

ROY MAKINSON

Story by...
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Over the years there have been many Canadian drivers coming across the border to successfully challenge the "Yankee" drivers down here in the States. Those of you familiar with racing in the Thousand Island region might recall names like Frank Andre, Tony Blake, Fred Gibson and Woody VanOrder and more currently Doug Carlyle, Barry Poitrus, Denzil Billings and many more. This profile is on a man who has been racing for over a quarter of a century or 26 years. He has been coming across the border to race with us Yankees for a good number of those years and has of late been one of the strongest runners in the limited sportsman division. His name, Roy Makinson.

Every weekend Roy, a plumber working for the Canadian government, his wife Hilda, his four sons and his crew load their car, tools, parts, sleeping bags and various other items into their truck and make the trip from Ottawa to the race tracks of New York State. Roy's sons, who are an integral part of his crew, are Bill 21, Bobby 20, Bruce 15 and Brian, 11. The other crew members are Charlie and David Brown, Pete Durocher, Norm Dunn, Terry McAdam, Frank Bird and a few other interested people from Watertown. Roy has been making this trip to the States for about a dozen years, roughly half his racing career.

Roy started out at the now defunct Beamish Hill race track in Ottawa running the old 34 & 37 Ford Flat Heads. His car, typical of the cars that ran at that time, was taken off the road, braced and then put on the track. Roy talks about that period rather fondly recalling how, with the exception of welding the bracing, he built that car with only a quarter inch drill out beside some lonely country road in the middle of nowhere. After Beamish Hill Roy went to Meadow Park, to SAYS Mountain, and to Iroquois Speedways, all of which are near Ottawa. Roy describes these tracks as being the old dirt tracks, so I imagine they were filled with ruts, holes and had plenty of dust and dirt. After this period Roy started working his way south. First it was Regal Speedway, near Montreal, then he made his first trip to a Stateside track, Fort Covington Speedway, which is about 20 miles southeast of

Massena, N.Y. From then on he has run almost exclusively in the States. But I am getting a little ahead of myself now. I asked Roy what brought him down here to the States regularly. He says that a few drivers had started coming down and had told him some good things about the tracks down here, so he decided to try his skill across the border.

He started at Fulton before the big blocks came in. He liked the track, and the people so he kept running there. He has also run at Rolling Wheels, Waterloo and Shangri-La Speedways. Roy enjoyed only a moderate success while at these tracks, occasionally taking a heat here and there. I have heard people who saw Roy drive in that period say that his driving style has changed, that he is more aggressive now and consequently is winning. "At that time", Roy says, "I couldn't afford the price of fielding a good competitive big block car. So I only won heats but never a main". This cost factor was one of the reasons Roy switched to small block when he built his present car.

Shangri-La Speedway was the scene of his worst accident. He was driving the car he presently has when the throttle stuck and he hit the third turn wall, cracking a bone in his ankle. After that accident he had to cut the frame off both before and after the roll cage and weld new frame rails in. It is a tribute to his driving ability that after all the years he has been driving, the number of laps he has driven and a dozen or so cars he has had that he hasn't been involved in anything more serious. He says that every time you build a car you build it a little more safer.

At the end of 1969 season Roy went into retirement. In 1971 he came out of retirement with his present car. Commenting on his reason for returning to racing Roy jokingly says that it cost more money staying home from the races than it did going to the races. "Racing", he says "keeps you occupied winter and summer". The car, now six years old, was built for the blacktop (actually the only thing remaining of the original car is the roll cage and body, everything else has been changed) but there really wasn't enough asphalt running the small blocks. At that time there was only two tracks running, Ottawa and Evans Mills. So he decided to put the car on the dirt. Going to dirt necessitated changing the



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gears and tires, and he was then able to race two more nights each week. I personally think that it is a great tribute to a man who can set up a car to be competitive on both dirt and blacktop week after week over a five year period that he has had the car. The only thing that Roy doesn't do is build his own engine. He feels that if you want your engine to stay together and be competitive, then most people have to go to a professional to have one built. Roy has had his engines professionally built for the past eight years, by Slagsen, a drag racer in Ottawa, who builds a good many drag engines and successfully enters into the NHRA Nationals here in the States. Slagsen builds engines for a number of the boys on the K-B-C (Kingston, Brockville, Cornwall) circuit.

Roy has driven only stock cars. He says that he never had any real ambition to get into any other type of car or motor racing. For him racing is mainly a family affair. "Some people go to cottages", he says, "some people go fishing and we go racing. The kids come with me, we camp out and have a real good time. We meet an awful lot of nice people, interesting people, different people. Looking back over the years, I wouldn't pass it up for anything. This, he says, is more or less what is still

keeping him in the sport today after 26 years. I asked Roy if he ever gave any thought to retiring from active driving and let someone else drive his car. His reply, "It has passed through my mind but I am still at it."

Over the past 26 years Roy has developed a lot of methods and procedures for working on his car as well as some thoughts and ideas on racing in general. Perhaps the most novel idea that I have had occasion to run upon is the trailer he uses for hauling his race car. The trailer is rather well organized. It has places for everything and is even a front end alignment machine. If any of you fans reading this happen to go into the pits after the races note the lines on the trailer bed. Roy uses these markings to line up his front end. As so often happens, independent front suspensions go out of alignment, and if you are at the track the only method that you can use to realign the front end is the best guess method. As a result Roy developed this way to align the front end of his race car at the track with a pretty good degree of accuracy.

Roy's many thoughts and ideas on racing in general are as developed as his mechanical and driving abilities. He feels that when the rules are set down they have a tendency to be very

generalized. The promoters make the rules and also must interpret and apply them. Quite often the interpretations are not very consistent, so he as a driver, owner, and car builder and other drivers, owners, and car builders are often frustrated when they build a car that meets not only letter of the rule but also the spirit of the rules. Someone comes in with a "controversial machine" that meets the rules only because someone interprets one of these generalized and vague rules in a way that never has been interpreted before. Although he understands and appreciates the promoter's need for cars, he feels that in the long run this policy chases away more cars than it brings in. In another area he feels that promoters are in some ways still thinking like they did twenty years ago when you could build a going machine for five hundred dollars. "Purses", he says, "haven't gone up in the same proportion as the costs of building, operating and maintaining a going machine". NEARA, he feels, should have happened about five years ago. The cost of tires has chased a good many people out of racing in the past five years, people that probably would have stayed if there had been NEARA type rules in effect then. Roy sees the need in the future for a NEARA type

organization for dirt. Costs are starting to rise for dirt tracking, and he hopes that promoters and race organizers can act before it is too late and do something about holding costs down and maintaining competitive racing.

At the conclusion of my interview Roy mentioned something to me that you hardly ever hear anymore and certainly from such a strong runner. He mentioned to me how well he knows the problems, difficulties and frustrations that a rookie in this sport has. Usually their only way of finding something out is by trial and error because there is no one they can go to for advice. Very often veterans tend to be secretive about their cars and methods of doing things. This attitude of the veterans is something that rather annoys Roy in that it is not quite right for a veteran not to lend a hand if asked for it. He has often helped out a rookie and is more than willing to help someone out as best he can if asked.

If any of you happen to be on Route 81 some Friday afternoon and pass Roy's hauler give a toot to perhaps one of the most congenial, realistic, successful drivers in the sport. He is without a doubt a credit to the sport that has provided him and his family with their recreation and enjoyment.