

# MOTORSPORT AT THE 1900 PARIS OLYMPIC GAMES

By Jeroen Heijmans

## Introduction

Currently, the Olympic Charter states that “Sports, disciplines or events in which performance depends essentially on mechanical propulsion are not acceptable.”<sup>1</sup> Therefore, no motorsport events can be conducted at the Olympic Games, placing them among other popular non-Olympic sports such as cricket, golf and rugby. But, like those other three sports, motorsport does have an Olympic history: a number of motorised events were conducted at the 1900 Olympics. This article attempts to give a more complete picture of these events than found in the current works on the 1900 Olympic Games and discusses their Olympic status.

## A short history of motorised sports up to 1900

After the invention of the combustion engine in 1867 by Nikolaus Otto, in 1885 both Karl Benz and Gottlieb Daimler produced a combination of this engine with a vehicle. In spite of the fact that the first automobiles were invented in Germany, the country was initially hostile towards them, as was Great Britain. This was not the case in France, which became the country where motorsport would develop.

In 1894, a reliability competition was organised between Paris and Rouen. FFR 5,000 was to be awarded to the car manned by a driver and a mechanic completing the course safely with a minimum of expenses. The first arriving vehicle was a steam driven tractor, steered by Comte de Dion. He was however not awarded the prize, since he did not have a mechanic on board. The jury also considered his vehicle to be impractical.

The next year, the first race in which speed played the major role was contested. The

forerunner of what would later become *l'Automobile Club de France* (ACF) organised a race from Paris to Bordeaux and back. Winner was Émile Levassor, driving a Panhard-Levassor car. He, too, was denied the award, as his car didn't have the required number of seats. The Paris-Bordeaux-Paris race also saw an entry by Andre Michelin, who was the first to equip his car with pneumatic tyres. That same year, races were also organised in Italy and in the United States.

The so-called ‘city to city’ racing grew in popularity. In the following years, the ACF organised Paris-Marseille-Paris (1896) Paris-Amsterdam-Paris (1898) le Tour de France (1899), Paris-Toulouse-Paris (1900), Paris-Berlin (1901) and Paris-Vienna (1902). The 1903 race, Paris-Madrid, would be the last in this row. The event was stopped after several accidents killed eight people, and the French government subsequently banned motor racing on public roads.

In 1900, another famous series of annual races was initiated. American businessman James Gordon Bennett<sup>2</sup> came up with the idea of a race in which each national automobile club could enter three cars. Although the Gordon Bennett Trophies only lasted until 1905, they were the first true international racing series.

## Events held in Paris

At the 1900 Paris Olympic Games 16 events for automobiles and motorcycles were contested. These events can be divided into two groups. The first group consists of the aforementioned Paris-Toulouse-Paris race. This race, which featured cars, voitures<sup>3</sup> and motorcycles, can best be compared to a present-day rally: the event was conducted on

<sup>1</sup> International Olympic Committee, *Olympic Charter*, [http://www.olympic.org/uk/organisation/missions/charter\\_uk.asp](http://www.olympic.org/uk/organisation/missions/charter_uk.asp), 2001.

<sup>2</sup> Newspaper tycoon Bennett (\*1841, †1918) lived in London and was also a member of the organising committee of the events at the Paris Olympics.

open roads, held in various stages, and the race was against the clock, not directly against opponents. A total of FFR 46,000 was available to the highest finishers in the three categories.

The second group consisted of reliability contests. In six different categories, some of them containing subcategories, art objects/gold medals and medals of vermeil gilded silver, silver and bronze were awarded by a jury.

## Olympic status

The question remains whether the motorsport events in Paris can be considered Olympic. To discuss their Olympic status, I use the five criteria also applied by Bill Mallon in his book on the 1900 Games<sup>4</sup>. These criteria state that an Olympic event (in 1900):

1. should allow entrants from all nations;
2. should not be a handicap event;
3. should be open to entrants of any age, religion, competency, etc.;
4. should not be based on motorised transport;
5. should not allow professionals.

It appears there was no limitation on the nationality or of the entrants, nor were there any other restrictions, which means requirements (1) and (3) are met. None of the events was a handicap event.

The fourth criterion would of course exclude all the motorised events. However, as Mallon also notes, this criterion is the most debatable among the five. At the 1908 Games in London, motor boating contests were held. On the program for the 1908 Games were also automobile races to be held at

Weybridge<sup>5</sup>, while on the original program for Rome 1908 automobile races were scheduled<sup>6</sup>. One might therefore argue that at the time, events based on motorised transport were possible at the Olympics.

For the Paris-Toulouse-Paris race, prize money was awarded, which makes the competitors professionals and excludes these events as Olympic. For the remaining events, art objects and medals were awarded. However, since many entries in these 'beauty contests' were from companies, one might argue that these events were also for professionals. That is apparently also the view of the Official Report, where the Paris-Toulouse-Paris race is called 'the most successful of the amateur automobile events'<sup>7</sup>.

Concluding, the reliability contests could be considered Olympic if the criterion of non-motorised events were to be dropped. However, these events were exhibitions rather than sporting events, and I would therefore not classify any of the motorsport events from 1900 as Olympic.

## Results

### *Paris-Toulouse-Paris*

The 1900 Paris-Toulouse-Paris race was organised by the ACF and was divided in three stages, Montgeron-Toulouse, Toulouse-Limoges and Limoges-Montgeron, totalling a distance of 1347 km<sup>8</sup>. The organisation had trouble getting permission for the race, and clearance was received only a few days before the scheduled start of the event. Entries for the race were divided into three categories: voitures, voiturettes and motorcycles. On July 25th, the contestants

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<sup>3</sup> Voiturette is French for 'small car' and originally applied to two-seater touring cars. The term is used in English as well.

<sup>4</sup> Mallon, Bill, *The 1900 Olympic Games - Results for All Competitors in All Events, with Commentary*, Jefferson, 1998.

<sup>5</sup> *Revue Olympique*, 1907, pp. 270-271.

<sup>6</sup> Kluge, Volker, *Olympische Sommerspiele - Die Chronik I*, Berlin, 1997.

<sup>7</sup> Merillon, M.D., *Concours internationaux d'exercices physiques et de sport: Rapports publiés sous la direction de M. D. Mé rillon, dé lé gué gé né ralis*, 1901-1902, p. 353.

<sup>8</sup> Several different figures are found for the distance. 1347 km is per Rose while [Mallon] and [Kluge] give 1443 km. [OR] gives both 1349 km and 1426 km (2 x 713) of which the latter also includes the parts where the race was neutralised. Cp.: Rose, Gerald, *A record of motor racing*, 1909 (reprinted in 1949).



**Four competitors in the Paris-Toulouse-Paris race. From left to right: René de Knyff, Selwyn Edge, Louis Renault (winner of the voiturette class) and baron Adrien de Turckheim.**

drove from Vincennes to Montgeron, where they departed for the timed part of the race at 3:07 in the morning, with two-minute intervals between the contestants. Along the course, 82 control posts were placed, which all cars had to pass. After the race, the vehicles were exhibited at the Exposition in

Vincennes.

In total, 78 vehicles were entered, of which 55 actually departed. Two days later, only 21 vehicles returned to Montgeron. For 18 of them, a time has been recorded.

Apart from the prize money awarded in each class, a jury of the ACF also awarded vermeil

medals to the winners of each class, silver medals to those who exceeded an average speed of 60 km/h (Pinson and Voight) and bronze medals to those who exceeded an average speed over 40 km/h (Giraud & Giraud, Antony, Collignon, Bardin and Gasté).

### Voitures

The first stage was won by Levegh, with an average speed of 68.18 km/h, while the second and third stages were both won by Pinson, in 65.46 and 69.84 km/h respectively. Of the 19 touring cars departing, 9 arrived at Toulouse and Limoges and all returned to Paris, although Gilles Hougières' time of arrival is unknown. Eighth placed Brillie was not eligible

### Results in the Voiture-class

Pos	Nr	Driver	Nat	Car	Time	Award
	1	6 Levegh	FRA	Mors	2050.09	8,000
	2	13 Pinson	FRA	Panhard	22:11.01	6,000
	3	2 Carl Voight	FRA	Panhard	22:11.51	6,000 <sup>9</sup>
	4	4 Etienne & François Giraud	FRA	Panhard	22:55.32	4,000
	5	75 Antony	GBR	Mors	26.46.27	3,000
	6	15 Baron Adrien de Turckheim <sup>10</sup>	FRA	De Dietrich	37:35.36	2,000
	7	62 Ravel	FRA	Peugeot	41:00.29	1,000
	8	27 Eugene Brillie	FRA	Gobron-Brillie	43:30.08	
	9	5 Gilles Hougières	FRA	Mors	arrived	
NF	1	Remé De Knyff <sup>11</sup>	FRA	Panhard	punctures	
NF	3	Léonce Girardot <sup>12</sup>	FRA	Panhard		
NF	8	Comte Bozon de Périgord	FRA	Panhard		
NF	11	Lefebvre	FRA	Bolide		
NF	14	Selwyn Edge <sup>13</sup>	GBR	Napier		
NF	15	De Lorys	FRA	Bolide		
NF	42	Cuchelet	FRA	Peugeot		
NF	73	Gaveau	FRA	Mors	ran into ditch	
NF	74	Huguet	FRA	Peugeot		
		+1 unknown starter				

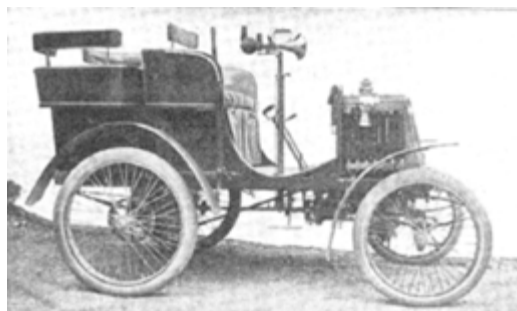
<sup>9</sup> The two available extra prizes of FFR 500 were both awarded by the jury to Voight, because of the small difference between the second and third arriving car.

<sup>10</sup> Mallon and Kluge list De Turckheim as a Baron von Tückheim from Germany. A contemporary German source Braunbeck lists him as a French baron from the Alsace-Lorraine region (Elsaß-Lotharingen). This region had been French until the 1870 France-Prussian war, but was a German Reichsland until after World War I. Cp.: *Braunbeck's Sport-Lexikon Automobilismus*. Berlin, 1910 (republished by U. Greve, Berlin, 1994).

<sup>11</sup> René de Knyff (\*1864 - †1954) was the director of Panhard, and winner of several major races, including the 1898 Paris-Bordeaux-Paris and the 1899 Tour de France.

<sup>12</sup> Léonce Girardot (\*1864 - †1922) later won the 1901 Gordon Bennett Trophy.

<sup>13</sup> Selwyn Francis Edge (\*1868 - †1940) was an Irishman, but born in Sydney, Australia. He is listed alternately as Irish, British or Australian. He would later win the 1902 Gordon Bennett Trophy for the British team, although it should be noted that it was not required to be a national of the country for which one drove; membership of the national automobile club sufficed.



**Voiturette Renault**

### Results in the Voiturette-class

Pos	Nr	Driver	Nat	Car	Time	Award
1	21	Louis Renault	FRA	Renault	34:133.38	4,000
2	72	Schrader	FRA	Renault-Aster	45:49.35	2,000
3	22	Grus	FRA	Renault	57:24.43	1,000
NF	20	Marcel Renault	FRA	Renault		collision
NF	38	Mercier	FRA	Gladiator		
NF	51	Jean Corre	FRA	Fouillaron		
NF	69	Cottereau	FRA	Cottereau		collision
NF	70	Camus	FRA	Teste-Morin		

for any award, as the owner of his car, Gustave Gobron, was also a member of the jury.

The winner, Alfred Velghe (†1904), drove under the pseudonym of 'Levegh'. Velghe's nephew, Pierre Boullion, later used the same pseudonym during his racing career. Pierre Levegh is mostly known for the infamous accident at the 24-hours of Le Mans in 1955, when his crash caused the death of more than 80 spectators and himself.

### Voiturettes

Of the 8 starting voiturettes, only three reached Toulouse, all of which returned to Paris. The average speeds (no winners known) of the stages were 36.42 km/h, 42.30 km/h and 42.42 km/h. Four more prizes of FFR 500 were available, but these were not awarded.

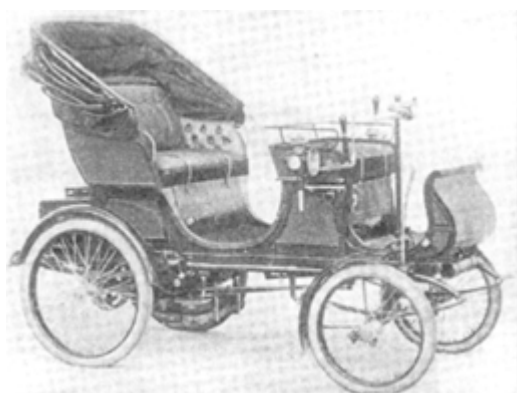
Marcel and Louis Renault are co-founders of the well-known car brand, for which they raced themselves.

### Motorcycles

Of the 28 departing motorcycles, only 9 are reported to have reached Toulouse and Limoges, while one more dropped out in the

final stage. The average speeds of winner Teste in the individual stages were 58.56 km/h, 57.12 km/h and 51.60 km/h. 6 more prizes of FFR 250 were available, but these were not awarded.

Pos	Nr	Driver	Nat	Motorcycle	Time	Award
1	29	Georges Teste	FRA	De Dion	23:54.01	2,000
2	31	Collignon	FRA	De Dion	27:28.32	1,500
3	28	Bardin	FRA	De Dion	28:00.26	1,000
4	25	Gasté	FRA	Soncin	30:32.30	500
5	30	Gleizes <sup>14</sup>	FRA	De Dion	36:19.14	500
6	65	Fournier	FRA	De Dion	42:59.19	500
7	58	Durand	FRA	Soncin	70:31.40	500
8	64	Vial	FRA	De Dion	arrived	
9	37	Demester	FRA	Aster	arrived	
NF	23	Osmont	FRA	Aster		
NF	24	Henri Tart	FRA	De Dion		
NF	26	Bonnard	FRA	Werner Bicycle		
NF	33	Levasseur	FRA	De Dion		
NF	35	Joyeux	FRA	Soncin		
NF	36	Laurens	FRA	Soncin		
NF	43	Marcellin	FRA	Buchet		
NF	44	Jean-Philippe Beconnais	FRA	Soncin		
NF	49	Villemain	FRA	Soncin		
NF	53	Perrault	FRA	De Dion		
NF	54	Bataillie	FRA	Aster		
NF	55	De Lisle	FRA	Soncin		
NF	56	Clement	FRA	Ardent		
NF	63	Caille	FRA	Bataillie		
+ 5 unknown starters						



**Voiturette Peugeot**

### Voitures de tourisme

These events were conducted for touring cars weighing more than 400 kg. Prizes were awarded in four categories. From 14 to 19 May, with the exception of 17 May, the cars had to complete 150 km a day, raced on a 50 km track near Vincennes, driving one lap in the morning and two in the afternoon. Speeds should not exceed 30 km/h; 20 km/h in

<sup>14</sup> Named Gleize, [Braunbeck].

inhabited areas. A total of 46 touring cars were entered, of which 33 were presented. Seven vehicles were excluded from winning a prize; one of them because it belonged to a jury member, three because they had exceeded speed limits, and three because they weighed less than 400 kg.

#### *Voitures de tourisme à deux places*

Of the 12 participating two-seater touring cars, the first prize was awarded to the company of Armand Peugeot, which was founded in 1892, though the Peugeot company already constructed (motorised) bicycles at the time.

Prize	Nr	Entrant	Award
1st	15	Société des Automobiles Peugeot	art object
2nd	29	Delahaye	vermeil medal
3rd	13	Rochet-Petit	silver medal
3rd	38	Serpollet	silver medal
4th	6	De Riancey	bronze medal
4th	34	Penelle	bronze medal

#### *Voitures de tourisme à quatre places*

The category for touring cars with four seats had 15 participants. Because the fourth touring car category only had one entrant, the jury decided to award the art object for that category in the four-seater touring car category.

The Société des Automobiles Delahaye had been founded by Émile Delahaye (\*1843-†1905) from Tours, but Delahaye left his own company in 1900 and retired. The automobile sector of the De Dietrich company was founded by baron Adrien de Turckheim, a competitor in the Paris-Toulouse-Paris race in 1900 and a nephew of one of the De Dietrichs. In 1905, the automobile sector became independent under the name of Lorraine-Dietrich.

Prize	Nr	Entrant	Award
1st	30	Delahaye	art object
1st	20	De Dietrich	art object
2nd	17	Brouhot	vermeil medal
2nd	22	Hurtu	vermeil medal
3rd	11	Georges Richard	silver medal
3rd	39	Serpollet	silver medal
3rd	44	Bardon	silver medal
4th	37	Société de Mécanique industrielle d'Anzin	bronze medal

#### *Voitures de tourisme à six places*

In this category, for touring cars with six seats, 5 vehicles took part. The winning car was from the Panhard & Levassor factory. This factory had grown from the coach building family business of the Panhard family. In 1876. René Panhard was joined by Émile Levassor, who had won the 1895 Paris-Bordeaux-Paris race.

Prize	Nr	Entrant	Award
1st	42	Panhard-Levassor	art object
2nd	18	Brouhot	vermeil medal
3rd	31	Delahaye	silver medal

#### *Voitures de tourisme à plus de six places*

Only one vehicle in this category, which caused the jury to decide to move the art object for the winner to the category for four-seaters.

Prize	Nr	Entrant	Award
2nd	43	Panhard-Levassor	vermeil medal

## Motorcycles

From 18 to 23 June, with the exception of 21 June, the motorcycles had to complete 70 laps of the track at Lac Daumesnil near Vincennes each day, 30 laps in the morning and 40 in the afternoon, for a daily total of 160 km. 13 motorcycles were entered and all participated. The brothers Eugene and Michel Werner, of Russian origin, had invented the motocyclette, with which they won one of the first prizes, three years earlier.

Prize	Nr	Entrant	Award
1st	11	Werner	gold medal
1st	1	Rochet-Petit	gold medal
1st	2	Rochet-Petit	gold medal
1st	3	Rochet-Petit	gold medal
2nd	4	Cré anche	silver medal
3rd	7	Renaux	bronze medal
3rd	8	Luc	bronze medal

#### *Taxis and delivery cars*

This event was conducted for taxis and delivery cars with a cargo capacity of up to 1200 kg. From 6 to 11 August, with the exception of 9 August, the vehicles had to complete a course of 30 km round Vincennes twice a day. Prizes were awarded in four categories, divided by type of car and propulsion. A total of 14 vehicles entered, all taking part.

### *Voitures de place à moteur à essence*

Two of three entered gasoline engine taxis received a prize.

Prize	Nr	Entrant	Award
1st	6	Peugeot	gold medal
2nd	15	De Riancey	silver medal

### *Voitures de place à moteur électrique*

6 vehicles were entered in the category for taxis with electric engines. Parisian Louis Krieger (\*1868-†1951) produced his first car in 1897, electrically propelled, introducing novelties as braking on all four wheels. The constructor of the second vehicle winning second prize was Charles Jeantaud. Krieger had been Jeantaud's mechanic when Jeantaud took part in the 1895 Paris-Bordeaux-Paris race.

Prize	Nr	Entrant	Award
1st	7	Krieger	gold medal
1st	9	Krieger	gold medal
2nd	14	Jeantaud	silver medal

### *Voitures de livraison à moteur à essence*

3 vehicles were entered in the category for delivery cars with a gasoline engine. Brouhot was from Vierzon, and also raced in his own vehicles.

Prize	Nr	Entrant	Award
1st	4	Brouhot	gold medal
2nd	17	De Diétrich	silver medal

### *Voitures de livraison à moteur électrique*

3 vehicles were entered in the category for delivery cars with an electric engine.

Prize	Nr	Entrant	Award
1st	8	Krieger	gold medal

## **Voitures**

This event was for voitures, cars weighing less than 400 kg with two seats. From 13 to 18 August, with the exception of 16 August, they had to complete the same program as the touring cars. Of 19 entries, 12 completed the event.

### *Voitures à deux places pesant moins de 250 kg*

Prize	Nr	Entrant	Award
1st	12	Gladiator	gold medal
1st	13	Gladiator	gold medal
1st	14	Gladiator	gold medal
2nd	4	Georges Richard	silver medal

### *Voitures à deux places pesant moins de 400 kg*

Prize	Nr	Entrant	Award
1st	1	Renault	gold medal
1st	2	Renault	gold medal
2nd	6	Outhenin-Chalandre	vermeil medal
2nd	7	Outhenin-Chalandre	vermeil medal
2nd	8	Outhenin-Chalandre	vermeil medal
3rd	3	Hanzer	silver medal
3rd	18	Fernandez	silver medal
4th	15	Créanche	bronze medal

## **Poids légers**

This event was for lightweight trucks for merchandise with a minimal carrying capacity of 100 kg. From 17 to 22 September, with the exception of 20 September, they had to complete the same course as the taxis and delivery cars. Of 12 entries, 10 vehicles were presented.

De Dion-Bouton was founded in 1882 in Puteaux by Comte Albert De Dion - winner of the 1894 Paris-Rouen contest - and Georges Bouton. After building motorised tricycles, the company switched to automobiles.

Prize	Nr	Entrant	Award
1st	3	De Dion-Bouton	gold medal
1st	2	Peugeot	gold medal
2nd	9	Gillet-Forest	vermeil medal
2nd	11	Ricker	vermeil medal
4th	5	Fernandez	bronze medal
4th	7	Fouillaron	bronze medal

## **Poids lourds**

This event was for trucks meant to transport either passengers or merchandise with a minimal carrying capacity of 1250 kg. From 8 to 13 October (not on the 11th), the trucks had to complete a course of 50 km. Of 13 entered trucks, 12 competed, with only 8 completing the event.

Prize	Nr	Entrant	Award
1st	7	De Dion-Bouton	gold medal
1st	3	Panhard-Levassor	gold medal
1st	8	De Dion-Bouton	gold medal
1st	9	Peugeot	gold medal
2nd	4	Panhard-Levassor	vermeil medal
2nd	13	Ricker	vermeil medal
3rd	10	De Diétrich	silver medal