The Story of the 28/45 HP Züst No. 127 Great Race – New York to Paris – 1908

By

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The Great Race from New York to Paris in 1908 was inspired by the Pekin-Paris event in 1907, won by an Itala, which is now in the Museo dell' Auto in Turin. Le Matin of Paris and the New York Times were the co-sponsors of the Great Race. The Automobile Club of America, including President Colgate Hoyt, was put in charge of the arrangements in North America.¹ Six cars started the race, which should really have been described as a trial or raid. These cars were a Thomas Flyer from America, a Protos from Germany, a De Dion, a Moto Bloc, a Sizaire-Naudin from France, and a short wheelbase 28/45 horsepower model (with a reinforced frame and lower gearing) manufactured by the Züst Company of Milan, Italy.².³ Züst automobiles had a successful racing history, with good placings in the Coppa d'Oro, 1907 Targa Florio and other events.⁴ Züst initially engaged the Marquis Boschi to drive the Great Race car.¹

Roberto Züst, the Swiss born company founder, died in 1897 and left the company to his sons, Arturo, Bruno, Otto, Roberto and Silvio.⁵ There was a factory in Milan and a machine tool company and foundry in Intra when experiments with automobiles began in about 1900. Production of automobiles began in 1905 at Milan with two models, the 28/45 horsepower 7.4 litre car and a 40/50 horsepower 11.3 litre car.⁶ These were large and expensive automobiles. Züst cars had been introduced to the United States in January of 1906 and first entered in local competition on Long Island by Raymond Healy in June of that year.⁷ Raymond Healy was a partner in the Healy Leather Tire Company of 88-90 Gold Street, New York City.⁸ R. Bertelli & Co. of 144 West 39th Street, New York⁹ was the sole importer and Paul de la Chesnaye the only selling agent.¹⁰ The minimal bodywork on the Great Race car was by Schieppati of Milan.¹⁰

The Great Race Züst left Milan for the 890 km journey to Paris by road with Antonio Scarfoglio, Emilio (aka Giulio) Sirtori and Heinrich (aka Henry or Henri) Haaga aboard. Figure 1 shows it in Milan in front of the Züst building sans mudguards. It was erroneously described, one of many times, as a "Brixia-Züst", an identity problem surrounding the car that survives to this day. A branch company was started in 1906 in Brescia to produce smaller, less expensive models, but the 28/45 model was never made in Brescia, only in Milan. Even family members made incorrect statements about the race car. For example, the wife of Roberto Züst, son of the founder, mistakenly said that the original car is now in a museum in Turin. There is a Züst in the Museo dell' Auto, but that car is a smaller 1908 10 horsepower Brixia-Züst and not a racing car. The noted British automotive historian, David Scott-Moncrieff, made several errors in his book on "Veteran and Edwardian Motor Cars", including the starting date of production (1907 vs. 1905), the location of early production (Brescia vs. Milan – Intra) and the entry of a car in the Pekin – Paris Race. He also stated that only one car, the Thomas Flyer,

finished the New York-Paris race.¹⁶ It is not now possible to determine the sources of these errors, but they have contributed to the confusion over the identity of the Great Race car over the years. T. R. Nicholson went as far as stating that "New York-Paris material is very thin on the ground", in contrast to the well-documented Pekin to Paris event the year before, and "sources as a whole....are few, and often sketchy or patchy, or both....some are confusing and wildly contradictory".¹⁷ The author hopes that this article will eliminate some of this confusion.

The Züst arrived in Paris on January 27, 1908 to a tumultuous welcome. ¹⁸ The Züst, this time with mudguards shown in Figure 2, then drove the 220 km to Le Havre with the French entrants and left for New York on February 1 on the steamer La Lorraine of the Compagnie Générale Transatlantique (French Line). ¹⁹ Mario (Marco) Conti, a driver of Züst racing cars, and a Dr. von Mueller (aka Vollmoeller) ²⁰ accompanied Scarfoglio, Sirtori and Haaga. The French Line has no record of the identity of the cars. ²¹ Alberto Pirelli represented the car in America and supplied tires for it. ²²

The cars arrived in New York on February 8, with the Marquis Boschi notably absent. The crew was the journalist Scarfoglio, engineer/driver Sirtori and the mechanic, Haaga.²³ The cars embarked on a trial run to Dobbs Ferry and crews were hosted to a sumptuous dinner by the Italian Club on West 16th Street.24 Some cars were garaged in the twelve-story Automobile Club of America building at 753 Fifth Avenue, while the Züst was kept in the company garage at 144 West 39th Street. The car was painted gray, with the green, white and red of the Italian flag on the hood. "Züst" was painted in large red letters on the front of the radiator. 25 In fact, all of the cars were painted in some shade of gray, 26 as was the Itala which won the Paris-Peking-Paris race in 1907.²⁷ The Züst, unlike some other competitors, had a New York State license, 19101 NY, attached to it for the start of the race.²⁸ Unfortunately, the 1908 owner of this number is no longer recorded at the Department of Motor Vehicles for New York State. The Automobile Club of America (ACA), a founding member if the AAA in 1902, later became the Automobile Club of New York, now located at 1415 Kellum Place, Garden City, New York 11530.²⁹ Some of their competition records, e.g. Vanderbilt Cup and Glidden Tour information, were allegedly donated to the Garden City Historical Society in the 1970's.³⁰ Mr. Cyril Smith of the Garden City Historical Society was unable to find any records mentioning the Züst.31 The Motor Speedway Museum in Indianapolis also has many historical documents of the early era in motoring competition in the United States, but nothing from the ACA or others concerning the Great Race.³²

The race started on February 12 in Times Square and the Züst made it as far as Hudson on the first night, in company with the Thomas Flyer and the De Dion.³³ Arthur Ruland, a sales manager of Züst in New York³⁴, was with the crew, as reported in Chicago.³⁵ After many adventures and breakdowns later chronicled by Scarfoglio³⁶, including a large reception crowd and a banquet in San Jose on April 3,³⁷ the Züst arrived in San Francisco. It was shipped to Seattle with the De Dion on the "City of Puebla" of the Pacific Coast Steamship Company on April 10.^{38,39} The year 1908 is one of those missing from the steamship company records.⁴⁰ The Züst, after completing 4836 driven miles, left Seattle for Japan with the De Dion on the

"Aki Maru" of the NYK Line (Nippon Yusen Kaisha K.K). ⁴¹ The shipping company has no record of this voyage, so the identity of the car cannot be checked. ⁴² The shipment of the car was apparently against the wishes of Züst in Italy and Sirtori had his contract canceled. ⁴³

The sensational news in May was that the Züst Company withdrew the car from the race and recalled Sirtori to Italy.⁴⁴ The withdrawal was denied in early June, as the company sent a Russian nobleman, Baron Scheinvogel, to take over the car and replace Sirtori.⁴⁵ Scheinvogel allegedly purchased the car and joined the race in Manchuria. The car arrived in Berlin on September 6 and Paris on September 17, long after the winning Thomas Flyer and the only other finisher, the Protos.^{46,47} The entry to Paris is shown in Figure 3. The Automobile Club of France (ACF) has no archives mentioning details of the cars at the finish of the race.⁴⁸

The Baron Scheinvogel vanished and Scarfoglio left the next day in the battered car for London via Folkestone at the behest of the Daily Mail, which had paid him for dispatches throughout the progress of the race. The car arrived in London with four men seated in it, as shown in Figure 4, but only Scarfoglio and Haaga remained of the original crew.⁴⁹ Scarfoglio visited the offices of the Daily Mail, the Züst concessionaire on Long Acre and the Franco-British Exhibition at the White City to display the car. 50 The car broke down on the way back to Folkestone, when the drive sprocket and gearbox again displayed their displeasure over the strenuous use in the journey around the world. The car then suffered a fire as petrol was removed for rail transport at Bromley South rail station on September 25. The mechanic doing the work, W. Maynard of Bromley, was badly burned and died from his injuries⁵¹. Mr. W. B. Sewell held a coroner's inquest in Bromley on September 30, the jury recording a verdict of death due to shock.⁵² Scarfoglio was very upset after the fire, declaring, "The car is dead. It is irreparable."53 This probably caused the impression, which persists to this day, that the car was destroyed in a fire after the race was completed. Scarfoglio lost all of his notes and thus had to write his book about the race from his diary and the dispatches he sent to the Daily Mail and other newspapers. Other local reports⁵⁴ indicate that the local fire department was very prompt and saved the front portion of the car. The response to the alarm took just three minutes and only the rear wheels and wooden body were severely damaged. The fire engine used is preserved to this day at the Kent Fire and Rescue Service in Maidstone⁵⁵ - see Figure 5.

A photograph of the wreck was taken by police constable George Charlo at 0630 the following morning,⁵⁶ which is probably the photograph which appeared in several publications later. The rear tires are completely burned, but the rims and spokes of the wheels are intact. Further damage occurred when the car was loaded on a rail car for transit to Folkestone, as the rear wheels collapsed due to fire damage to the spokes.⁵⁷ The police 1908 Occurrence Book, which would have recorded details of the incident, apparently has not survived.⁵⁸ The local reports also mention that some damaged parts, including the rear wheel rims, were taken back to the Züst showroom at Long Acre, near Covent Garden in London. The remainder of the car was looted for souvenirs such as tanks, petrol cans and charred papers by the local populace.

The damaged and vandalized car was allegedly sent back to Milan with Scarfoglio, both leaving on the Folkestone ferry to Boulogne on Sunday, September 27 on the mid-day boat. The car was intended for a new body and wheels in time for the Olympia Show and the Paris Salon.⁵⁹ However, there is no mention of the car or the Züst Company in the program for the 1908 Paris Salon. 60 The movements of the car from Boulogne are unknown. The French Line has no record of the car being shipped again to New York or anywhere else. However, the presence of a New York State license plate on the car at the start of the race indicates ownership there, so the return of the car to the United States is reasonable. The car is now fitted with Healy detachable rims on the rear wheels,61 a modification that was only available in America in the early 1900's. The Healy Company, run by the same Raymond Healy who initiated Züst cars into competition in America, also did significant research into tires for Arctic conditions just prior to the start of the Great Race. 62 The appearance of the rims on the car is thus consistent with Raymond Healy's association with the Züst marque and the final destination of the car in Dawson City, Yukon. The rear wheel spokes were "scorched" when the car arrived on Vancouver Island, 63 suggesting to the present owners that the original wheels taken to the Züst showroom at Long Acre in London may have been reunited with the chassis. However, the reported collapse of the rear wheels during the rail transport to Folkestone suggests that they present wheels had replacement spokes that may have been scorched in a separate incident after the return of the car to North America.

The original route for the race included a foray across Alaska and the Yukon, including Dawson City, prior to crossing the Bering Sea on the winter ice. The organizers altered the route several times during the race, and the only car to make it to Alaska, the Thomas Flyer, was sent back to Seattle. Local anticipation of viewing the cars in Dawson City was dashed.

A 1906 Pope-Toledo was the first car brought to Dawson City by Stanley Scearce, a local entrepreneur. A local native chief dubbed it the "Red Devil". 64 Scearce and his chauffeur Carl Lillesternla made an unprecedented run from Dawson to Forty Mile and back in April of 1908 over winter roads 65, just after three Great Race cars arrived in San Francisco. The journey took just over 7 hours to cover the 53 miles in each direction. Scearce used the car as a taxi on the frozen river. 66. Other cars were soon appearing in Dawson.

The 28/45 horsepower Tipo 1906 Züst with serial number 127 (chassis plate shown in Figure 6) was obtained in New York by mining engineer O. B. Perry of the Yukon Gold Company and taken to Dawson City during or prior to mid-1910. In early August of 1910 the Züst was "the only car in use" until Joe Boyle brought in a Flanders. Perry was the general manager and a director of Yukon Gold, which was run by the Guggenheims of New York. Robert Guggenheim was an enthusiast for automobiles in general and Italian automobiles in particular. He sponsored events such as a race from New York to Seattle in 1909 in which he himself entered an Italia.

The "Tipo 1906" is a reference to a design designation rather than the actual date of manufacture, as is common in many later Italian automobiles. An example is the Tipo 1750 Alfa Romeo, where the 1750 is the displacement of the engine in cc.⁷⁰

Another example is the racing Tipo 158 Alfetta, in which the "158" stood for 1.5 litres displacement and 8 cylinders. The design notation is confirmed by a French article in late 1905 referring to the new 28/45 Züst as a "Modèle 1906". The chassis number 127 makes the likely date of chassis manufacture as late 1907, since the likely yearly production was about fifty to sixty.

Perry visited the Yukon until at least 1915,⁷³ but he only stayed a few days in the summer at that point. The "Guggenheim Automobile", driven by George Potter, was still making news in Dawson in 1913, completing a winter road journey from Whitehorse to Dawson.⁷⁴

The ownership of the Züst from that time is undocumented, although it did stay in Dawson City. It was in Dawson until the 1950's, when Buck Rogers, an avid collector, bought it and removed it and to his residence in downtown Vancouver, British Columbia. The chassis was in two pieces by then and the car was inoperable. There it stayed, untouched, evading an attempt to purchase it by William Harrah of Reno, Nevada, who already had the race-winning Thomas Flyer. In 1980 it was sold and came to Vancouver Island, where it still resides in the ownership of Harry and Shirley Blackstaff today, in restored condition.

There are many reasons that No. 127 is the actual Great Race car, of which the following are the most important:

- 1. The frame, as noted by the New York Times in 1908, is stiffened and reinforced by the addition of top and bottom cover plates riveted to the frame channel sections from the front spring hangers to the cross member behind the flywheel. The gearbox also shows evidence of the altered gear ratios, accomplished by increasing the diameter (and thus the number of gear teeth) on the two drive ring gears and the first and second gear wheels on the counter shaft (see references 2 and 3). There are slots cut in the side and rear of the standard rectangular short wheelbase aluminium gearbox casting to accommodate each of these four larger gears, see Figure 7a and 7b. The chassis is also modified by the addition of an extra transmission brake for a total of two. This was not normal on the short chassis model, but was an available modification, due to its use on the intermediate wheelbase car. The intermediate wheelbase car also had a different shape for the gearbox casting, which has extensions at the first and second gear countershaft locations as well as extensions in the pinion locations. It is therefore possible that lower gear ratios from the larger car were substituted for the normal gears in the short wheelbase chassis, accounting for the slots cut in the rectangular casing to accommodate the larger gears. These features are clearly shown on published chassis drawings for each wheelbase, as shown in Figures 8 and 9.
- 2. The front cylinders are unadorned cast iron while the rear two have "Züst" cast into the top surface. The chassis drawing of the short wheelbase car shows each cylinder with the "Züst" cast on top, Figure 9. The car suffered an oil line failure on February 10 in New York⁷⁵ and had the front two cylinders replaced. The oil line is

called a "broken tube of the injector" in the translated version of Scarfoglio's book and has been mistaken for the carburetor.⁷⁶ The solder repair to the oil line is still on the car.

- 3. The car broke a driveshaft gear in Paxton, Nebraska and had a new one shipped from New York via Omaha.⁷⁷ The countershaft (driver side) ring gear in the car has neat, even, factory rivets fastening it to the driveshaft, while the mainshaft (passenger side) gear is obviously hand riveted, see Figure 10.
- 4. The car suffered an engine bearing failure near Kourga in Siberia at the end of June and Haaga repaired the bearings by casting new ones from an alloy concocted from lead bullets and a tin lozenge box.⁷⁸ The bearings from the rear two cylinders contain 97% lead and 3% tin (from a chemical analysis by an independent laboratory), while the front cylinder bearings are a normal high tin Babbitt alloy.

There are several other items of evidence, which are consistent with No. 127 being the race car, but are circumstantial in isolation. These items include many extra spring hanger holes in the channel section of the frame at both front and rear of the chassis. The car broke many springs in the race and had to adapt whatever was available at the location involved. There are also fish plates added vertically to the inside of the frame channels where fatigue cracks have started from stress concentrations, such as drilled holes. Some appear to be of railroad origin, consistent with the repairs by the Union Pacific at the Ogden, Utah shop. The original lower gears on the countershaft were very worn, indicating heavy use, and had to be replaced. This is consistent with the extended use of the lower gears during the race and the difficulties with the drive train noted in the reports in Bromley before the catastrophic fire at the train station.

The oil injector control is by L. Dubrulle of Glichy, France⁸² and the fuel pressure gauge is by Schaeffer and Budenberg, Milan⁸³, both consistent with the era. There was a trace of green paint discovered on the driver's side of the brass form supporting the engine hood on the cowling of the car during restoration cleanup, which is consistent with the green stripe of the Italian flag painted on the engine hood for the 1908 race.⁸⁴

These details are greatly in excess of the number found by George Schuster on the Thomas Flyer when he inspected it for William Harrah. Schuster found one particular chassis crack repair using bolts and some clutch pins hammered instead of screwed in place, both of which Schuster had done himself during the race, according to Harrah. The only difference with the Züst is that Haaga is no longer available to validate his repairs to the car. It is unlikely that more than 200 of the 28/45 model were produced in the 1905-08 production run in Milan, so the probability of another car having all of the above characteristics is vanishingly small.

Züst cars campaigned in later races in the United States. In March of 1909, V. P. Pisani, who was the General Manager for Züst distributor R. Bertelli &

Company in New York, obtained a perfect score in a New York to Boston endurance run.⁸⁶ Pisani and Joseph Kingsland entered Züst automobiles in a hill climb in May of 1910 at White Plains, New York, in the class for the most expensive cars (over \$4000.00 - they were the only ones entered in the class).⁸⁷ However, neither car actually competed in the climb.⁸⁸ Jules Devigne competed with a Züst in a hill climb won by Ralph de Palma in the summer of 1910.⁸⁹

In early 1910, the trophy for the New York to Paris race was awarded to the Thomas Flyer team in New York. It is over 6 feet high and weighs in excess of 1,600 pounds. The base is a combination of green Italian and pink French marble. There are medallions of German bronze depicting the coats of arms of the competing countries and the trophy is topped by an American eagle. It is now in the National Automobile Museum in Reno, Nevada with the Thomas Flyer, as restored by William Harrah. The Protos was restored by the Siemens family and is in the Deutsches Museum in Munich. The restored Züst as it is today is shown in Figure 11. We therefore have the unique situation in which all of the finishers of the longest automobile race ever sanctioned, over 100 years ago, still exist in restored condition. The only other Züst known to be in operational condition is a later Brixia model S305, shown in Figure 12. It is exercised in Vintage Sports Car Club events in the United Kingdom. A condensed form of this article, including photographs of the factory and some early photographs of other cars, is in Automobile Quarterly⁹¹.

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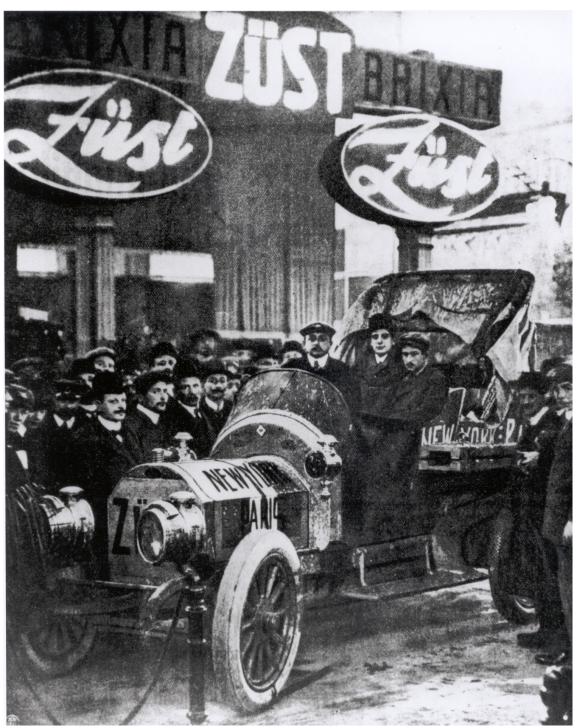


Figure 1 The Züst in front of the Züst building in Milan – Sirtori at the wheel, Haaga to his left and Scarfoglio to the rear. Note the oval headlamps, rounded cowl with badges, folding canvas top and the lack of mudguards.

Resnick Collection, Western Reserve Historical Society



Figure 2 The Züst in Le Havre, with mudguards, just prior to shipment to New York.
Resnick Collection, Western Reserve Historical Society

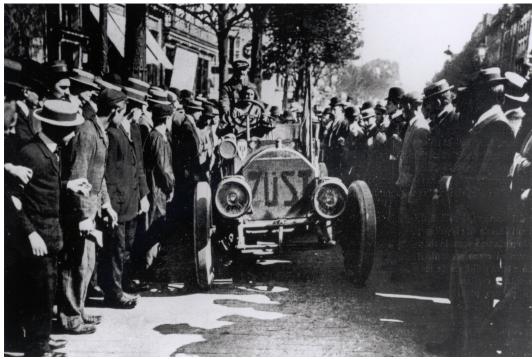


Figure 3 The Züst entering Paris, with round headlamps, one sidelamp missing, different driver's side sidelamp and no rounded cowl. The mudguards and folding canvas top are also missing.

Resnick Collection, Western Reserve Historical Society



Figure 4 The denuded Züst entering London after completing the race. Haaga appears to be at the wheel, with Scarfoglio to his left.

Resnick Collection, Western Reserve Historical Society



Bromley UDC bought this Shand Mason 260gpm double vertical steam pump at a cost of $\pounds 430$ in 1897. It was sold to Albert E. Reed & Co. Ltd for use at its Horton Kirby paper mill in 1919 and is now kept by Kent Fire & Rescue Service in a restored condition. (Kent FRS Museum)

Figure 5 The Fire Engine used to extinguish the blazing Züst.



Figure 6 The chassis plate of the Tipo 1906 Züst, No. 127.



Figure 7a The gearbox casing modified for first and second gears on the countershaft.



Figure 7b The modified gearbox casing for the ring gears of No. 127.

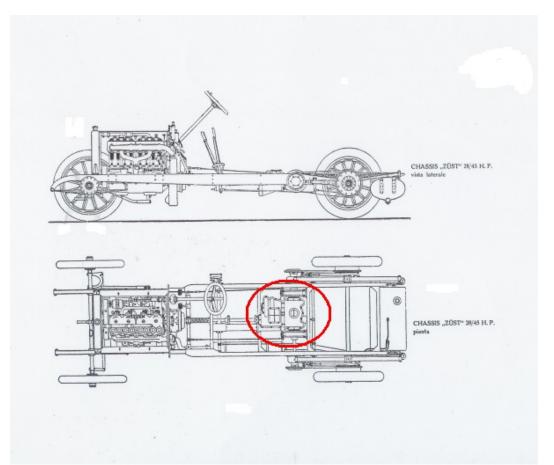
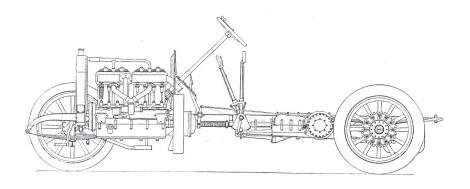


Figure 8 The normal wheelbase chassis, showing the two transmission brakes and the non-rectangular gearbox casing. Note the extended width of the gearbox casing at the first and second gear locations on the driver's side and at the location of the drive gears at the rear.



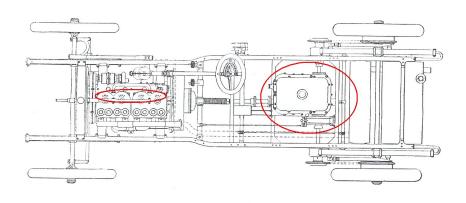


Figure 9 The short wheelbase chassis, showing the "Züst" characters cast in the cylinder heads and the single transmission brake. This rectangular gearbox casing is the one used on No. 127.



Figure 10 The rivets holding the ring gears in place, hand fabricated on the right.



Figure 11 The restored No. 127 in 2008. Photo by John Beresford.



Figure 12 The 1913 Brixia Züst owned and campaigned by the Collings family in Great Britain.

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- ³³ New York Times, February 13, 1908
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- ⁴¹ New York Times, April 14, 1908
- ⁴² Toshio Nozaki (Toshio Nozaki@jp.nykline.com), NYK Museum, Tokyo, Japan, 2007
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- ⁴⁶ New York Times, September 7, 1908
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