



**George N. Schuster Sr.
Driver and Winner of the
New York to Paris Automobile Race 1908
1873-1972**

George Schuster was born February 4, 1873 to German immigrants, Casper Schuster and his wife in Buffalo, NY. His father was a blacksmith on South Park Avenue, and that was where George acquired many of his early mechanical abilities.

Always physically active, in his youth he was an avid cyclist often competing in bicycle races from Buffalo to Erie, PA or in an easterly direction to Rochester.

He worked for a cycle shop in the 1890's, and then on October 4, 1902 George joined the E.R. Thomas Motor Company on Niagara Street in Buffalo (where Rich Products now stands) first building radiators, then as their mechanic, and eventually the Chief road tester. He would accompany cars being delivered and frequently teach the new owners (often their first automobile) how to drive and maintain their newly acquired Thomas. George continued his racing enthusiasm, participating in the 1906, 1907 and also the 1909 Glidden Tour with Thomas automobiles. For a better sense of perspective you should remember there were only 45 states in the Union, and Teddy Roosevelt was President. Lindberg's flight lay 20 years in the future. George was asked to participate in the New York to Paris Race (the day before it was to start) on February 11, 1908. He took a train from Providence, RI to New York City and arrived at Times Square for the start of the Race, with the Thomas Flyer fresh off the Central Park showroom floor. When George told his young son George Jr. he was going on a race around the world, the youngster asked that his father bring him home a monkey.

George began the Race as mechanic, and then in San Francisco became the driver in charge of the Thomas Flyer. He is the only man to have gone the full route from NY to Paris on the Thomas. George is the first person to drive an automobile across the United States in the winter, and also still holds the unbroken record for the New York to Paris automobile Race route (100 years later)! Along the route he applied his self taught celestial navigation when there were no maps, and often employed his MacGyver like aptitude for creative solutions to numerous problems. It was an epic test of men and machines which took 169 days to complete. Details about the Race itself, as well as George's role in the restoration of the Thomas Flyer can be found at www.TheGreatAutoRace.com

George worked for the Thomas Company until it closed in 1914, and then went to work for the Pierce Arrow Company, also in Buffalo until about 1920. He would accompany the delivery of vehicles (primarily trucks) worldwide. This took him to Africa, the Middle East, China, Europe, Puerto Rico as well as the United States.

George then moved to Springville, NY with his family. With his wife Rose, son George Jr., and daughter Helen, they bought a home on Prospect Ave. He opened a Dodge dealership on Buffalo/Church Street, and ran that company until shortly before World War II. Very much a patriot, during the War (now in his 70's) he served as a security watchman for Winfield Smith (Winsmith today). He carried a .32 pistol on his rounds, the same one he carried during the Race.

Even with world wide interest George shied away from publicity, feeling that his accomplishments were just part of his job. Little did he know that this Race would change the way the world thought about automobiles. Prior to the event, the auto was considered to be a rich man's plaything with the horse and locomotive being the only truly reliable form of land transportation. All of that was to change, when millions of people read in the daily newspapers across the world about the progress of the competition. George in his later years did write an article for Reader's Digest and in 1966 published a book ***The Longest Auto Race***. He also appeared on "I've Got a Secret" hosted by Garry Moore, with the celebrity panel in July 1958. They did not guess his secret!

George was an avid sportsman, and liked both hunting and fishing. He was one of the early members of Springville Field and Stream, and physically active through his 90's.

In his later years he lived with his son George Jr., at one point in Wyoming NY, then returning to Springville. His winter routine through his mid nineties saw him often shoveling snow from their East Ave. driveway.

George passed away July 4, 1972 at the age of 99 and is buried in the Springville Maplewood Cemetery.

Interest in the Race has continued for nearly 100 years, and we all look forward to the Centennial of the event in 2008. George's pure determination, Yankee ingenuity and competitive spirit accomplished a feat that was to become a truly landmark event for the automobile...

Jeff Mahl
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