and the freight service shut down in 1977. Today, the railway station houses the tourist office and the hall has been turned into a theatre.

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KILOMETRE Lamnay

Commemorative panel about Panhard-Levassor, rue Principale, near the church

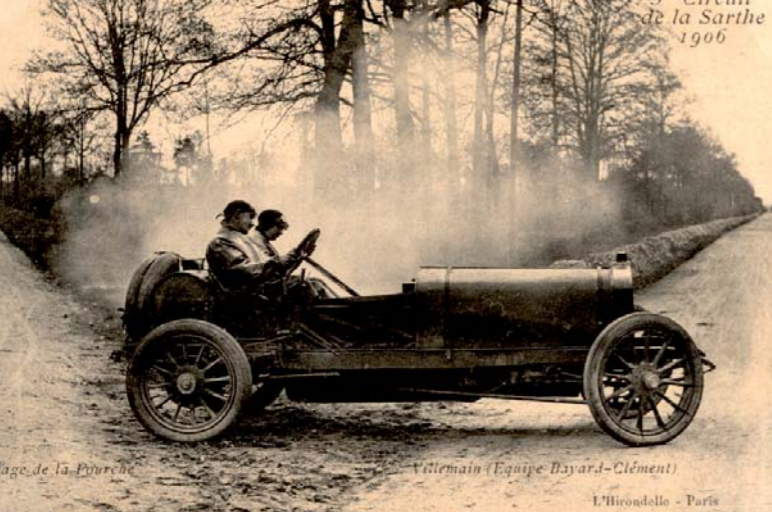
The race

When the circuit was chosen on 16 January 1906, the ACF sporting committee also announced that it was in favour of a two day race that would be "hard on motors and cars". M.Darracq, the famous automobile manufacturer in Suresnes was pleased to see technical and human difficulties give way to real workmanship. Therefore, with 6 anticlockwise laps of the circuit per day, some 1240 km were travelled on 26 and 27 June 1906.

On 29 May, ACF did a draw to decide on the order of departure. Gabriel's Lorraine-Dietrich was to start, followed by Lancia's Fiat. Szisz started in third position. Bayard-Clément was the last to depart. The car was driven by de la Touloubre. Scrutineering took place on 24 and 25 June. The scales revealed the following weights:

Lorraine-Dietrich : 995 kg (1007 with non-slip), 999, 1007 kg
Fiat : 1006, 1006, 1007 kg
Renault : 990, 989, 1001 kg
Darracq : 994, 1004, 1007 kg
Brasier : 1007, 1007, 1007 kg

Mercedes : 1007, 1007, 1004 kg
Gobron : 1003 kg
Itala : 1006, 1007, 1007 kg
Grégoire : 886 kg
Panhard-Levassor : 1004, 1007, 1004 kg
Vulpes : too heavy, the car was not authorised to race.
Hotchkiss : 1007, 1007, 1003 kg
Bayard-Clément : 1004, 1007, 1005 kg



Villemain in his Bayard-Clément at the Fourche d'Auvours.
Coll. Arch. dép. Sarthe, 2F107519



A. Clément in his Bayard-Clément during refuelling. Collection A.C.O.



De la Touloubre in his Bayard-Clément just before Sceaux-sur-Huisne.
Coll. Arch. dép. Sarthe, 2F107529



Victor Hémerly's Darracq approaches the start line. Collection A.C.O.

1st day of the race

Tuesday 26 June: the spectators arrive at the circuit. On foot, on horseback, by car, bicycle or train, motoring fans head for a spot on the “La Fourche, Saint-Calais, La Ferté-Bernard” triangle. They have plenty of victuals with them. The refreshment tents get ready to welcome their customers. Campers set up home under the pine trees and in clearings earlier the same morning, Le Mans railway station was

inundated. The same could be said of Pont-de-Genes. At 5am, the ACF and ACS stands are already packed full.

At 6am, the starting gun is fired, Gabriel shoots off into the distance towards Saint-Mars-la-Brière. The other competitors follow, every 90 seconds, in the order that was determined by the draw. At 6.12am, the Grégoire withdraws due to a mechanical problem. At 6.15am, the Vulpès too steps out (car too heavy). The beginners bow out. De la Touloubre in his Bayard-Clément is last to start.

Lancia's Fiat 1 leaves second and finishes the first lap in first place. At the end of the first day, during which there were a few minor incidents, Szisz in Renault is in the lead, having covered 619km in 5 hours and 45 minutes. A.Clément in the Bayard-Clément is second with 6 hours and 11 minutes and Nazzaro with Fiat in third place with 6 hours and 26 minutes. The fastest lap is recorded by Baras in a Brasier, in 52 minutes averaging 118 kmh.

On Tuesday 26 June, there are 17 finishers out of 34 registered. They represent 3 Brasier, 2 Renault, 2 Panhard-Levassor, 2 Lorraine-Dietrich, 2 Fiat, 2 Mercedes, 1 Bayard-Clément, 1 Hotchkiss and 1 Gobron. Michelin's detachable wheel rims share first place with Szisz. 4 of the first 5 cars are fitted with them.

Withdrawals on the 1st day: Gabriel (Lorraine-Dietrich): broken chaine adjuster. Cagno (Itala): overheated engine.

Edmond (Renault): eye pain due to tarmac projections.
Wagner (Darracq): broken oil hose in Cherré.
Fabry (Itala): car overturned near the old railway bridge in Vibraye.
Civelli de Bosch (Grégoire): leaky radiator.
Tart (Panhard-Levassor): broken chassis.
Salleron (Hotchkiss): broken wheel.
Villemain (Bayard-Clément): flat wheel rim following flat tyre.
Weillschott (Fiat): skid on the plank road in Vibraye.
Hanriot (Darracq): burst cylinder.

De Caters (Itala): burst tyre and flat wheel rim.
De la Touloubre (Bayard-Clément): gear box damage.
Le Blon (Hotchkiss): broken wheel.
Florio (Mercedes): damaged hub following flat tyre.

2nd day of the race

On the morning of day 2, the cars were drawn to the departure point by Percheron horses. It had been very hot the previous day and there seem to be fewer spectators. The race

organisers are honoured by the presence of M.Barthou, the Minister of Public Works. He watches from a box in the ACF stand, accompanied by the Prefect of Sarthe.

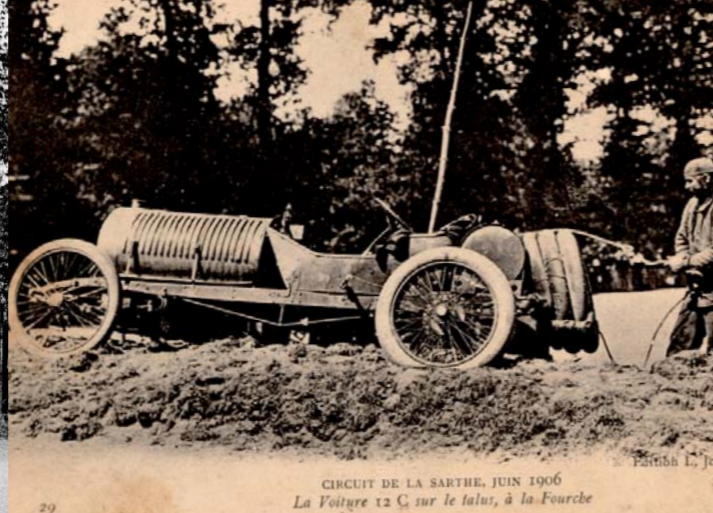
The race recommences at 6am. The drivers leave one after the other, according to their time for the first day. Szisz leaves first. Teste and Richez both have accidents (Test breaks his leg and wrist just after the Fourche d'Auvours). Hémerly, Shepard, Rougier and Rigoly withdraw due to mechanical problems or flat tyres. Finally, after 12 hours and 14 minutes

over two days, Szisz completes his twelfth lap and is declared the winner. Fiat, driven by Nazzaro come second. Clément comes third, at the wheel of his Bayard-Clément.

Renault and Michelin are the real winners of the competition. Szisz averaged 101 kmh over the total 1238 km (107 kmh on day 1 and 95 kmh on day 2). Szisz' Renault was the fastest over the flying kilometre, reaching a speed of 148 kmh.



De la Touloubre's Bayard-Clément going through the forest of Vibraye.
Coll. Arch. dép. Sarthe, 2F107527



Shepard in his Hotchkiss leaves the road.
Collection A.C.O.



Victory for Ferenc Szişz.
Collection A.C.O.



M. Barthou, Minister of Public Works, congratulates the winners. Collection A.C.O.

Brasier was the only manufacturer whose three cars finished the race. The fastest lap was recorded by Baras, with an average of 118 kmh.

Overall ranking order:

1. Ferenc Szişz (Renault)
12h14'07"

2. Felice Nazzaro (Fiat)
12h46'26"

3. Albert Clément (Bayard-Clément), 12h49'46"

4. Jules Barillier (Brasier)
13h53'

5. Vincenzo Lancia (Fiat)
14h22'

6. George Heath (Panhard-Levassor), 14h47'

7. Paul Baras (Brasier)
15h15'

8. Arthur Duray (Lorraine-Dietrich), 15h26'

9. "Pierry" (Brasier)
16h15'

10. Camille Jenatzy, then **Burton** (Mercedes)
16h18'

11. Mariaux (Mercedes)
16h 38'



Szişz' Renault. Illustration by E. Montaut, collection A.C.O.

M. Barthou, Minister of Public Works, congratulated Szişz and the Renault brothers: "As a Frenchman, I am particularly pleased to see our national industry triumph once again; as a sports fan, it makes me happy to see Renault's efforts justly rewarded. This morning I watched the start of the race having already seen the circuit. I watched the competitors take

off with great interest and I awaited the results of the race in all confidence. This race is international, and therefore extremely important. The French reap the benefits, which of course is particularly satisfying for me, and that's why, in the name of the government and the Republic, I present you my sincere congratulations on your splendid victory."

★ *On the circuit: leave Lamnay on the D1 towards La Ferté-Bernard. At the first roundabout, take the D1*

towards La Ferté-Bernard and Cherré. At the second roundabout, leave the D1 and follow signs to Cherré on the D274. Enter Cherré by rue Princesse Alice de Monaco.

What to see in Lamnay

- ▶ Saint-Martin church
- ▶ Espace Panhard-Levassor

What to see around Lamnay

- ▶ Montmirail: Petite Cité de Caractère (heritage village)
- ▶ Château de Montmirail (private property)
- ▶ Espace Georges Durand in Montmirail
- ▶ Neolithic museum in Gréez-sur-Roc

Lamnay

Lamnay was a settlement even in prehistoric times, as the discovery of carved flint and other archaeological finds prove. However, permanent settlements came somewhat later. Neighbouring villages were evangelised by the monks who travelled along the river. In the past, other than traditional craft work such as weaving, Lamnay subsisted on farming, which was the village's main activity up until the 20th century. After over a century of demographic decline due to people deserting the countryside in the second half of the 19th century, Lamnay is now thriving due to transport networks and the employment pool of La Ferté-Bernard. Nonetheless, with 908 inhabitants, the current population remains lower than in 1906, when there were 1039 inhabitants.

Michelin and the detachable wheel rim

Michelin, founded by brothers André and Edouard in 1889 in Clermont-Ferrand made its sporting debut in 1891. The manufacturer fitted the bicycle that won the Paris-Brest-Paris with its newly patented detachable tyres. After cycling, Michelin moved on to motor sports and the 1895 Paris-Bordeaux-Paris featured the first car fitted with pneumatic tyres, "L'Eclair".

For the 1st French Grand Prix in 1906, Michelin designed a detachable wheel rim which enabled the car wheel to be changed without removing the tyre. The Fiats, Italas, both Bayard-Cléments and the Renaults were all fitted with them. Michelin tyres were fitted on both Lorraine-Dietrichs, the Fiats, the Renaults, the Italas, the Panhard-Levassor, the



L'Eclair. Private collection.

Hotchkisses and one of the Bayard-Cléments. Hémerly's Darracq and both Bayard-Cléments were fitted with Dunlops. Rigoly's Gobron-Brillié and Barriaux's Vulpès were fitted with Le Gaulois and Continental kitted out all the other cars (Mercedes, Brasier...). Partly thanks to the Michelin technique, with which a tyre can be changed in a few minutes (less than 4 minutes, the record being 1.5 minutes) instead of around ten minutes for a fixed wheel rim, Sziş won the race by changing tyres every two laps as a precautionary

SUPPRESSION DES PANNES DE PNEUMATIQUES



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CREVÉ ou ÉCLATÉ
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BRÉVETÉES S.G.D.G France et Etranger

Michelin advertisement.
Collection A.C.O.

measure. The ingenious system has evolved over time, but the basic concept is still the same today. Michelin has become a multinational but the headquarters are still in Clermont-Ferrand. In 2012, the manufacturer won the Le Mans 24 hours for the 15th time. Michelin employs over 100,000 people throughout the world.

★ *On the circuit: leave Cherré via rue Triger. At the end of the road, turn left onto the D323 towards Le Mans.*

Cherré

Located on the Gallo-Roman road between Le Mans and Chartres, Cherré has long been a settlement. Covering over 2000 hectares, its territory was initially used as farmland with natural prairies ideal for breeding animals along the valley of the river Huisne.

Many of the town's buildings are old and the church tower is particularly original. The church as we see it today is not quite the same as the one seen by the drivers and spectators during the 1906 Grand Prix, when reconstruction work had only just finished. It was sold as national property during the Revolution, and all but the bell tower had been destroyed. In the late 1820s, the increase in Cherré's population, which reached a peak in 1851 with 1767 inhabitants, led authorities to consider rebuilding the church. Several projects were examined and a new building was erected in 1905-6. The Neo-Romanesque style church includes the tower that had stood lonesome in the middle of the village for over a century.

What to see in Cherré

- ▶ Saint-Pierre and Saint-Paul church
- ▶ Park and château du Haut Buisson
- ▶ Voie Darracq

What to see around Cherré

- ▶ Historical La Ferté-Bernard
- ▶ Notre-Dame-des-Marais church in La Ferté-Bernard (open to the public)
- ▶ Square Grand Prix A.C.F. 1906 in La Ferté-Bernard



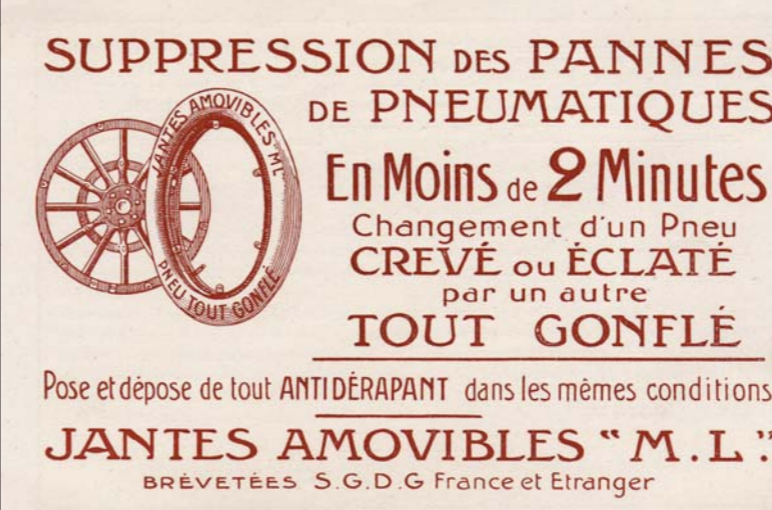
The detachable wheel rim.
Collection A.C.O.



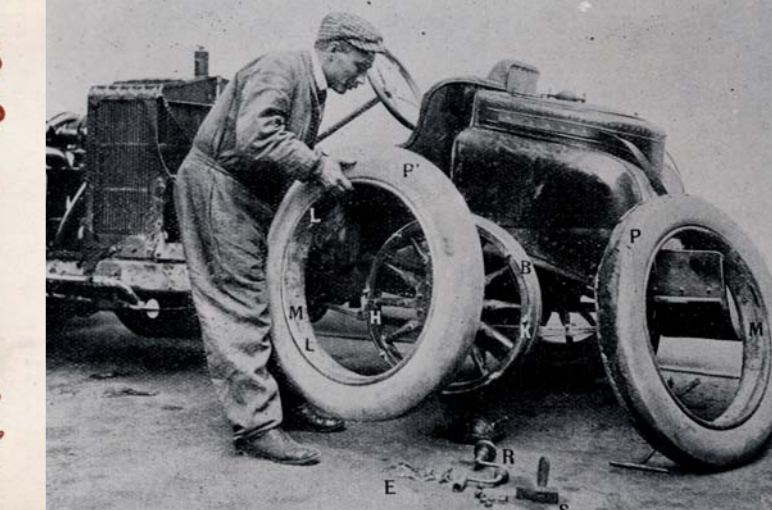
Michelin advertisement.
Collection A.C.O.



Michelin advertisement.
Collection A.C.O.



Michelin advertisement.
Collection A.C.O.



Extract from the Michelin instructions for the detachable wheel rim. Collection A.C.O.

Commemorative panel about Lorraine-Dietrich, in the car park behind the town hall (Mairie).

Georges Durand and the Automobile Club de la Sarthe

Born on 30 April 1864 in Fresnay-sur-Sarthe, Georges Durand was general secretary of the Tramway Company for Mayenne, Eure et Loir, Finistère, Vienne and several other departments. He was also short-hand secretary for the councils of Sarthe and Le Mans. A member of the Touring-Club de France in Le Mans, he was particularly interested in promoting Sarthe



and its tourist attractions. He popularised the Alpes Mancelles and founded a tourist office there. Known as the father of the Circuit de la Sarthe, he prepared the plans, examined the quotes and found the sponsors for the circuit.

Under his instigation, in October 1905, the Circuit de la Sarthe committee was founded by a group of four automobile amateurs, Gustave Singher,

René Pellier, Georges Carel and himself. Together, they presented the Circuit de la Sarthe to the Automobile Club de France in the hope that it would be selected as the venue for the 1906 1st French Grand Prix.

On Wednesday 24 January 1906, following the announcement that the ACF Grand Prix would take place in Sarthe, they decided to found the Automobile Club de la Sarthe. Adolphe Singher was chairman. Georges Durand was general secretary, Georges Carel was vice-president and René Pellier treasurer.



The founding members of the Automobile Club de la Sarthe. From left to right: Georges Durand, René Pellier, Georges Carel and Gustave Singher. Collection A.C.O.



Collection A.C.O.



Georges Durand. Collection A.C.O.



'A presentation of the Automobile Club de la Sarthe'. From left to right: M. Bariller, M. Pellier, M. Carel, M. Verney (at the back), M. Durand, Dr Moreau, M.A. Singher, Queen Bérengère and M. G. Singher. Painting by J.Perrin, collection A.C.O.

The Automobile Club de la Sarthe comprised some one hundred members from its founding meeting and by 4 February 1906, it had 200 members. The headquarters was in Le Mans, at 7 boulevard Levasseur.



The Automobile Club de la Sarthe played a major role in setting up the 1906 race. Among many other actions, it sought financial partners and institutional backing. It also took part in the works on the

circuit and in informing residents. Indeed, in an interview with *Le Petit Phare* in June 1906, M. Durand admitted that “the PR campaign for the Grand Prix has two aims: to convince the local residents that this new type of locomotion is a good thing and also to encourage them to come and watch the race by showing them what advantages it will bring them. The result was beyond all my hopes. The locals came to us in droves... Lately we have had to ban testing racing cars on the circuit so that we can do the work that needs to be done.

The twenty-one mayors of the twenty-one towns concerned all wrote to us to request that the testing recommence”.

Following the success of the 1906 Grand Prix, the ACS continued organising other motor racing events. In 1910, it became the Automobile Club de la Sarthe et de l'Ouest and the chairman was Gustave Singher, the late Adolphe Singher's son. In 1911, the ACSO organised an event that it had already



envisaged in 1905, a Grand Prix de France. The circuit went from Le Mans to Ecommoy, from Ecommoy to Le Grand Lucé and from Le Grand Lucé back to Le Mans. Hémerly won the race in his Fiat, with an average speed of 91 kmh.

In 1913, the ACSO became the Automobile Club de l'Ouest. It had more than 650 members. The ACO carried on organising races against the clock, but also wanted to stage endurance races. The first 24 Hour race in Le Mans took place in 1923. From then on, there was a major race each year in Sarthe,



Refuelling stand at the 1911 Grand Prix.
Collection A.C.O.



Hémery victorious in his Fiat at the
1911 Grand Prix. Collection A.C.O.



Coming into La Ferté-Bernard.
Collection A.C.O.



The railway station in La Ferté-Bernard.
Private collection.

something that Georges Durand had already dreamed of back in 1906. In 1937, Durand retired due to illness. He died in Le Mans in 1941.

★ *On the circuit: leave Sceaux-sur-Huisne on the D323 towards Le Mans. Go through Duneau and after 1 km, leave the D323 and turn left (signpost to Dolmen-Menhir) in Connerré onto rue de Paris.*

What to see in Sceaux-sur-Huisne

- ▶ Saint-Germain church
- ▶ Museum on rillettes Bahier
- ▶ Espace Lorraine-Dietrich

What to see around Sceaux-sur-Huisne

- ▶ Priory church in Tuffé
- ▶ Dolmen in Vouvray-sur-Huisne

Sceaux-sur-Huisne

Like most towns in the valley of the Huisne, Sceaux-sur-Huisne is very old. In the Middle Ages, the village was built on ancient constructions. This explains the presence of Gallo-Roman rubble stone in the church walls. Although the village has a thriving agricultural activity, its location on a major road network greatly helped its development in the 20th century. Today, Sceaux-sur-Huisne is inextricably linked to pork manufacturing as the local family-owned delicatessen business, Bahier, turned to industrial agri-foodstuff in 1966. Over 45 years on, the company is a leading manufacturer of rillettes (potted pork meat).

Getting the motor industry on the rails

In 1906, the automobile was a means of transport for the privileged few. Working class people did not own cars and so, to ensure that the event was well-attended, many extra trains were scheduled. The Automobile Club de France chose Pont-de-Gennes as the starting point for the 1906 Grand Prix because it was close to the Paris-Brest railway line. On a local level, six stations

were located near to the circuit: La Ferté-Bernard, Sceaux-sur-Huisne, Connerré, Pont-de-Gennes, Champagné and Le Mans. This infrastructure played an essential role in ensuring that thousands of visitors could travel from Paris and elsewhere to see the race. Travel arrangements were also made for people coming from further afield in France and

from abroad. The ACF scheduled a luxurious train from Saint-Lazare station in Paris, with a restaurant car and sleeping quarters on board. It cost 92 francs per person to take advantage of the train's services for the two days of the race. Meals were extra. The ACF also scheduled other less luxurious trains. They enabled thousand of people to travel to the circuit

KILOMETRE **92,5**
Connerré
Commemorative panel about Renault, rue de Paris



A Compagnie de l'Ouest locomotive. Private collection.





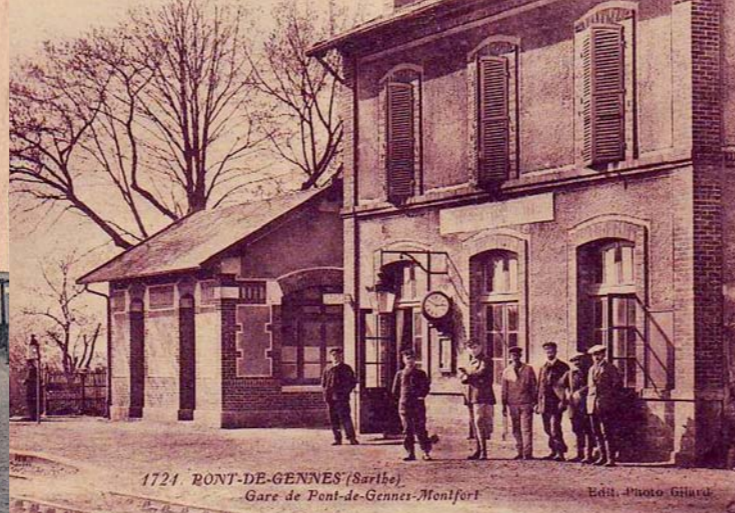
The railway station in Pont-de-Gennes - Montfort. Private collection.

for a fair price. A round trip from Paris cost 12 francs in 2nd class and 9 francs in 3rd class. The Compagnie de l'Ouest also organised trains from Rennes, Caen and Nantes to Pont-de-Gennes on both race days. As Fiat and Itala were participants, the Italian automobile club scheduled a train for Italians who wanted to travel to the Circuit de la Sarthe.

The Compagnie de l'Ouest scheduled trains every ten minutes between 3.38am and

7.28am on 26 and 27 June between Le Mans and Connerré (4 trains out of 5) and Le Mans and La Ferté-Bernard (1 train in 5). For the return journey, there were departures every 8 minutes from 11.16am to 2.15pm then every 20 minutes until 6pm.

On the nights of 25/26 and 26/27 June, the Compagnie de l'Etat scheduled special trains to take spectators from Paris, Orléans, Saumur, Tours and Blois to Le Mans. There was also a special train from Blois to Saint-Calais. Finally, the Compagnie de Chemin de Fer



The railway station in Pont-de-Gennes - Montfort. Private collection.

from Mamers to Saint-Calais also scheduled special passenger trains for 26 and 27 June.

As well as ensuring most of the spectator transport, the railway companies also provided financial backing for the Grand Prix. Each company granted a sum. The Compagnie de l'Ouest contributed 5,000 francs, the Compagnie from Mamers to Saint-Calais 200 francs and the Compagnie des Tramways de la Sarthe, 300 francs.

★ *On the circuit: leave Connerré via rue de Paris and rejoin the D323. Take the D323 towards Le Mans. Return to Parc des Sittelles, Montfort-le-Gesnois / Soultré, kilometre 100.*



Connerré. Coll. Arch. dép. Sarthe, FRAD072_2FI11085_00

What to see in Connerré

- ▶ Saint-Symphorien church
- ▶ Park and manoir de la Jatterie (private property)
- ▶ Panel about the home of rillettes (local speciality made of pork)
- ▶ Resistance members' house in Bois de la Croix (free entry)

What to see around Connerré

- ▶ Sarthe steam train in Beillé, old section from Mamers to Saint-Calais
- ▶ Menhir and dolmen in Duneau



Sarthe steam train in Beillé. Photo J.-P. Berlose.

Connerré

For commercial and industrial expansion, Connerré relied on the royal road that dates back to the 18th century and two railway lines, Paris-Le Mans, which opened in 1854 and the local line between Mamers and Saint-Calais, which opened in 1872. In the late 19th century, the town was home to many tanneries, canvas makers, candle makers and potteries. There were 2373 inhabitants in Connerré in 1891. During the 19th century, this valley became very important for pig farming. Albert and Blanche Lhuissier founded their delicatessen in 1900 and their potted pork meat, rillettes de Connerré, soon became famous. The 1906 Grand Prix provided the ideal opportunity to publicise the local speciality. Today, rillettes remain a local speciality and Prunier, the local delicatessen company, is run by the descendants of Albert Lhuissier.



The railway station in Connerré - Beillé. Private collection.

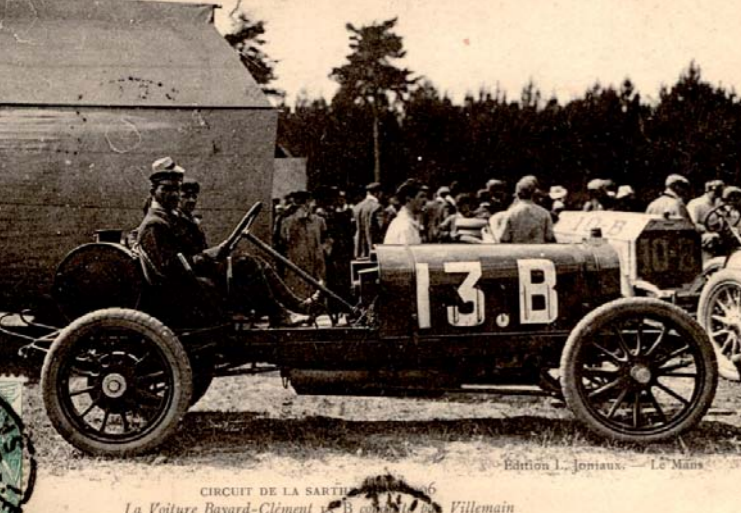
In the wake of the ACF 1906 Grand Prix

The 1st French Grand Prix was a huge success. Many people were involved in the set up and running. Local residents were enthusiastic about the event and there were many spectators. Yet, financially the results were not great. The Automobile Club de la Sarthe collected the 100,000 francs they had promised to the Automobile Club de France but they remained out of pocket on the extra costs as the stands were not full. Spectators preferred to line the route rather than buy expensive tickets to sit in the stands. However, two other ACF Grand Prix took place in

1907 and 1908 in Dieppe before a three years gap when there was a lack of entrants.

During that time the Automobile Club de la Sarthe organised humbler races than the one in 1906. Among them was the 1907 flying kilometre in Sillé-le-Guillaume. In 1910, the ACS became the Automobile Club de la Sarthe et de l'Ouest and in 1911 the new ACSO founded the Grand Prix de France (circuit between Le Mans, Ecommoy and Le Grand Lucé). The ACSO became increasingly enterprising as the years went

by, after three Grand Prix de France it became the Automobile Club de l'Ouest in 1913, and after WW1 began organising international cups that eventually led to the first Le Mans 24 Hours, held on 26 and 27 May 1923. Since then, except in 1936 and between 1939 and 1949 (WW2), the race has taken place every year. The event rewrites history every year on the now world famous Le Mans circuit.



Villemain's Bayard-Clément.
Coll. Arch. dép. Sarthe, 2F104370



The flying kilometre competition.
Collection A.C.O.



Poster of the first Le Mans 24 hours.
Collection A.C.O.



Bugatti numbers 28 and 29 finish the first
Le Mans 24 hours in 1923. Collection A.C.O.

Photograph credits

- Automobile Club de l'Ouest archives.
- Archives départementales de la Sarthe.
- Illustration by François Bruère, ACO collection.

Main references

- Automobile Club de l'Ouest archives.
- Michel Bonté, François Hurel et Jean-Luc Ribémon, *Le Mans, un siècle de passion avec l'Automobile Club de l'Ouest*, Editions Automobile Club de l'Ouest, 2006.

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a listed Pays d'art et d'histoire (area of artistic and historical interest)

The Pays d'art et d'histoire tourist guides and tourist offices
would be happy to give you advice and information.

Throughout the year, we organise events for individuals,
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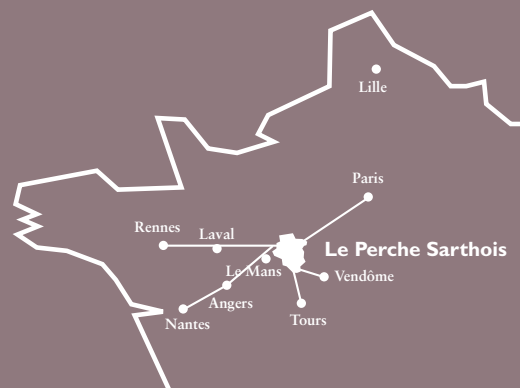
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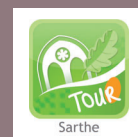
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*Sarthe
tourist
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*Video of
the ACF French
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