

# DON O'REILLY—

## Cars, Racing and Magazines

By JOHN FERGUSON IV

DON O'REILLY, auto racing authority, is the man generally credited with firing the opening gun that inaugurated the parade of a couple dozen or so automotive magazines to the newsstands of the nation.

Whether that is to his credit, or the reverse, only history can report in the future, but many people have become automobile conscious and have broadened their knowledge of professional auto racing and cars in general as the result of his original and continuing efforts.

This writer first became acquainted with the rotund Irishman (he won't admit his 200 pounds) about seven years ago when O'Reilly's first publishing venture, *Speed Age Magazine*, was in its infancy.

His enthusiasm for auto racing bub-

bles over with an effervescent quality. He has been an ardent follower of auto racing since his school days in Plainville, Mass., and he was frequently in attendance at the races at the old Readville, Mass., mile speedway near Boston, the Weymouth and Brockton Fairgrounds and the old Interstate Speedway in South Attleboro, Mass.

After a few years operating a commercial printing establishment in Plainville, he seized an opportunity to become a staff reporter for the Attleboro (Mass.) *Sun* and area correspondent for the *Boston Post*. During this time he continued to follow the auto racing sport and his participation increased with the opening of the then revolutionary Thompson, Conn. Speedway, an elaborate banked asphalt half-mile track. There he became one of the track photographers and assisted in speedway publicity activities.

O'Reilly created another 'first' when he approached Paul Waitt, then handling the Soap Box Derby for the *Boston Traveler*, with the suggestion for a preliminary derby to be held in Plainville the week before the Boston affair, with all the Plainville participants going on to the big event at the Suffolk Downs horse track.

Waitt liked the program and gave it tremendous publicity in the *Traveler* and O'Reilly handled all the preparations and operation of the event, even to the extent of cutting his and his wife's honeymoon short a couple days so he could rush back to conclude preparations. The Plainville Derby was such a success that it is now the practice for many preliminary Derbies to be held prior to the metropolitan events.

O'Reilly then worked as a reporter-photographer for the North Attleboro (Mass.) *Chronicle*, which is owned and published by Cong. Joseph W. Martin, Jr., Speaker of the U. S. House of Representatives, and he later went to the New London (Conn.) *Day*, as a reporter, covering the Coast Guard Academy, Navy Submarine Base, and the other military and submarine construction installations.

While in New London, the U. S. became embroiled in war and O'Reilly enlisted as a photographer in the Coast Guard. After 'boot camp' training at Manhattan Beach, N. Y., his first assignment was to Coast Guard Headquarters in Washington, D. C., where he helped set up the general release press picture section which scored so many journalistic beats in fast release of action photos from the war fronts.

He then served until the war's end as photographer on the U.S.S. *General Richardson*, a Coast Guard-manned transport carrying troops between the U. S. and European ports.

While stationed in Washington, O'Reilly had received an offer of a post-war job as a reporter with the *Washington Post* and after being discharged from the Coast Guard in Boston, Mass., on a Saturday afternoon, he bundled his family into the automobile, headed for Washington and reported for work at the *Post* Monday morning.

With the war over, auto racing activity was resumed and the ex-New Englander started planning for a publication which would serve the auto racing sport, a dream which he had conceived back in the days at the Thompson Speedway in Connecticut.



Art Green—National News and Illustration Photo

TV Star Dave Garroway receives award from Don O'Reilly

As his work at the *Washington Post* and his free-lance photographic activities kept him busy, he stored away his plans for the auto racing magazine, but attended all possible races and developed an extensive photographic business at several of the Eastern speedways.

While returning with a friend from a National Championship race at Goshen, N. Y., one night, O'Reilly discussed his dreams and plans for a racing magazine and the friend offered to join him in such a venture.

Plans for the birth of *Speed Age* were formulated, and in the meantime the former Bay Stater took on the duties of public relations director for a Maryland State-County agency.

The first issue of the new magazine made its appearance April 15, 1947, and the saga of those early days of *Speed Age* should make a story in itself for the publishing-advertising business trade press. Maybe it will be written some day.

Subsequently, the friend and associate decided to enter other activities and O'Reilly purchased the remaining interest in the magazine.

During these past seven years I have watched Don O'Reilly as he worked untiringly and unceasingly in his efforts to improve the various phases of the motor sports by making the public more informed through the medium of specialized magazines.

In the past half dozen years, the American people have become much more automotive conscious and many now think of their own cars as something more than a mere means to transportation. The public now has a thirst for knowledge about their cars and what make them tick.

In the early days of motoring, the car owner had to make his own emergency repairs, and as a result he became quite a skilled mechanic. As the auto business prospered and expanded, garages, staffed with experienced repairmen, took over that work and the car owner, occupied with many other activities, was happy to cooperate.

However, watching the pendulum swing the other way during the past few years, O'Reilly commented, "The problem seems to be that too many garages employ only 'replacement artists' today. These mechanics take the easiest course and replace any and all parts with new equipment, rather than make repairs as they once did.

"This has resulted in abnormally high repair bills for the car owner and some loss of skill on the part of the mechanic, until it has reached the point that too many motorists are utterly dissatisfied with the auto performance after the garage has completed operations and handed over a sizeable invoice."

So what is the poor car owner doing about this turn of events?

O'Reilly continues, "Some owners continue to do their own repair work, but the majority still leave all those operations in the hands of their dealers' service departments, unhappy as they



Art Green—National News and Illustration Photo

### Don O'Reilly gives awards to Tim Flock, Wilbur Shaw and Marshall Teague.

are about the situation. However, these same car owners are becoming better informed and many of them are doing the fine tune-up jobs themselves.

"In their enthusiasm for the European-type sport cars, many folks forget the different uses to which autos are put in the United States and in Europe. Here, we have miles and miles of super highways and we are a traveling nation. As a result, we pack the wife and youngsters in the family car, along with considerable luggage, and hit the open road.

"We like our home-type comforts, even while traveling, so we load the car down with permanent accessories such as radios and heaters and air conditioners, and we stow a Coke cooler in the trunk so we can have the 'pause that refreshes' while on the road. All this requires an abundance of interior space and makes for heavier and larger cars.

"Conversely, in Europe, the roads are not as expansive as ours, and fuel costs are much higher, so they prefer smaller cars, that will handle well on narrow, winding and rough roads, and cars that will give top fuel mileage.

"Americans like comfort and luxury, and if they have to make a choice between that and economy, then the latter takes a back seat."

The *CAR LIFE* editor uses as the prime example of this situation the story which Henry Ford told him and a group of auto journalists recently about the man who wrote to Ford outlining his thoughts on the ideal automobile.

"When the man finished listing all of his ideas," Henry Ford said, "it boiled down to the fact that he wanted the same car we are building today, with a few additional refinements, and he wanted it to sell for about \$1,000."

What is the automotive future in the U. S.?

In the opinion of many, the horsepower race in Detroit will continue, and

the American manufacturers will put more effort into planning and building sport cars, after seeing the successful reception of Chevrolet's Corvette.

The sport car movement is definitely on the upswing, with European imports continuing at a fast pace. The sport car makes the ideal vehicle for a family with two or more cars, because it can be used as a utility machine, as well as for recreational driving. Father can use it when he has to battle congested city traffic en route to the office, or Mother can use it for shopping.

Highway road racing is undoubtedly out of the picture because the American people react violently when spectators are injured or killed as the result of racing or any sport activity. In European and Pan American countries, Grand Prix racing is very much a part of their way of life, and while every effort is made to have the road racing as safe as possible, it is not considered a national tragedy should spectators be injured.

For example, there were four spectators killed in the recent Mexican road race. While the race officials obviously regretted this unfortunate and sorrowful incident, plans were immediately made for the race next year. If that had occurred in the U. S., there would have been a hue and cry set up the breadth of the nation, with probably a Congressional investigation to boot, the U. S. elected officials are that sensitive to such occurrences. For that reason, it is felt that highway road races are definitely out in this country in the future, with one possible exception.

On the other hand, there is a trend toward construction of special closed road racing courses, with adequate spectator safety features, and this may be the key to successful sport car racing activities.

There has been a tendency of late for the multitudinous sport cars clubs to

band together in working out schedules and mutual problems, rather than to battle each other, as in the past, and this, too, is seen as a healthy sign.

What are the plans for CAR LIFE Magazine?

"Our plans for CAR LIFE," Editor O'Reilly said, "call for complete coverage of the so-called 'exciting phases' of the automotive world. Experience has proven that it is impossible to even attempt to cover activities in news format in a monthly magazine, and that will not be attempted in CAR LIFE. Instead, the stories will all be presented in feature style, with a constant attempt to analyze and interpret.

"Emphasis will be on the newest developments, engineering-wise, in the automotive field. We will keep you informed of activities in Detroit, the Motor Capital of the World and bring you complete analytical and technical road test reports of the American standard passenger automobiles, and of special sport cars.

"We will bring you product test reports of the newest and unusual auto accessories and equipment. In addition, the Car Life Testing Laboratories, Inc., will test various products and issue the Car Life Automotive Seal of Merit to those that meet rigid standards. This Seal will be issued after the products have undergone thorough studies by one of the nation's leading testing laboratories.

"Professional auto racing and sport car activities will be fully covered in CAR LIFE on the feature-style basis mentioned before. It is our feeling that professional auto racing and sport car racing are truly the proving grounds for the passenger cars of the future. In these sports, new techniques are designed, developed and proven or disproven.

"CAR LIFE will be a hard-hitting magazine," O'Reilly insisted, "and we will report the situation as it is, without favor or prejudice and will maintain a program of honest, forthright and objective coverage."

In discussing the CAR LIFE plans, it is obvious that O'Reilly and his staff sincerely feel that they have an obligation to the public to keep them informed about automotive development and progress and they display a boundless fervor for objectivity in their reporting.

"We are going to do the best job possible," O'Reilly reiterated, "and CAR LIFE will be absolutely tops in the automotive publication field . . . that is our goal, and I am fortunate to have a most capable editorial and production staff on the firing line. A chain is only as strong as its weakest link, and we have no weak links."

And so, the 40-year old New Englander—former newspaper reporter, Coast Guard cameraman, auto racing authority and pioneer in the auto magazine field—embarks on another phase of a hitherto active career as editor of CAR LIFE Magazine, destined to be the absolute tops in the business. ☆ ☆



## ARE YOU ON THE MERRY-GO-ROUND

### of Battery Replacements?

#### Get a **SPAN-O-LIFE**

#### Guaranteed for the Life of Your Car!

It's a vicious circle! Once you get on the merry-go-round of limited guarantees and pro-rated replacement costs, you're hooked, brother — you're hooked! So why buy a battery with a 12, 18 or 24-month guarantee in the first place when it actually costs less in the long run to get a Span-O-Life Battery that's guaranteed for the life of your car.

No double talk . . . no replacement costs . . . no fine print! Your Span-O-Life Battery is guaranteed for as long as you keep the car for which it was purchased.

Find out about America's most revolutionary battery — SPAN-O-LIFE — guaranteed for the life of your car.



Write for Free  
Descriptive Folder



SPAN-O-LIFE CORPORATION  
P.O. Box 99, Dept. SA-1  
New Braunfels, Texas

Tell me more! Send me your free descriptive folder that tells me about America's most revolutionary battery.

Name.....

Address.....

City..... State.....