

THE SAGA OF THE ROARING ROAD

turned my back on the track to strike at match and light my pipe. My foot was resting lightly on the inner guard rail, and just as I leaned over to pick up my flags, I experienced such a blow as though Jack Dempsey had socked me on the chin. Thoroughly dazed, somewhat stunned, and a little unsteady on my legs, my first impulse was to look around and see who had hit me. About three feet away was Hartz's car. He had crashed the guard rail and splintered it to bits.

It was then that I felt something loose in my mouth—something that didn't belong there. "It's the stem of my pipe," flashed through my mind. "I must have bitten it in two." But when I spat in my hand, three teeth, once perfectly sound, dropped out instead of the anticipated bit of amber. Trained hands and a pair of forceps never did a cleaner or more workmanlike job. But if ever I must have any more molars extracted, Harry Hartz won't get my trade. I'll go to a licensed dentist who gives an anesthetic.

I might add right here that I've never had the remotest desire to mingle with a racing car while it was prize-money mad. I've even climbed water tanks to escape them, as I did in New Orleans in the heyday of dirt track racing when I saw Louis Disbrow bearing down upon me in a monsoon of dust, and I've kept religiously in training to perform comparable feats of acrobatic agility whenever the occasion demanded that I make my getaway and make it pronto, as they say down Mexico way.

My narrowest escape from death, however, came at Oakland, California, on New Year's Day, 1932, in full view of some 10,000 spectators, when Bryan Salspaugh's car crashed into the judges' stand, injuring six, including myself. My hurts laid me low for six months!

THE SAGA OF THE ROARING ROAD

Death! How many of my boys—the knights of the roaring road; the courageous fellows to whom I have been "Pa," and to whom the gracious, loyal and understanding lady who has been my perfect helpmeet for nearly two score years, has been "Ma Wag"—the same lady, who, no doubt, will have to finish this volume, because I know my number has been "posted" on Eternity's "callboard."

Old men, they say, cherish most the pursuit of fleeting memories. If this be true, I'm nothing less than an octogenarian, and youth, which lingers in my step, has vanished from my thoughts.

For in etching these vagrant vignettes, I constantly find that the years that are gone, rather than the months that are now, are the periods of the highest color . . . of drama most tense.

There's a bit of lavender about it all as these mellow memories come crowding in upon me, clamoring insistently for preferred position in my record, and making this errant autobiography a telltale confession of my mental senility.

And now that the truth is out, there is no harm in adding that I am a charter member of the I-Knew-Him-When Club, Automobile Chapter, and privileged, as such, to tell Horatio Alger stories about the great and the near-great of the motor car industry.

Sporting editors, speedway owners and drivers have dubbed me the "Czar" of auto racing. Crooked gamblers and others grinding axes for dishonest personal gain have called me less complimentary things.

So in the post-Volstead manner, here's to you!