

Period clothes at the Put-in-Bay road Races Reunion

Oct. 22, 2019,

The Put-in-Bay Races Reunion Celebrates the excitement of car racing during racing's post-WW2 heyday as a motor circuit in the 1950s. Today, Petrol heads and vintage fashion enthusiasts, alike, hit the streets of South Bass Island in 1950s, '60s, and '70s automobiles. The personal styling one has could be as important as the cars on the track.

When would you wear the clothes?

Primarily, the period clothing is for the non-racing portions of the event, such as spectating, the rocker-cover races, the Wine & Cheese reception, the Awards banquet, and the Farewell brunch. You might just wear it all week, unless you are a racecar driver, in which case you are required to wear a driver's suit.

What will I need to wear?

This is up to you. If you are a driver, you might choose to wear a simple jumpsuit, and "fireproof" it; spectators might go all-out with trousers, a shirt, sweater/cardigan, necktie/bowtie, hat/cap, shoes, etc., as appropriate for the period that interests you.

How do I start putting together an authentic vintage look?

First, choose your favourite era, like the 1950s, or choose to match the period that your car was built. Then, do an Internet search to get a feel for the general style of the decade. You might also go to your local library to look through magazines and books, for examples of your period fashion. Make sure you are looking at American fashion though, because the PIB Races are very much American, being more successful than the Watkins Glen races, which only lasted a few years, ending in 1952; the PIB races ran through to the end of the 1950s!

Basically, what was the style of the 1950s and '60s?



(Sketch by John Weitz, fashion designer)



1950s Men's Clothing Suggestions:

- 100% Cotton Twill Pant
- Corduroys
- Cardigan, V-neck or cable-knit sweater
- Tweed Jacket
- Flat cap or Fedora
- Sensible brogue shoes
- Tattersall shirt
- Club tie
- Belstaff jacket

PIB Races aficionados know that the races started with cars like the early MG brought home from Europe by GIs. The Fifties saw the end of wartime rationing, so everyone was able to splurge a bit.

... **In** the 1960s, there were daring trends introduced by teenagers, as young people were no longer a mirror image of their conservative 1950s parents.



Shoes: Lace up oxfords, monk strap shoes, penny loafers, Chelsea boots (Beatles shoes) chukka boots, retro sneakers. Most men's dress shoes and boots had a high shine to go with the plastic age.

... **And** the 1970s?

There are no rules in the fashion game due to overproduction flooding the market with cheap synthetic clothing. Common items included:

- Bell-bottom jeans
- Polyester leisure suit
- Shirts and jackets with wide lapels
- Tie-dyed shirts or jackets
- Peasant blouse or skirt
- Halter-top
- Army jacket
- Western-inspired clothes: Cowboy boots, vest, and hat

What if you want to put together a 1950s vintage-Style race suit?



- You'll need a jumpsuit, which you might get at a thrift store or the local department or uniform store. Then you'll need to "fireproof" the jumpsuit; Cotton and Wool are common fabrics, as Cotton is naturally fire-resistant, and Wool is more so. Avoid synthetics, because if it actually caught fire, it would melt to your skin, and burn! Err on the side of safety.



Fireproofing won't make the clothing stiff or uncomfortable; it will just make the clothing resistant to flame. But you won't be jumping into a fire or firefighting, will you? Fireproofing clothes in this case is only for the vintage fashion or feel. *See the Appendix for the procedure for fireproofing clothing.*

What else is there besides the jumpsuit?

You may want to add a **vintage helmet, some gloves, and shoes**. In-period, drivers liked to wear boxing shoes:

They were leather shoes with high sides, but the soles were rubber or synthetic rubber, so they would melt in a fire. Today, you might like to get a pair of wrestling shoes, which are essentially the same, but easily purchased at sporting goods stores.

Then, you'll want some kind of **helmet and leather gloves**. Motorcycle helmets were popular in-period, but are now too expensive for such an informal costume, so I opted for an old moped helmet; it has the correct bowl-shape, leather cover with a visor, and a chin strap- everything you'll want!

Gentlemen spectators AND drivers usually wore a flatcap.



Leather gloves can include the string-backed kind to the close-fitting kind, but not too loose, in case you do need to drive a car while dressed.

Driving a Spyder? You'll want a Scarf. (Tazio Nuvolari >>)



APPENDIX – FIREPROOFING CLOTHING

Please note: This does not meet the requirements for race suits, but is intended to provide a way to make clothing “fireproof” in the way it was done in-period. In tests, this actually worked! But remember- it’s for looks and feel, not as an alternative to a fireproof driving suit, which will resist burning at 2400F for 15 seconds (the time it should take you to escape a burning car -- and save your life!)

Fireproof Your Stuff with These Common Chemicals

Chemicals (for 1 gallon):

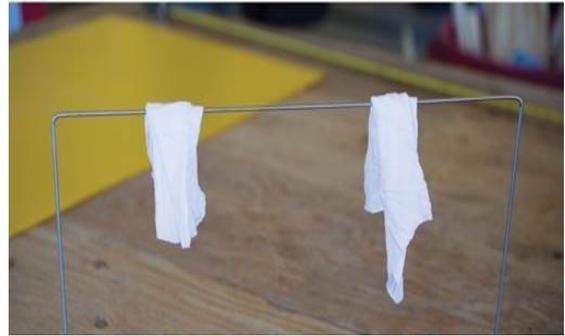
- 50g (2 oz.) boric acid powder from a hardware store. Boric acid is a weak acid that's deadly to roaches and ants, but safe for humans (to handle.)
- 60g borax available at grocery stores (laundry products aisle)
- 1gal. hot water
- Cloth, 100% cotton, such as an old undershirt (for the testing part)
- Large bucket or tub, to hold 1 Gal. water and the clothing you intend to treat
- Wooden stick, to work the garment into the solution, and to hang garment to drain and dry
- Hangar, to hang garment to drain and dry

Step#1: Mix the solution

Weigh and mix the boric acid powder and borax in a half-gallon of hot water in the bucket. Stir until the chemicals are completely dissolved. Add the rest of the hot water to the bucket/tub.

Step #2: Soak and dry a test cloth

- Place a piece of cotton cloth in the boric acid solution, saturating it thoroughly. Remove the cloth and hold it over the bucket, allowing the excess solution to drain back into the bucket. Hang the item up to dry.
- Repeat 3X



Step #3: Test and adjust

- Soak & dry several times for maximum effectiveness. When the test cloth is dry, test a corner by holding a match to it. The cloth should char and turn black but it should not actually ignite and burn.
- You can fine-tune the performance of your fireproofing solution by slightly adjusting the proportions of the borates and water. Make a note of the final mix formula.



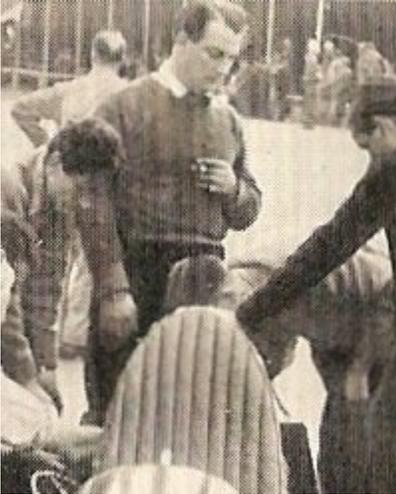
Untreated cloth is on the left and burns; treated cloth only tries to ignite.

Step #4: Soak your item (the Jumpsuit)

Soak well & dry several times for maximum effectiveness. **Note:** You may need to make more solution. Keep your test cloth. Put it in the washing machine with your jumpsuit, and test it for char after washing. If the test cloth burns, your jumpsuit needs to be re-treated.

Images of Formula 1 drivers from the 1950s:

Joe Fry (GB)



Raymond Sommer (Fr)



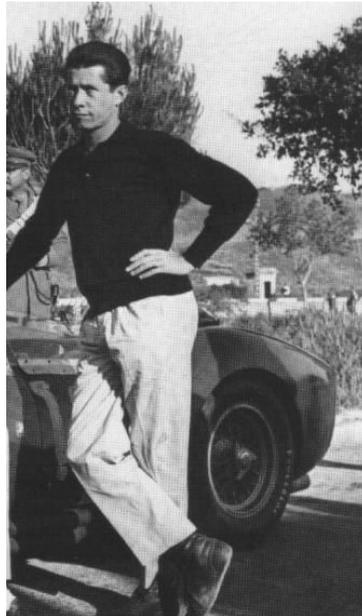
Felice Bonetto (It)



Tazio Nuvolari (IT)



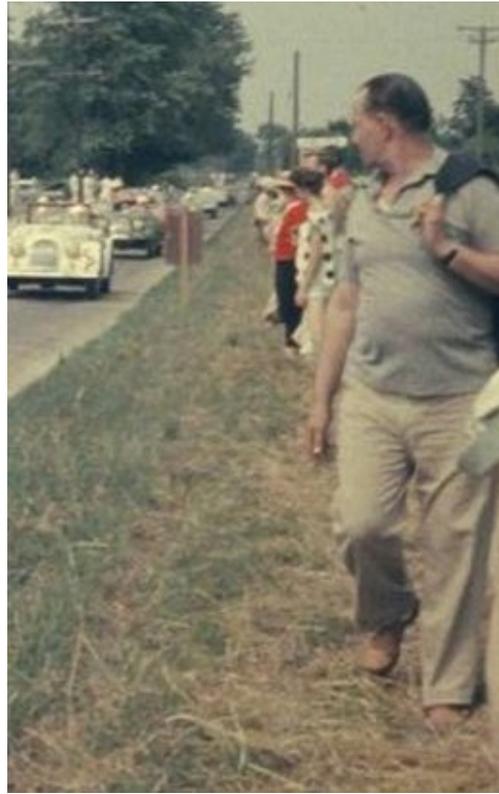
olivier gendebien (BE)



Carroll Shelby (USA)



Spectators at the 1959 Put-in-Bay races



See Also:

[When Cars Required a Special Wardrobe](#)

[What We Wore Then](#)

[This Is What Vintage Car Racing Heaven Looks Like](#)

[American Sports Car Racing in the 1950s \(Hardcover\)](#)

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