

THE SAGA OF THE ROARING ROAD

At every opportunity he buttonholed High Ford, the stage manager, and asked for a speaking rôle. Finally his persistency was rewarded when, one morning, Barney happened in the theatre as the scene just preceding the race, showing the crowds eating breakfast along the roadside and waiting for the start, was being rehearsed.

"You're just the guy I'm looking for," Ford declared when he spotted Oldfield, "I'm going to use you in this scene."

Oldfield's winsome smile fairly lighted up the dark auditorium.

"You enter right, Barney," the stage manager explained, "and when you get about to the center, you notice a party of your friends and say to them: 'Oh! here you are. Here is the ham.'"

Barney did as Ford directed, but apparently he was not letter perfect in the new part.

"No, no, Barney!" the producer cried. "You're not speaking a piece in school. You're an actor now. Give the lines some expression, and don't forget the gestures. Now try it again."

In his disappointment, Oldfield sparred for a little time, and asked:

"Do I bring in the ham?"

Now this was just the opening that the wily Ford had been hoping and waiting for, his own cue of cues, in fact.

"No," he replied in the kindest of tones. "You merely make the confession."

It was several years later, long after "The Vanderbilt Cup" had been buried in Cain's theatrical storehouse and when Oldfield's renown as a Broadway star was but a lavender-scented memory, that Barney pro-

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vided me with the material for another story that I like to tell whenever the occasion offers because it's a tale that invariably declares dividends of laughter.

In a race on the Los Angeles speedway, Oldfield was getting wretched work from his pitmen, who had been recruited at the proverbial eleventh hour and put in charge of an erudite manager who had picked up a smattering of French while serving with the American forces overseas.

"What the hell's the matter with the pit work?" Barney finally demanded on one of his many stops when he lost several precious minutes through a slow tire change.

"You haven't any esprit de corp," the pit manager replied.

"Well, go and get some," was the order of the sorely exasperated driver. "Get it of Harry Stutz. He said I could have anything he had."

This story, as well, has a screaming sequel that, to my mind makes it twice as good. It was about a year later, and the tale was being told to a crowd of automobile race fans in the lobby of a New York hotel during automobile show week. In the party was one of Harry Stutz's drivers, and he alone did not join in the laughter but kept a very serious face. When the merriment had subsided, he soberly declared:

"Yes, and Barney could have got it if Harry had had it. 'Cause that's the kind of a guy Harry is."

It was then the house detective rushed over to see what the riot was about.

All good things come in threes, so I'm prompted to add one more Oldfield anecdote to this collection so that the old charm may not be broken.

Out in California, one of Barney's closest friends is