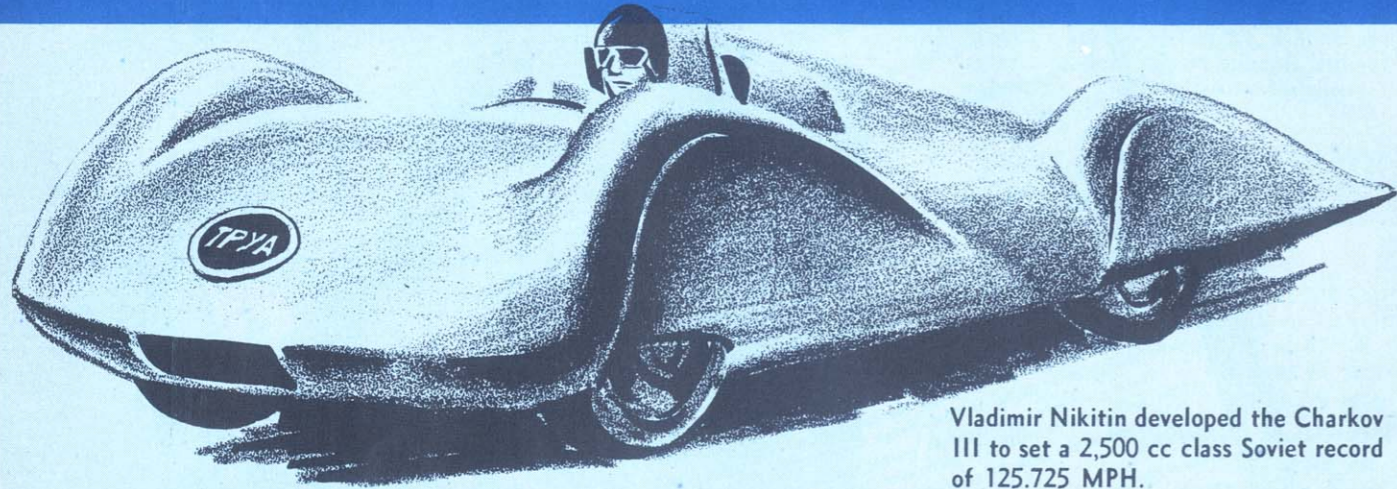
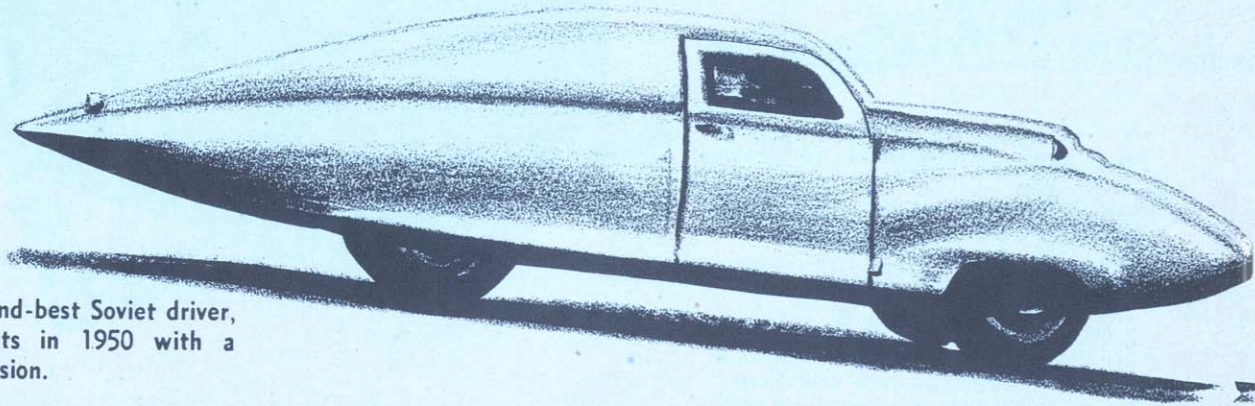


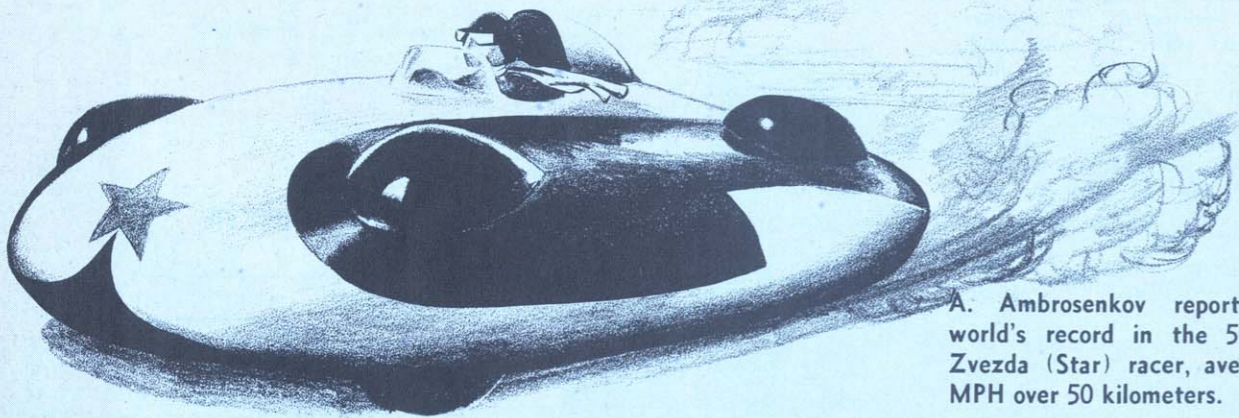
Racing Cars Sketched from Russian Photos



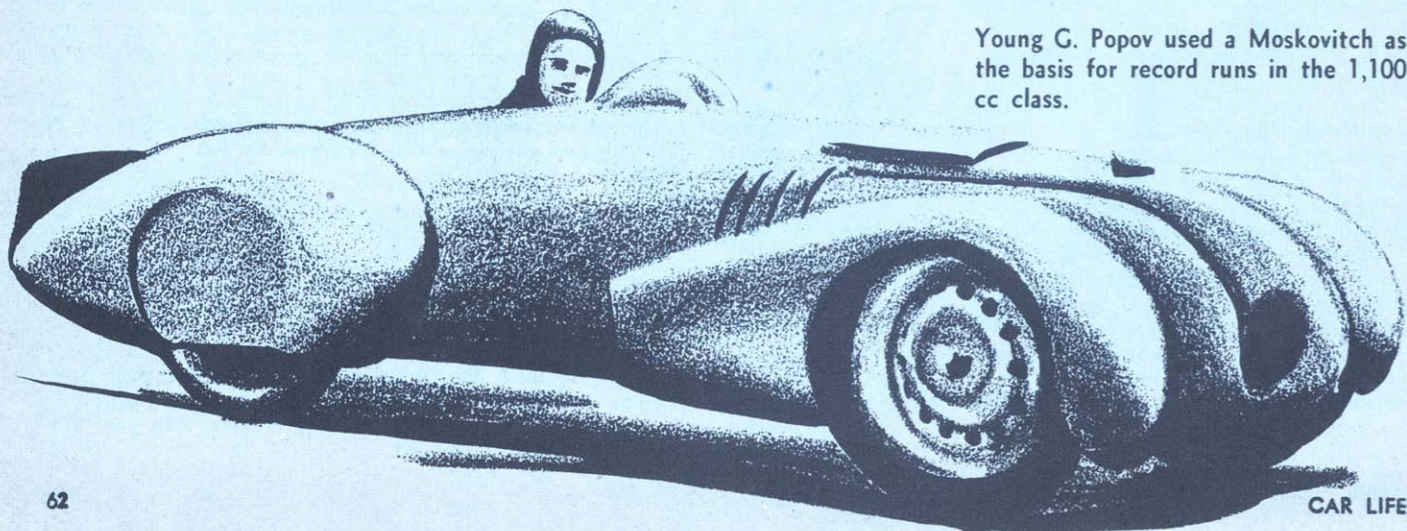
Vladimir Nikitin developed the Charkov III to set a 2,500 cc class Soviet record of 125.725 MPH.



M. Metelev, second-best Soviet driver, scored top results in 1950 with a Pobeda racing version.

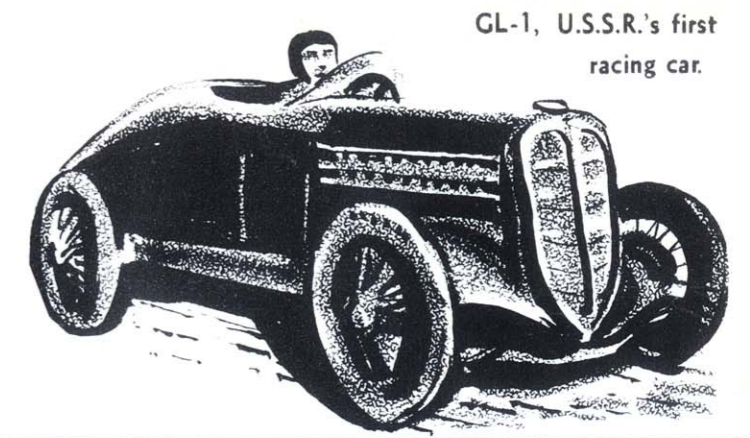


A. Ambrosenkov reportedly set a world's record in the 500 cc class Zvezda (Star) racer, averaging 107.3 MPH over 50 kilometers.



Young G. Popov used a Moskovitch as the basis for record runs in the 1,100 cc class.

CAR LIFE brings its readers the first, exclusive report on what the Russians are doing in secrecy to develop racing cars and drivers in an effort to build up the Soviet Union's prestige in the automotive world. The author is a European newspaperman. "To protect myself," he writes CAR LIFE, "please do not use my name. The Soviets are still present in"



GL-1, U.S.S.R.'s first racing car.

AUTO RACING ... BEHIND THE IRON CURTAIN

RUSSIA is making a strong bid for world leadership in automobile racing.

Subsidized by government funds and rewarded with state prizes, Soviet racing car designers and drivers have been geared into the U.S.S.R.'s prestige-building apparatus. The Russian goal in auto racing is the same as in all other sports, in science and in industry: "to overtake and surpass the West."

Starting almost from scratch in 1946, the Soviet Union pushed its racing cars into world prominence in less than five years. And the Russian struggle for speed, on the ground as in the air, is going forward relentlessly.

Automobile racing in Russia dates back to Czarist times. First contest was held near St. Petersburg (now Leningrad) in 1898. Distance was 25.8 miles, and the winning driver is said to have attained a speed of almost 15 mph.

In 1908, a great cross-country race was held along the road from St. Petersburg to Moscow—a distance of around 400 miles. Thirty-two cars of various types started.

Russian newspapers of that time reported that the cars "sped along the road to Moscow amid clouds of dust and frightened peasants' horses." Only ten machines reached the finish line, the remainder failing mechanically or bogging down hopelessly in the deep, sticky mud that still characterizes much of Russia's road network.

All of the cars in the Leningrad-Moscow race were of foreign make. Except for a few machines assembled from imported parts at the Russo-Baltic factory in Riga, Russia had no automobile industry until after World War I.

However, there were some well-known Russian drivers. One of these, Ivanov, attained a speed of 80 mph. for a distance of one kilometer (.621 mile) in 1913, using a Russo-Baltic factory automobile.

First Soviet "sports cars" were built on the chassis of the GAZ-A and M-1 passenger cars. It was in one of these revamped passenger automobiles that driver G. Kleshchev in 1937 set a new Russian speed record of 88.9 mph. over a one-kilometer course.

Finally, in 1939, the Molotov Auto plant in Gorky built the first specially-designed Russian "sports car"—the GL-1. During tests, the GL-1 attained a speed of 99.36 mph.

The Stalin Auto plant in Moscow then built the two-place "ZIS-Sport" car, using the basic parts of the ZIS-101 automobile. "ZIS-Sport" reached a speed of 100.85 mph.

Looking back at the prewar period, present-day Soviet propagandists try to make a virtue of the absence of powerful, specially-designed Russian racers. In this connection, one Russian magazine declared recently:

"Abroad, records were set during the 1930s only by resorting to construction of so-called 'meteors'—special machines equipped with airplane motors of up to 5,000 hp. These machines had no relation to the design of contemporary automobiles. They were useful only for setting records.

"But our (Russian) designers built racing cars similar in design to production-model cars. Thus it was not by chance that our auto races gave our automobile factories valuable experimental data for future design improvements on Soviet passenger cars."

This point of view is patently ridiculous. Russian passenger automobiles, which allegedly benefited so greatly from racing car experience, are five or six years behind American models in performance and styling. And besides, the Russians have now turned to the very extreme racing car designs which they considered so reprehensible when developed by the Western nations 20 years ago.

In 1946, the Bureau of Racing Automobiles of the Russian Automobile and Motor Scientific Research Institute (NAMI) started construction

on the Zvezda (Star) series of racers which have received world-wide attention. The Zvezda was super-streamlined. Gage between the front wheels was wider than between the rear ones, giving it a tapered shape toward the rear.

In 1952, Moscow driver A. Ambrosenkov wheeled the Zvezda M-NAMI to five world records. For the one kilometer distance, Ambrosenkov hit a speed of 133.26 mph., breaking a record set by a German driver in 1951. In 100-kilometer contests (62.1 miles), the Zvezda recorded an average speed of 95.59 mph.

Driving in the Fourth USSR Motor Racing Championship last year, Ambrosenkov reportedly set a new world's record when he drove a 500 cubic centimeter class Zvezda 50 kilometers in 17 minutes 2 seconds averaging 172.84 kilometers (about 107.3 miles) per hour.

In November, 1950, B. Nikitin, affiliated with the "Labor" Sports Society of Kharkov, drove to new Russian records for one kilometer events, reaching a maximum speed of 100.73 mph. Nikitin made further design improvements, and in the fall of 1952 his "Kharkov-6" attained a speed of 126.23 mph. The "Kharkov" racers were equipped with stock car engines.

Another racing car, the "Dzerzhinets," designed by the Ukrainian I. Pomogaibo, appeared during the 1952 racing season. It was powered with a rear-end, souped-up six-cylinder engine used in the GAZ-51 two and one-half ton truck.

Modifications boosted the engine's maximum horsepower from the normal 70 to more than 140.

During races near Melitopol in November, 1952, Pomogaibo's Dzerzhinets set a Russian speed mark of 143.24 mph for 10 kilometers.

Russia has also turned some of its attention to midget racers. Smallest of these is the L-250 (see picture) built by E. Lorent. Its speed marks have not been widely publicized. ☆ ☆