

THE SAGA OF THE ROARING ROAD

competition. He was proud of the trophy when all went well, but when death extracted tribute from the road, it was a flagon of bitterness.

Once, when he had retired the Cup and was asked subsequently what he intended to do with it, he replied: "I'll take the blamed thing to Europe with me the next time I go and drop it in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean."

Fortunately, he never carried out his threat.

In fact, only six months later, I called at his office, as an emissary of the Panama-Pacific Exposition, to ask the reinstatement of the Cup for another race to be held in connection with California's world fair. He knew the nature of my mission as soon as I was announced and as I stepped through the doorway he asked:

"After the Cup again, Wag?"

The yogis never did a better job of mind-reading. I confirmed his well-grounded suspicion with a nod, and then unloosed a flood of oratory upon him.

"There is a popular demand for another Vanderbilt Cup race," I told him. "And California wants to stage it in connection with the Panama-Pacific Exposition. They have sent me to ask you for the Cup and I can't see how you can gracefully refuse their request. Several years ago, Mr. Vanderbilt, you took from California one of her fairest daughters and married her. What a splendid opportunity is afforded you to repay California for what she gave you!"

Perhaps I took an unfair advantage of him, playing thus upon his sentiment, but I wanted to see another Vanderbilt Cup race just as much as California wanted to stage it.

"Wag," he replied after a minute's consideration,

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"go back and tell California they can have the Cup. But tell them it's the last race. And don't you dare come back to my office on such an errand again."

I never did, fully convinced that his decision was final. I did not then realize, however, that the days of the road racing were numbered, that this branch of the sport must soon bow to an inexorable economic law, that it would be killed by the very thing it had glorified—the automobile. I did not have the foresight to see that the highways of the country were becoming all-important arteries in the national transportation scheme and that even a few miles of them were too essential to our economic life and welfare to be closed for a week or more so that a sporting event might be staged upon them.

So, when I chanced to meet John Jacob Astor at the Automobile Club of America a few days later, I sounded him out in regard to sponsoring a new road racing trophy.

"Mr. Vanderbilt," I told him, "has definitely decided to retire the Vanderbilt Cup after this year's race. He feels that he has done enough for the sport, and that he should now withdraw and permit someone else to act as road racing's patron. His successor must be a man of high standing and nationally known. It strikes me that you are just that man, representing as you do a fine old American family whose name, like that of the Vanderbilts, is linked with noteworthy achievement."

Not only did he take kindly to my suggestion, but he supplemented it with another to the effect that should he decide to sponsor such a trophy, he would fill it with five thousand dollars in gold annually.

"Of course, I want to think the matter over," he