


# *Harrington Driver Training services*



*For many middle-class Americans, the 1920s was a decade of unprecedented prosperity. Rising earnings generated more disposable income for the purchase of consumer goods. Henry Ford's advances in assembly-line efficiency created a truly affordable automobile, making car ownership a possibility for many Americans. The social effects of the automobile were as great. Freedom of choice encouraged many family vacations to places previously impossible. Urban dwellers had the opportunity to rediscover pristine landscapes, just as rural dwellers were able to shop in towns and cities. Teenagers gained more and more independence with driving freedom. Dating couples found a portable place to be alone as the automobile helped to facilitate relaxed sexual attitudes. However, the automobile also had a sinister use and became a vital cog in the distribution of 'Moonshine' during the Prohibition Era. It was the bootleggers' job to transport the alcohol across the Canadian border or across "dry" states and the motorcar was the ideal 'vehicle' for this illegal but rewarding enterprise. Many of the big-time gangsters of the Roaring 20s and later were forced to develop and modify (soup-up) their basic cars in order to evade getting caught by lawmen Whilst many did a roaring trade and made massive profits, there were those who would subsequently end up either killed by other gangsters when a deal fell through. After all, heists required getaways, and corpses needed, well, trunks. Just as in the movies, vehicles often served as mobile whacking sites.*

# **“Moonshine” Motorcars of the Prohibition Era**

*Tom Harrington LL B F Inst. MTD (August 2020)*

*“From North Carolina to Spokane, Washington, bootleggers during the Prohibition Era used “souped-up” automobiles to stay ahead of federal agents and local police while transporting illegal whiskey on back roads in the dark of night”. Often overlooked by historians, the rapid rise of a motorcar culture greatly contributed to the lawlessness that characterized the Prohibition Era. Nowhere was this more evident than along the bootlegging routes.* <sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

For the first decade of the 20th century in the USA, the “horseless carriage” was just a device of luxury for the elite. Beginning in 1913, however, with Henry Ford’s implementation of the assembly line to mass produce the Model T (“*Thin Lizzie*”) and the subsequent lowering of car prices, the average American wage earner could afford a motor vehicle. Besides the numerous benefits “automobility” provided—including greater access to market goods—the marked uptick in motor vehicle sales spurred a robust automobile culture. In turn, prohibitionists hoped to utilize this important societal development to change the attitudes and actions of drinkers. Dry organizations like the Women’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) and the Anti-Saloon League (ASL) gained momentum and garnered the national spotlight in the late 19th century, a couple decades prior to the Ford Motor Company flooding <sup>2</sup> the American market with its “universal car.” By the time widespread passage of local, state, and national prohibition laws were finally realized in the 1910s and 1920s, the precipitous wave of automobile ownership was fully inundating the country. <sup>3</sup> In turn; dries embraced the motorcar craze of the early 20th century. They utilized automobiles in public parades to disseminate their anti-alcohol message and traveled in them to deliver speeches in churches and capital buildings.

---

<sup>1</sup> googl:e.com

<sup>2</sup> Richard Crawford, “*Local Effort to Make San Diego Dry Was All Washed Up,*” San Diego Union-Tribune, February 24, 2011 accessed at <http://www.sandiegoyesterday.com/wpcontent/uploads/2011/03/Anti-Saloonists1.pdf>; “*Automobiles Instead of Rum,*” Brewers Journal and Barley Malt and Hop Trades’ Reporter, (New York City: New York), October 1, 1916; “*Welcome Pussyfoot Home,*” New York Times, April 25, 1920.

<sup>3</sup> W.J. Rorabaugh, *Prohibition: A Concise History*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 88-89; Lisa McGirr. *The War on Alcohol: Prohibition and the Rise of the American State*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 2016), 33; Daniel Okrent, *Last Call: The Rise and Fall of Prohibition*, (New York: Scribner, 2010), 141-145; Julien Comte. ““*Let the Federal Men Raid*”: Bootlegging and Prohibition Enforcement in Pittsburgh.” *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies* 77, no. 2 (2010): 166-92.

Described by Herbert Hoover - US president from 1929-1933, as “*a great social and economic experiment*”, - prohibition had a considerable impact on American society before its repeal in 1933. The prohibition – a ban which prevented alcohol from being made, transported or sold – was established across the United States in January 1920 and would remain in force for 13 years. How successful was prohibition in its aims and who were the gangsters who profited from the bootleg business during the prohibition era and what type of automobiles did they drive? Prohibition was the attempt to outlaw the production and consumption of alcohol in the United States. The call for prohibition began primarily as a religious movement in the 19<sup>th</sup> century– the state of Maine passed the first state prohibition law in 1846, and the Prohibition Party was established in 1869. The movement gained support in the 1880s and 1890s from social reformers who saw alcohol as the cause of poverty, industrial accidents, and the break-up of families; others associated alcohol with urban immigrant ghettos, criminality, and political corruption. Groups such as the Women’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), formed in 1874, and the Anti-Saloon League (ASL), founded in 1893, became powerful crusading forces and by 1916, twenty six of the then forty eight states had already passed prohibition laws. Passed in February 1933 and ratified on 5 December 1933, the 21st Amendment repealed the 18th and so ended prohibition in the United States. Control of alcohol after 1933 became a state rather than a federal issue. A small number of states remained ‘dry’ for some years – Mississippi was the last until 1966, but there were still local areas where the ban on alcohol remained <sup>4</sup>

### **Modify Their Cars**

Starting in the Prohibition Era of the 1920s, big city gangsters like Al “Scarface” Capone, “Baby face” Nelson, John Dillinger, “Lucky” Luciano and others, paid small-town brewers to provide them with cut-price, illegal alcohol to distribute among speakeasies. <sup>5</sup> Law enforcement naturally took a dim view of this enterprise, forcing still operators (Brewers) to work after dark, hence the term “moonshine”. As with any business, manufacturing the product was only half the challenge, and the job of getting it from stills to customers fell to the bootleggers.

---

<sup>4</sup> W.J. Rorabaugh, *Prohibition: A Concise History*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 88-89; Lisa McGirr, *The War on Alcohol: Prohibition and the Rise of the American State*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 2016), 33; Daniel Okrent, *Last Call: The Rise and Fall of Prohibition*, (New York: Scribner, 2010), 141-145; Julien Comte. ““*Let the Federal Men Raid*”: Bootlegging and Prohibition Enforcement in Pittsburgh.” *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies* 77, no. 2 (2010): 166-92.

<sup>5</sup> A speakeasy, also called a blind pig or blind tiger, is an illicit establishment that sells alcoholic beverages. Such establishments came into prominence in the United States during the Prohibition era (1920–1933).

It was the bootleggers' job to transport the alcohol across the Canadian border or across "dry" states. Having to distribute their illicit products under the radar quickly, moonshiners were forced to develop and modify their cars in order to avoid getting caught by lawmen.<sup>6</sup> According to Junior Johnson, one of the greatest legends in NASCAR<sup>7</sup> racing and a former North Carolina bootlegger:

***"You had to have fast cars to haul your whiskey to the people and to get away from the revenuers, the Alcoholic Beverage Control Commission and the federal officers,"***

Although Prohibition was repealed in 1933, the taste for illegal moonshine endured until the 1960s, and a number of drivers continued "runnin' shine" while evading the tax men who were attempting to scupper their operations. Later, when attempting to defend prohibition, they referenced soaring car production and sales statistics. Nevertheless, prohibitionists and those who supported their message failed to foresee that the culture of automobility would ultimately play a role in steering the "noble experiment" to its demise. Recent historians have correctly identified the fatal flaw of the 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment: its inability to be effectively enforced. (*The 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment was the only Amendment ever repealed under the US Constitution. Ed.*) Specifically, scholars have pointed to abusive and corrupt liquor agents, lack of governmental funding and resources, and troubles due to concurrent enforcement. While all of these were indeed problems with policing during the era of prohibition, historians have largely neglected how automobility in America fostered a bootlegging culture and presented predicaments to dry enforcers. The jobs of sheriffs, municipal officers, state troopers, and federal agents became more demanding as automobile usage became more popular.

### **Ford V8 – "Moonshiners" Iconic Hot Rod**

In the "Roaring" 20s, and the era of jazz, three out of four cars on the road were Model T Fords. Capable of up to 45 mph and priced at \$250, the Model T ("Tin Lizzie") was ubiquitous, making it possible for the bootlegger to blend in. The auto magnate Henry Ford was a staunch teetotaler, but the car that made him rich also became the most popular bootlegging car of the Prohibition Era. Early bootleggers could move ninety gallons of booze in a Model T, which was worth \$4,000.

---

<sup>6</sup> Richard Crawford, "Local Effort to Make San Diego Dry Was All Washed Up," San Diego Union-Tribune, February 24, 2011 accessed at <http://www.sandiegoyesterday.com> Saloonists1.pdf; "Automobiles Instead of Rum," Brewers Journal and Barley Malt and Hop Trades' Reporter, (New York City: New York), October 1, 1916; "Welcome Pussyfoot Home," New York Times, April 25, 1920.

<sup>7</sup> National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing

At the time, the average household income was a little over \$700 per year. Most bootleggers used stock Model Ts, but some added false bottoms to hide the alcohol with cargo like live chickens on top. The Model T was produced for 18 years beginning in October 1908. It was replaced by the Model A in 1927. The Ford Model 18, or “Ford V8,” was introduced in 1932 and became the ‘moonshiners’ iconic hot rod in the 1940s and 1950s. Bank robbers and highway outlaws were partial to high-powered Fords. Clyde Barrow of the notorious crime duo Bonnie and Clyde wrote a note to Henry Ford thanking him for the Model 18’s reliability and speed. The pair ultimately met their maker in one. Bank robber John Dillinger escaped from an “escape proof” jail in Crown Point, Indiana and stole the county sheriff’s new Ford V8 in March 1934. On April 22, 1934, Dillinger used a 1930 Ford Model A to escape federal agents near Little Bohemia, Wisconsin. The car sold at auction in 2010 for \$165,000. A few days later, he ditched the car in Chicago and exchanged it for a faster 1934 Ford V8. The shot-up 1934 Ford sold for \$250,000 in 1988 to a casino. Dillinger also wrote a letter to Ford, extolling the virtues of the V8.

### *The Cadillac*

Al Capone<sup>8</sup> loved Cadillacs, which were also used by Cook County police. A Cadillac figured in eyewitness accounts surrounding the St. Valentine’s Day Massacre warehouse in 1929. Capone owned one of the world’s first armoured cars - a 1928 V8 Cadillac clad in three thousand pounds of steel. It included a police band radio and was painted the same colour to match the Cadillacs driven by Chicago police. When Capone went to prison in 1931, he left the car with a Chicago dealer for resale. It was bought by a London amusement park operator in 1933, changed hands several times and went on auction in 2006. It sold for \$621,500. During the economic downturn six years later it sold for a measly \$310,000. A second armoured Cadillac, a 1930 Cadillac 452 V-16 Imperial Sedan, was seized by federal agents at Capone’s Palm Island, Miami home. President Franklin D. Roosevelt (FDR) used this car (Similar) a decade later in the days following Pearl Harbour. Some people confuse the two Cadillacs, but Capone often bought two or more similar cars. He would drive one while an underling drove the other, confounding his enemies. Following Capone’s lead, mobsters and politicians rushed to bulletproof their rides.

---

<sup>8</sup> Capone was one of the most notorious gangsters of the Prohibition Era. He was eventually indicted on charges of tax evasion. He got 11 years behind bars and was also fined \$50,000 which was the harshest sentence for tax fraud up to that point. He also sent time in the infamous Alcatraz prison. He died at his home in Florida at the age of 48 years.

A 1931 armour-plated Lincoln owned by gangster Dutch Schultz was sold at auctioned at Christie's in 1999, replete with 105 bullet holes. Mickey Cohen sold his bulletproof 1940s Cadillac Coupe de Ville for \$12,000 in 1951. Even the Pope-mobile owes its existence to Capone.

### *The Packard*

The Packard was the epitome of the gangster car. It outsold Cadillac as the American luxury brand. Capone owned a 1925 Packard Phaeton, which is now on display at the Auto Museum in Salt Lake City, Utah. The last new Capone cars were a pair of 1947 Packard Custom Super 8s purchased after he retired to Florida. Franklin D. Roosevelt's Packard V12 was outfitted with bulletproof glass. Bugsy Siegel traveled in a 1933 Packard V12 limousine, which was later displayed in the lobby of Vegas' Tropicana Hotel. In 1936, Packard produced just 682 of the amazing V12 Victoria convertibles. If you could find one, today the car would sell for \$400,000.

### *The Chrysler*

Muscular Chryslers were also popular with gangsters. Jack "Legs" Diamond bought a 1932 Chrysler Imperial Sedan in Florida. The current owner is an Australian who bought the car from an elderly gentleman, Monte Gillespie, in Indiana for \$35,000 – half its true value. When the car was lifted on a hoist in August 2011, a steel box was found welded to the undercarriage. No one knows what was inside because Customs confiscated the contents. Three black cases were strapped on the trunk. One bore a luggage tag from The Hotel Seymour on West 45 Street in New York. "Legs" may have hidden in there himself.

### *The Duisenberg*

Duisenberg's and Rolls-Royces were the hand-built toys of the super rich. By and large, Rolls-Royces were too heavy and slow for gangsters; those were driven by robber barons and tycoons who engaged in 'legitimate' thievery. Gangsters preferred Duisenberg's. Just 480 Duisenberg's were made between 1929 and 1938. Hollywood heart-throb Clark Gable bought one. So did a number of high-profile mobsters. Conman Jake "The Barber" Factor owned a 1930 Duisenberg J which sold at auction in 2004 for \$880,000. Owney "The Killer" Madden, a New York gangster who owned the Cotton Club and was pals with Dutch Shultz, also had a Model J. It's now part of the Bill Smith Collection of American Speed Cars. A 1931 Duisenberg was the prized possession of Philadelphia bootlegger Mickey Duffy. Capone allegedly owned a Duisenberg, which was restored by the son of Capone's mistress, Gladys Walton.



Capone built the Two Bunch Palms in Desert Hot Springs, California as their love nest. It's worth noting that Capone died from advanced syphilis and had many mistresses. (*Capone was eventually brought down due to tax evasion. Ed.*)

### Emil Francis Denmark

Most of the Capone gang bought their cars from Chicago auto dealer Emil Denmark, whose wife Jennie was alleged to have been Capone's mother-in-law. In the 1920s, Denmark was dealing heavily with the Capone gang. Al Capone purchased a Cadillac from Denmark in 1925 under the name "Mr. Brown." In February 1927, Denmark's house on Clinton Avenue in Oak Park was fire-bombed while his children and their nanny were inside. Within a month, his auto showroom was also bombed and his chauffeur was shot to death. Emil Denmark Cadillac was originally located on W. Ogden Avenue, but later moved to S. Pulaski Road. Denmark became the biggest General Motors agency on the South Side of Chicago. A lengthy report addressed to the Intelligence Unit Chief of the Bureau of Internal Revenue states that Capone was caught in October 1931 attempting to sell his home in Florida, along with two yachts and other items, for \$150,000 cash. One of the two sixteen's (V16 Cadillacs) is mentioned among other vehicles; given that these two sixteen's had made their way into the headlines and grabbed the attention of the Federal Agency, the older, armored Model 341A sedan was evidently overlooked while it lay quietly tucked away in a Chicago garage. The timing and circumstances suggest that the car was consigned to the agent at the behest of Capone and that agent was Emil Denmark.

### Joseph P. Bergl

Denmark wasn't the only auto dealer who got rich doing business with the mob. Joe Bergl supplied customized cars with armour and devices such as smokescreens. He had two garages, one at 5346 W. Cernak (22nd Street) next to the Cotton Club, owned by Ralph Capone, and another on Austin Boulevard. His clients included George "Machine Gun" Kelly, Vernon Miller, the Barker Gang, and Capone associates. Bergl was financed by Gus Winkler, who was thought to be one of the St. Valentine's Day shooters along with Fred "Killer" Burke. Bergl and Winkler were arrested in September 1933 when an armored car used by the Barker gang was traced back to Bergl's garage. Less than a month later, Bergl, who was already in jail, was accused along with reputed bootlegger Charles Caplan of having hidden George and Kathryn Kelly for five days in Chicago before the pair was captured in Memphis. By the 1950s, a man called Baron was a mob kingpin in Vegas and a successful Chicago car dealer with lucrative contracts to repair city police cars. Joe Bergl's wife, Marie, was in a fatal car accident in 1936.

On the rebound, Bergl married a heavy drinker named Claire, but the marriage was short lived. He then married a showgirl from the Chez Paree Club named Dorothy Johnson. He died September 26, 1950 at the age of 49 and the Bergl Chevrolet Sales agency was sold to Joe's former salesman, George Pavlicek. Pavlicek began with Bergl in 1929 and became general manager in 1937. He owned the dealership from 1950 to 1978, retiring to Naples, Florida where he died in 1991. One of Joe Bergl's nephews, Emil Bergl, founded Community Chevrolet on W. Ogden Avenue in 1950. It later became Jack Phelan Chevrolet.

### Clarence Lieder

Bergl's competitor was Clarence Lieder, a Polish Jew who owned the Oakley Auto Construction Company at 2500 West Division Street. Lieder had grown up in The Patch with Lester Gillis, a.k.a. "Baby Face" Nelson. Both men loved cars. Nelson was a skilled mechanic before he became a bank robber, and raced a car built by Lieder at Robey Speedway, circa 1930. For mobsters like Al Capone, who ran the same Chicago streets that visitors took to the 2017 Chicago Auto Show, car choice had less to do with horsepower and showy design than features like superior braking and running boards. Enter Capone's 1928 Cadillac sedan. Low-key or flashy, custom or stock, cars have always been an important part of gangster life, particularly during the Mafia's heyday from the 1920s to the early 1980s. After all, heists required getaways, and corpses needed, well, trunks. Just as in the movies, vehicles often served as mobile whacking sites. Running boards were especially handy during shootouts. Although the kind of vehicles gangs preferred ran the gamut, a few were particularly popular. One mobster favorite was the Ford Model V8. Introduced in 1932, it was touted as an affordable big-engine car and swiftly became associated with 1930s gangland. Favoured by Chicago gangster John Dillinger, Bonnie and Clyde and "Baby Face" Nelson for its iconic design and robust power, the innovative car became known as the height of mobster mobility. Dillinger also is said to have owned a Model A, and Clyde Barrow wrote a letter to founder Henry Ford thanking him for the car's dependability and speed. Another top marque of La Cosa Nostra was the Lincoln Continental, especially Mark III to Mark VIII. Often spotted on New York streets from the late 1960s through the 1990s, the whip had a bold, slightly threatening presence and was driven by, among others, Carlos Gambino, Paul Castellano and Richard "The Iceman" Kuklinski. "The Godfather" film featured the 1941 Continental. Not the most pedestrian of vehicles, the stately Rolls Royce Silver Ghost was particularly popular with mobsters during the Roaring '20s. Wiseguys like Johnny Torrio and Arnold Rothstein each had one. Other notable underworld wheels include the 1975 Chevy Malibu.



Whitey Bulger customized one with a device that could emit smoke or drop oil from the rear. (*Within hours of arriving at a West Virginia prison on 30 October 2018, Whitey aged 89 – Boston’s notorious crime boss – was pummeled to death by a padlock stuffed inside a sock. The beating was so forceful that it displaced his eyeballs. Ed.*) Bootleggers in general liked the inconspicuousness of Chevrolets and Fords, hooking them up with secret compartments, brawny suspensions and a way to dump contraband if they were on the losing end of a cop chase. Ubiquitous Ford Model T's during Prohibition often would be outfitted with fake undercarriages to hold liquor. While living in exile in Italy in the 1950s, Charles "Lucky" Luciano was known for tooling around in late-model Oldsmobiles with New Jersey or New York license plates, said organized crime historian Christian Cipollini. Meanwhile, Jake "The Barber" Factor, Owney "The Killer" Madden and Dutch Schultz were fans of luxury maker Duesenberg.

***"In the '60s, Dodge Darts were big. Some of the older bosses didn't flash — they were more circumspect,"*** said noted mob author Scott M. Deitche. ***"Wiseguys liked Caddies and Town Cars, but some of the younger ones got a little flashy."***

Customizers did brisk business. Capone's Caddy, for example, was painted green and white to match cop cars, and was also outfitted with bespoke features like police band radio, inch-thick glass, and side windows with holes for Tommy guns. The rear window also could be lowered to allow fellow mobsters to blaze at pursuers. Doors were lined with more than 3,000 pounds of armour. Just as nearly all Mafia families had repair garages that serviced only them, most members, for obvious reasons, didn't shop at stores for cars. Capone and his henchmen reportedly bought their rides from a dealer who had married into Capone's family, and from a man who also handled customization. Some mobsters owned dealerships, Deitche said, while others favored stolen cars—usually in a dark color—for use during hits.

***"The really bad guys would walk around Brooklyn, and when they needed a car they had people to steal it,"*** Cipollini said. ***"When they were done with it they'd take it to their favorite junk yard and have mechanics tear it apart and remove any pieces, because they generally had killed someone in the vehicle or around it."***

In recent years, organized crime bosses have traded their high-end sedans for luxury SUVs, said mob expert Scott Burnstein.

Anthony "Little Tony" Zizzo, a high-ranking mobster and a reputed member of the notorious Chicago Outfit, had been driving a Jeep Cherokee when he disappeared in 2006. In the end, you never know: those new cars on the garage showroom floor just may be prized for something more than fuel economy and aerodynamics.

### **NASCAR Rooted in Prohibition Bootlegging**

For bootlegging, the idea was fairly simple – take a car that looked ordinary on the outside, modify the engine for greater speed, remove the floorboards, passenger and back seats to store as many cases of illegal liquor as possible, strengthen up suspension to handle the weight, a dirt-protecting plate in front of the radiator and deliver the prohibited booze to customers by outsmarting and outrunning the authorities. To elude Federal Agents, sheriffs and cops, these daring ‘runners’ needed sharp driving skills to speed and manouvere along dirt, gravel, single-lane back- roads after dark and at time with their headlights turned off. Even before prohibition came to an end in 1933, racing these high-powered cars became a popular pastime among the ‘runners’ in North Carolina, Virginia, Tennessee and elsewhere in the South. They raced each other in cars like the Ford models on weekends out in the country and on makeshift dirt tracks.<sup>9</sup> Such were the bootlegger roots of the stock car, and what would evolve into the National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing (NASCAR) in 1947. Booze runners looked for good mechanics who knew how to ‘soup-up’ their cars, handle better than the basic police cars. This became even more important 1932, when Ford introduced its V8 car (eight cylinders) a powerful car that runners started using as did police departments to keep pace. Driving fast along winding mountainous roads, ‘runners’ taught themselves to be the best stock car drivers of the era. Many future NASCAR drivers cut their teeth bootlegging illegal moonshine in the 1940s, such as Hall of Fame recipient, Junior Johnson, who won his learner’s permit before his NASCAR debut in 1955. Edmund Fahey of Spokane, Washington, who smuggled cases of Scotch whiskey from Canada inside his modified Buick across the border in the early 1920s, wrote in his 1972 autobiography that ‘runners’ had to guard against getting punctures due to the flimsy tubed tyres and be good roadside mechanics, almost like a race car driver and a crew in one.

***“The rum smuggler put his cars through mechanical tests as tough as those devised by test drivers,” he wrote. “Tyres were put to the severest possible tests.***

---

<sup>9</sup> *NASCAR Rooted In Prohibition Bootlegging*. Prohibition an interactive history. [prohibition.themobmuseum.org](http://prohibition.themobmuseum.org) (Last accessed 5 September 2020).

*Heavy loads, hauled over the toughest of roads often at reckless speeds, kept the rubber on your car always under the utmost strain. Therefore, the rum smuggler at all times used the best tyres that could be bought. In fact, several companies developed tyres especially for the rum-running trade. Many a runner served time in jail simply because his rubber failed him at some critical moment.”*

Fahey dropped out of the runners’ racket after being arrested and serving a six-month prison sentence in the mid-20s and did not end up as a racer. The legacy of the Prohibition ‘runner’ went beyond backwoods racing in 1936, when the City of Daytona, Florida, held the first organized stock car race as a promotion. It lost money, but a prohibition-era mechanic named Bill France, who was placed fifth in the race, was determined to find a way to organize stock car racing. It took him more than a decade, but NASCAR’s organization set a simple set of rules for racetracks and formalized the sport. The first NASCAR race was held in Daytona on 5 February 1948. The winner, in a modified Ford, was Red Byron, a former moonshine ‘runner’.<sup>10</sup>

### Conclusion

When we imagine the “Roaring 20s” and the heyday of Chicago gangsters, one of the most iconic images are the cars they drove. What types of vehicles were they, exactly? And what made certain models popular with organized crime? Specific features were of particular use for gangsters in Chicago. Of course, a showy design and high horsepower were desired by some who wanted to flash their success. But for others, a subdued ride that blended in with the rest was best for staying incognito. Of particular importance were features like good brakes and running boards. A good and reliable vehicle was necessary for getting away from the scene of a heist. Running boards could come in handy for providing cover during shootouts. And voluminous trunk room was essential for, well, “human cargo.”<sup>11</sup> Detroit was the epicentre the auto- mobilized world. It rightly earned its “Motor City” moniker churning out cars at a record-breaking pace throughout the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. In 1910, Detroit-based car companies produced 63pc of all the cars that made it to the market. By 1915, thirteen of the fifteen leading vehicle makers listed their primary factories addresses in the Detroit Metro region.<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> *NASCAR Rooted In Prohibition Bootlegging*. Prohibition an interactive history. prohibition.themobmuseum.org (Last accessed 5 September 2020).

<sup>11</sup> Mitsubishi Motors. 8 March 2020. *What vehicles are Chicago gangsters known for?* countrusidemitsubishi.com

<sup>12</sup> Joseph Bogga may 2019 (Thesis) for Master of Arts. *Prohibition proving ground: Automobile culture and dry enforcement on the Toledo-Detroit-Windsor corridor. 1913 – 1933.*

Often overlooked by historians, the rapid rise of a motorcar culture greatly contributed to the lawlessness that characterized the Prohibition Era. Nowhere was this more evident than along the bootlegging routes. Besides possessing a ready source of high quality booze in Canada, the region's deep connection to mass automobile production ensured that its residents were steeped in motorcar culture and adept with the steering wheel in their hands. Regional dry enforcers, in order to keep pace with their rum-running rivals, felt compelled to engage in questionable and even life-threatening policing practices. In the late 1920s and early 1930s, booze-related, gangland killings and police corruption scandals became intertwined with regional motorcar culture. By that time, it was clear that prohibition did not "mix" well with anything, especially the large motoring populace in the bootlegging runs. Herbert Hoover's (Then US President) "*great noble and economic*" experiment failed dramatically on this narrow, though important strip of territory that encompassed two nations, (Canada & the US) two American states, numerous towns, villages, and cities, and a people inclined to enjoy intoxicating beverages. Prohibition was "taken for a ride" and the region's motorcar culture was a driving force behind its ultimate demise. Finally, cars know no morality. Sometimes their owners don't, either, but that doesn't mean they don't love their cars. A preferred status symbol for gangsters, lowlifes, and hoods, cars are also the ticket for when the crime is done and the two choices are - getting away or going away - for a long, long time.

**PS**

***In view of the Prohibition Era, the "Roaring 20s, and the utilization of the motor car for bootlegging and other gangster activities, it would be remiss of me not to mention the following event that occurred in 1929: Chicago's gang war reached its bloody climax in the so-called St. Valentine's Day Massacre. One of Capone's longtime enemies, Irish gangster "Bugs" Moran, ran his bootlegging operations out of a garage at 2122 North Clark Street. On February 14 1929, seven members of Moran's gang were gunned down standing lined up, facing the wall of the garage. The shooters were dressed as policemen and some 70 rounds of ammunition were fired. When police officers from Chicago's 36th District arrived, they found one gang member Frank Guesenberg barely alive. In the few minutes before he died, he was pressed to reveal what happened, but Guesenberg never talked. Ironically, "Bugs" Moran was on his way to the garage and was only minutes away when the massacre took place.***