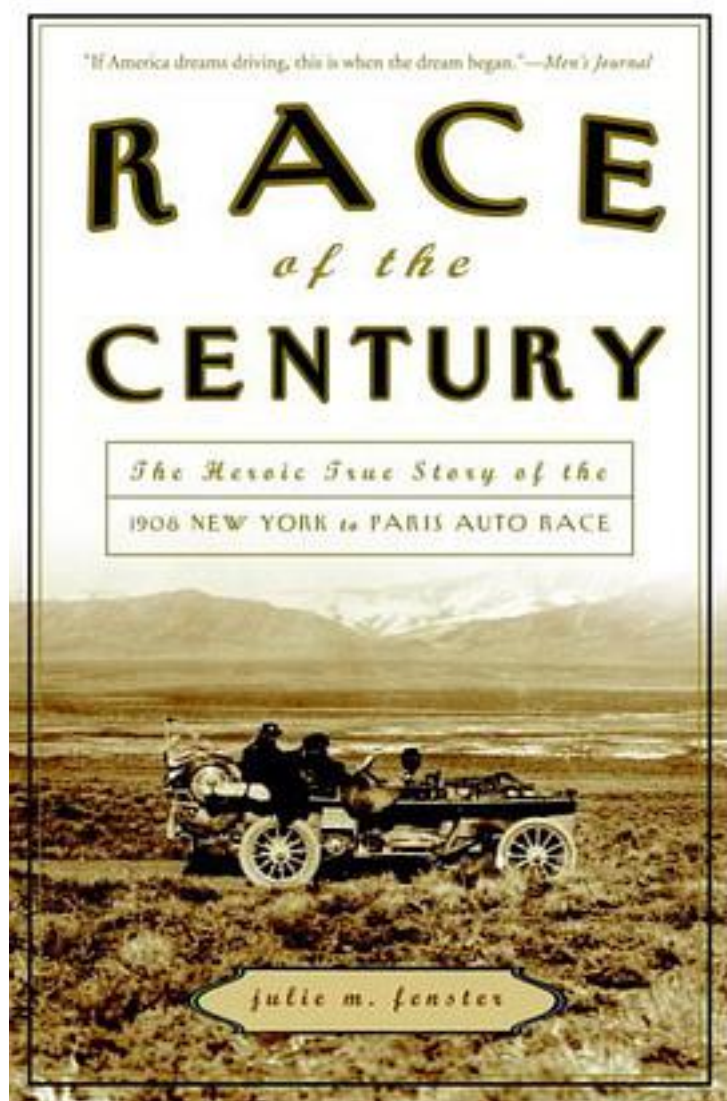


Race of the Century



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17 men, 6 cars, and a 21,000-mile race across 3 continents

On the morning of February 12, 1908, six cars from four different countries lined up in Times Square, surrounded by a frenzied crowd. The men who competed in the New York to Paris auto race were an international roster of personalities: a charismatic Norwegian outdoorsman, a witty French nobleman, a pair of Italian sophisticates, an aristocratic German army officer, and a cranky mechanic from Buffalo, New York. At a time when most people had never seen an automobile, these adventurous men set their course over mountain ranges, through Arctic freeze, and desert heat. There were no gas stations, no garages, and no replacement parts in case of emergency.

Two men rose to the top. Ober-lieutenant Hans Koeppen, a rising officer in the Prussian army, led the German team in their canvas-topped 40-horsepower Protos. His amiable personality belied a core of sheer determination, and by the race's end, he had won the respect of even his toughest critics. His counterpart on the U.S. team was George Schuster, a blue-collar mechanic who led the Americans in their lightweight 60-horsepower Thomas Flyer. A born competitor, Schuster battled Koeppen until the very end. Ultimately the German and the American would be left alone in the race, fighting the elements, exhaustion, and each other until the winning car's glorious entrance into Paris, on July 30, 1908.

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