

# NATIONAL SPRINT CAR HALL of FAME & MUSEUM

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## FRED J. "POP" WAGNER

The American Automobile Association (AAA) had been formed in 1902, including a Contest Board which was instituted in order to exercise some official control over the nation's major motor racing events. The Contest Board's edicts were administered by starter Fred J. "Pop" Wagner, who was an effective and hard-hitting official active since 1903. The actual running of the major AAA events was delegated to Wagner and he not only waved the flags, but shepherded the contestants from one track to another, arranged their transportation, oversaw the preparation of the tracks (ensuring safety of drivers and fans alike) and made sure that the prize money was under the control of the AAA before a race was run. One of the AAA's first duties was to see that their member drivers fulfilled their commitments to member prom-

oters, a function which was overseen by Wagner.



**Fred J. "Pop" Wagner**  
Bruce Craig Collection

Wagner was one of racing's pioneer officials, whose longevity in the sport was legendary, as was his fairness and honesty. The native New

Yorker started the first board track race at Playa del Rey and was still officiating when Altoona ended the board track era.

It is said that "Daddy", another nickname that Wagner enjoyed, once turned down an opportunity to loan money to Henry Ford to help him organize the Ford Motor Company. It is also ironic that Wagner, one of racing's most colorful starters over dirt, bricks and boards, himself couldn't drive an automobile.

The veteran Legion Ascot starter, noted for giving the green at the Indy 500, was injured when Bryan Saulpaugh crashed to his death at Oakland on January 1, 1933. Fred J. "Pop" Wagner died on November 5, 1933 of complications from that tragic accident.

