

## The Indianapolis Motor Speedway, the internal combustion engine, and the Corvette



There's a Jewish story everywhere. Just ask Don Harrison, the editor of the San Diego Jewish World. He will tell you that. And...he is right.

For years, the Jewish American Society for Historic Preservation has been placing dedicatory bricks and pavers at museums, venues, institutions, wherever possible. The inscribed texts on the bricks are not complicated; honoring, in recognition, in memory, etc. However, one word is absolutely required, Jewish.

The reasoning is cost, effectiveness, and most important is general awareness of something the average visitor is not expecting to see, the word Jewish. Yes, Betsy, there were, there are, and there will be Jews here.

Jews did not get off the boat yesterday. Jewish Americans have been part and parcel of the American experience, the American story, from the very beginning.

During the height of the pandemic, I ordered a dedicatory brick for placement outside the Indianapolis Motor Speedway museum. The text of the brick is as simple as always.

“Jewish American Society for Historic Preservation”

Who would have “thunk” Jews were involved in motorsports, and that goes for non-Jews too.

Yes, we were and are!

If it had not been for a nice Yiddishe Thomas Edison, Siegfried Marcus, there would not have been the internal combustion engine. Greta Thunberg would be thrilled today. No cars, no CO2 or sulfur emissions to cause global warming and give the anti-Semites something else to hate the Jews over. Now, if we can just put a cork in the butt ends of those cows and stop their flatulence (that is farting for the non-scientifically inclined).

Siegfried Marcus was, since a child, a tinker, an innovator and an engineering disassembler, a re-imaginer. He was certainly not much of a Talmud Scholar. But he could think and see things that others could not.

In 1864, when he was 33, a German living in Vienna, he invented the gasoline-powered internal combustion engine. He hitched it to a wagon and rode around town to his thrill and the fright of nice old ladies and horses. Fifteen minutes and the wagon was kaput. It needed things like brakes, suspensions, modulators, much more.

That all came later. 1897, another Jewish boychick, Emil Jellinek, a wealthy Austrian Jewish diplomat, and the son of the Chief Rabbi of Vienna, invested in cars and racing. He did have one condition. The car must be named after his lovely daughter, Mercedes.

Yes, the Mercedes is named after a Jewish girl.

When the Nazis came to power, it was beyond not acceptable, mortifying to them, that the most famous car made in Germany should have Jewish roots.

Simple solution, the Mercedes became the Daimler-Benz, two acceptable innovators who were totally Nazi kosher.

Marcus was famous in Austria for his invention. He even had a statue outside the Vienna Technology Museum. The statue came down in 1940. The history books were rewritten, and Marcus vanished from memory.

Today, there is a statue of Marcus up in Vienna. DK who insisted it be reinstalled.

Motor racing is an expensive endeavor. Most Jews did not have the funds to pursue the proposition to build, maintain, and keep car racing crews. Besides, most of the races, other than the back street drag stuff we all did as kids, was done on Shabbat. That made things difficult for the more observant of the tribe.

Yet Jews have been part of the car racing world down through the years. We even continued to play a significant role in the development of the sport.

Few people ever heard of Maurice 'Mauri' Rose. He won the Indi three times, 1941 and 1947-1948. Some say he was the greatest Jewish race car driver ever.

That is contestable by the likes of other great Jewish NASCAR/Drag Racer greats. Their names most tribal members never heard of, like Kenny Bernstein, Albert Francois Cevert Goldenberg, the Scheckters, Ricardo Rosset, a nice U.K. madele, Sheila van Damm, even an Israeli, Ilan Day, and more.

I will bet you most of the non-Tribal aficionados at the Tracks know their names and don't care about their ethnicity. They care if they were great drivers.

As a kid, I always wanted a Corvette, that, and a 57 Chevy with the fins... dreams. I never achieved either. I did drive a 57 Chevy once. The Corvette was out of the question even after I could afford one when I learned my insurance rates alone could fund the national debt because I had teenagers in the house.

I loved the power, the style, the chick magnet mystique of the Corvette. It was not until later I learned the father, not the inventor, of the Corvette was a Jewish boychick, Zora Anton-Duntov.

Zora, not Zoro, was born in Belgium, grew up in Leningrad. He was educated in Berlin. He was a race car driver and married a bombshell of a girl who starred in the Folies Bergère. He enlisted in the French Airforce when WWII was a reality. With the fall of France, being caught by the Nazis was not a good option.

Duntov escaped to the U.S. and ended up with Chevrolet as an engineer, one heck of a good engineer. He became involved with the Corvette project and brought the concept, invented by Harley Earl, to reality. He knew American consumers wanted speed, power, and sex appeal. Duntov's engineering and marketing made the Corvette, CORVETTE.

The Indianapolis Motor Speedway send me an email – bashert on timing last week.

“It is with great pleasure to announce your personalized stadium brick has been installed and is ready for viewing at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway!”

Excited by the long-awaited announcement that the Jews will have a brick at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway, I started looking around at NASCAR stuff and happened upon the Corvette Museum.

WOW, what a trip that place must be. I immediately looked up the Papa of Corvettes, Zora Anton-Dunton. They had a whole section on him. He was even buried at the Corvette Museum. That is famous.

But there was a problem with his bio. There was no mention he was Jewish. They noted he escaped France and came to the U.S. But there was no mention he was escaping the Holocaust, the murdering hands of the Nazis intent on killing any and all Jews.

American had given him refuge. Chevrolet had given him the Corvette, and he gave everything he could to return the belief in American freedom and ideals ten times over. But there was no mention he was Jewish. There was no mention that Corvette was the beneficiary of Nazism’s antisemitic hatred.

I seriously doubt the oversight of his ethnicity and story was intentional. I suspect it was benign, and plain brain blank. The Corvette Museum had a great opportunity to tell Dunton’s store and at the same time sing the praise of America.

I wrote to the Corvette Museum’s customer service, Pam Pillow.

“Hi Pam,

My name is Jerry Klinger. I am the president of the Jewish American Society for Historic Preservation, [www.JASHP.org](http://www.JASHP.org).

I was looking at your site’s history re Zora Arkus-Duntov. <https://www.corvettemuseum.org/zora-arkus-duntov/>

There is an oversight in his biography that I believe, if added will significantly enhance the interpretive importance of the Corvette and the American experience.

You wrote about Duntov as having escaped during WWII from France. You did not mention that he was Jewish. His life was at risk for being a Jew.

The context of his escape that made Corvette the beneficiaries of his coming here was he had been Jewish. Adding in that simple identifier to his bio will make your site more inclusive. It will positively reflect on the meaning of the American experience.

May I recommend a simple addition to his bio -

Zora Arkus-Duntov was born in Belgium **to a Russian Jewish family.** He was raised in Leningrad and educated in Berlin.

Thanks,

Jerry Klinger”

Pam wrote back promptly.

“I will forward to the appropriate person and thank you.”

Follow up, I will.

The Nazis erased Marcus and Jellinek from the story of Motor Sports and Jews deliberately.

In this time of rising anti-Semitism, I can't sit back and let negligent oversight erase Duntov.

At least I know, some excited fan visiting the Indianapolis Motor Speedway Museum will see the word Jewish American on a brick and wonder with acceptance.

There's a Jewish Story Everywhere.

Jerry Klinger is the President of the Jewish American Society  
for Historic Preservation.

[www.JASHP.org](http://www.JASHP.org)