

Motor Trend Profile: **ROGER PENSKE**

Roger Penske's a very busy young man, but not too busy to pull off racing's coup of the year when he switched from Chevy to AMC.

By Bob Thomas

The wonder of Roger Penske is how he does it at all. The wonder by Roger Penske is that others who could, don't. The fact is, of course, that every young man with ambition simply doesn't want to devote eight days a week to business...or businesses. Roger does. He does because he happens to thrive on it.

"It's terrific," said the handsome Philadelphian about a pace that rebounds crazily among two new car dealerships, car rental franchises, a tire distribution business, an insurance agency, a car and truck leasing company, a lucrative position with Sears, Roebuck & Co., part ownership in a thoroughbred racing track as well as vice-chairmanship of its board and two other enterprises in the making, "that I really can't talk about just yet."

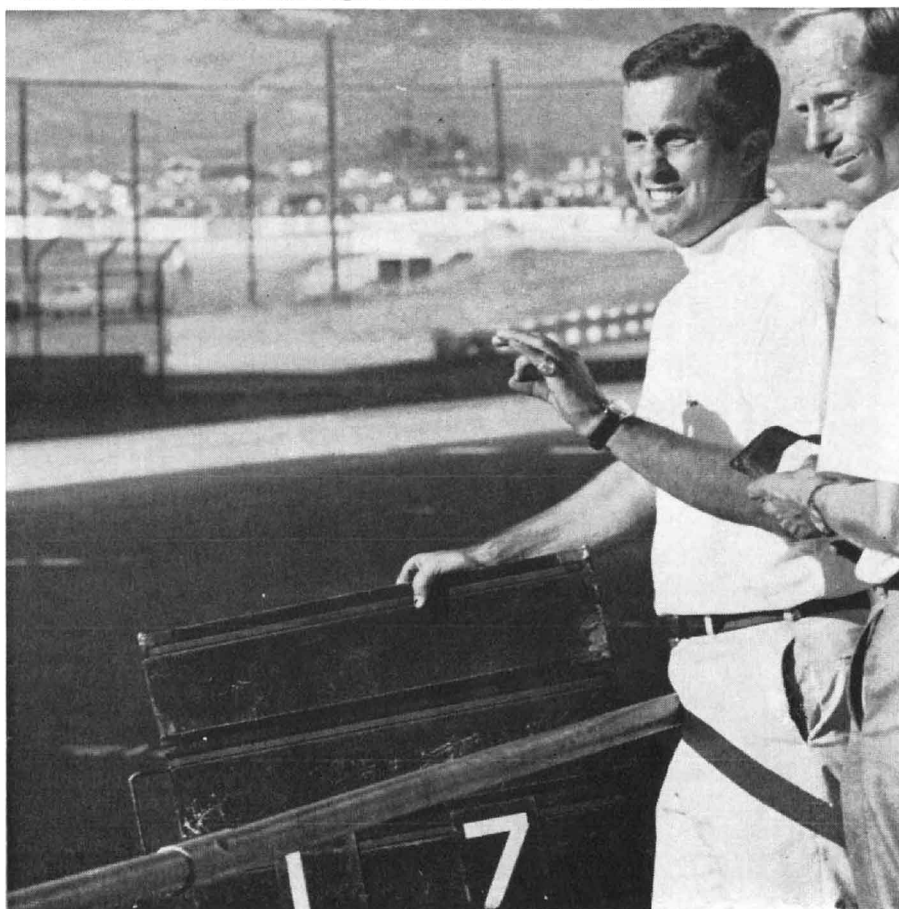
Oops. There's more. Much more. There's Roger Penske the racer. That's the more familiar side of Penske only because it's the view that gets the most public exposure. Even in racing, as in business, Penske is tireless. He's also somewhat unique. The reason, surprisingly, is that he's strictly business on the track. The sport is not a sideline, just a diversion, an avocation or something he does to let off the pressure that accumulates from activity in so many ventures. Racing is all part of the empire. And like the rest of it, Penske Racing Enterprises is ever expanding. In addition to operating and directing what is considered the most successful team in auto racing, Penske recently acquired minority stockholdings in Ontario Motor Speedway, Inc., and became a member of the board of directors for the \$25.5 million Southern California racing plant which opens Labor Day weekend, 1970.

To be sure, you don't wind up the Roger Penske doll. It's already wound up...and moving in another direction. What makes the Penske doll run?

"There's so much to do if you really want to," Penske said in a whirlwind interview. "I just don't understand guys who are in a position to do it and
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don't. It's all out there and, well I love it."

Not everybody, naturally, understands Penske, either. Or his amazing drive. But usually they respect him for it, mainly because of the consistent, high level pattern of his success. No detail is ignored in a Penske operation.

Actually, Penske doesn't want to sound like he's putting down people who don't pursue "what's out there" at the same furious tempo he does. "Jeez, I don't want to make anybody mad. I don't mean it that way. I just like it. It's the way to go." And he's not bragging, either. He just thrives on activity. At 32, he's proud of the fact that he's a member of the worldwide young men under 40 who are heads of companies.

What kind of relentless schedule feeds a young man on the go? "Well, like today, for example, it started at 7:30 a.m. and will go until 10 or 11 tonight. I go like that seven days a week, so I don't have a lot of time."

Nevertheless, Penske doesn't have that shot-out-of-a-gun appearance. If Penske is to be analogized with a raging hurricane, then he's the eye—absolute calm. He is a perfectionist who leaves nothing to chance. He practices nit stops with his team like a news photographer takes pictures... "Just one more." Penske fits the old saying, too, that "anything worth doing is worth doing right." Only had he authored that old maxim he doubtless would have added "for a profit." Again, that is not to disparage the young man whose multiplying flecks of grey hair are only giving him a distinguished look premature to his age. Business is business. Even racing.

It is this attitude, without a doubt, that has accounted for his success in motor sports. "He's the best team manager in auto racing anywhere in the world... except my own, of course," said world champion Jackie Stewart, of Scotland, recently in an unsolicited expression of praise. Penske's teams traditionally have been identified as the best prepared. His attention to the myriad detail of competition is exhausting... to others perhaps. To him it's routine. His appearance at the track could, but hasn't, earned him the title as the Impeccable Mr. Penske. It's not only his own clean, wholesome look, but the corresponding appearance of his crew, his cars, his pit. And the most disarming individual in the



entire Penske organization is driver Mark Donohue. A cherubic graduate engineer of Brown University, who would have to visit Hollywood's finest makeup artist to put on a mean expression. Call Mark Captain Nice. Everyone else does.

While Penske himself may sound a little brash, he's not. Just bold. After winning his second straight Trans-American Sedan Championship series this past season with a Camaro, Penske's comment to Chevrolet was "good-bye." That wasn't quite as shocking as Henry Ford's similar statement to Bunkie Knudsen. But almost. Then Penske signed a three-year contract with American Motors to campaign Javelins. That was bold, too: Penske owns two Chevrolet dealerships, one in Philadelphia, another in Allentown, Pa.

Just how bold is Penske? Well, pretty bold. He predicted flatly, "We're going to win the TransAm series for the third time." That's almost as bold as the promise he made to AMC when the deal (very fat) was signed. "I told them my first job was to win seven races for them next year," he said. "No, I wasn't kidding. That's what I told them I would do. They know we won't sit back on our heels." That's confidence. Just one victory would improve Javelin's TransAm record. The model has never won a TransAm race. Penske Camaros, incidentally, have won 17 in two years, sparing a handful for all the Mustang teams.

Does he feel he may be jeopardizing his reputation, leaving a proven make for a model and a company that is eager but hardly considered formidable in major racing?

"No, not at all," he said. "Well, I guess you're always putting your reputation on the line. But the Javelin, we feel, is as good as any car in the series. All the cars in competition come under

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"... you're always putting your reputation on the line. But the Javelin, we feel, is as good as any car in the series."

the same specifications. Now with Dodge and Plymouth in this thing, TransAm racing is going to be the greatest racing there is. In fact, it was this year. Maybe, too, I've got a little different philosophy than some other people. I happen to think racing is like other sports. In golf it doesn't really matter what kind of club Nicklaus swings or what kind of ski Killy uses. What happens really depends on the guy swinging the club or going down the slopes. If all the cars are equal, and I think in this case they can be, then the same thing applies."

It virtually goes without saying that Penske thinks Donohue is the greatest. "As far as I'm concerned, if I had the pick of all the drivers in the world—Grand Prix, Indianapolis, anywhere—he is the best there is," Penske said in a tone that was unequivocal. "He may not be the fastest on one particular lap, but no one has his total abilities. Then, there's the reliability factor he builds into a car. No, dollar for dollar, or pound for pound, he's the best. I don't think people realized this when he went to Indianapolis last May. Yet he qualified his car right up there in front with Mario [Andretti] and Bobby [Unser] the first time he was ever there."

Penske pointed out Donohue's value exceeds his driving ability. "He's a very, very integral part of the team. He works seven days a week, doing a lot of the engineering, and all of the planning," Penske declared. "Really, he's the key man in the racing operation."

"Oh yes, and he's a gentleman," Penske added. "He's not looking for anything that he doesn't deserve."

Penske's switch to American Motors raised one immediate question: Since he's a Chevy dealer, how does that affect his relationship with GM's Chevrolet division?

"It doesn't affect it at all," he said. "It's two different areas—selling Chevrolets and racing Javelins. What can they [Chevrolet] say? If they were involved in racing, that would be different. It's very evident by the fact that General Motors has a 'no racing' policy that Chevy isn't in racing. So, there's no problem."

There is a very widespread feeling, of course, that Chevrolet is involved in racing... albeit under the table and through the back door. Those who ar-

continued on page 103

gue the point base this on circumstantial evidence which they claim is rather conclusive; e.g., the success of such Chevrolet-powered teams as Penske, Jim Hall and Bruce McLaren.

"I was a Chevrolet dealer interested in racing Camaros," Penske explained. "I had strong sponsors [Sunoco, Goodyear and Champion]. They [Chevy] helped me in areas of engineering." Penske, however, denied there was any direct assistance from Chevrolet.

But why the switch to AMC?

"We had been contacted by a lot of major automobile manufacturers," Penske continued, "but hadn't thought too much about it. Then American Motors came along with a deal we couldn't turn down. We also felt it was an opportunity to go with someone who was in racing and who could really use somebody like us. It also offered advantages to our sponsors because we then were with a factory that was in racing all the way and would assist in escalating our programs."

Penske makes no bones about the fact that he enters racing with profit motives. He's not depending on purses (very low, incidentally, in TransAm racing) to pay the bills (because they don't, even when you win). "I don't go into any deals that don't look profitable. I wouldn't be in racing if it weren't," he said frankly. "I look at racing as I would any of my profit-oriented businesses in the operation."

Without sponsors, Penske pointed out, it would be "pretty difficult" for a team to exist in racing. "But what's wrong with that? That's part of racing. Without sponsors there wouldn't be any racing."

Racing-wise, Penske plans an ambitious year in 1970. Work for that campaign began in earnest in the fall of 1969 as Penske's crews tore down the old racing Javelins and rebuilt them for comparisons against the victorious Penske Camaros. "We have to know what the baseline is before we start a very extensive new program," he explained. In addition to a dozen TransAm events, there will be Penske Javelin entries at Daytona and Sebring.

He's confident that American Motors' 320-cubic-inch engine will do the job in TransAm, reduced in displacement to the legal 305-cubic-inch limit. Even here, he's leaving nothing to chance. Those southern California experts, Jim Travers and Frank Coon of Traco in Culver City, are preparing Penske's engines, just as they did with the Chevrolet powerplants that seemed so susceptible to such Traco "ticklings" through the years.

Also, he will run a championship car at Indianapolis and in the first California 500 to open Ontario Motor Speedway on Labor Day weekend, as well as some of the U.S. Auto Club road races. He won't go Canadian-American Challenge Cup racing.

Somehow there will be time for the other things in Penske's business life. The heartbeat generates from an office

in his Chevrolet dealership (No. 2 in sales among 43 metropolitan dealers) in Philadelphia where he spends most of his time. It was there that Penske became a man of many businesses.

He graduated from Lehigh University in 1959 and pursued a dual career as a sales engineer with Alcoa and a road racing driver. Both were brief. Although abbreviated, Penske's racing career is a story in itself... driver of the year awards, winner of the Times Grand Prix for sports cars in 1962, plus numerous national Sports Car Club of America championships. But, after winning all three races in Speed Week at Nassau to close out the 1964 season, Penske quit racing "for business reasons"... of course. "I had to make certain commitments," he explained. In February 1965, he took over a Chevrolet agency that he had joined in 1963 as general manager.

Since then his commitments have enlarged greatly: ownership in a brand new Chevy dealership in Allentown, Pa. His National Car Rental franchises are located in Philadelphia and Atlantic City. Also, he distributes Goodyear Racing Tires in half of Canada, plus 13 eastern states. Atlantic City Raceway provides a different kind of horsepower to occupy part of Penske's time.

He's particularly excited about one of his latest associations—Sears, Roebuck & Co. "I'm a consultant for their racing activities and on high performance. They've got a lot of exciting things in the works. They're trying to reach the young adult. That's where I hope to help them."

In fairness to Penske, he pointed out very early in the interview that he isn't a one-man gang. "I go seven days a week," he said, "because that's the only way to go. But the real secret of this thing is that I've got good people in all areas of my organization... Chuck Cantwell, general manager of the racing shop, who has come along to take a load off Mark and myself now that racing has grown so much... my brother Dave (he's 27) at the dealership... Craig Scott, my partner in Allentown..." He named several others. "They're young people," he added. "That's the way it has to be." Penske gives his people a share of the business. "That way we're all working toward the same thing."

It all sounds great, of course, but there's one big hangup with a busy schedule and success and the pace it demands. "Family time," remarked Penske with a heavy voice. "That's my problem. There's not a lot of time with them. I take my two boys to the races, though, when I can."

Challenges demand time. He faced two of them on the track last year: Indianapolis (Donohue was Indianapolis Rookie of the Year) and a slow start in the TransAm (Ford won three of the first four races). "I heard they spent \$3.4 million in the TransAm to beat us," Penske said with amusement. "Then we won seven straight."

Well, Penske has promised American Motors seven victories in 1970. This time, he's got to beat Chevrolet. /MT

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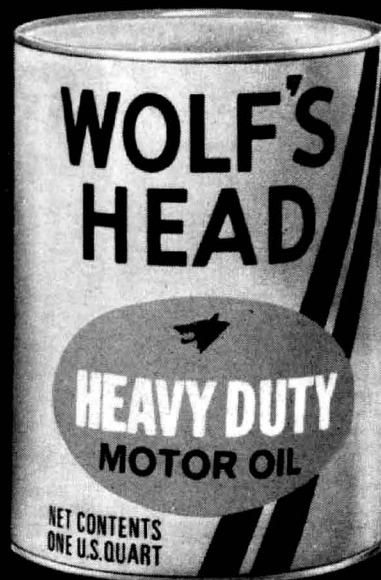
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