



Motorsports and American Culture: From Demolition Derbies to NASCAR

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Soon after the first automobiles were introduced in the United States, auto racing became a reality. Since that time, motorsports have expanded to include drag racing, open wheel racing, rallying, demolition derbies, stock car racing, and more. Motorsports have grown to such an extent that NASCAR is now the second most watched professional sport in America, behind only football. But motorsports are about much more than going fast and finishing first. These events also reflect our culture, our society, our values, and our history.

In *Motorsports and American Culture: From Demolition Derbies to NASCAR*, Mark D. Howell and John D. Miller bring together essays that examine the relevancy of motorsports to American culture and history, from the late nineteenth century to the present. Addressing a wide spectrum of motorsports—such as stock car racing, demolition derbies, land speed record pursuits, and even staged train wrecks—the essays highlight the social and cultural implications of contemporary and historical moments in these sports. Topics covered include gender roles in motorsports, hot rods and the creation of fan and participant identities, the appeal of demolition derbies, the globalization of motorsports, the role of moonshine in stock car history, the economic relationship between NASCAR and its corporate sponsors, and more.

Offering the most thorough study of motorsports to date from a diverse pool of disciplines and subjects, *Motorsports and American Culture* will appeal to motorsports and automobile enthusiasts, as well as those interested in American history, popular culture, sports history, and gender studies.

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Editorial Review

Review

Howell and Miller have brought together a wide array of individuals with disparate backgrounds and interests. The volume asks the question of whether US motor-sport culture is unique (as compared to that of Europe or Asia)--and if it is, how and why. The question, addressed in several essays, is answered in part by the nature of the geography of the US (large and open) and the nature of the population, diverse in origin and behavior. The most striking, well-considered discussion is of stock-car racing--and by extension NASCAR--which began on dirt track as a regional event and gradually became national (though it is often still considered culturally regional). Also discussed are gender issues, which began in particular types of racing; as in many situations, a woman had to be better than the men even to become involved. This bias diminished but has still not disappeared. . . .Summing Up: Recommended. . . .Lower- and upper-division undergraduates; general readers. (*CHOICE*)

Howell's and Miller's *Motorsports and American Culture: From Demolition Derbies to NASCAR* is a welcome publication in the small but growing field of motor sports studies. . . .[C]ollections of essays such as this one offering different perspectives on a common theme can be exciting reads because one witnesses on the page scholars in the act of angling approaches to a newer area of study. (*Aethlon: Journal of Sports Literature*)

Motorsports and its multiple variations have influenced American history and culture in myriad ways, and *Motorsports and American Culture: From Demolition Derbies to NASCAR* chronicles this influence in the critical and entertaining fashion. . . .For those whose background and knowledge of American motorsports is limited, *Motorsports and American Culture* serves as an excellent introduction to the role of motorsports in American culture, with thorough research notes and bibliography provided. Even those who are well versed in the subject will find the book an enjoyable read. (*Society of Automotive Historians Journal*)

The primary value of *Motorsports and American Culture* is launching conversations that encourage more in-depth studies in this under-examined field. In other words, the volume offers starting points for research as motorsports becomes increasingly intermingled with broader popular culture domains. These essays help readers further understand, and even critique, the relationships between racing and American culture/national identity. . . .[T]he collection is most useful for advanced undergraduate and graduate courses in sport communication, cultural studies, gender studies classes, and even applied coursework in sports management. *Motorsports and American Culture* provides valuable contextual and historical background regarding the intricate relationship between American identity, popular culture, and auto racing. (*The Popular Culture Studies Journal*)

Written in accessible language and interspersed with intriguing photographs. . . .[The] chapters provide novel empirical material capable of enriching discussions of narratives, repertoires, consumption and boundaries. . . .Academics concerned with the links between culture and consumption will also find *Motorsports and American Culture* a worthwhile read. . . . [It] would therefore be a welcome addition to both undergraduate and graduate classrooms. . . .*Motorsports and American Culture* succeeds in its quest to be a spark for additional academic conversations around racing. (*Sport in Society: Cultures, Commerce, Media, Politics*)

About the Author

Mark D. Howell is professor of communications at Northwestern Michigan College. He is an

internationally-recognized automobile historian and motorsports scholar. His numerous publications include the book *From Moonshine to Madison Avenue: A Cultural History of the NASCAR Winston Cup Series* and his "Professor of Speed" columns are regularly posted on Frontstretch.com, an award-winning automobile racing web site.

John D. Miller is assistant professor of literature and cultural studies at Longwood University in Farmville, Virginia. A former freelance motorsports writer, his recent scholarly publications include essays on Southern literature and popular culture.

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