

# The International Motorsports Hall of Fame

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International Motorsports Hall of Fame, 3198 Speedway Boulevard, Post Office Box 1018, Talladega, Alabama 35161. Don Naman, Executive Director. Telephone: (2.56) 362-5002.

Open daily 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. central time except Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Easter morning. Extended hours during spring and fall race weeks. Admission is \$8 for adults, \$7 for students 7-17, children 6 and under free. Group rates are available. Tours are offered every half-hour except when the track is closed for practice or racing, and a large selection of primarily stock car racing items are available in the gift shop.

The IMHOF is located in east central Alabama just off Interstate 20 near Talladega. Take exit 168 if eastbound or 173 if westbound, and follow the signs. For more information, call (2.56) 362-5002 or check the excellent website at <http://historyonwheels.com>.

If you like race cars, the International Motorsports Hall of Fame (IMHOF) may be your heaven on earth. The facility, which opened in 1983, came about as the result of a cooperative venture between NASCAR founder Bill France Sr. and Alabama Governor George Wallace. The France family donated land adjacent to the Talladega Superspeedway (formerly Alabama International Motor Speedway), and the state of Alabama built and operates the facility. The Hall of Fame, founded to "preserve the history of motor sports on a worldwide basis, and to enshrine forever the people who have been responsible for its growth," is motorsports' Cooperstown. There is modest state funding, but the IMHOF is essentially self-sustaining. Most monies come from admission fees from the approximately 100,000 visitors each year.

The International Motorsports Hall of Fame honors racing achievement in all types of motorsports, including automobiles, motorcycles, and boats. Individuals who have been retired at least five years are eligible for election. The motorsports

media (approximately two-thirds of whom are American) nominate and vote on new members and the “old timers”—living inductees—choose one or two people from those nominated but not elected after 15 years, for a maximum of five individuals annually. Inducted in 1999 were the first woman member, stock car driver Louise Smith, the first African American member, stock car driver Wendell Scott; Formula 1 champion Alain Prost; 1976 USAC champion and two-time winner of the Indianapolis 500 Gordon Johncock; and car builder and crew chief Harry Hyde, who was the inspiration for Robert Duvall’s character Harry Hogge in the 1990 Tom Cruise film *Days of Thunder* (Cruise was Hollywood’s version of the late driver Tim Richmond). The nationally televised induction ceremonies are held in late April, to coincide with the spring Talladega race.

The International Motorsports Hall of Fame is also home to seven other halls of fame: the Automobile Racing Club of America Hall of National Champions, the Western Auto Mechanics Hall of Fame, the Quarter Midgets of America Hall of Fame, the World Karting Hall of Fame, the Alabama Racing Pioneers Hall of Fame, the Auto Custom Carpets Hall of Fame, and the Alabama Sports Writers Hall of Fame.

The IMHOF features vehicles and memorabilia from all types of racing. The collection reflects the ongoing efforts of Executive Director Don Naman to publicize the facility and acquire worthy new items for display. Naman spends about half his time attending races and promoting the Hall of Fame, with impressive results. The BBC, alerted by a description of the IMHOF in a cookbook published by the Formula 1 wives’ auxiliary, did a live interview with him, and a representative of inductee Tazio Nuvolari’s family arranged for an exchange of memorabilia with an Italian museum. The IMHOF has a pace car provided by Chevrolet, which appears in prerace festivities, parades, auto shows, and similar events around the country.

Nearly 150 vehicles, all donated or loaned, are on exhibit. Ranging from quaintly antique to high-tech awesome, they are primarily the vehicles of champion drivers, the last of a kind, or associated with an outstanding achievement. Among them are Don Garlits’ Swamp Rat 23 dragster; the Dodge Charger Richard Petty drove to 31 wins; the Buick Regal in which Patty Moise set a new women’s closed course speed record of 217.498 mph, the 1972 Eagle Indy car built by Dan Gurney and driven by Bill Vukovich Jr.; the 1935 Bluebird of Sir Malcolm Campbell, the 1988 Pontiac Sunbird driven by Shawna Robinson, the first woman to win a NASCAR feature tour event (a Dash Series race at Asheville, N.C., Motor Speedway); and Stan Barrett’s rocket car (48,000-horsepower engine with a 12,000-horsepower sidewinder missile), which broke the speed of sound. One-of-a-kind vehicles are also on display, such as the car that race team owner and former Washington Redskins coach Joe Gibbs’ crew painted in Redskin colors for the Talladega Diehard 500 in 1996 to honor Gibbs’ induction into the Professional Football Hall of Fame. The chilling remnants of some of racing’s most spectacular wrecks reside here also, including Michael Waltrip’s terrifying 1990 crash at Bristol, which left pieces of car strewn for hundreds of yards and only the safety cage intact. Remarkably, the cage did its job and Waltrip had only

minor injuries. Vehicles other than cars are on display: Several Indian motorcycles are in the collection, as is Tom Gentry's Turbo Eagle Superboat (Don't you just love the vehicle names? They sound like competitors at the Westminster Kennel Club show!), a 48-foot craft with four engines of 1,400 horsepower each, which Gentry piloted to a world superboat record of 148.238 mph in 1987.

There are also displays of trophies, banners, medals, helmets, and posters, as well as original works by motorsports artists such as Sam Bass and Jeanne Barnes. Special cases are devoted to Bobby Allison, the leader of the "Alabama Gang" of stock car drivers; and to the King, Richard Petty. My favorite artifact is a pair of cowboy boots worn as "driving shoes" by stock car racer "Tiny" Lund.

The McCaig-Wellborn International Motorsports Research Library, a 1,700-square-foot facility with a representative collection of books, programs, serials, clippings, and photographs, is a treasure trove for the motorsports scholar. The library, which is open to the public 8:30 a.m.-5 p.m. Monday through Friday, cannot be called comprehensive, since it relies on donations to expand its collection, but Naman has been successful in acquiring a number of important resources. Librarian Betty Carlan regularly answers information requests from everyone from NASCAR to CBS Television. She has developed a computerized database with entries on every major driver and track internationally. Contact the library at (256) 362-5047.