

Joe Scalzo's

City of Speed and elsewhere

Ride-Buyers: Joe and Mark

This is a long story about two of racing's filthy rich ride-buyers, Joe Boyer (1890-1924) and Mark Thatcher, but it begins with Boyer's distant relative William Burroughs, the beat generation's favorite author, who wrote bandit books like "Junky" and "Naked Lunch," and



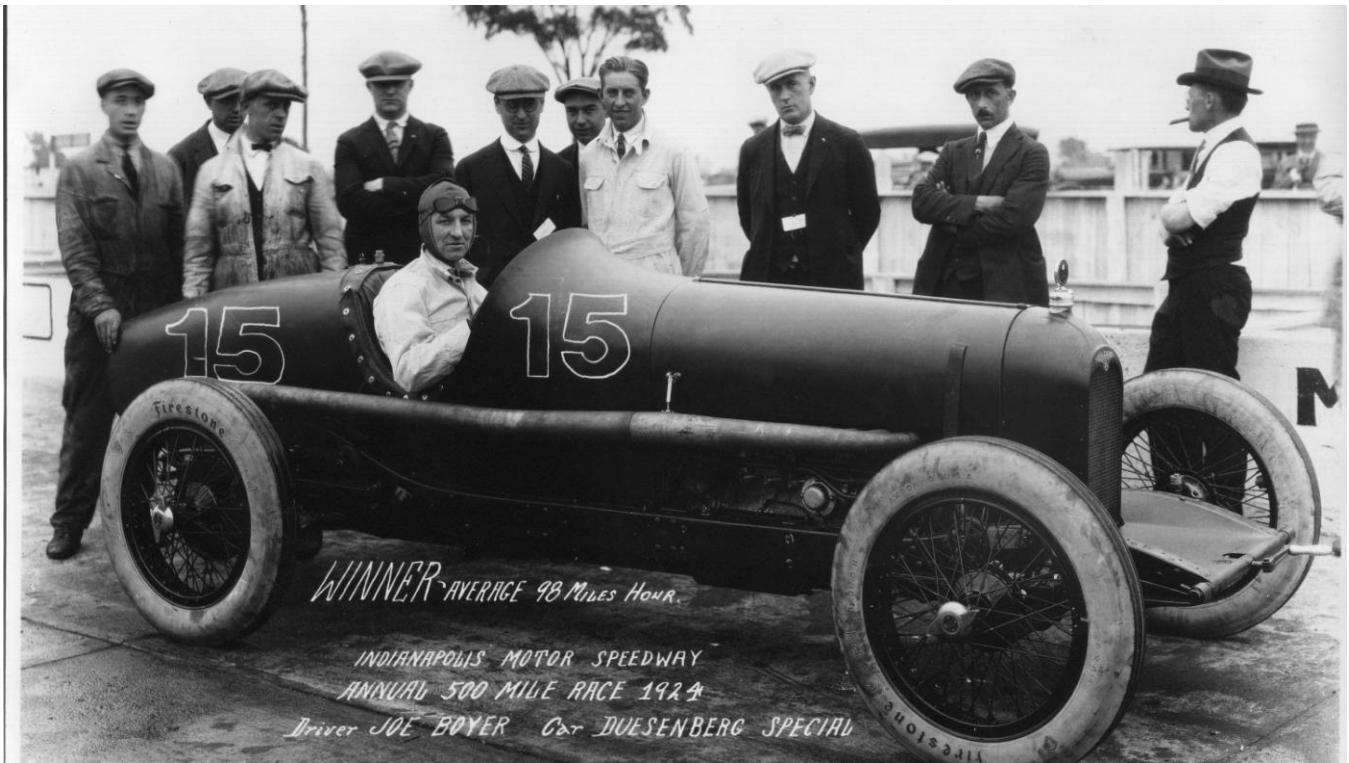
spent his life roaming the freak earth from Algiers to Mexico City to New Orleans hanging with three of other great beatniks Dean Moriarty, Sal Paradise, and Carlo Marx (all pseudonyms). Purposely spaced out in his various personas as dope fiend, petty criminal, sexual athlete, and firearms fanatic, Burroughs once played a game of "William Tell" with his wife and, while trying to shoot an apple off her head, missed and blew her brains out.

Burroughs' grandfather was the inventor of the world's favorite multiplication appliance, the Burroughs Adding Machine, and Joe Boyer's father was the company's very own Chief Executive Officer.

Yet when William Burroughs died in the late 1990s it was a cultural event in print and on TV; and the last time Joe Boyer, missing since 1924, was ever accorded a tribute was back in 1985, when the Indy 500's Old Timers club posthumously inducted him into its Hall of Fame. Too bad that the counterculture drug addict and the Brickyard's richest ride-buyer never hooked up - they'd have made quite a twining.

Until the stock market tanked in 1929, the Roaring Twenties was the ultimate decade for enjoying private wealth and privilege, and Joe Boyer benefitted from wealth and privilege alike - A blue-blood of Detroit's high-society who belonged to every snob country club that upper crust Michigan boasted of, Boyer, upon deciding he had to become a race driver in the Indy 500 as quickly as possible, wasted no time on formalities. Which was to say, instead of taking a debutant driver's test like every other rookie, he paid financially-strained Louis Chevrolet 27,000 crisp 1919 dollars - more than first place itself paid, - for a Frontenac ride that Memorial Day.

Five 500s later, at the height of the Duesenberg-Miller wars, the same Joe Boyer, the spendthrift playboy with the plank-foot, was pulling Dusie chestnuts out of the charcoals with a classic victory in the mad-dog charger tradition of three other winners from the 1990s, godly Frank Lockhart, and the two Billys, Arnold and Vukovich.



Motor City reporters and the movers and shakers of the Indy 500 found Boyer irresistibly appealing. Reporters by habit started their stories “Joe Boyer Detroit’s millionaire driver,” or “Millionaire daredevil Joe Boyer,” while also writing up celebrity suck-up pieces praising Boyer’s sailing and equestrian talents.

Ordinarily ride-buyers didn’t race as fast as Boyer did, and it soon was clear he was going to become the Brickyard’s fastest driver - if he didn’t kill himself first. By 1924, no longer a ride-buyer, Boyer was getting paid a salary to race for the brothers Duesenberg, and Fred Duesenberg described Boyer’s great strength - hurtling speed - which, ultimately was going to annihilate him: “Joe Boyer is a

wild man - his job on our team is to press the accelerator to the floor and endeavor to trap other drivers into a race with him - a race run at such a pace that either car or man must give out by the finish and only Joe can survive.”

Nineteen twenty-four's was a make-or-break Indy 500 for the hometown Dusie team, because Harry A. Millers hot rods out of Los Angeles had already swept the 500s of 1922 and 1923. And time trials continued that discouraging trend when Jimmy Murphy parked his Miller on the pole and took off in the lead with Boyer coming after him. But Joe's and all the other Dusies were in deep trouble. No. 12, Ernie Ansterberg's couldn't complete a lap before breaking a steering knuckle and meeting the wall - No. 9, the one that Boyer started in the 500 but gave up on after its supercharger sickened, went through for different relief drivers before walling itself, just like Ansterberg's No. 12, at 430 miles.

Which left only No.15. Although the automobile itself was healthy, its driver, a nonentity and stoker named Slim Red Corrum, hadn't had the stomach to climb into the furnace with the leading Millers of Murphy and Tommy Milton or with Earl Cooper and his Studebaker.

Realizing that unless they took immediate action victory was going either to the hated Millers or the slow Studebaker, the Duesenbergers cogitated and then hauled No. 15 into the pits, threw Slim Red over the side and replaced him with Boyer, who, as ever, was hot to trot. And Boyer was fortunate. By the time he hit the bricks anew, Murphy's Miller was missing with a leaking fuel tank, Milton's was sinking fast with worn out Firestones, and Cooper's Stude was the last adversary Boyer had to overtake.

So here came Joe Boyer, the relief driver from hell. After he finished working over Cooper he was a minute and a half in the lead; had almost become the first driver to crack the 100 mph barrier; and a Duesenberg had won the fastest Indy 500 in history. His \$30,000 first-place prize amounted to chump change to Boyer but was a true windfall for Corrum. So Joe let Slim Red keep all on it. The victory also provoked a telegram to Boyer from his proud but anxious father, the Wall Street CEO: CONGRATULATIONS. NOW LET US TRY SOMETHING ELSE.

But Boyer failed to heed the well-meaning advice. Just a few months later, when he traveled to Pennsylvania for the Labor Day board track races at Altoona, still racing like a wild man, he and his Duesie splintered a wooden wall. Joe Boyer became a statistic. Such was the high-price you could pay for being a ride-buyer.

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Ride-buyers can be viewed as either Jekyll and Hydes: 1) They are seen as financially generous sportsmen like Boyer who save racing teams from going out of business with all the money they bring or; 2) they're clueless fakes masquerading as authentic race car drivers who rip-off rides from authentic race drivers. What a really first-rate ride-buyer required was

plenty of the old-do-re-me, money. Money enough to purchase a factory Lincoln Capri sedan, as the aviation hero and super-market owner Ray Crawford does, afterward using it to win the Mexican Road Race; money enough to buy an Indy car ride, name it the Pillsbury Special, and qualify it on the front row of the 500, as does the flour family heir Howdy Holmes; purchase as many Ferraris and Lotuses as his heart desires ,then compete in amateur sports car races and down the west coast going so slowly he barely gets the oil warmed up, as does Jack Nethercutt, of the famous cosmetics clan; use his Marshall Field & Co. inheritance to buy his pet Danny Ongais as many Indy cars as Danny desires, no matter how many Danny crashes and kills, which is the trademark of Ted Field; or ape Mark Thatcher, sole son of England's prime minister, who buys rides for himself in 1) the Paris-to-Dakar across the empty Sahara, where Mark and his female co-driver and a bodyguard from Special Branch get lost for six days and nights, 30 miles off course; 2) then in the Baja 1000, 935 miles from the bottom to the top of barren and trackless lower California, the world's foremost automobile wrecking yard, where Mark and another bodyguard are reported kidnapped; and 3) finally in Formula 1, where Mark is discouraged to discover that no matter how much money he has, and no matter if he is Margaret Thatcher's son, and is also a Second Bayonet who wears a Rolex watch, Frank Williams Racing wants no part of him.

But this rejection didn't stop Mark from continuing to blare "I am Margaret Thatcher's son"



wherever he happened to be, which was everywhere - London, New York, Paris, Madrid, Los Angeles, Santiago, Singapore .Amman, Dallas, Dubai, Peking, Manila, Bermuda, Macao, Bombay, Monte Carlo, Abu Dhabi, Lucerne, Las Vegas, La Jolla, Long Beach and finally Capetown where he pled guilty, lost his passport, and was made to pay a tremendous fine for helping to finance an unsuccessful coup in Equatorial Guinea, a tiny but oil-rich country on the west coast of Africa which is run by a cannibal who cooks

and eats the testicles of his foes.

What Mark loved best, when he wasn't name-dropping, was talking on and on about big money, fast cars, jet helicopters, and risky business deals. He kept company with big shot magistrates, investment bankers, wealthy businessmen, Italian billionaires Sultans, Sheiks, ambassadors, crown princes, and gold miners; but he also came in contact with such slimy scallywags and scammers as the son of a prime minister ought never to be associated with as commercial dilettantes. deadbeats, fraudulent bankrupts, swashbucklers, roustabouts

swindlers, Ponzi schemers and such corrupt generals as Sukarno of Indonesia and Pinochet of Chile

“I have more money than my mother and father” bragged Mark. But it was never enough. To support his racing he once wrote to 600 companies seeking sponsorship. What few sponsors he did attract included a pornographic magazine and a roller-skating company. His racing career began in 1979 when he was describing himself as “England’s new James Hunt” and bought his way into a Formula 5000 car with an F1 engine; had he been permitted to race so powerful a missile he’d have experienced instant annihilation.

Somehow he purchased a ride for himself in one of racing’s most difficult classics, the 24 hours of Le Mans - he had catered champagne and specially commissioned food flown in - but despite of a fresh set of rubber he crashed out at 16 hours. Next he tried something new and joined 392 drivers in the Paris to Dakar, the world’s most deadly rally - there were 76 deaths, including the organizer of the rally - with barren mountains sand dunes, camel grass and everything racked by heavy sandstorms,.

“I’ve now raced at Le Mans” Mark assured doubters” This rally is no problem” And then he proceeded to go 31 miles off course and be lost for six days and nights. Mark’s favorite possession was his B20t Jet Ranger helicopter, and it was what got him into all the trouble in Equatorial Guinea. He’d loaned it to a gang of 30 very hard South American and Armenian soldiers of fortune who were going to fly into Equatorial Guinea and make a grab for its oil. But the coup failed and Mark, facing possible extradition, must have felt a shiver of apprehension running up and down his spine when he realized were he to be extradited he’d first be executed by a firing squad and then have his testicles roasted and eaten by a cannibal.

An unsuccessful movie was made about the failed coup and Mark attended its premier.

British tabloids find Thatcher son's latest troubles irresistible

By Beth Gardiner
ASSOCIATED PRESS

LONDON — One of Britain's iconic names is back, in bizarre circumstances tailor-made for the country's boisterous tabloids.

Sir Mark Thatcher — son of British political legend Margaret Thatcher, titled by inheritance, and wealthy through connections and marriage — is in trouble in a far-off land, accused of helping to bankroll a bungled African coup attempt.

The story features oil interests, a dictator, mercenaries from elite private schools in Britain, a Lebanese immigrant tycoon, and faint echoes of Britain's former colonial dominance. And the people are lapping it up — especially the front-page photos of the white-haired, suited Thatcher being led away from his Cape Town mansion by police.

Sir Mark — as the press invariably refers to him — is out on bail, and the press won't let go of a story about a man who many believe got rich by

trading off the name of his mother, Britain's first female prime minister.

"The nasty man who has caused so much trouble for the woman he calls Mummy" is how the Daily Express summed him up in a headline.

The papers bristle with reconstructions of how the coup plot in Equatorial Guinea was allegedly hatched in a London mansion by conspirators whose real goal, it is suggested, was less to depose a brutal dictator than to secure a position in oil dealings that would follow.

A total of 88 men are in custody in the case in South Africa, Equatorial Guinea and Zimbabwe. Yesterday, an Equatorial Guinea court indefinitely suspended a trial of the alleged mercenaries accused of being involved in the plot, saying it wanted more information on Thatcher and other international financiers.

Security and intelligence services in the countries foiled the purported plot in March as the accused men were allegedly moved into position for the take-

over bid. The regime they are accused of targeting is widely considered one of the world's most corrupt.

Equatorial Guinea wants Thatcher, 51, and his alleged coconspirators extradited for allegedly plotting to overthrow Teodoro Obiang, president for a quarter-century. Media reports have accused Obiang of torture, in addition to the theft of his nation's oil wealth.

Thatcher's attorney says he is innocent and will cooperate. Most analysts say he is unlikely to be sent to Equatorial Guinea, where he might face the death penalty, which South Africa opposes.

Many of the alleged coconspirators come from privileged backgrounds.

Simon Mann — a graduate of the elite Eton private school, a British special forces operative, and a longtime merce-



Mark Thatcher, accused of links to an African coup plot, denies wrongdoing.

nary — was convicted last week in Zimbabwe for trying to illegally buy weapons from that country's state arms manufacturer.

Witnesses have also named Eli Calil, a British Lebanese businessman who made fortunes in African oil deals and lives in London's exclusive Chelsea neighborhood.

But it is Thatcher who has gripped the public, at a time when his mother is trying to exit the public stage.

Margaret Thatcher, who dominated British politics as prime minister from 1979 to 1990, said in 2002

that she was giving up speech-making after a series of small strokes.

It's not the first time Mark Thatcher has caused his mother concern.

He got lost in the Sahara for a week in 1982 when his car broke down during a race from Paris to Dakar. Seneg-

al — a disappearance that prompted the notoriously tough prime minister to cry in public.

Later came a string of accusations about shady dealings in which he appeared to profit from his name.

Margaret Thatcher was forced to answer questions in Parliament about her son's involvement in a British company's successful bid for a \$600 million contract with a university in Oman just after she made an official visit there.

Parliament also scrutinized reports in the early 1990s that said Mark Thatcher made \$15 million as a middleman on a \$25 billion arms sale to Saudi Arabia a decade earlier.

He moved to Dallas and wed the daughter of a wealthy Texas auto dealer in 1987. The couple later moved to South Africa with their two children.

Writing of his latest scrape in the Sunday Times this week, columnist Minette Marin mused: "I keep wondering rather guiltily why I am enjoying the whole thing so much."