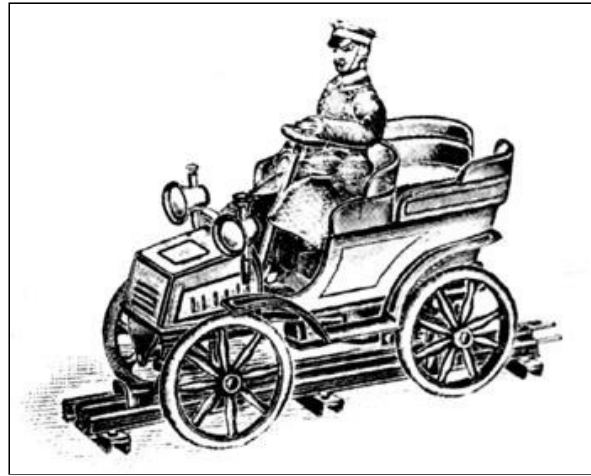


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## The Origins of Slot Car Racing

The hobby of slot car racing developed directly from people's ambitions to race model cars side-by-side in the same way as real cars are raced.



Märklin electrically powered rail guided car from 1909

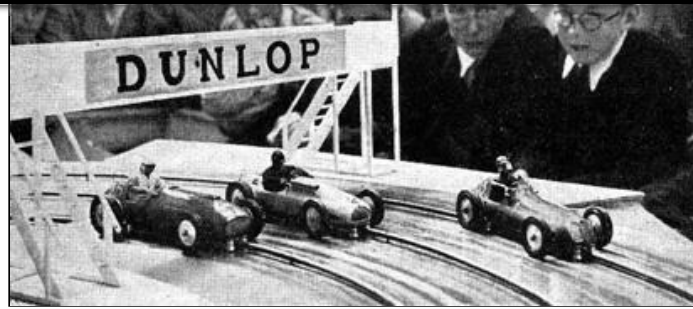
Surprisingly electric car tracks had been built even before the first world war, but these were expensive toys for the very rich. Many more individual and commercially produced electric car tracks came and went after the war but along with a handful of clubs racing free-running, clockwork and rubber band powered cars for one reason or another they never developed into any sort of widespread popular hobby. Things didn't really move forward until the development of small diesel or glow-plug engines for model airplanes in the mid-1930's. These were soon fitted to model cars in the USA, these cars were run singly around a large concrete circle tethered by a sturdy wire to a central post with the fastest car for the size of the motor being judged the winner. Tether cars were very noisy, quite satisfying for the car builder, but unless you had the fastest car, perhaps not the most involving of sports.



H.H Crooks at the Handley Page M.E. Societies

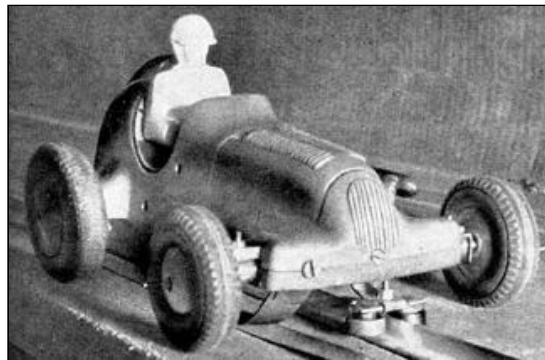
tether car track in Hendon 1947

One thing that was lacking was a method for racing the cars directly against each other around a track and a development of tether car racing was rail car racing. Here a hardboard or concrete circuit was laid out with a sturdy 'I' section metal rail for each car above the surface of the track. One section of track allowed you to attach the car to this rail via two pair's of ball races underneath which prevented the car from flying off in all directions and forced it to follow the rail. Rail car racing was much more exciting for the driver and spectator and with four or more cars screaming away side by side very, very noisy! The two hobbies were popularised in the late 40's and early 50's through the pages of *The Model Craftsman* in the USA and *Model Cars* and *The Model Car News* in the UK.



Diesel powered model rail cars at the Model Engineer Exhibition in 1951

The big drawback with both of these schemes was that once you got over the excitement of starting the motor, you didn't have any real control of the car other than stopping the motor. That wasn't the only reason that these hobbies disappeared, but it did cause some of the people involved to seek a better way. As enthusiasm for diesel powered cars began to die out, electrically powered models were rediscovered. Perhaps they had been dismissed by racing enthusiasts until then because the means of propulsion didn't directly emulate the real thing, but utilising electric rather than diesel motors and controlling the supply of the electrical current to the car via a rheostat proved to be a near perfect method of racing model cars side by side.



Electrically powered rail car patented in 1951 by Ivor Lewis

Electrically powered rail cars achieved a degree of popularity in the late 1950's chiefly through the efforts of the British magazine *Model Maker* where various experimental schemes were given wide coverage. Tracks were relatively easy to build and the hobby slowly developed a following. However supplying the power to the cars via raised rails above the track did have some drawbacks and before long a more satisfactory method evolved (not for the first time!) of cutting a groove in the track and supplying the power from flat conductors on either side. These refinements were adopted for the commercially produced model racing car sets from Minimodels (Scalextric) and Victory Industries ([VIP Model Roadways](#)) which both arrived in the shops around the same time in August 1957 and which finally made simple, affordable, racing model cars easily obtainable. It took a few more years to convert all the enthusiasts from electric rail cars to slot, but once tried the advantages were obvious and the hobby was well and truly born.

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