

1908 NY TO PARIS GREAT AUTO RACE THROUGH SYRACUSE
Tracking the Three Leading Cars on Saturday Morning, February 15, 1908

Compiled by Bill Coffin

Q Which were the leading three race cars at Canastota the night of February 14?
A The American Thomas Flyer, the French DeDion and the Italian Zust

Q Where did the crews spend the night in Canastota after arriving on the canal towpath?

A The Weaver Hotel on Peterboro Street

Q On the morning of Feb.15 when did each car depart Canastota and arrive at the Yates Hotel in downtown Syracuse?

A Flyer	depart 7:30, arrive 8:57	time-- one hour & 37 minutes
DeDion	depart 8:00, arrive 9:48	time-- one hour & 48 minutes
Zust	depart 8:45, arrive 9:55	time – one hour & 10 minutes

Q What kind of weather?

A Icy cold rain in warmer temperature on recent fallen snow made a deep muddy slush. Ruts were 4" deep.

Q Did any race car go all the way to downtown Syracuse on the towpath?

A No. All three of the lead cars left the towpath when close to Syracuse according to the New York Times correspondent on board the Thomas Flyer.

Q Which route did they take after the towpath to downtown?

A The Syracuse Herald reported the DeDion used East Genesee St. and then said the Zust was behind and arrived at the Yates Hotel 7 minutes later.

Q And the Thomas Flyer?

A Probably by East Genesee St. since the other two did.

Q Where did the cars leave the towpath?

A Clues point to Manlius Center, then Rt. 257 to Fayetteville, or by turning left on North Burdick St. to the west end of Fayetteville. Fayetteville meant they were on their way to East Genesee St., Syracuse.

Q What about Rt. 5 from Mycenae to Fayetteville?

A According to Barbara Rivette, Town of Manlius Historian, this was a very undeveloped road and hardly open in the winter. Rt. 290 from Mycenae was a favorite way to downtown Syracuse.

Q Could the Flyer have used Rt. 290 into East Syracuse and then James St. to downtown?

A There is no clue yet it did.

Q Is it certain that all of these roads existed in 1908?

A Referring to the 1902 topographical maps, yes.

Q Why did the DeDion take the longest to make the trip?

A The DeDion was reported by the Zust crew to have been stuck in the mud on the towpath "just before Syracuse." The Zust could not pass the DeDion, so it turned back and passed it "by a road." A car being stuck just west of Manlius Center and the use of Rt. 257 to pass it answers this description.

Q Then how did the DeDion get to East Genesee St. in Syracuse before the Zust?

A The Zust must have stopped, possibly in Fayetteville, where it could have met its pilot car and allowed the DeDion to get ahead soon after it left its mud hole. This looks like a chase happened into Syracuse.

Q What is a pilot car?

A A car that goes out to guide a racing car in or out of a city, and it was usually a volunteer from the local automobile club. The Flyer also had a pilot car meet it "east of Syracuse."

Q Did the Flyer get stuck on the towpath?

A The Thomas crew reported no trouble from Canastota to Auburn.

Q What happened when the cars reached the Yates Hotel in downtown Syracuse?

A The Flyer stopped briefly to send two reports and check for fuel, and then left for Auburn by way of West Genesee Street. The DeDion hardly stopped, even for a photo. The Zust stopped only for a few minutes.

Q Did all race cars leave Syracuse for Auburn by West Genesee Street?

A Yes, and several pilot cars escorted them as far as Camillus Hill.

Q What about the other three cars that had entered the race in New York City on February 12?

A The German Protos car arrived at the Yates at 6:01 p.m. on Feb. 15. The French Motobloc car arrived at the Yates at 8:00 p.m. on Feb.16. Both cars stayed at the Yates overnight. The last car, a small French Sizaire-Naudin, broke down and withdrew from the race at Red Hook, NY. on Feb. 13.

Q Didn't still another race car go through Syracuse a few days later?

A Yes. It was an only car from another event, a little Studebaker roadster that had come from NY City Feb. 18, the same way the other cars did, including the towpath. By way of Fayetteville, it had arrived in Syracuse on East Genesee St. at noon on Feb 19. It was lightweight, had few stops, and successfully carried a symbolic "war message" to the Army commandant at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.