Sports on Wheels



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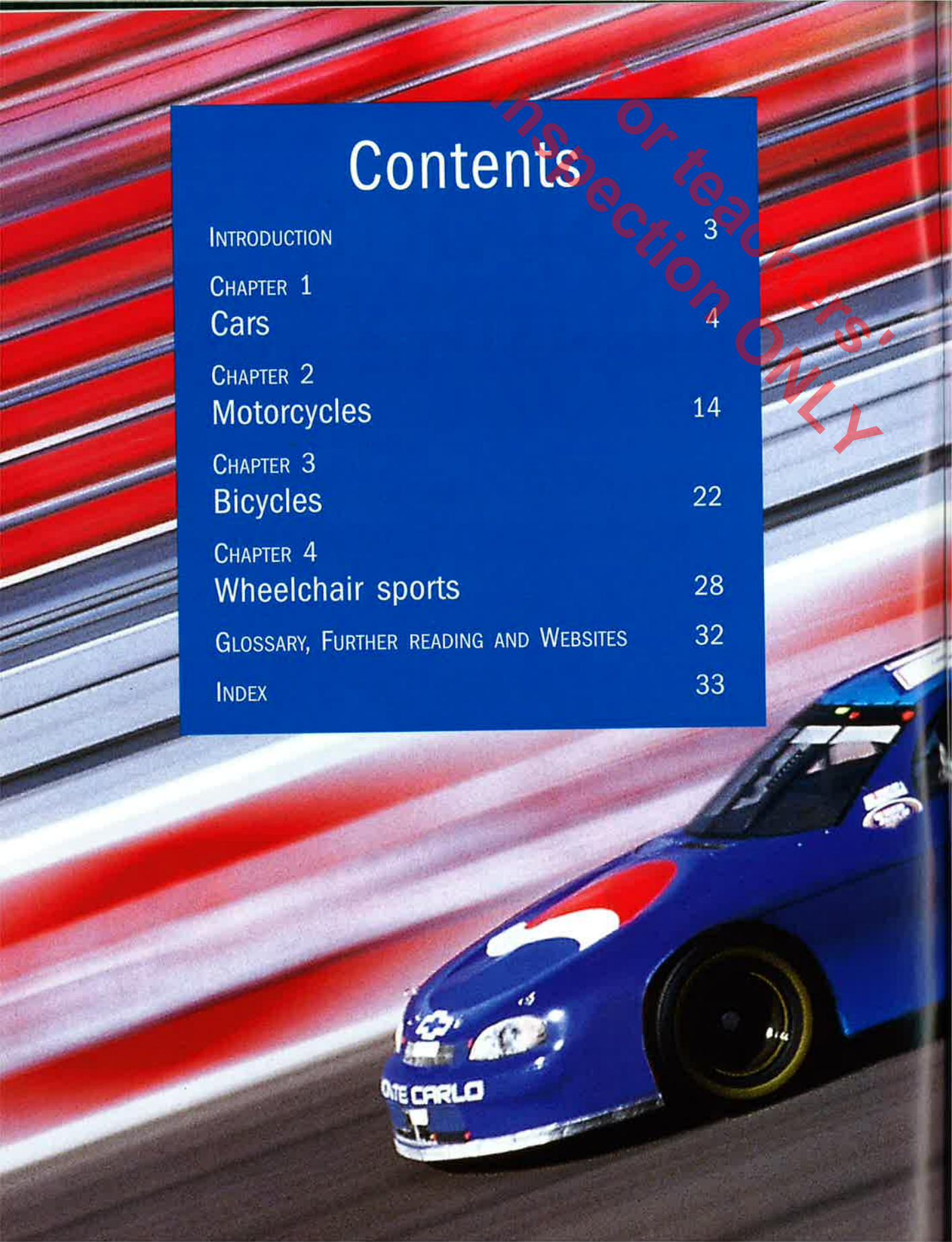
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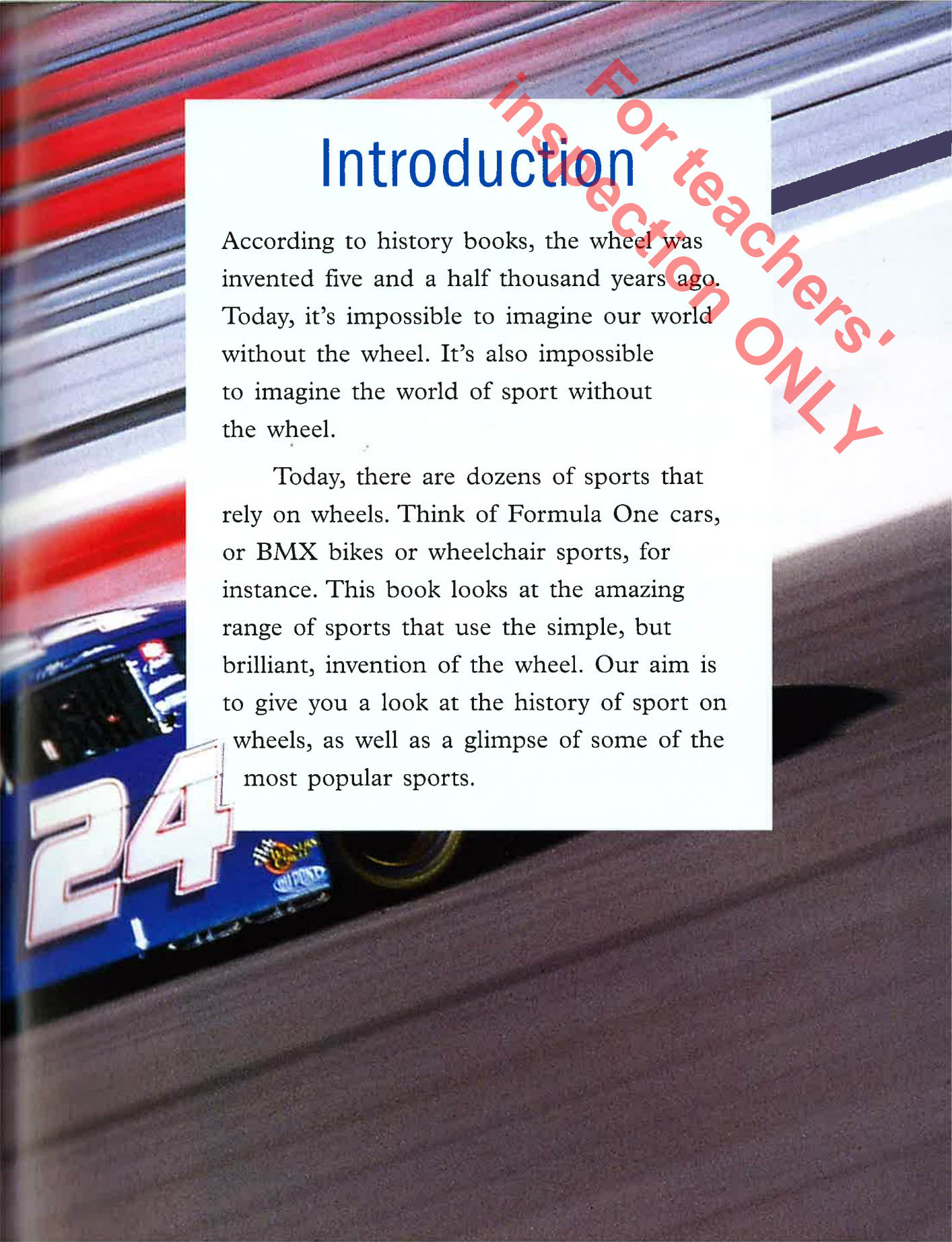
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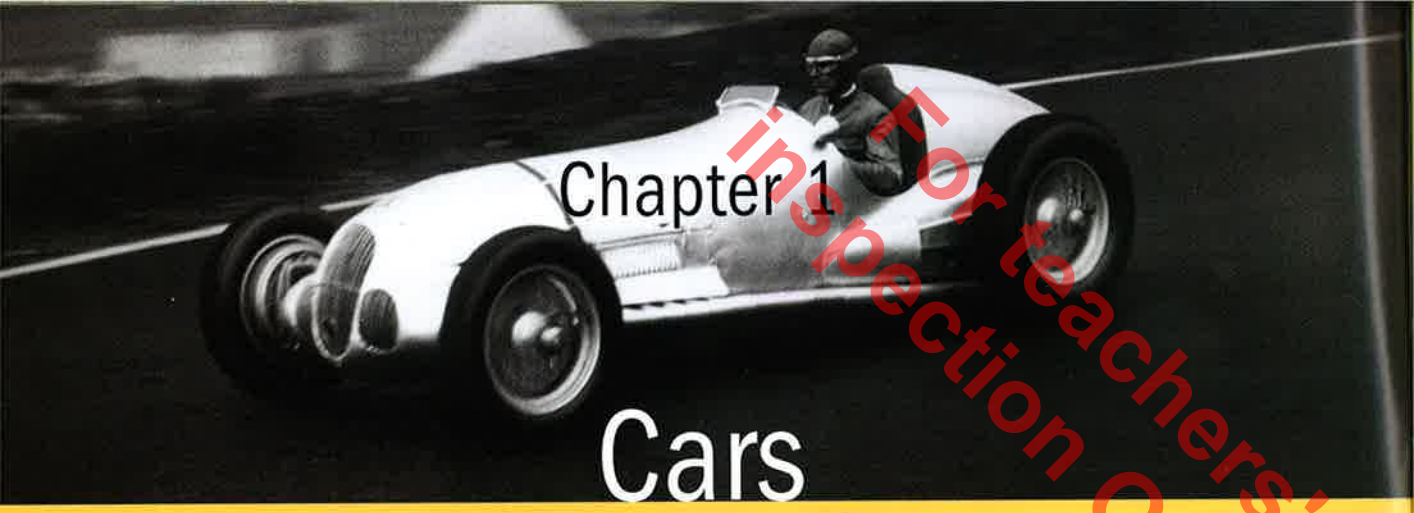


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Introduction

According to history books, the wheel was invented five and a half thousand years ago. Today, it's impossible to imagine our world without the wheel. It's also impossible to imagine the world of sport without the wheel.

Today, there are dozens of sports that rely on wheels. Think of Formula One cars, or BMX bikes or wheelchair sports, for instance. This book looks at the amazing range of sports that use the simple, but brilliant, invention of the wheel. Our aim is to give you a look at the history of sport on wheels, as well as a glimpse of some of the most popular sports.



Chapter 1

Cars

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The first cars

At the end of the nineteenth century, engineers were working on designs for a new machine called a 'horseless carriage'. In the 1880s, the first car was designed with an *internal combustion engine*. German engineers Karl Benz and Gottlieb Daimler were working separately, but they came up with the idea at almost the same time. They both ended up becoming famous automobile makers, and their names are still famous because of Mercedes-Benz and Daimler cars.

A few years later, in 1894, the first-ever car race was held in France. It was a 130-kilometre race from Paris to Rouen and it was very different to modern car races. It was obviously quite a relaxing day, because all the competitors stopped for lunch during the race!

Car races were soon organised from one city to another across Europe and they became very popular.

One of the first car races in America was won by J. Frank Duryea in a car that he helped create.

The last road race of this type was held in 1903. The cars travelled from Paris, in France, to Madrid, the capital of Spain. They were noisy, and raised clouds of dust as they went. People lined the roads to watch the race.



Unfortunately, there were several accidents, and seven people were killed. Road races were banned after that, so special tracks were used for cars to race on.

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Formula One racing

Formula One racing is one of the most exciting sports in the world. Each season, races are held at seventeen different places around the world. Millions of fans watch on television and go to the race track to see the colourful spectacle.

The *Grand Prix* races attract more spectators than almost any other sport. Hundreds of thousands of spectators attend each Grand Prix race. That's at least twice as many fans as most football stadiums can hold. Formula One has certainly come a long way since the first World Championship in 1950.



The Villeneuve files

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Jacques Villeneuve is one of the best Formula One drivers in the world. He is also one of the most popular.

When Jacques was growing up, did he always want to be a racing driver?

Car racing was definitely in his blood, because his father Gilles Villeneuve was a champion driver in the 1970s and early 1980s. Unfortunately, Gilles died tragically during a practice session for a Grand Prix race in 1982.

He had another relative who was quite famous, didn't he?

His uncle, who was also called Jacques, was a racing driver as well. When Jacques junior had his first major race in North America in 1992, his Uncle Jacques was in the race too!

Has Jacques been in Formula One racing for long?

Not really. His first Grand Prix was in Melbourne, Australia, in 1996 and he surprised everyone by coming second. People were even more surprised when he came second in the World Championship that year.

Has he ever won the Formula One Drivers' World Championship?

He certainly has. Jacques was the champion the very next season in 1997.

On another subject, he's not very tall for a successful sports person, is he?

That's true. Jacques is 168 cm tall (5 feet 6 inches) and when he was younger, he raced in cars that were specially modified for his height. The fact that he's not a giant hasn't stopped him becoming a superstar, though!