

NATIONAL SPRINT CAR HALL of FAME & MUSEUM

EDDIE RICKENBACKER

by Craig Agan

Edward Vernon Rickenbacker was born October 8, 1890 in Columbus, Ohio. This American patriot was both an automotive and an aviation engineering pioneer. Eddie was forced to leave school at age 13 because of the death of his father but began laying the foundation for his career by taking correspondence courses on the internal combustion engine. He entered the automotive industry by talking his way into a job in the Frayer-Miller automobile factory in Columbus in 1906. His racing career began later that year as a riding mechanic with driver Lee Frayer in a Frayer-Miller entered in the \$10,000-to-win Vanderbilt Cup race.

In 1907 Rickenbacker moved with Lee Frayer to the Columbus Buggy Works owned by Clinton D. Firestone and helped engineer the first Firestone-Columbus passenger car sold in 1908. Beginning in 1909 he traveled the country selling and servicing the Firestone-Columbus and as a part of that promotional effort entered his first race in Red Oak, Iowa in March 1910. That race ended in a crash but two weeks later Eddie won nine out of nine races at the Aksarben festival in Omaha. He spent most of the summer traveling over Iowa and Nebraska racing and winning, but later was invited back to Columbus to enter his first big race, a 100-miler against the great Barney Oldfield. Eddie was leading with two laps to go when his motor broke.

In 1911 Rickenbacker entered the first Indianapolis 500 as a co-driver with Lee Frayer in the Red Wing special. The winner was Ray Harroun in his famous Marmon Wasp while the Red Wing finished eleventh.

In 1912 Eddie entered the 500 by himself again in the Red Wing and was running fourth when he lost an engine. Later that summer he moved to Des Moines and began working



Eddie Rickenbacker
Bruce Craig Collection

with the Duesenberg brothers in the Mason Automobile Company. They had no luck in the 1913 Indianapolis 500, but later that year in an internationally known-300 mile event in Sioux City, Iowa, the Mason team came in first and third winning \$12,500 and establishing them as the team to beat.

Eddie Rickenbacker raced and won all over the United States in the ensuing years and closed his racing career by winning at Ascot in a Duesenberg in November 1916.

Eddie joined the Army Air Corp in 1917 and became America's Ace of Aces during World War I. He shot down 22 enemy planes and four observation balloons which earned him the rank of captain.

After the war he worked with several automotive corporations before buying the Indianapolis Motor Speedway in 1927. He sold the speedway to Tony Hulman in 1935.

Rickenbacker joined Eastern Airlines in 1935. He eventually became president of the company and later chairman of the board, leading Eastern to much prosperity.

Captain Eddie Rickenbacker retired in 1963 and died in Zurich, Switzerland on July 23, 1973.