

# First To Hit 120 MPH

## Marriott Set Record In Steam-Driven Car

By JOHN GOULD

The man who 50 years ago became the first human ever to travel at two miles per minute has finally relinquished thoughts of new records for himself.

For one thing, there's no steam automobile available for Fred H. Marriott of Newton Lower Falls—or anybody else—to try for faster ground travel.

For another — on a more practical basis—Marriott is now 83, and his health is not what it used to be.

### STILL A STEAM MAN ON MOTOR VEHICLES

Marriott is a steam man when it comes to motor vehicles. And the day of steam on the highway is gone by, except for an antique automobile here and there.

For Marriott the years have been filled with speed. And steam.

He got the speed bug years ago when he was a machinist for the Union Cycle Co. in Needham. That was on bicycles. He became known as a crack bike rider and racer.

Then he got to know the bearded Stanley twins, Freelan and Francis, back before the turn of the century. They had a photographic dry plate plant on Hunt St., Watertown. But their chief interest became steam automobiles — the famous Stanley Steamers of a bygone era on the twisting, bumpy roads of that day.

### ROAD TESTER FOR STANLEYS

Marriott, ever lured by his fascination for speed, got together with the Twins Stanley, and became a road tester and racing driver for them.

There were nine years of developing the vehicle. Some people were interested, and some were not.

Finally, the Stanleys took their driver, Marriott, and their fastest car, the Bug, to Florida's Ormond Beach.

It was 1906. They weren't invited, but they went to the

race, held on the beach in January of that year.

### MARRIOTT SURPRISED BY WINNING RACE

Marriott surprised everybody, especially competing drivers, by winning the race handily over the one-mile course. He also established a new record of 114 miles per hour for the event.

He wasn't satisfied.

He spent the next day checking old time records and looking over the sandy strip.

No man had ever traveled at two miles per minute, but Marriott decided to give it a try. He took it up with race officials and got approval for an attempt at a new mark on the following morning — Jan. 26.

Dawn brought clear skies, moderate wind and a beach in fine condition for speed driving.

### WEIGHTS IS ADDED TO CAR'S BALLAST

During the night weights had been added to the front end of the Bug to correct a take-off-and-climb tendency the vehicle had shown at high speed.

Marriott climbed in for his try at automobile history. The Bug, resembling an overturned canoe of wood and canvas, was ready. Marriott's angular frame was fitted into an opening custom built for his size.

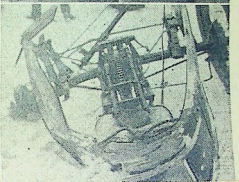
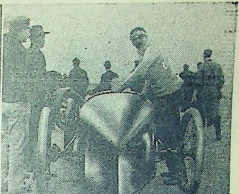
Timers at the alert, Marriott streaked down the beach.

He recalls how bugs and flying grains of beach sand peppered his face and clouded his goggles as he hurtled over the course.

When it was over, mar for the first time had traveled more than two miles in a minute. The official figure was 127.659 miles per hour.

### NATIONAL RECOGNITION FOR GREATER HUB MAN

There was national recognition for the Greater Boston driver, The Feb. 10, 1906, edi-



HIGH SPOTS in the career of a pioneer automobile racing driver. Left: Fred Marriott of Watertown receives an award for his record two-miles-a-minute ride. The presentation is by Watertown Selectman Edward G. Seferian. Top right: The steamer in which he set the record. Lower right: Part of the wreckage of Marriott's car after it met disaster on the Florida beach race course. Bottom: One of the cars in which Marriott raced to fame.

mobile record, but is also the fastest official time ever recorded for a contrivance driven by a human being."

The Bug, in a sense, was a tea kettle on wheels. It had a 100-inch wheelbase with wire wheels and high pressure tires measuring 34 by 3 inches on a 54-inch tread.

The two-cylinder steam engine was powered by a fire tube boiler 30 inches in diameter and 18 inches high. The gasoline was vaporized under 160 pounds pressure, forced into a pit beneath the boiler. For every revolution of the engine, the wheels turned one and three-quarters revolutions.

Not content with the Bug's record, the Stanley brothers and their champion driver returned to Ormond Beach in January, 1907 with an improved racer, the Rocket.

### DECIDED TO TRY DESPITE WEATHER

The weather was marginal, and the sand rippled. Marriott decided to try for a new record just the same. Two speed runs were accomplished without incident.

But on the third, with Mar-

riott clocking 190 miles per hour for the first half-mile, the Rocket hit a rough spot. It began bouncing toward the surf like a bucking broncho gone berserk. Out of control, the car hit the water and came to rest on its side.

Marriott was pinned in the wreckage, unconscious and under water. A quick rescue saved him, although he had received multiple injuries.

"Is the car safe?" were his first words upon regaining consciousness. It wasn't. It was a wreck, the steam plant torn out and flung along the beach.

That was the end of the Rocket, and it came close to being the end of the world's fastest driver. It ended also his attempts at speed records, although he continued to take part in local races.

### SECOND CLOSE BRUSH WITH SUDDEN DEATH

Not long afterward he had another close brush with sudden death.

He was driving on Watertown's Galen St., just behind a car driven by a friend, Albert Holland. Holland's steering gear failed, and the car hit a

pole, overturning. Spilling fuel flared.

Marriott stopped, jumped out, and ran to the upset vehicle. He crawled under the smashed car to shut a fuel valve. Burned about the face and hands, he helped put out the fire.

Marriott opened his own garage business shortly before the Stanley business folded in 1924. The garage, on Galen St., is filled with pictures of Stanley racers. Even today, an old Stanley sometimes puts in for repairs there.

The one-time beach speed king feels that mass production sounded the death knell of the steam automobile. He also suspects the average driver today isn't competent to handle the gadgets of steam power.

He believes, however, bus and truck fleet owners have overlooked steam as a possibility for these larger vehicles.

Today the hot-rod of an earlier era is content to let someone else shoot for speed records. As to his own record of 1906 he says:

"That's just a cruising speed today."

How to Help Your Child

Parents' Anxiety Hurts