

# Businessman chronicles Alberta's racing history

BY MARK WEBER  
Red Deer Express

Dick McDonell's passion for racing has sparked his first venture into publishing – a new book chronicling Alberta's storied auto racing history.

The city businessman first took up the sport himself in 1965.

His book, entitled *The Speediest Land Traveller: A History of Alberta Auto Racing*, paints an exciting portrait of the sport and the historical contexts in which it has flourished over the years.

"I got the idea for a book right after I quit racing," he says during a recent chat. "I didn't want to lose contact with the sport."

But a stream of community and business interests put the plan on hold in 1996.

Then in early 2002, one of the fellows he'd initially interviewed for the book called and gave him 'what for' about the uncompleted project.

It was enough to kick-start the research.

"I gave myself a time line of two years to do it."

The book delves into several aspects of the sport – from the folks who built and raced cars and the developers to the politicians and promoters who gave them places to learn their craft.

Researching the material was a constant delight.

"One thing I've found about racers is I never felt they weren't being completely hospitable to me."

And besides being a must-

read for enthusiasts, the book taps into a compelling and rich story some may not have known exists in Alberta.

It's an expensive, time-consuming sport to be apart of, but the rewards are many.

McDonell writes that "racing is a world where the life of tires is measured in minutes-hours if you're lucky; four miles to the gallon (58 litres per 100 km) is considered reasonable fuel consumption, where cars crash and explode.

"In racing, 'all-nighter' refers not to a party or hitting the books, but to a dusk-to-dawn scramble to repair a damaged car so it can race the next day."

Through his own career, McDonell took several class wins in various races, and in 1968 claimed second place in C Sedan Class in the Prairie Region Championship.

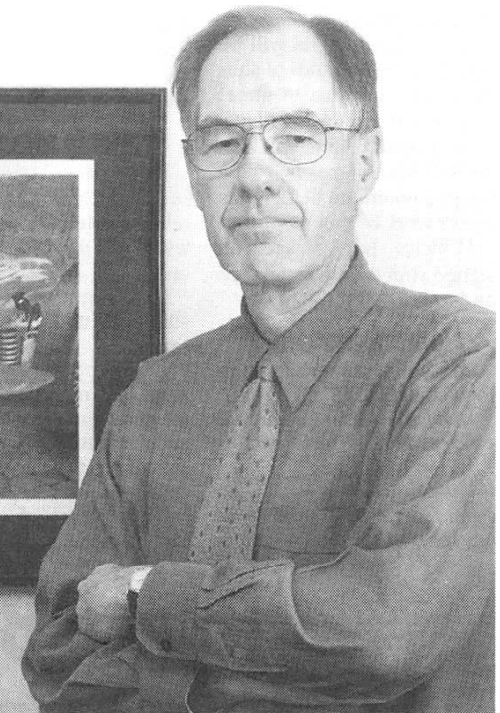
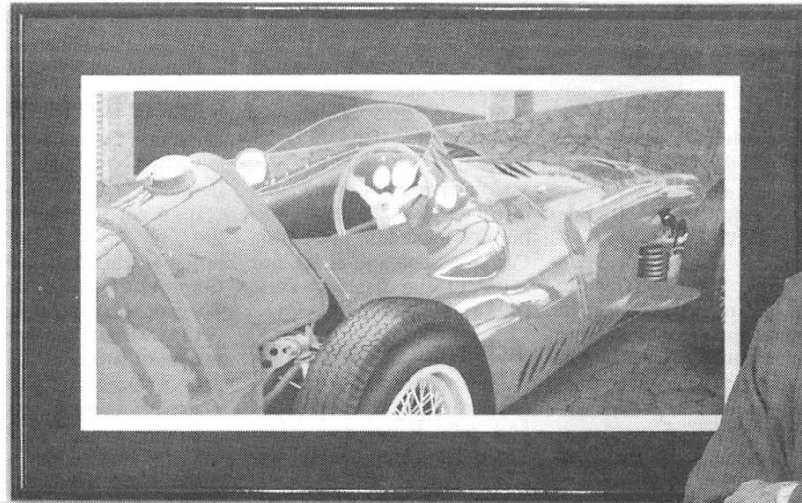
"I've always like going fast," he says, reflecting on what prompted his early interest in racing.

"I always rode my bicycle fast. I had an uncle that drove too fast, and I always wanted to drive with him instead of my dad," he chuckles.

In 1972, he took a hiatus from the sport to pursue career, marriage, and raising kids.

In 1990, he returned to racing – this time on oval tracks.

"I was so fortunate to be able, at middle age, to get back into the sport and be competitive for half a dozen years."



**CRAZY ABOUT CARS** - Local author and car enthusiast Dick McDonell poses beside a painting of a Maserati 250F in his downtown office.

Scott Van Seggelen/Red Deer Express

He raced International Motor Contest Association modifieds for six seasons and 're-retired' in 1995 as Race City Speedway Champion.

"You've really got to want to push a car as hard and as fast as you possibly can," he says.

"Without that fire in your belly, nothing else is going to happen."

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