

NATIONAL SPRINT CAR HALL of FAME & MUSEUM

LOUIS MEYER

Louis Meyer is the only winner of the Indianapolis 500 prior to World War II who is still around today. The Searchlight, Nevada resident is a three-time 500 and AAA Champion (1928, 1929 and 1933). He is also a three-time winner at the Altoona (Penna.) board track.

A mechanic, racer and businessman, Meyer earned a solid reputation in those areas as well as being revered as a decent man. Born in New York State on July 21, 1904, his start on the road to fame was almost thrust upon him as a kid growing up in California. Older brother Eddie was the auto racer in the family. Louie was a mechanic. He'd help his brother get the car ready and then sit behind its wheel as it was towed to the track with a length of rope tied around the front axle.

Meyer first went to Indianapolis as a mechanic for Frank Elliott in 1926. The next year he took his tools again, but this time he also logged about 100 miles while driving relief for Wilbur Shaw. The 1928 500 was the first one run under the Rickenbacker interests. With the help of his father, a one-time bicycle racer, Meyer prepared the car for the race.

"We paid \$5,000 for the car that I won with at Indianapolis in 1928. And that was complete. It was a used car, but to me it was better than a new car because the bugs had already been worked out of it."

To show that his 1928 win at Indianapolis wasn't a fluke, he finished second to Ray Keech in 1929, the last race for the single seaters for a while. In 1933, driving with Lawson Harris in the cream and red No. 36 Tydol Special Miller that he entered, he became the second two-time winner as he finished almost six minutes ahead of Wilbur Shaw. And in 1936, driving again with Harris in a car that he owned, the man who initially went to the Speedway just to work on the cars became the first three-time winner of the Indy 500.



Louis Meyer
Bruce Craig Collection

Towards the end of his driving career, Louie Meyer was responsible for the building of a car that had a long and popular history. With the help of Ed and Bud Winfield and Leo Goossen, he put together a hybrid eight-cylinder Offy made out of two four-cylinder engines sitting back-to-back on the same crankcase.

After he retired from driving, Louis had an engine rebuilding plant in L.A. until 1946, and then he bought the Offenhauser Company out with Dale Drake. They built the Offy engine together for about 20 years.

"The Offy was the Miller originally, and then Fred Offenhauser purchased Harry A. Miller out and built the engine under his name," told the man whose name was also to be associated with one of the most famous powerplants in racing history.

"When we purchased it from Fred, we left the engine, which was well established, under the Offenhauser name and just continued building it. Fred improved it over Miller and we kind of improved it over Fred. It was just a matter of a little improvement every year."

In the early '60s, Meyer sold out his share of the business to Drake and moved his family and belongings to Indianapolis to take over the assembly and service of the Ford dual overhead cam racing engine. His partner was his son. They continued in the business until 1970 when Ford got out of the race engine manufacturing game. The Meyers still had their shop and became dealers for Drake's offering. Then in 1971, Meyer's son-in-law, George Bignotti, bought out his half of the business and took on the responsibility of the Patrick Racing Team. Louis, who was named to the Hoosier Auto Racing Fans (HARF) Hall of Fame in 1968, retired soon thereafter.

