



# Heartland Science

Ohio's Legacy of Discovery & Innovation



## Transportation

From the Soapbox Derby to the Jeep

### First Soap Box Derby

Dayton, in 1934, held the first "All-American Soap Box Derby," a race that has sparked interest in automotive engineering in thousands of young people. There were 34 entries in the first derby, which quickly became a national sensation. Local competitions still are held around Ohio counties, with winners coming to the event's home in Akron, Ohio every July for the World Championship race.



### Myron Scott's Idea

Myron Scott was a journalist who came up with the idea of the "Soap Box Derby." He had been reporting on a race that only allowed "home-built" race cars in Dayton Ohio. He then copyrighted the idea and helped spread the idea nationally. The first "All-American Soap Box Derby" was held in Dayton in 1934, but moved to Akron in 1935 for a more challenging terrain. The sport was so popular that a permanent track called the "Derby Downs" was built in Akron in 1936. Derby Downs was built in a city park near the Akron Municipal Airport and the Goodyear Air Dock, where the blimps Macon and Akron were housed. A 1600-foot cement-paved raceway was constructed with three ten-foot lanes. The distance the cars would actually travel was 1175 feet.

### The Rules

In 1937, a few new rules came into play. The age limits were changed from 6-16 to 9-15 years, and prior winners could no longer compete. Also, no car could cost more than \$10 and adult involvement was strictly prohibited. Today's rules are a little more complicated.

These days, The All-American Soap Box Derby Championship is still held annually in Akron and is comprised of 440 qualifiers from the U.S. and foreign countries. Each competitor builds his or her own gravity-powered car, with assistance from a parent or other adult, from kits purchased from the All-American Soap Box Derby. The first, second, and third place winners in each division and age group are now awarded college scholarships (up to \$5,000).



1965 Soap Box Derby Trophy

## Did You Know?

- In 1934, the winners of the Soap Box Derby were Robert Turner (Muncie, IN) followed by Claude Alexander (Chattanooga, TN) and Jack Fusternberg (Omaha, NE). As first place winner in 1934, Robert Turner earned \$500. He won by only 1.4 seconds.
- Scott named the Chevrolet Corvette.
- Prior competitors in the Derby include: Johnny Carson (former Tonight Show host), Tom Sneva (1983 Indy 500 champion), and Cale Yarborough (multiple NASCAR WC champion).

## Find out more...

- [All American Soap Box Derby](http://aasbd.com/)  
(<http://aasbd.com/>)
- [Soap Box Derby History](http://aasbd.com/SBD_history.htm)  
([http://aasbd.com/SBD\\_history.htm](http://aasbd.com/SBD_history.htm))
- [Soap Box Derby Historical Photos](http://aasbd.com/pic_gallery.htm)  
([http://aasbd.com/pic\\_gallery.htm](http://aasbd.com/pic_gallery.htm))
- [Smithsonian Article on the Soap Box Derby](http://www.smithsonianmag.si.edu/smithsonian/issues95/may95/object_may95.html)  
([www.smithsonianmag.si.edu/smithsonian/issues95/may95/object\\_may95.html](http://www.smithsonianmag.si.edu/smithsonian/issues95/may95/object_may95.html))