

New York to Paris

World Race 2011

ON FEBRUARY 12th, 1908, when few roads existed and long-distance automobile travel was still in its infancy, 250,000 spectators witnessed as six teams departed New York's Times Square for the start of the Great Race. Sponsored by the *New York Times* and Paris' *Le Matin*, the Great Race remains the most ambitious and arduous motorsports event of all time and conclusively silenced the automobile's critics.





BELOW: Flying the "Stars and Stripes", George Schuster's Thomas Flyer is almost consumed by Siberian mud. Just one example of the horrendous conditions faced and overcome almost continuously by the 1908 teams. Photo courtesy of Jeff Mahl, www.thegreatautorace.com

OPPOSITE PAGE TOP: With its period "Chrysler FirePower" livery, the 1951 New Yorker piloted by Jonathan Auerbach and Bill Secret is a veteran of La Carrera Panamericana 2003.

OPPOSITE PAGE BOTTOM: George Schuster's mighty Thomas Flyer, the 1908 victor, greets the World Race 2011 teams in Reno, Nevada. It is maintained in running order at the National Automobile Museum, formerly the world-famous Harrah's Collection.



THE CHAMPION IN THE MUD



Few, if any, observers expected the teams to successfully cross the Continental United States, let alone the route traversing Alaska, Japan, Russia, Germany and France to Paris, which even included a crossing of the frozen Bering Strait! Both Henry Ford and Ransom Olds refused to support an American entry, and only at the insistence of then-U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt, who bristled at the notion of French, German and Italian teams crossing American soil by motor car, did an American team enter the race.

George Schuster was the sole American entrant with his large and powerful Thomas Flyer. Driving, pushing, pulling and digging through appalling conditions, he and the other competitors overcame every adversity with super-human effort, ingenuity and remarkable sportsmanship.

An incredible 22,000 miles and 169 days later, Schuster and his Thomas Flyer entered Paris to win the race. He lived to age 92, and following the location and acquisition of his race-winning car by the famed Harrah Collection in the early 1960s, he assisted with its authentication, aided by evidence of the frame repairs he completed in Siberia so many years before. A pioneer in the truest sense, Mr. Schuster lived to see the establishment of the modern highway system

and the primacy of automotive transportation, and in 2010, he was posthumously inducted into the Automotive Hall of Fame.

Following in the footsteps of George Schuster and the other competitors of 1908, 16 teams embarked on the World Race 2011 on

April 24 to recreate the event for the first time in 103 years. The crossing of the United States included several stops along the way, notably including a visit to the National Automotive Museum in Reno, Nevada, where George Schuster's Thomas Flyer still resides.





In San Francisco, the cars were loaded onto a ship bound for Beijing, China, with the race scheduled to resume on June 4. From Beijing, the racers will cover a different but still challenging route through

China, Kazakhstan, Russia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Germany, the Czech Republic and Switzerland, with the winner anticipated to reach the Eiffel Tower in Paris on Thursday, July 21.

As in 1908, today's event showcases the cutting edge of automotive technologies under the most demanding conditions, with the 'Innovation' class including alternative-fuel, low-emission and hybrid entries, with one entry, a 2007 Corvette, capable of using up to six different fuels. Jerry Price, Executive Director for the World Race 2011, recently summed up the significance of the event and its legacy, stating: "Much like the 1908 race proved the automobile could travel around the World; the 2011 race will prove new technology will improve the human race."

For a complete list of the teams, event information, progress reports, updated standings and race results, be sure to check out the World Race 2011 website at www.world-race.net, which also includes daily blog updates, team biographies and information, plus links to information on the original event, Facebook and Twitter updates, and much more.

The author wishes to thank the following people and organizations for their assistance with this article: Joe Pepitone of AUTOCOM Studios (www.pepitonecreativeservices.com), Jerry Price, Executive Director World Race 2011 (www.world-race.net), and Chris Purdum, President-Chairman, Intermountain Concours d'Elegance (www.intermountainconcours.com).





"Stewball", the trusty 1967 VW Beetle entered by Ed and Janet Howle, awaits its turn to begin the race.



The multi-fuel 2007 Corvette campaigned by Price Team Racing, which includes Jerry and Theresa Price, Ed Gaven, and Jeff Mahl, the great-grandson of 1908 winner George Schuster.

OPPOSITE PAGE TOP: Crabtree Racing's Jack and Mary Crabtree in their 1929 Ford Model A Speedster, built by them from the ground up. The open cockpit, heavy snowfall and mountains echo the challenges of the 1908 event.

OPPOSITE PAGE BOTTOM: Appropriately fitted with period style goggles, Team Studebaker's Howard Street and Dennis Barfield depart the Crowne Plaza Hotel in their 1916 Studebaker Racer.

BELOW: The spectacular and rugged terrain of Western Colorado's Delores River Valley provides a majestic backdrop for the teams as they prepare to stab further westward to the end of the US leg of the race in San Francisco.

