



CHEVROLET AS HE IS TODAY

# Pioneer of Speed Was Also Pioneer Motor Designer

By Bob Murphy

"Vive la Chevrolet . . ."

France's loss was America's gain when Louis Chevrolet switched his allegiance and affections back in 1900.

There was a spirit of roaring adventure churning through the veins of this romantic youth who loved to tinker with motors and then personally chaperon them around some track at a dizzy, death-defying speed.

Louis Chevrolet was a pioneer of speed. Also a pioneer of the automobile industry.

It was Louis Chevrolet who organized a manufacturing company in Detroit in 1911. He designed the first car which still bears his name. Today, at the age of 57, Louis Chevrolet is a salesman for the company that was founded by him.

Living at 2595 Lakewood avenue, Louis Chevrolet sits peacefully by the family fireside of a Winter evening and dreams of the glamorous days that used to be.

Then with the coming of a new day, the affable husband and father moves out to earn his daily bread. He meets the clients with a smile and a handshake and, quite naturally enough, there is never any lack of enthusiasm as he goes over the chief talking points of the product which was born in his brain.

## Louis Born in Switzerland And Reared in France

Born in Switzerland in 1878, Louis' family moved to Beaune, France, in the center of the Burgundy wine district, when he was only 7.

Louis was the second oldest child, having three brothers and four sisters. Gaston Chevrolet, his younger brother, became renowned as a racer. He won the Indianapolis 500-mile classic in 1920 and was killed later the same year in a crash at Los Angeles on Thanksgiving Day.

"I started my career in sports at the age of 16," Louis said. "I entered bicycle races on Sunday. There wasn't much money, but it was something."

"I quit the bicycles after about three years. It was in 1897 that I first became interested in a gasoline engine. I've lived by it since. I guess I'll die by it. Just one of those things that gets in your blood and stays there."

Louis told of the queer incident that started him on his way to eternal fame and glory in the automobile world.

"I was working for a company in my home town. They sold tricycles with one and one-quarter horsepower. A customer returned one of the cycles one day when the engine went floey. I took it apart and started tinkering. I've been interested in nothing else ever since."

## Romantic Youth Moves To America in 1901

In 1900 Chevrolet, accompanied by a companion named Alexander Gonthier, landed in Canada. In April of 1901 he moved into New York.

There followed years of work in several automobile factories. In the Spring of 1905 he secured a job with the Fiat Motor Company, an Italian concern. Officials of this company gave Louis his start in racing.

"They turned over a car to me for a race at Morris Park, N. Y.," he recalled as he leaned back in a Morris chair in front of the family hearthstone.

"In that first race I received probably the greatest thrill of my life. I not only won, but set a world record for the mile at 52 4-5 seconds on a dirt track. It was a classy field—including such aces as Barney Oldfield, Basle, Webb Jay and Sartori. Oldfield and I became bitter professional rivals in that race, but we also formed a friendship that still endures."

"I won every race I started the first year save two. In those my car went wrong."

## Defeats Barney Oldfield In Match Race at Yonkers

That same year, 1905, the country clamored for a match race between Oldfield and Chevrolet at Yonkers, N. Y. Fifteen thousand breathless spectators, a capacity crowd, watched as Chevrolet again defeated the great Oldfield.

"I'll never forget what Barney's manager said to me," chuckled Louis. "He said: 'You certainly have stepped on Oldfield's meal ticket with spike shoes.'"

"I raced in 1905, remaining out of action in 1906-07, and then started rolling again in 1908, 1909 and 1910. It was in 1911 that I organized the Chevrolet Motor Company in Detroit. Then came another period of racing from 1915 until 1920, when I retired from active competition."

The veteran daredevil of the speedways estimates that he started around 250 races during his track career, and won at least one-third of them.

Since 1920 he has been engaged in experimental work, pouring out his brains and energy for several years in the development of aircraft motors. The depression struck this business a telling blow.

Today he is connected with the Eastern Chevrolet Sales Company of 14800 East Jefferson.

## Designed Indianapolis Race Winners Two Years

In all of his daring exploits, Chevrolet never was able to win the 500-mile classic at Indianapolis. However, he finds complete satisfaction in the fact that cars designed by him triumphed for two years in succession.

His brother Gaston won in 1920. Tommy Milton was driving a car fashioned by Chevrolet when he whizzed across the finish line in 1921.

"Until that time I was the first to ever turn out cars that won twice in succession," Chevrolet said proudly. "Of course, it has been done since."

Fate seemed always kind to Louis Chevrolet in whatever he attempted. He entered a speedboat race in Blockyunc Bay in 1925 and won. That was his first and last attempt at speedboat racing.

Chevrolet still cringes in his chair as he recalls his closest rendezvous with death.

"It was in 1910 at Long Island," he explained. "I was driving a Marquette Buick. A steering arm broke and the car lunged crazily through a picket fence, tearing away about 40 feet of it."

"I struck a parked car in which three women were parked. The chassis was torn from the body. The women, in some miraculous fashion, were not hurt. The car then swerved wildly and struck a tree. This compact turned the car upside down and it landed on a hedge."

"This hedge was able to hold up the 3,000 pounds. I escaped with only a dislocated shoulder. My mechanic, Charley Miller, was killed. It was the only time I ever hurt a mechanic badly."

## Had Few Bad Crack-ups During Palmy Racing Days

Chevrolet, compared to most drivers, had few crack-ups. Louis, however, remembers another in 1919 when his car caught

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on fire. Both he and his mechanic leaped from the car after it had been slowed down to 45 miles an hour.

The veteran of the track pulled back his shirt sleeve and showed a seared wrist.

"Just a few reminders of that occasion," he said, "and I have the same thing on my ankles."

One of the greatest thrills racing gave Chevrolet was in 1905 in a 400-mile road race at Morris Park, N. Y.

"Leading by 17 minutes, I had the misfortune to have a valve break. A piston was broken and the valve head was thrown through the crank case."

"We took out enough time to get three cylinders working. By this time the 17-minute lead was gone and my car now was 33 minutes behind the others and with only three cylinders. The gods took care of us. I took terrible chances on the last few laps when I realized there was a chance for victory. In that race my mechanic and I lost 24 pounds between us."

## Started Boyer, Sarles On Their Track Careers

Louis Chevrolet's magic name was sufficient to cause many youngsters to tag along at his heels. Among others, Louis started Joe Boyer, Roscoe Sarles, Earl Devore and Charles Kirkpatrick—all noted racers—on their way to fame and, in most instances, death.

But there is also humorous incidents in even so tragic a sport as racing.

"The funniest thing I've ever seen in racing occurred at Columbus July 4, 1909," Chevrolet related.

"I was racing on a track there. A right front tire blew out and the car plunged through a fence, jumped the ditch and headed across the road for the wall closing in a baseball park."

"A game between two colored teams was in progress. There was a terrific crash as the flying machine ripped through the fence. The colored lads ceased their ball-playing and started for the great wide open spaces. They probably are still running."

Chevrolet likes to recall the 1922 Indianapolis race when he had Marshal Foch as his guest.

"Foch could speak English, but preferred French," he said. "I was interpreter. He got a kick out of being around the racing boys and they seemed to enjoy him."

Louis Chevrolet's life has been crowded with action. It would take pages to record even half the thrilling experiences that came his way.

As proud as he is of his record as a driver, Chevrolet is more concerned over the part he has played as a builder and designer of motors.

Louis Chevrolet's name will endure as long as we have roaring motors on the speedways and humming machinery in the industrial factories.

"Vive la Chevrolet!"