

# INDY'S NEXT 3-TIME WINNER?

**T**HE RICHEST race driver, Rodger Ward, is a remarkable and controversial figure. He may become, if he is not already, the greatest driver in the history of U.S.-style and Indianapolis racing. Or he may not even be close. He may merely be the luckiest. His stature is hotly disputed. Beyond dispute is his ability to win, and it will be an insult to his record if he is not the favorite when the 47th running of the Indianapolis 500 rolls around on Memorial Day.

Forty-two-years-old, a stocky 5-9 and 165 lb., the round-faced, always-smiling, well-spoken veteran expects to be a dominant figure during the mad month of May when close to 1 million persons wedge into the Hoosier capital to see the 4-week assault on the richest yearly prize in sports. And he is not about to step aside for a couple of raw young interlopers like fiery, powerful, A. J. Foyt, or the confident Arkansas traveler, Parnelli Jones. "The grand old man of U.S. racing" is, in his own words, "as hungry as a rookie," and unwilling to bow before injury or age.

Neither the broken back he suffered last year, nor the years weighing in favor of his spectacular young opponents frighten him. Nor do the hazards of his trade. And the race that pays the most money, more than \$400,000, draws the most fans, nearly 300,000 persons. He is the defending champion. He has finished four consecutive 500s, winning two, placing second once and third once.

The businessman driver, a wartime fighter pilot, has every reason to retire. He has won more than a half-million-dollars racing, more than any race driver in world history and, even after splitting the take with his sponsors, he has retained a healthy bank account. He has invested in a string of Indianapolis businesses that promise him fu-

ture security. He has achieved the pinnacle of his profession. There is little left for him to win that he has not already won. And he is old enough to quit without reluctance or fear of recrimination.

But, after he won last year's 500, he said, "I love to race and it's a mighty good way of making a living as long as you can win. I'll never retire from racing as long as I have a chance to win. I don't care how many times you win the 500, the thrill is still there. The



first time I won it, it was like living in a dream. It is the same this time. I feel wonderful. I couldn't feel any better. I don't know anyone else who has a better reason to feel as happy as I do."

And, the other day, when questioned about the forthcoming 500, he said, "The most important thing to a race driver is his desire. I still have the same desire to win now that I ever had. I won't deny that I now temper that desire with good judgment. I'm not as foolish or reckless as I once was. But this good judgment is an advantage, it

helps me win. And I want to win as much as ever. I'm looking forward to this year's race. The old desire is still there."

Ward is a proud man. He is proud of his profession and he has been probably the outstanding spokesman for U.S.-style auto racing in its history. He is an articulate spokesman for it, much as Stirling Moss has been for Grand Prix racing, and he has been a willing traveling salesman for this profession, at banquets and meetings, in the press and on radio and TV.

He is called to account for two things which bother him in such instances, the toll of death and injury in his sport and his own standing in the current and all-time ranking of U.S. drivers.

Ward has not been shielded from the tragedies of his sport. Before he scaled the racing heights, a fellow Californian, Bill Vukovich, had moved into the Indianapolis spotlight. Vukovich was winning the 1952 500 when his car broke down under him. He returned to win the 1953 and 1954 races. And he was leading the 1955 race when he crashed over the wall and was killed in the tail-end of a 4-car crash which began with Ward. Rodger spun out after the front axle of his car broke, and he flipped end over end three times. He escaped with a cut nose, but bore the memory of tragedy which followed his accident.

Ward, who has been in many crashes and suffered many injuries, but has been extremely fortunate in recent years, crashed last year. In practice for the Riverside Grand Prix last October, his Chevrolet-powered Chaparral broke a brake caliper at 100 mph, knocking out the steering and brakes. The car dove off the track at the first turn, plowed through a field, overturned twice and was totally wrecked. Ward

walked away from the wreck, but was hospitalized with compression fractures of the second lumbar vertebra in his lower spine.

He kept a smile on his face and joked with the doctors who worked on him. Although he wore a cast for four months, he seemed most concerned with the temporary interruption of his racing career. He has said, "Death and injury are an unfortunate part of this business. We enter the sport of our own free will. We regret every accident, but we have learned to live with them." They are, in Rodger's eyes, a part of the sport, an unfortunate part, but a part that truly tests the courage and determination of the individual.

Early this season, Rodger said, "I feel fine. No mental scars at all. I hope to get in some racing before the 500, at Daytona probably, and at Trenton. I'm looking forward to the whole season."

It is a season that could mean much to racing history. Ward will be seeking his third 500 victory. Only Wilbur Shaw and Louis Meyer have won three 500 titles. Mauri Rose won two and shared a third with a co-driver. No man has ever won four. Ward's record over the last four years at Indianapolis is surpassed only by Shaw, who had three victories and a second in one 4-year span. Shaw's best accompanying finish was a seventh, so Ward could emerge with the race's finest 5-year cumulative performance this season.

Jim Rathmann will be driving in his 14th 500, Ward his 13th. All of Ward's have been consecutive, which is the current record. The all-time standards are 16 starts by Cliff Bergere and Chet Miller and 15 in a row by Mauri Rose. Ward has won \$338,248 at Indianapolis, more than any driver in history. His major purses were \$125,000 and

\$110,000 for his victories last year and in 1959, \$48,000 for second in 1960 and \$26,000 for third in 1961.

The United States Auto Club national championship is determined by the 500 and about a dozen other races yearly, mostly 100-milers, all on 1-mile tracks, dirt or asphalt, and in Indianapolis-styled cars. In the last

four years, Ward has won 13 of the 50 races in this period and his nearest rival, A. J. Foyt, has won 12. Each has won two national titles, Ward last year and 1959, Foyt the two years in between.

Only three men, Louis Meyer, Ted Horn and Jimmy Bryan, have won the national title three times and nine oth-



**Rich Rodger Ward's driving may be controversial but his string of victories in round-track racing makes him one of the best drivers around**

STORY BY BILL LIBBY

ILLUSTRATIONS BY BILL NEALE

WARD EXPLAINS engine works to TV-film actor Lloyd Bridges.

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ers have won it twice. It is an ironic fact that Horn never won the 500, although he was one of the most consistent drivers in its history, placing second, third or fourth for nine straight years. A great deal of luck enters into winning the 500, and it is worth many points toward the season title.

"Ward has all the luck," says one veteran driver. "He has better cars and better crews and he still has to be lucky to beat Foyt. Man for man, he doesn't touch A. J."

Foyt, a 28-year-old Texan, has risen in the last three seasons to cast a shadow over Ward's position as leader of the U.S. racing set and a serious feud has erupted between the two. In the last three years, Foyt has won a dozen championship races, Ward nine.

He is one of the few Indianapolis drivers interested in sports car and Grand Prix racing and has shown some promise, if few finishes, in his efforts in this line.

He does drive stock cars occasionally and probably will drive them a good deal this season. He avoids the dangerous bull-rings of the racing circuit, while Foyt drives 50 races, big and small, each year, with a success that bolsters his claim to supremacy.

It is the additional contention of many of Foyt's supporters and Ward's detractors that Ward's biggest advantage lies in being a member of the finest team in racing. Ward drives for the Leader Card team, sponsored by Bob Wilke of Milwaukee, whose chief engineer-mechanic is A. J. Watson of Glendale, Calif. Although the Indy-style racing cars are so highly similar that mere seconds separate the cream of the crop from the also-rans, Watson has built the cars and headed the pit crews that have consistently dominated the field in recent years.

Watson has built five of the last nine winning cars at Indianapolis and has built, or planned, half of the cars that have ranked among the leaders in that time. In last year's 500, the team placed one-two as Len Sutton in a sister Leader Card car trailed Ward across the finish line. Leader Card had the top two cars in the Trenton 150 and the first, second and fifth cars in the Milwaukee 200.

While Watson also builds cars for other teams, he prepares cars and supervises the pit crew for Leader Card. Under Watson's guidance, Ward made three pit stops, changing tires and taking on fuel, in an incredible 62.6 sec. last season. Third-place finisher Eddie Sachs ran a faster race on the track, but spent 87.1 sec. in his

pits, and the difference put Sachs 20 sec. behind Ward at the finish. Foyt's pit crew neglected to tighten a wheel and it flew off during the race, sidelining him. Foyt grew so exasperated during the rest of the season that he changed cars, car-owners and crews three times.

Foyt and Ward are quite different types. Foyt is a charger, who gets to the front as quickly as possible and drives as hard as he can at all times. He is a daring and extremely skillful pilot. Ward is rarely a front-runner, but prefers to take a comfortable position near the lead, waiting for the leaders to fade. These are conservative tactics, but they have paid off for him. Ward's supporters point out that he knows his cars, nurses them to the maximum and is usually running at the finish, while the more spectacular Foyt often runs his cars right off the track.

The two rarely speak to each other these days. The hot-tempered Foyt



says, "There's no reason we have to be friends. He's a great driver, I don't deny that. I beat him out before and I can do it again. I think he's been on top long enough. I think it's time for me to be on top, and I want to stay there a while. We're polite to one another, but we're enemies on the track, and so maybe we should be the same off it."

The charitable Ward says, "Foyt and Parnelli Jones are the two toughest drivers I have to face. I always figure Foyt is the man to beat. He's a very fine driver and he could become the greatest. But I'm not ready to step aside yet. He's a nice kid, really, he's just young and hot-tempered and he sometimes speaks before he thinks. I don't think he really dislikes me, it's just that I've been on top as he's coming up and it's only natural for him to pick on me."

There are not many drivers who have the skill and equipment to win the 500 in any given year. Ward and Foyt must be placed at the top of this list. Jones, a young Gardena, Calif., driver, must be placed right up there, too. He has led the race both of his

years there. His car went sour in 1960, dropping him back to seventh, but he was named "rookie of the year." Last season, he qualified at 150.370 mph, breaking the Speedway's 150-mph barrier, and was running away with the race in its early stages when he lost his brakes. He finished fifth after an impressively skilled brakeless run the last 200 miles.

Jones has twice won the national sprint-car title, but he has won only two races in three seasons on the championship circuit. "The Indianapolis race is different from any other race," Ward points out. "It is the only track we run which is more than a mile around. It is a 2.5-mile mildly-banked, asphalt track. The 500 miles takes 3.5 hours to run, which is the longest race we have. The lap speeds, up to 150 mph, are the fastest of any race in the world. Some drivers are ideally suited to this race and Jones is undoubtedly one of them. He learned the track faster than any driver I've known in my time, and he can't be discounted."

At 42, Rodger Ward remains the man to beat. U.S. racing is not a young man's game. The average Indianapolis driver is in his mid-30s and many are past 40. Winners of five of the last six 500s—Sam Hanks, Jimmy Bryan, Rathmann and Ward—were veterans who succeeded at Indianapolis only after many years of trying. Foyt was a rare exception. But even under these circumstances Ward is a senior citizen. His leading rivals are all younger, with Foyt at 28 and Jones and Hurtubise 29.

It has been a long, hard road for Ward and there were a great many frustrations in the beginning. He began as a midget-car driver in the Los Angeles area in the 1940s and enjoyed some modest success. After his war-time flying days, he moved into the midwest and drove midget cars and then sprint cars in Indiana, Illinois and Ohio. He made his first Indianapolis start in 1951, but ran into a series of mechanical troubles and accidents that kept him from finishing higher than eighth in 1956 and left him frequently far back in the pack until his sudden breakthrough in 1959.

That was the year Ward joined the Leader Card team. Up until then, he was considered a journeyman hack. But with a good car under him, he moved immediately to the head of the class. He drove a smooth and steady 500 to win at 135.857 mph, trimming the hungry Jim Rathmann by 23 sec. That year he also won the Milwaukee 200 and Duquoin, Ill., and Indianapolis 100s to ascend to the national title, one of the most startling rises out of the ranks of the also-rans any champion has achieved in sports.



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He started out 1960 as though he was much too good for any of his rivals, winning at Trenton and Milwaukee and placing second by a mere 12 sec. in the 500, a feat made particularly noteworthy by his having lost 40 sec. on his first pit stop when his car stalled.

That 500 was one of the most stirring duels of all time. Ward and Rathmann dueled, wheel-to-wheel, swapping the lead, for most of the last 125 miles at top speeds as high as 147 mph, the fastest ever turned in traffic there. Near the finish, both cars suffered from extreme tire wear. Thrice second, never a winner, Rathmann may have been more recklessly determined than Ward. In any event, when Ward finally slowed down to insure his safety, Rathmann continued pushing. Rathmann averaged 135.8 mph, Ward 135.6. Rathmann pocketed \$110,000, Ward \$48,000.

Ward had little mechanical luck the remainder of the season, failing to win a championship race. In 1961, he had handling difficulties with his car, but drove a smooth 500 to third place as Foyt outlasted Eddie Sachs, by 8 sec. in a hectic battle. Foyt clocked 139.1, Sachs 139.0 and Ward 55 sec. behind, Foyt banked \$117,000; Sachs \$53,000; Ward \$26,000.

But Ward was not, as was then suspected, bowing out. He won 100-mile races at Milwaukee, Syracuse and Sacramento, was second at Phoenix, third at Trenton and sixth at Springfield. And the following year, last year, he bounced all the way back, winning the 500, the Syracuse 100, the Trenton 150, the Milwaukee 200, placing third at Trenton, fourth in the Milwaukee 100 and the Trenton 200, and fifth in the Indianapolis 100. In fact, he led for more than half the miles on the circuit, regaining the championship, and scored a particularly satisfying win in the Milwaukee 200 where he dueled Foyt nose-to-nose for the last 50 miles and staved off this tough young foe to win by a car length.

Only Jones' record run surpassed Ward's 149.371 mph qualifying time in the 500, and Ward led the race itself for 65 of the 200 laps, including the all-important last 31, rolling comfortably to an 11-sec. triumph over teammate Sutton at a record average speed of 140.293 and earning \$125,000 of the record \$426,000 purse.

A jubilant Ward smeared the grease back from his face to accept a victory kiss from the queen, but his wife was noticeably missing. During most of his career, Rodger's wife, Jo, and his

mascot dog, Skippy, were prominent spectators. Once, in discussing how she bears the strain of Rodger's races, Jo said, "I carry a Bible with me, and when I begin to worry, I just open it any place, read, pray and believe God is going to take care of Rodger." Usually, she closed the Bible in time to plunk a wildly-barking Skippy into Rodger's lap in Victory Lane.

She was not here this time, and after the race it was announced that Rodger was suing her for divorce, and she was cross-filing for a separation in the hope that Rodger "may adjust himself sufficiently to return to a happy marital situation."

Nevertheless, Rodger had family in the winner's circle. His parents, Mr. and Mrs. Ralph Ward, and his two handsome sons, Rodger Jr., 21 and David 17, were there. Rodger Jr., obviously not discouraged by his father's success, said he was going to try his hand at stock car racing to see if he was any good. David had a rather touching and interesting comment: "Racing looks like a wonderful career, but you've got to look on the other side, too. You know there's a lot of disappointment here. There were 32 other drivers trying just as hard as my dad to win. And you have to feel sorry for them."

Rodger has always been considerate of others in racing and he spread the praise around after his latest triumph: "I have to thank Bob Wilke who gives me the finest racing automobiles money can buy and who is a wonderful boss; A. J. Watson, who builds the best cars in the world and is the greatest mechanic in the world; his pit crew, who put on a flawless performance, giving me the great service I need, and to Lady Luck. Never discount Lady Luck."

Wilke, whose team has won more than half of the 1.5 million dollars in Speedway prizes over the last four years, said, "You can't beat this team. They're smart, fast gentlemen, and they all work together to get a job done." He just may be right. His cars have traveled 3000 miles around the tough track in the four years, and had only one failure. With steady chauffeurs to pilot these cars, Leader Card is a winner.

Wilke has had Watson build a new car for Ward every year, as it usually takes a new car to win this race; this coming race is no exception. Len Sutton will also get a new car, and Don Branson may pilot Ward's winning 1962 car as the team bids for a 1-2-3 sweep, something never accomplished at Indianapolis.

Ward's cars last year and this year are traditional Indianapolis machines, 4-cyl., rear-drive, front-engine aluminum roadsters. They went back to torsion bar suspension last year after having experimented with the coil springs, which had lessened the weight of the car but cut down on its handling ease, and Rodger was pleased with the results. Neither Watson nor Ward are discussing the changes planned this year, except to say that there are some, but no major ones.

Firestone's improved tires, with a widened tread, pleased most of the drivers and a vastly improved type, well-tested, is expected to be introduced this year. With the last of the old bricks removed and the track now fully and smoothly asphalted, traction and tire wear is expected to improve, pushing the speeds up, though how high they will go is anyone's guess. "It's my guess there will be three or four of us qualifying in the 150-mph bracket this year, and turning some

laps in the race close to that figure, too," Ward says. "The overall speed is bound to be faster, too, though the number of slower caution laps you have to run after accidents always influences that."

"I'm ready to run faster, as fast as I have to to stay on the track, hold the car together and win. You don't go into this thing if you don't expect to win. Certainly I wouldn't. I skip some of the other races these days, because at this point in my career it

would be foolish to take the risks of tough tracks for small rewards. I simply don't need it. I can leave it to the younger fellows. But, even though I may be spotting some of the boys a few years, when it comes to the big races, particularly the 500, it may do them well to remember that I'm still going to be around, with a good car and a top crew, a little more careful than I once was, perhaps, but just as determined as I ever have been."

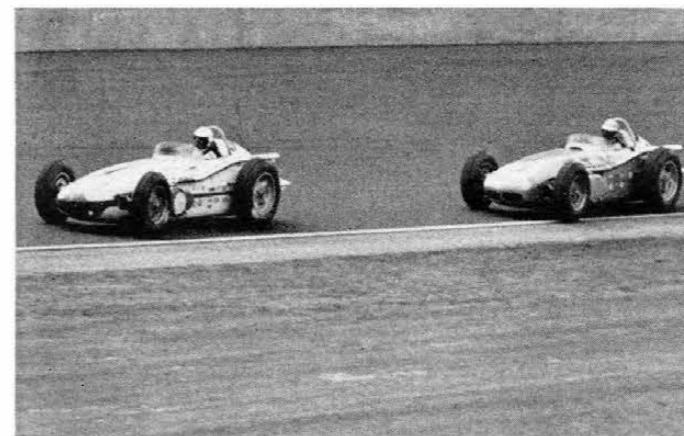
It's bound to be a good race. ■



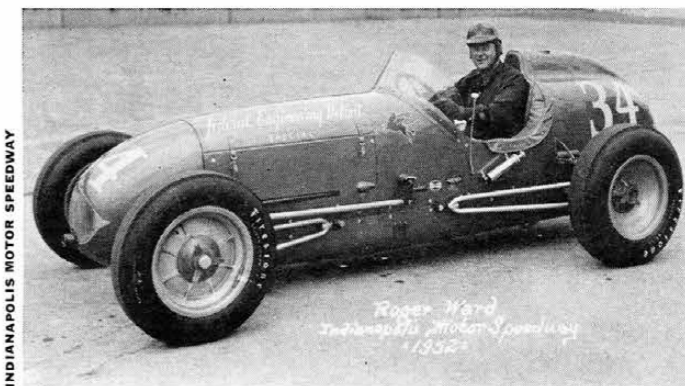
JEF STEVENS



RODGER THE rookie in 1951, fresh from the midget tracks.

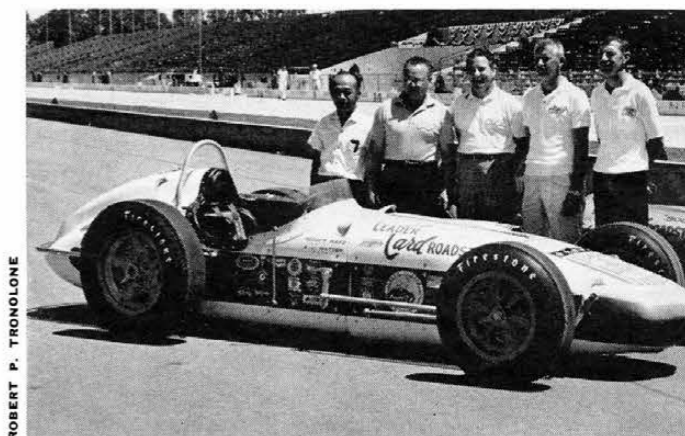


IN 1961, he waged a torrid battle with Jim Rathmann (rear).



INDIANAPOLIS MOTOR SPEEDWAY

A YEAR LATER, and Ward had a better ride in this car.



ROBERT P. TRONOLONE

'62 LEADER CARD crew: (l-r) Hirashima, Wilke, Ward, Watson, Turner.



R. SCHUSTER

ROAD RACING: Ward, in Midget, passes George Constantine, in Maserati, at Lime Rock.