

# HISTORY OF

## NASCAR®

### PART 4

*Steve Havelock retraces the history of Nascar from 1956 to the opening of the Daytona International Speedway at start of 1959*

**T**EAM Kiekhaefer's privately run Chrysler C-300s had NASCAR sewn up in 1955, but towards the end of the season, the giant Ford Motor Company entered the fray with the factory backed De Paolo Engineering Team, fronted by 1925 Indianapolis 500 winner, Pete De Paolo, and promptly won two races. Mercury got Bill Stroppe to prep its cars, and the Chevrolet Factory also joined in, with three-time Indy 500 winner, Mauri Rose running their show. For '56, Team Kiekhaefer was kitted out with new Chrysler 300Bs and a few Dodges, which had been destined for a rival series.

Following the AAA's withdrawal from racing, NASCAR spread its wings still further and by merging with the Society of Autosports and Fellowship Education (SAFE), a Mid-West sanctioning body, increased the number of races to 56 from the previous years 45. NASCAR now ran coast-to-coast and had races in 17 different states. They also introduced The Convertible Division for ragtop stock cars, but that's a whole story on its own.

By the time the NASCAR circus arrived at Daytona Beach for Speed Weeks, Chrysler, Ford and Chevrolet had all won a race. Kiekhaefer turned up with a fleet of six cars. Current champion, Tim Flock, in one of the new, even more powerful 340bhp Chrysler 300Bs, established a new qualifying flying mile record at 139.373mph and continued his form by winning the race. Mercury and then Chevrolet took the next two rounds before the 'Kiekhaefer Krew' strung together a remarkable run of 16 successive wins, 11 in Chryslers and five in Dodges. Tim Flock had a big bust-up with Kiekhaefer and walked out on the team, having taken 21 wins in 15 months. He only won one race thereafter. Bus driver Buck Baker, Herb Thomas and Speedy Thompson divvied up most of the prizes after his departure.

From mid-season onwards, the Ford team got their act together. 'Fireball' Roberts was their star driver and he secured five wins that season. He earned the name 'Fireball', which he apparently hated, through his University baseball antics, not through driving. Ralph Moody was another of Ford's top drivers, and he took four wins, while top spannerman in the Ford camp was John Holman.

These two would later combine to form Holman Moody, one of the all-time great NASCAR teams. As Ford was on the way up, they met Team Kiekhaefer on the way down. Their second half of the year was rather barren, but Buck Baker, driving both Chryslers and Dodges, hung in there. He took 14 wins and 12 poles to clinch the championship while team mates Speedy Thompson and Herb Thomas took eight wins and five wins respectively. On October 23rd, at Cleveland County Fairgrounds half-mile dirt track, poor old Herb really smashed himself up, which virtually put paid to his career. Six different makes won races in 1956 and Chrysler topped the list with 22 wins, largely thanks to Kiekhaefer. Ford took 14 wins, Dodge 11, Mercury five, Chevrolet three and Oldsmobile one.

Although the Kiekhaefer Krew was a private team and they were pitching against the top factory teams, the crowds put them in the frame as the 'bad guys' and even started to boo their drivers



ABOVE: CONVERTIBLE DIVISION RACING WAS A SISTER SERIES BACK IN 1956, BUT WOULDN'T LAST AS LONG AS THE TIN-TOPS

**‘TIM FLOCK HAD A BIG BUST-UP WITH KIEKHAEFER AND WALKED OUT ON THE TEAM, HAVING TAKEN 21 WINS IN 15 MONTHS. HE ONLY WON ONE RACE THEREAFTER. BUS DRIVER BUCK BAKER, HERB THOMAS AND SPEEDY THOMPSON DIVVIED UP MOST OF THE PRIZES AFTER HIS DEPARTURE.’**



ABOVE: FIREBALL ROBERTS SHOWS WHAT HE IS MADE OF ...