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Book tells story of racing in Alberta

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THE SPEEDIEST LAND TRAVELLER: A HISTORY OF ALBERTA AUTO RACING BY RICHARD MCDONELL

Granville Island Publishing

308 pp. \$27.95

Did you know some of the first sanctioned drag races in Alberta took place on public highways with help from the Alberta government?

In 1958, three members of the Edmonton-based Rebels Car Club met with the provincial minister of highways of the day, the Honourable Gordon E. Taylor. The three young men explained to the minister the nature of their new sport -- drag racing -- and the need for a safe place to race their cars.

Taylor, a former school teacher, had a long record of working with youth and was sympathetic to the young men's request. As the minister of highways, Taylor used his authority to order that Highway 14X (east of Edmonton) and the newly-constructed Barlow Trail (in Calgary) be closed on Sundays, as needed, for drag racing!

This is just one of the fascinating stories recounted in *The Speediest Land Traveller: A History of Alberta Auto Racing*, by Richard McDonnell, a Red Deer author and motor racing historian. McDonnell, a former auto racer, artfully covers the gamut of Alberta's racing history.

This book records in one place significant historical events, profiles of important Albertans who helped develop the sport, those who have successfully competed at the top ranks of racing, the development of racing facilities, and the development of the drag/oval/road/rally racing.

The author has painstakingly interviewed the racers, their families and friends and scoured historic documents and photographs to craft a fascinating record of motorsports in this province.

McDonnell's unique book is crammed with stories and information that will appeal to racing enthusiasts:

Did you know . . .

- the first known race was held on July 4, 1906 in Calgary as part of the "Ex-American Days" celebration (with a race in Edmonton just two days later)?
- Edmonton was once the centre for the best drag racers in North America with Albertans having won 34 National Hot Road Association (NHRA) nationals?
- from 1967 to 1982, Edmonton International Speedway was one of the finest motorsports facilities in North America, hosting international races such as Can-Am and Trans-Am?
- Albertans have competed in the world's top racing series (Eldon Rasmussen, Indy 500; Allen Berg, Formula One; Trevor Boys, NASCAR Winston Cup)?

The essence of this book is best revealed by the author's interview with former NASCAR-Winston Cup competitor Trevor Boys (whose father, Buddie was a racer and now, son Wheeler is also racing).

McDonnell asks Boys if racing is still fun.

"Fun?" asks Trevor rhetorically. "We don't race for fun. Racing isn't what we do for fun. Racing is what we do. Racing is what we are. We are racers."

The *Speediest Land Traveller* is a valuable chronicle of Alberta's history of racing and its racers. It's a must-read for history buffs and motorsports enthusiasts.

Tim Yip is an Edmonton-based freelance writer