

# 1904 Vanderbilt Cup: DARK HORSE

## What Hope for the Pope-Toledo Against the European Giants?



SPECTATORS CROWDED the course as the hastily converted passenger Pope-Toledo, with its tiny 24-bhp engine, chased the 90-bhp Panhard and the 80-bhp Clement-Bayard.



THE DUEL between George Heath in the Panhard (above) and Albert Clement in the Clement-Bayard was settled only on the 10th and final lap of the 1904 road race.

BY CLEVELAND POOLE

IT'S THE LONG shot, the impossible, that makes a sporting event really come alive, the horse that comes from way back to win, the low bhp car that trims the monster. One of these unusual finishes occurred in the 1904 Vanderbilt Cup Race. Full revelation of its miraculous nature, however, was made years later.

This race was the first major automobile race in America. It drew an entry of 18 cars from the U.S. and Europe. The date was set—Oct. 8. The 284-mile race was laid out on a 30-mile triangular course on Long Island. New York City was only 14 miles away. The race was run over the ordinary gravel roads of that period, lightly oiled to hold down the dust; no other preparations were made.

Racing drivers and their cars arrived some days before the race to prepare their car and to practice on the course.

Thirteen of the cars were European, five were American. They were, in the main, 4-cyl. machines, heavy and fast, capable of speeds well in excess of 70 mph. The foreign cars included famous names such as Fiat, Mercedes, Panhard and Renault. The American cars were Packard, Pope-Toledo, Royal Tourist and Simplex, great names in their day, now departed. Two of the five American cars were Pope-Toledos, one an oversized special model, the other a regular passenger car. Pope-Toledo was the Cadillac of the Pope group of automobiles. It was this regular model that made history for itself and its driver on the day of the race.

Because the race was to start at 6 A.M., the spectators started to arrive late on Oct. 7, some of them spending most of the night along the course. People who owned automobiles drove

out from New York. The majority of the 200,000 spectators arrived by train.

Early in the evening Albert Pope, an executive of Pope-Toledo, arrived at the hotel located on the course. As he drove into the hotel courtyard with his party, ready for a big dinner and a night's lodging, Herbert Lytle, gentleman driver of the smaller passenger Pope-Toledo, rushed up to Pope.

ALBERT POPE was driving a new, fresh-from-the-factory Pope-Toledo touring car, just delivered to him. It was painted a gleaming white with a gold stripe; red leather upholstery and brass gleamed in the lamp light of the hotel yard. It was a beautiful machine. It could show the world how exquisitely built a motor car could be. It was a toy for the wealthy. The car cost \$3500 in 1904, equal to the Rolls-Royce of today. Every Pope-Toledo



VANDERBILT Cup race watchers lounged beside a 1904 Packard.

was guaranteed to do a "mile a minute." In those days, 60 mph was the prevailing idea of the ultimate in speed for a pleasure car. This was exceptionally fast for even the best roads of that era.

Lytle's story was this: His Pope-Toledo, No. 6, had broken down that day in practice. There was no time to re-

pair it before the race. He asked if he could use Albert Pope's car. The answer came fast, "Yes." The result was dramatic, perhaps unexpected.

Al Pope recalled years later, "It was a terrible sight. Out back of the hotel, in lamp light, they stripped the car of its lamps, top, fenders, running boards. Drained it of oil, gasoline, and water. Then tipped it over on its side and, with cold chisels, cut off the body bolts, holding the body to the frame. They just left that body lying there like a hunk of junk."

Mechanics quickly fitted the racing body and special tanks to the chassis, connected everything and readied the car for the race. It was an all-night job at a man-killing pace.

At 4:30 A.M., Lytle's No. 6 was ready. Time remained for a short trial run down the road.

The race started promptly at 6 A.M.

Lytle was running 10th at the end of the first lap. The rest is history, a tally of how many of the huge foreign racers that passed him on the first lap at over 70 mph, one by one came to grief, how lap by lap the 24-bhp Pope-Toledo moved up in position.

Lytle, driving a steady race, extracted everything his car was able to give. Tire trouble set him back on one lap. Two of the largest cars, the 90-bhp Panhard, driven by George Heath, and the 80-bhp Clement-Bayard, driven by Albert Clement, were fighting it out to win, a duel that was settled only on the 10th and final lap, with Heath winning. Herbert Lytle brought the little Pope-Toledo pleasure car/racer in for third place. He left 15 cars behind.

The press praised Lytle, but did not know he had driven an untried stock pleasure car to high success against special racing machines. ■