

General view of the first automobile show held in Madison Square Garden, November 5, 1900

25 Years of Automobile Shows

Looking back on America's first motor vehicle exhibit and its influence on the growth of the industry

THE industrial showmen of the late 1890's were quick to appreciate the possibilities of the automobile from an exhibition standpoint. Hardly had the news of the Times-Herald race, 1895, reached the East until there was talk of exhibitions. Madison Square Garden appointed a man to organize a permanent exhibit for automobiles. Some automobiles were put into the various bicycle shows as early as 1897, and the New York cycle show of 1899 was almost the first automobile show. The Chicago Inter-Ocean, recognizing that it had made an error in neglecting the new vehicle when the Times-Herald had staged its race, organized an out-door show in Washington Park in that city. This show was given in 1900.

The automobile publications were printing reports from Europe about amazing automobile shows that were well attended, and in New York and other American cities the proud car owners, stirred by manufacturers,

were giving parades and crowds were turning out to see the novel vehicles and sometimes to jeer at those whose machines would not start after necessary stops and some that just stopped. The stage was set for the automobile show.

In New York cycle shows were being held and it was natural that the automobile idea should be incorporated in these shows, as the bicycle manufacturers were in the main turning out the cars of that day and they had one very decided advantage of understanding publicity better than the men devoted entirely to automobiles. So it came about that a combined show was given at Madison Square Garden beginning January 24, 1900. The American Bicycle Co. took 104 of the 245 spaces. The automobile exhibitors were: Indiana Bicycle Co., Loomis Automobile Co., Foster & Co., Canda Mfg. Co., Riker Electric Vehicle Co., Duryea Motor Co. and International Automobile & Vehicle Co., and representing the accessory group were Dia-



Tri-cycles were popular in those days and many demonstrations were carried out on track of Madison Square Garden Show

mond Rubber Co., Dixon Crucible Co., American Roller Bearing Co. and Gleason-Peters Air Pump Co.

Perhaps the chief result of the New York show was to call forth editorials in the trade press that the time had come for an exclusive automobile show that would properly represent the industry. It had been said that previous to that time there was no organization in the industry suitable to handle a show. Then this paragraph:

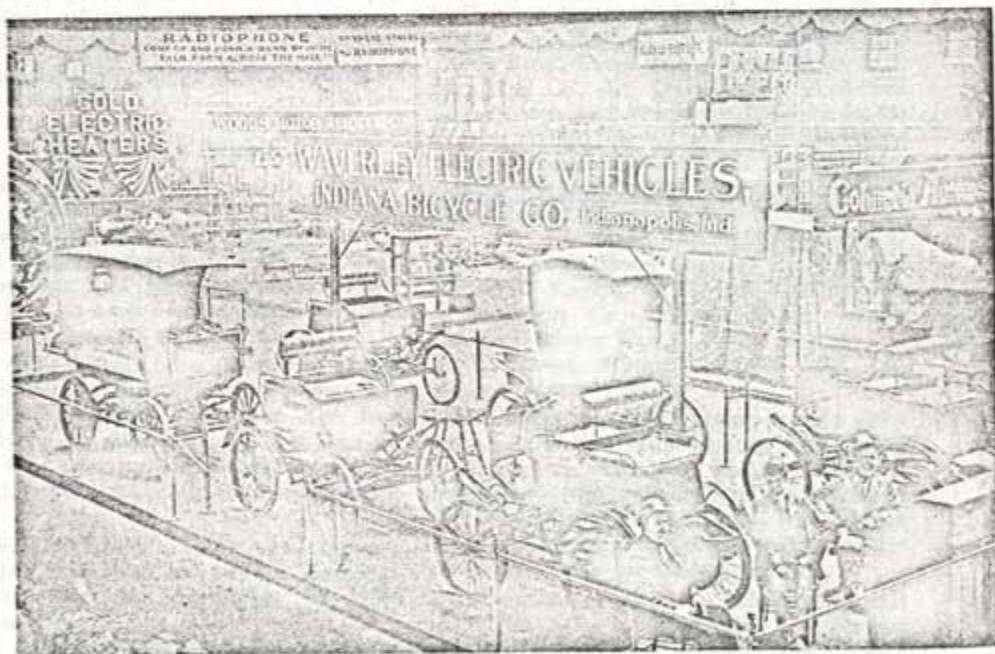
"The situation has changed, however. We have in the Automobile Club of America an organization well fitted to undertake the work of an exhibition. As a neutral body, aloof from the commercial entanglements

and animated by a worthy ambition to further the interests of the new industry as a whole, its position is one of impartial dignity."

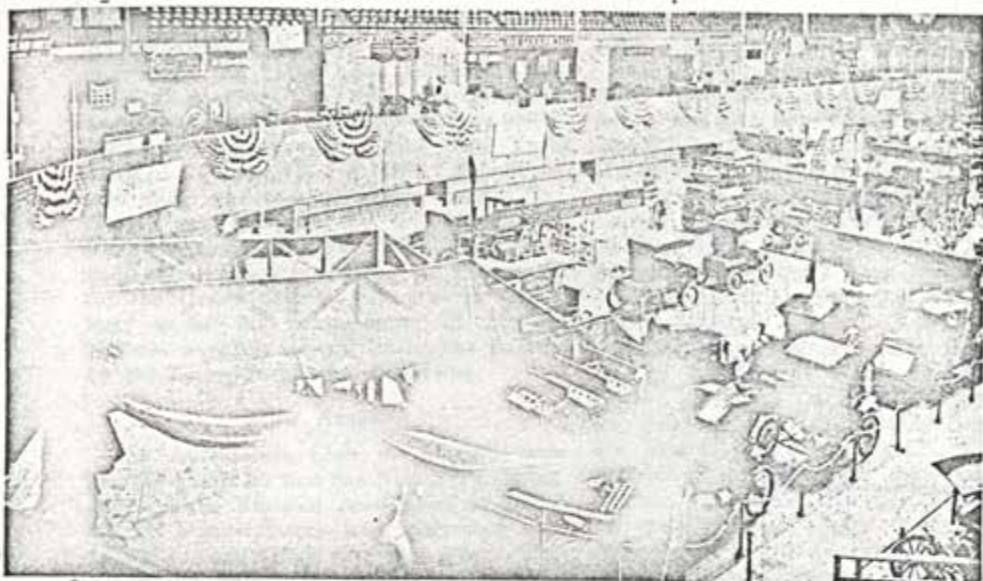
The idea planted in this paragraph ruled for a long time in many sections of the country. It became a part of the ambition of the motor clubs in various sections of the country to hold worth-while shows, and it was a very long time before the dealers in many of the cities took over the exhibitions.

There was one point of exception at this time, however. Samuel A. Miles, owner of Motor Age, in Chicago, was a showman from years back. In England, his native country, he had experience in sporting club work, and since his arrival in this country in 1880, he had been in newspaper, publicity and promotion work, and he had recently changed the name of his Chicago publication from Cycle Age to Motor Age in 1899, in keeping with the change of transportation vision. He saw in the automobile something for the showman. Mr. Miles was watching the show efforts in the East as well as in his section of the country and a special representative of his publication attended the combined cycle and automobile show in New York.

In the East, this show attracted little attention even from the business papers, but in Chicago Mr. Miles, with his own enterprises in mind, gave considerable publicity to the show and among the comments appearing there we find these:



Waverly Exhibit, New York Electric Show, May, 1899



A view of the first automobile show, showing the runway track used for testing vehicles

"J. Overton Payne, the multi-millionaire, purchased a Waverly automobile from Billy Young for \$1,500 cash. This is the third sale for the old time bicycle rider for the week.

And this item:

"Exhibitors at the show were driven to death with applications for agencies. No maker could be found who was in position to fill any number of orders. The chief anxiety is seemingly to catch up with the orders of the present, and a number of clever advertising schemes presented to makers received scant attention."

Old timers at the shows will be interested in this comment:

The Caterers' Words

"Harry Stevens, the Madison Square Garden caterer, could not withstand the pressure of the show of automobiles. Mr. Stevens finally came forth from his hash producing den and purchased what he describes as a 'b-e-a-u-t-i-f-u-l machine.' 'No more horses for me,' said Mr. Stevens."

It is quite evident from the nature of the comment on this first New York show, that Mr. Miles, the owner of Motor Age, had definitely in his mind the plan that later he was to take over the automobile show idea. He was already planning his first Chicago show.

However, before Mr. Miles' show opened, the Inter-Ocean show was held in Washington Park, that city, September 18, 1900. This was a tournament, with races and fancy driving exhibitions. The management ap-

pears to have been criticised because the exhibits were not ready and because it rained, but there was a considerable gathering of notables of the day. Alexander Winton was present in hope of meeting Albert Bostwick and W. K. Vanderbilt, Jr., famous drivers of the east, but they had engagements elsewhere. However, Albert Champion and Kenneth A. Skinner were present to race their motorcycles.

The exhibitors were Wood Motor Vehicle Co., American Bicycle Co., Baldwin Chain Co., Buffalo Gasoline Motor Co., Canda Bros., Carse Bros., Consolidated Rubber Tire Co., De Dion-Bouton Motorette Co., Eastern Automobile Co., Empire Motor Works, Helios-Upton Co., Hewitt-Lindstrom Motor Co., Locomobile Co. of America, Milwaukee Automobile Co., William P. Miller's Sons, Mobile Co. of America, Motsinger Device Mfg. Co., Ohio Automobile Co. (Packard), St. Louis Motor Carriage Co. (Dorris), Strong & Rogers, U. S. Ball Bearing Co., J. O. Wells Co., Chicago Motor Vehicle Co., Olds Motor Works, Porter Battery Co., B. F. Sweet, Wagner Electric Mfg. Co., Winton Motor Carriage Co.

Mr. Miles was very active at this show and lent of his handicapping and racing experience to make this out-door affair as successful as possible for the public and at the same time point out to the trade that a mixed industrial and sporting event was not the proper thing for trade promotion.

In connection with the publicity for this show, Mr. Miles announced that an industrial exhibit was planned for the next March

(1901) in the Coliseum in Chicago under the management of Motor Age.

Between the Inter-Ocean exhibition and the Chicago show, came what was really the first of the exclusive automobile shows under automobile management in the New York show of November 3 to 10, 1900. This show was under the management of Frank W. Sanger and sponsored by the Automobile Club of America, the New York owners' organization. Another show was announced for the Grand Central Palace three weeks later under the management of Marcus Nathan, a purely private enterprise backed by the management of the building.

Show Auspices

The Automobile Club of America was identified with the first five New York shows, although the National Association of Automobile Manufacturers was interested and taking a more active part each year. The Association took over the shows in 1906. Mr. Sanger, who had charge of these early shows, died in April, 1904.

At this time the trade press was warning against the activities of irresponsible promoters who had seized upon the automobile as a means of organizing hippodrome exhibitions of which the Inter-Ocean show in Chicago was a type. The burden of these warnings was that the automobile manufacturers and dealers and the automobile clubs should be certain as to the responsibility of the managers of these shows.

The New York show, November 3, 1900, at Madison Square Garden, proved to be the actual foundation of the show business, for during this show, the National Association of Automobile Manufacturers, N. A. A. M., was organized. The first meeting was held in the Press Room of the Garden and the second meeting at the Hoffman House. S. T. Davis, Jr., was selected as president. The members did not find out at this time exactly what they were organizing for, but they knew there was need for an organization. An effort was made to pass a resolution defining shows, but the members declined to commit themselves at this time.

This show was quite an event. There were demonstration tracks, driving exhibitions and some ancient steam vehicles on exhibition. All of the prominent racing men were present and the Automobile Co. of America had an inclined track 200 feet long on the roof of the Garden Building, on which the climbing and braking powers of their cars were demonstrated.

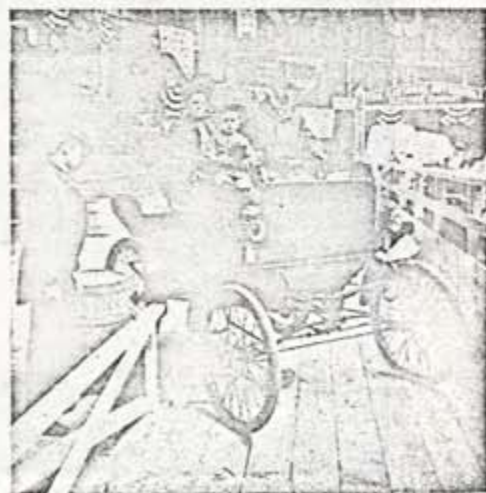
The Palace show was held and during this the new association made further steps toward organization, but the show itself did not seem to be entirely satisfactory to the

backers. It was a purely financial venture and it helped to clarify the situation.

One of the early questions before the National Association of Automobile Manufacturers was deciding whether or not there should be a Chicago show, as announced by Mr. Miles. A special meeting was held and there was a bunch of telegrams from the Chicago newspapers favoring the show and pledging their support for it. The manufacturers in this way gave moral support. Mr. Miles gave his show and the following were exhibitors:

National Automobile & Electrical Vehicle Co., E. R. Thomas Motor Co., De Dion-Bouton Motorette Co., Mobile Co. of America, Fanning Mfg. Co., Shelby Steel Tube Co., Woods Motor Vehicle Co., Knox Automobile Co., Milwaukee Automobile Co., Electric Vehicle Co., Hewitt-Lindstrom Motor Vehicle Co., Steam Vehicle Co. of America, Twentieth Century Mfg. Co., B. F. Goodrich Co., Goodyear Tire and Rubber Co., Truscott Boat Co., Woods, Waring Co., O. V. Bacheffe, Automobile & Cycle Parts Co., C. H. Larson Cycle Co., Ralph Temple Automobile and Supply Co., India Rubber Co., Midgley Mfg. Co., Diamond Rubber Co., George D. Garland Co., Standard Welding Co., Snell Cycle Fittings Co., Badger Brass Mfg. Co., Veeder Mfg. Co., Hoetelling Bros., Liberty Bell Co., American Roller Bearing Co., Baldwin Cycle Chain Co., Munger Vehicle Tire Co., Moffett Vehicle Bearing Co., P. J. Dasey & Co., Turner Brass Works, Carse Bros., Porter Storage Battery Co., Tucker & Co.

This show, like others of that year, included a demonstration track. The attendance was at no time so great that the cars could not be demonstrated at will. The



An ease in steering and flexibility test at the first show

demonstrations are said to have been of great interest to the spectators.

This show was a success from the viewpoint of Mr. Miles in that it established that the public was interested and that a well regulated show would be worth while for manufacturers. Also it put Chicago on the show map. The promoters did not make much out of it but they felt that they were well set for another year, which proved true. The morning sessions of this show were open to the trade without charge.

Second New York Show

The second New York show was held in Madison Square Garden November 2-9, 1901, and Mr. Sanger was again manager. There were electric, steam and gasoline divisions. That year the reporters in describing the show began to talk of styles, predominance of certain ideas and to treat the show idea generally as a fixed institution. There was considerable disappointment on the part of some spectators when they found that the popular race drivers of the day—Vanderbilt, Bostwick, Keene and others were not on exhibition.

A note says that W. E. Metzger, who had put Detroit on the map during the previous summer by his Grosse Pointe races, was the busiest man at the show. The big news surprise of the show was the announcement that Haynes and the Apperson Bros. were to have separate factories.

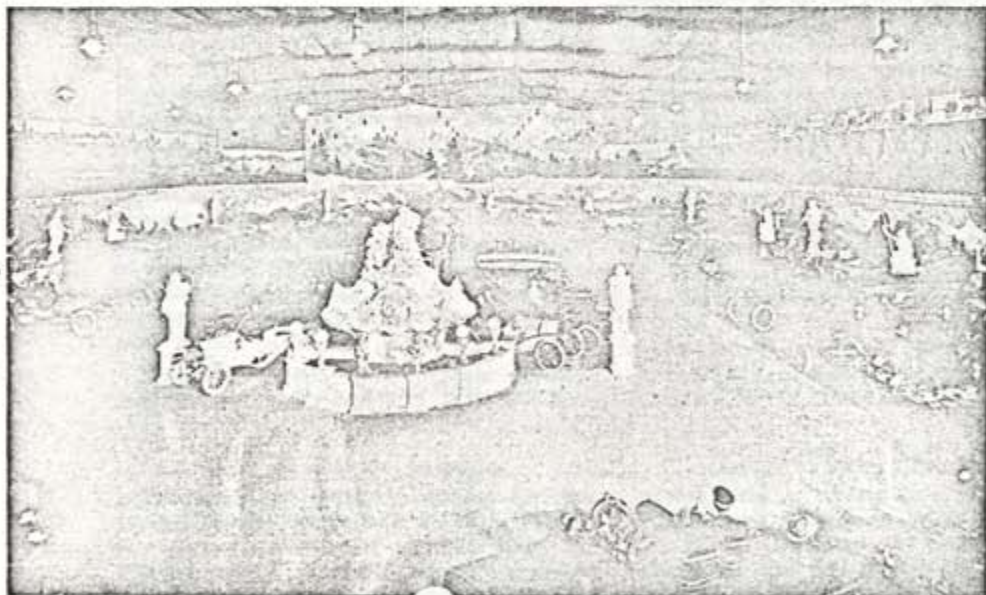
The 1902 Chicago show began March 1,

and advertisements give the name of S. A. Miles as manager, and also report that the show is "under the auspices of the Chicago Automobile Club and the National Association of Automobile Manufacturers." The show was entirely successful in the way of attendance despite the fact that Prince Henry of Germany was the Chicago guest at the time. It was at this show that club delegates from many sections met and organized the American Automobile Association with Winthrop E. Scarritt president.

Just prior to this show the Automobile Club of America and the National Association of Automobile Manufacturers settled their dispute about the New York show. The recent show had been so successful that everybody wanted a hand in it. Finally it was decided to hold only one show in New York and the two organizations held it.

In 1906 the series of rival shows that lasted until the Association of Licensed Automobile Manufacturers was disbanded began. These rival shows were very spirited events. There was much plotting among the leaders to have a big news event to announce during their shows, but the greatest of these came entirely without planning on the part of the promoters. Manager Miles steered his course as one of neutrality, but the license holders would not be neutral.

It was during the 1911 show that the decision of Judge Noyes was handed down, the decision that the Selden patent was valid, but that Henry Ford did not infringe the



Kansas City's first automobile show, March 4, 1907

Promoted solely by J. H. Wittman as there was no dealers' organization at that time. The decorations were from the Madison Square Garden New York Auto Show of 1907 and were erected in Kansas City Convention Hall as here shown by the original New York decorators.

patent because the patent described only the Brayton type engine and that this type was not used in automobiles. Every manufacturer knew that this was the end of the Selden patent and also the end of the A. L. A. M. This was easily the biggest news item that ever came with the shows, and it cleared the way for Manager Miles to have a clear sweep with his shows and their course since has not been involved with serious difficulties nor interrupted except in the case of the omission of the national shows one year—1919—and the decision of the N. A. C. C. not to give a show in that year was made before the ending of the war. The New York and Chicago dealers carried on that year and because the conflict was actually ended, Mr. Miles assisted with the shows.

Growth of Show Idea

The show idea spread rapidly and within the early years of the century almost every city in the country held an automobile and fashion show combined. The automobile clubs fostered the show as a social and money making proposition. In 1906 there came a turn and the automobile dealers of the various cities wanted a more business-like air to the shows, and this was the beginning of the dealer associations. The show profits have created a fund that held most of the dealer associations together. Today there is an automobile show in practically every county seat of populous districts. The show is really the foundation of the Dealer Association Movement.

The first association west of the Mississippi River was that at Kansas City, organized by J. H. Whittman, then distributor of the Pope lines. Mr. Whittman had visited the Madison Square Garden show late in 1906 and bought the decorations and took them to his home town for a show during the winter of 1906-07. This was rather an adventure at the time and bid fair to fail when E. H. Patterson, then advertising manager of the Kansas City Post, saw the possibilities for business and swung that newspaper to its support and established the show as an annual feature of Kansas City.

There have been some notable developments in the show movement. The first Bos-

ton show was held February 24-28, 1903, and this was now a show in the present meaning of the word. It really was a demonstration that automobiles would run. It was given under the auspices of the New England Automobile Association. Beginning March 21, 1903, only a month later, the Boston Automobile Dealers' Association held a show in which there were not stunts but at which practically all automobiles sold in Boston were exhibited. This show made money, in the face of that fact that the show only four weeks previous had lost money. This was the beginning of the Boston shows.

This first show attracted many manufacturers and many dealers from all parts of New England, and this New England character for the show has been maintained. The Boston show has always stood second to the New York and Chicago shows in respect to attendance of manufacturing executives, and while never of a national character, has always been of a sectional character, rather than the local character by most local shows. Of late years, Chester I. Campbell, a veteran in the show ranks, has been instrumental in maintaining this reputation.

The Show on the Coast

The San Francisco show had held something of the same sectional character. It is regarded as the Pacific Coast show, and it has been suggested at times that this show be made a third national exhibit.

This year the Motor Accessory Manufacturing Association recognizes it as a national show so far as parts exhibits are concerned. George A. Wahlgren, long identified with automobile publications in Denver and points west, has maintained the wide reputation for this show.

The Show Managers' Association was organized at Chicago in 1917, and includes in its ranks such veteran show managers as Captain R. E. Lee, of St. Louis; Claude E. Holgate, of Newark; Walter Wilmott, of Minneapolis; Bart J. Ruddle, of Milwaukee; H. H. Shuart, of Detroit. Fred Caley of Cleveland, was active in the association before he turned over the Cleveland shows to his former assistant, Herbert Buckman. E. E. Peake, one of the organizers, died in Kansas City in November, 1924.

Gas Production Increase

Production of gasoline during October totaled 760,646,784 gallons, an increase over the previous month of approximately 10,000,000 gallons, says the Department of the Interior. Average daily production was 24,500,000 gallons. Domestic consumption of gasoline of that month amounted to 751,499,199 gallons.

Essay Winner Announced

John Liska, a student in a Wood County High School, Wisconsin Rapids, Wis., won the H. S. Firestone 4 year scholarship offered for the best essay by high school students on the subject "The Relation of Improved Highways to Home Life." The contest was conducted by the Highway Education Board.