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The Fast Times of Albert Champion: From Record-Setting Racer to Dashing Tycoon, An Untold Story of Speed, Success, and Betrayal

Peter Joffre Nye

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RACER. INNOVATOR. CELEBRITY. MOGUL. CHAMPION.

This is the first biography of the short but exciting life of Albert Champion—record-setting bicyclist and motorcyclist, daredevil racecar driver, early automobile innovator, charismatic ladies' man, and celebrity of the Jazz Age.

Though most Americans have heard of the companies Albert Champion founded—ACDelco and Champion Spark Plug—few know much about the charismatic man behind them. Like a Richard Branson of the early 20th century, or an Evel Knievel with a business degree, Champion was a powerhouse whose life was defined by both speed and success.

Champion rose from poverty in Paris to great wealth and fame in both his native France and the United States. As a bicycle racer, Champion set more than a hundred world records. When the urban speed limit was 8 mph, he was the first ever to drive a motorcycle a mile under a minute. A car-racing crash snapped a leg bone that kept him in traction for eleven weeks. Undeterred, he hobbled out of the hospital on crutches and recovered to win the French national cycling championship.

Champion invested his prize money to become a tycoon in the new and revolutionary American auto industry, working closely with the leading players and amassing thirty US. His contemporaries included Charles Lindbergh, who endorsed Champion's product by saying, "AC Spark Plugs kept my engine running perfectly."; Louis Chevrolet, whom Champion backed financially until it came out that he was trying to seduce Chevrolet's wife, which led to a fight and the end of their friendship; and William Durant, founder of a "new holding company" called General Motors.

A notorious ladies' man, Champion's many dalliances were fodder for the papers and finally ended in a love triangle that resulted in his death under mysterious circumstances.

From the Hardcover edition.

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