

ON THE ROAD

Red Deer writer traces Alberta's racing history

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FOR THE CALGARY HERALD

Alberta's centennial year ought to be a time when residents of this province learn things about our collective history that we didn't know before. The *Speediest Land Traveller*, a history of Alberta auto racing, certainly gives us that opportunity.

Dick McDonell of Red Deer began talking about writing this book 10 years ago as he contemplated life without driving a racecar. After several years in the extremely competitive International Motor Contest Association modified stock car series at Race City, McDonell won the track title in 1995 and retired.

After 10 years of research and writing, in addition to his business commitments and community involvement, McDonell has managed to produce a most informative and entertaining look at what has been Alberta's most overlooked sport.

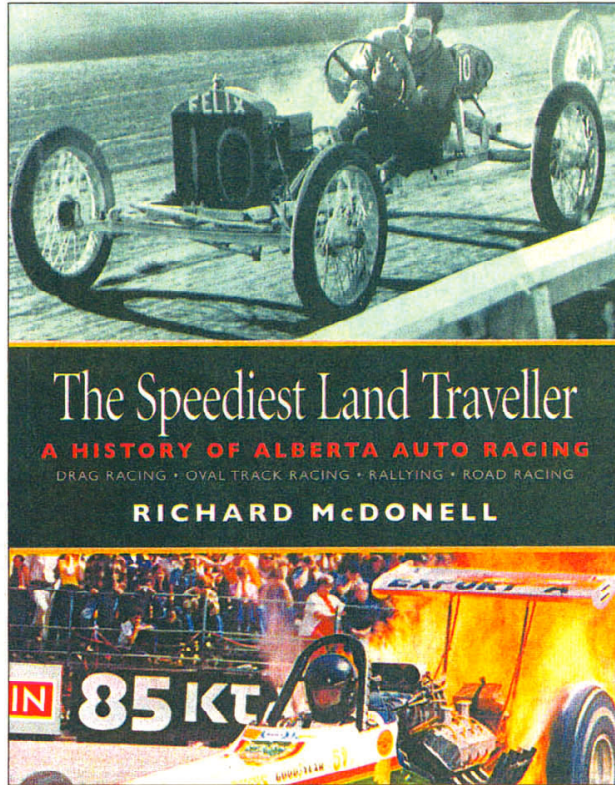
Beginning with casual contests among passenger cars held in 1906 in Calgary and Edmonton, the book traces the growth of the sport through occasional flying visits by American barnstormers to its rapid growth following the Second World War.

McDonell realized early that he had taken on an enormous task. Auto racing is a multi-faceted sport.

Although McDonell clearly has been a fan all of his life, racing sportscars as a young man. He turned to the oval when he resumed racing once his family was grown and he freely admits he knew very little about drag racing. It is a credit to his skill as a historian that the drag racing segments in the book are well done.

Both rallying and road racing have been blessed with clubs of long-standing with very detailed records. McDonell was able to make considerable use of these archives.

For oval track and drag racing, however, the best resource proved to be the memories of



Courtesy, Richard McDonell

Richard McDonell Alberta race stories date back to 1906.

Driving calendar

April 29 & 30
Central Alberta Vintage Auto Club, Red Deer Swap Meet.
Friday 5 to 10 p.m.
Saturday 8 to 5 p.m.
Admission \$2 at the Westerner Fairgrounds.
Contact Jim 403-342-2840.
Sharon's Show and Sale for antique and collectibles is at the same times at the Agricentre building. \$2 admission.
403-347-7494.

those who were actually there. Easily the most interesting parts of the book are the often amusing, but occasionally tragic stories, recalled by former participants.

The wealth of material uncovered by McDonell forced him to keep shifting the book's

focus. A chapter about a particularly significant individual is succeeded by the story of a just-as-significant racing facility. To his credit, McDonell does not just pay attention to the drivers, but tries to give some idea of the many hands which have left fingerprints on the sport.

A casual reader with some knowledge of international racing might be surprised at the number of Albertans who have gone on to make a mark at the highest levels of the sport. In top fuel dragsters, Indycars and stock cars, Albertans have attempted great things — sometimes with success.

McDonell will be appearing at car shows and speedways all summer to promote *The Speediest Land Traveller*.

Copies should be in bookstores now, or may be ordered from www.alberta-auto-racing.reservefundplanners.net.