

CAMILLE JENATZY & *La Jamais Contente*

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PRESS RELEASE

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1.

Camille Jenatzy, the Red Devil

Engineer, inventor, entrepreneur, and industrialist from Schaerbeek, Camille Jenatzy (1868-1913) was above all one of the most astonishing adventurers in car racing. He was part of that generation that was passionate about all sports, starting with cycling, which he practised too. An electromechanical engineer, he designed electric vehicles, produced hybrid tractions and multiplied patents to improve production in his workshops situated at 224 Rue du Progrès. But as he often said: nothing compared with the excitement of racing. In the story of his victory at the Gordon Bennett cup in 1903, he wrote: “The last lap had started; it was no longer a race, it was a chase, a hunt; I was the hunter and Knyff, who had left fourteen minutes before me, was the prey: I had to arrive thirteen minutes after him to win. Ah! The exhilaration of the hunt at 90 km/h! It was precisely a hunting accident that put an end to the turbulent course of his life on 7 December 1913 in Anlier forest.

2.

A family of industrialists

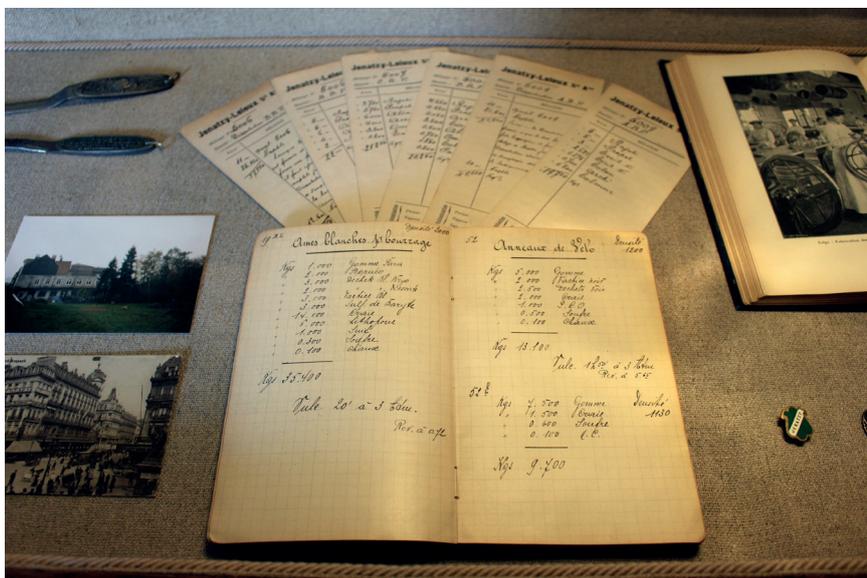
Constantin Jenatzy (1842-1904), Camille’s father, and his wife Honorine Leleux launched a company of rubber items in 1865 in the North Station district of Schaerbeek. The business grew and led to a relocation of the registered office at 13 Avenue de la Reine and workshops at 10 Rue Stephenson. Constantin Jenatzy would serve as liberal town councillor from 1875 to 1895. After his death, one of the arteries of the new Teniers-Josaphat quarter (the Avenue Louis Bertrand and its surroundings) was named after him. The development of the automobile as of the 1880s and that of tyres developed by Dunlop and improved in the beginning of the 1890 by the Michelin brothers would gear the production of the Jenatzy works to the automobile sector with quality products and new developments such as “twinned tyres on removable twinned wheels” to make them last longer. Rubber production in Congo Free State would stimulate the creation of new companies in this sector, even if foreign investigative journalism reported regularly on the cruel manner that production was organised.



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3.

La Jamais Contente

The choice of name for this electric race car would reflect the perseverance, and desire to go beyond, i.e. the unremitting driving force of Camille Jenatzy's research. It is also said that it referred to his wife's bad mood, brought about by the constant travels of her race driver husband. It should be seen as the first car designed for racing: a bombshell, a torpedo 4 metres long, painted in blueish grey, made of partinium, a light alloy of aluminium, tungsten and magnesium. Its two electric motors were powered by Fulmen accumulators, and the wheels sported Michelin tyres.

This historical car would be kept in the family company before serving as an advertising ornament for Fulmen in Clichy as of 1931. When it started to deteriorate, it was brought to the Compiègne Museum of the Car and Tourism in 1933, where the bodywork was partially renewed. A replica was made in 1994 at the initiative of sponsors brought together by Mr Christian Wannyn and the Lions Club 103 Nord. La Jamais Contente continues to make people dream as attested by the replica presented here, made by Mr Xavier Van der Stappen.

4.

Paris 1898

In 1898, Camille Jenatzy founded the Compagnie Générale des Transports Automobiles-système Jenatzy (CGTA) in Boulogne-sur-Seine to make cars ordered by the French company Commerciale d'Automobiles. A competition was launched in Paris at the initiative of the Inspector General of Pont et Chaussées [Highway Agency], G. Forestier, to test various automotive vehicles to replace the horse-drawn carriages. It entailed comparing the cost price, comfort, performance, advantages and disadvantages of various types of cars for at least 16 hours over 60 km, so as to determine a standard to be proposed for the public. The Jenatzy electric vehicles went on to win many first prizes for future taxis and for heavy-duty vehicles. The horse-drawn carriages motorised by Camille Jenatzy went into operation in the French capital as of September 1898.

5.

Breaking records

In its issue no. 50 of 10 December 1898, La France Automobile published the regulations of a speed race to be held on 18 December at 10:00 AM sharp in the central alley of the Achères agricultural park to the north-west of Paris. It entailed racing 2 consecutive miles, with a first start stopped and a second launched. Count Gaston de Chasseloup-Laubat broke the record that day, clocking in at 63.157 km/h on average in an electric Jeantaud car. Jenatzy, who had not been able to take part in the race, wrote to the organiser the next day that he would take up the challenge according to the rules of the competition. On 17 January 1899, Jenatzy reached a speed of 66.667 km/h in his electric dog-cart, but the account clocked in at 70.313 km/h on average. On 27 January 1899, Jenatzy managed 80.357 km/h. On 4 March of the same year, Chasseloup reached 92.784 km/h. His competitor announced instantly that he would do better within a month. On 29 April 1899, the 100 km/h on average were exceeded, as the Belgian driver established a world record at 105.882 km/h with his streamlined race car: La Jamais Contente. Count de Chasseloup-Laubat informed the organisers that he would never race again.

Nearly a century later, on 15 October 1997, driving a turbojet powered car, Andy Green reached a speed of 1,223.65 km/h in Black Rock Desert – the first supersonic land record.

6.

The beginnings of a champion

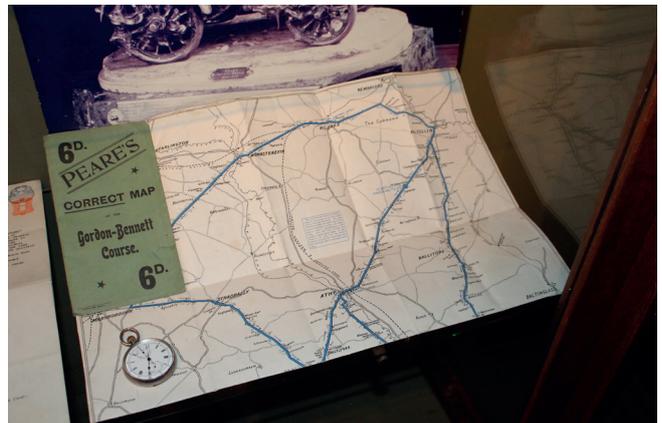
Before the races in Achères, Camille Jenatzy had already distinguished himself on 27 November 1898 by winning the Chanteloup-les-Vignes speed hill climbing race in an electric dog-cart he had made with an average speed of 28.24 km/h. He would then take increasingly part in car races, using a 2HP Mors in the Tour de France in 1899, and a Snoeck race car for the Gordon Bennett cup, which he unfortunately finished in the storefront of a wine merchant in Moulins. He broke the world speed record for a petroleum-powered car (12 HP and higher category) during the Diegem-Lo to Melsbroeck-Batavia race on 17 June 1900. And that summer, he won the Spa Hill Climbing Race and the Provance Criterium, in a Snoeck race car. He was not as lucky during the Circuit des Ardennes on 31 July 1902, as he went off the road in his 60 HP FN in the second trial lap. His pugnacity, red hair and pointed beard earned him the nickname “Red Devil.”



© Patrimoine Michelin



© Patrimoine Michelin



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7.

Mercedes star driver

An important figure in Jenatzy's sporting career, Emile Jellinek was the representative of Daimler-Motoren-Gesellschaft in France. He marketed its products under the registered trademark "Mercedes," inspired by his own daughter's first name. He recruited Camille Jenatzy as a driver, because he considered him to be the most coolly bold precision driver, one of those that have had the most impact on sporting crowds. The beginnings at Mercedes were modest: fourteenth place in the Paris-Madrid, did not finish at Bordeaux, but his triumph at the Gordon Bennet cup in 1903 in Ireland made the Belgian driver immensely popular. He then went from strength to strength: he had to settle for second place at the Gordon Bennet cup in 1904, came in fifth at the Vanderbilt cup in Long Island in 1906, and third at the Circuit des Ardennes in 1907. When his father died in 1904, he had to focus again on managing the family rubber factory with his step-brothers Constant and Ferréol.

After Camille's death, the company went through a series of reorganisation operations: discontinuance of production in Brussels in 1932, establishment in Liège and a reduction of activities which led to its final liquidation in 1994.

M A I S O N

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