

September 19, 1953

08/30/07 452 W, 1 I - + 19 - 15

Would you believe a double fatality at a raceway in Raleigh? Found the date while skimming [Silent Speedways of the Carolinas: The Grand National Histories of 29 Former Tracks](#). Here's a *Raleigh Times* photo:



The next day's *News & Observer* article read: "Two race drivers were fatally hurt last night at the Raleigh Speedway when 15 hot rod racers piled up along the backstretch. Two of the cars exploded and one of the drivers, Bill Blevins, 25, of Fayetteville, burned to death behind the wheel before about 10,000 race customers. Jessie Midkiff, 18, of Haw River, died at Rex Hospital. His head was crushed. Several drivers were injured, but apparently not critically. The crash occurred during the first lap when Blevins car stalled on the backstretch.

The pack of about 60 cars was hitting 90 miles an hour. A number of the drivers were injured by only two of the injured were treated at Rex Hospital. They were James Croom of Zebulon, fractured collar bone, and Buddy Matthews, first and second degree burns on his hands, arms and the left side of his face. Both were discharged from the hospital after receiving treatment. Flames from the two cars shot about 70 feet into the air and showered over the other speeding cars.

An unidentified woman looking through the fence on the backstretch went into shock when she saw the cars explode. She was taken to Rex Hospital. The other drivers injured besides Croom and Matthews apparently weren't hurt seriously because they were not treated at either of the Raleigh hospitals. Durham Police Captain M. T. Yates, who witnessed the crash from only a few yards away, said when the first car stalled a number of the speeding hot rods swerved by the stalled car.

One came up behind the stalled car, No. 50, and attempted to get it started by pushing it. But the jam became too thick and the pile-up occurred. One car turned over and barreled for several hundred feet along the shoulder of the track. The air was filled with smoke, dust and flame.

The race was the 220-mile national championship N A S C A R sportman's modified stock car race. A total of \$15,000 in prizes was offered in the race. Top prize was \$2,000. The race was held up for about an hour after the pile-up. It was restarted with 47 cars. William France, manager of the track, said the cars were running about 90 miles per hour at the time of the crashes."

The Raleigh Speedway was located southwest of the present intersection of New Hope Church Road and Atlantic Avenue. Here is [slightly more information about the racetrack](#).

Unknown if the Raleigh Fire Department responded to the accident.

The article says the track manager was a William France. Any idea if that could have been Bill France, Sr., the founder of Nascar ? Just one nascar junky here who also loves fire history.

Jon C - 08/30/07 - 20:42

Sorry for the late reply. I was going through some older messages and found this one. A quick search turned up this New York Times article which mentions Bill France having been in Raleigh. The article is about Juanita Epton and the quote is..."Epton, who has two children and a granddaughter, married Joe in 1943. Two years later, she and her husband moved from Spartanburg, S.C., to Raleigh, N.C., where he began working as an official scorer, timer and carpenter for William France, an organizer and promoter of auto races, who founded Nascar in 1947." URL is <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/11/25/sports..>

Hope this helps

Keith G ([Email](#)) - 12/13/07 - 11:47

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preferred)
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Comment moderation is enabled on this site. This means that your comment will not be visible on this site until it has been approved by an editor.

To prevent spam we require you to answer this silly question

What are the FIRST TWO LETTERS of the word 'fire'?

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Notify: Yes, send me email when someone replies.
Hide email: Yes, hide my email address.

Small print: All html tags except and <i> will be removed from your comment. You can make links by just typing the url or mail-address.