

# Great American Game Revived After 90 Years

*It's Polo with 100 year old race cars!  
Daredevils in Antique Ford Model T  
speedsters battle it out to reinvent the  
crazy game of Autopolo in Australia's  
Outback*

PERTH, WA, AUSTRALIA, March 15, 2021 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The American game of [Autopolo](#) has been revived near the outback town of York in Western Australia after 90 years in hibernation.

Autopolo is played with antique race automobiles, Ford Model T speedsters, and was last played during the depression era of the early 1930s.



Autopolo 2021: malleeteer Warren Milward with Bill Lee driving attack the ball in the World Autopolo Championships at Brooklands Airfield, York, Western Australia

The contest was conducted at Brooklands Airfield, which is normally used for skydiving, but for a few hours it was a 1920s fairground as two teams battled it out for supremacy.

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The Autopolo World Champs 2021 began as a reenactment and ended as a no hold barred battle with both teams driving just as hard as they could, blocking opponents and fiercely attacking the ball.”

*Graeme Cocks*

The brainchild of a group which calls themselves the Ford T Party, it was dreamed up during the long Covid year as a way of using the period race cars in a more exuberant way than quiet drives in the country.

All six cars were antique Model T speedsters ranging from a 1913 model called the Ashton Racer after its constructor Vic Ashton in the 1980s to a 1926 Gow Job built by Graeme Lockhart for the Lake Perkolilli Red Dust Revival in 2019.

Credit as the heroic founding father of Autopolo goes to Joshua Crane, Jr. of the Dedham Polo Club in Boston, USA.

Joshua was the first person to wield a mallet and steer an automobile at the same time. This was in 1902. His car was a Curved Dash Oldsmobile. Ralph “Pappy” Hankinson, however, popularised the sport for the world’s most popular car with two people in each car. Pappy was a

Ford dealer in Topeka, Kansas. In July 1912, Pappy held an autopolo match with Ford Model T cars in an alfalfa field in Wichita. "Build it and they will come" could have been a quote from Pappy himself, for come they did, in their thousands to see two teams — the "Grey Ghosts" and the "Red Devils" to battle it out. He popularised the sport in 1913, using Model Ts and playing to great crowds at county fairgrounds in the USA. The sport spread to Europe and Australia.

In those days it was a daredevil sport with injuries-a-plenty and its fair share of fatalities. Each car was stripped to bare chassis and a big round roll cage ensured they could be flipped back onto their wheels if they tipped over. In the original form of the game, the malleter ( a name coined by Warren Milward to describe the non-driving team member) or jockey as he was called, would crawl all over the car to hit the ball from the front, sides or rear.

In the modern form of the game, the malleter can only hit the ball from the left of the car. This is the same rule as horse polo to ensure there aren't so many collisions. A new rule was created that cars could only turn right coming off the ball to ensure that there weren't any inadvertent collisions as cars were catching up in the rear.

A small ball like a basketball was used in the original game but after experimenting with several different sizes, a 18 inch fit ball was used. Three balls were destroyed in the course of the game. Fatal injuries to the balls were caused when they were driven over.

The field was 300 yards long and 50 yards wide with a goal scored by hitting it over the line at either end. The team which started had the ball at the centre line. The airfield is covered in small round gravel stones which made it ideal for fast turns with minimal danger of flipping a car.



Shane and Meg in the Ford Model T Ashton Racer in the World Autopolo Championships in Western Australia



Two teams of Ford Model T racers battle it out at the World Autopolo Championships in outback Australia

Three cars were used for each team with two cars on the field at any one time. The third car would be substituted on a rotation basis to ensure that our cherished Model Ts did not boil in the Aussie heat.

The game was played on 7 March 2021 in four 15 minute quarters with a rest break in between for cars and drivers. It was played in a spirit of fun and called the World Autopolo Championship 2021 for the "Pappy Trophy" with the Australia A team competing against the Australia B team.

With scores tied at five all in the last quarter, umpire Hugh Fryer decided to call it a tie and it was an Australian victory in the first Autopolo match in Australia for almost a century.

The Pappy Trophy and Autopolo honours were shared by all the participants and it was resolved to make the World Autopolo Championships an annual event.

Ford Model T speedsters proved ideal "iron horses". The low speed acceleration was perfect for attacking the ball and the top gear was ideal for racing down the course to get ahead of play. With a field of only 300 yards, top speed was never required. Yes, it's slightly crazy but everyone had a blast!

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