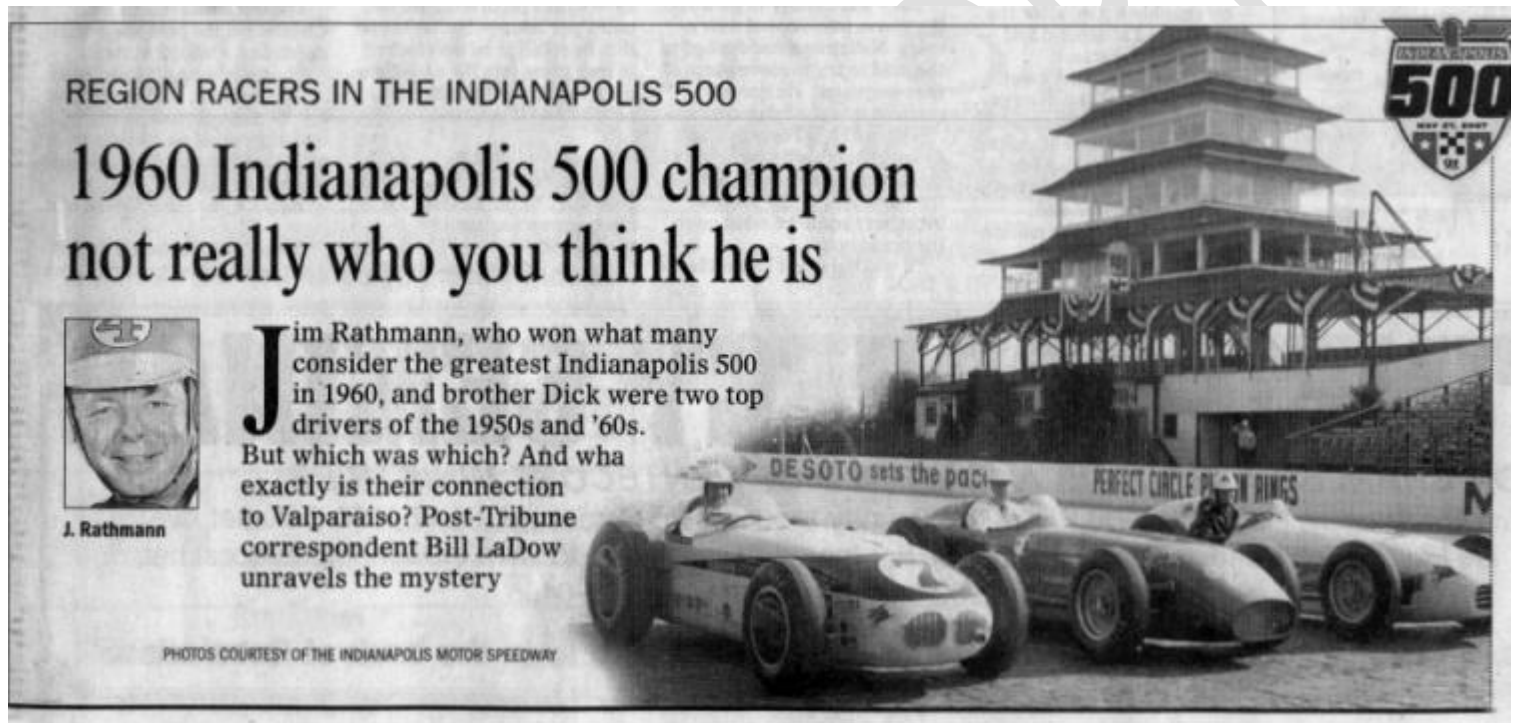


# Joe Scalzo's

## City of Speed and elsewhere

### BROTHERS

“Jim Rathmann” was born “Dick Rathmann.” And “Dick Rathmann” was born “Jim Rathmann” – oh, forget it. Getting bogged down in all the minutiae means there won't be enough space to tell all of the really hot news about the bomb-headed, battling, racing brothers.



REGION RACERS IN THE INDIANAPOLIS 500

## 1960 Indianapolis 500 champion not really who you think he is

**J**im Rathmann, who won what many consider the greatest Indianapolis 500 in 1960, and brother Dick were two top drivers of the 1950s and '60s. But which was which? And what exactly is their connection to Valparaiso? Post-Tribune correspondent Bill LaDow unravels the mystery

J. Rathmann

PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE INDIANAPOLIS MOTOR SPEEDWAY

The racing Rathmanns of the prior century began the game very early, in Los Angeles, right as the Second World War was wearing down, and they abandoned L.A. where a hot rod boom was going on, and headed for Illinois. Instantly becoming kid stars of Chi-town's Hurricane Racing Association, where the weekly menu included T-boning, short-braking, cooked-scoring, plus rooked results: lessons learned in lawless Hurricane stayed with the brothers for the rest of their careers.

Their look-alike bomb-heads notwithstanding, it was difficult imagining Jim and Dick coming from the same household. Jim, the younger by five years, was the physical runt of clan Rathmann. When the money was right, he'd bet the farm. Winner, in 1960, of the Indy 500's great Offy roadster and Firestone match between himself and Rodger Ward, then hit

the finish threadbare. Minus the stimulation of other racing drivers to attack, though, Jim was apt to slip into cruise control and fall asleep.

It was a dangerous problem for Jim. Making a celebrity appearance as Indy 500 champion at Road America, in a sports car Grand Prix, he was in the cockpit of a Lister whose Stovebolt V8 was fast as hell, jamming up and down the straightaways at almost 190 mph. But the pack became strung out, Jim had no enemies to race, and, to prevent him from losing consciousness, his pit crew, desperate, began flashing him stay awake pit boards every lap. Having run out of such nonsensical signals “Smile,” and “Hi,” Jim’s frustrated mechanic-in-chief, the ex-NASCAR titlist Red Byron, chalked up. “Crash It!” Whereupon Jim either fell asleep or the Lister’s brakes failed and Jim, performing endos, flew in and out of the Wisconsin woods. His hurts included ribs fractured, lung punctured, melon rattled – apart from having his back busted when mindless medics prying him out of a crunched Meyer-Drake roadster upright dropped him off their litter, this was the most severe case of racing assault-and-battery ever suffered by Jim.

Dick was Jim’s opposite – no racing car ever harmed him, and he never ran shy of attitude or adrenaline. A cruncher-puncher with muscle-bound shoulders and fists that broke faces, upon graduating from Hurricane, he migrated to NASCAR where he led the



South in death stares. Dick, in fact, is said to have invented the black-and-blue practice of pitting randomly in somebody else’s pit stall and informing them that unless they serviced him by changing his tires and refueling him, they’d be on the receiving end of a stomping.

He campaigned bathtub Hudson Hornets for several seasons and, when he was wasn’t experiencing racing escapades he was having cross-continental traveling ones. After competing one weekend in Georgia, at Atlanta, he had to make it from Dixie to San Jose, in California, in less than a week. Commuting via Chicago, Dick spent three sleepless days and nights in a garage straightening a substitute Hornet that had been in a roll-over. Setting out towing to the Pacific Coast in a blizzard, the tranny of Dick’s Lincoln tow car

gave out en route and he arrived at San Jose towing the Lincoln behind the Hornet! Its gas tank fell onto the track during practice laps, and, upon demanding another, slower Hornet driver to surrender his - and, quite naturally, getting refused - Dick took possession of it anyway. After finishing first, getting protested by the



**driver of an 88 Olds, Dick survived the protest then won for the second time on appeal.**

**A true tumbleweed, occasionally he'd desert the ranks of Hornets and other taxi-cabs to parachute in on the Indy 500, where on different Memorial Days, he'd sit on pole position; be perhaps co-instigator of one of the Brickyard's biggest, most dramatic, first-lap disasters; whack the wall after the 500 was already over; almost nail Indy's original 150 mph lap; and even have his own mechanics light him up.**

**It happened on his first pit stop for rubber and refueling, when Dick's Meyer-Drake roadster flamed, and Dick, with his own uniform beginning to smolder, typically ignored the heat of the blaze while waiting patiently for the Speedway's volunteer firemen to do their jobs and hit him with blasts of CO<sub>2</sub>. They ran away instead, so the inferno finally had to be beaten down by Dick's own mechanics, who of course had started it. Forced to abandon the 500, Dick, uniform smoking and still struggling to flare up, sent a blizzard of curses and threats at the false firemen.**

**When not busy wailing throttles, Dick was an apprentice butcher; served in Alaska with the U.S.'s Corps of Engineers; laid concrete; constructed homes; helped weld bridges together on the Columbian river of Ohio; operated a gas station, and ran a wrecking yard.**

**Jim, in addition to amassing victory and three runner-ups in the Indy 500, was as busy as his brother: he was proprietor of his own speed shop; made a killing shipping used De Sotos to South America; manufactured his own brand of go-kart; and toiled away in semi-secret presiding over GM's clandestine taxi-cab racing program. At last quitting racing in 1964 – the same season Dick stopped – he went on parlaying such various enterprises as a Caddy dealership, a cable TV franchise, and a treasure-hunting gamble searching the Atlantic's shallow east shore for lost and sunken Spanish galleons.**

**Sometimes the skin-head bros were on speaking terms, other times not. They existed as uneasy neighbors in the community of Melbourne just down the storm coast from Cape Canaveral – the Rathmanns hobnobbed with the seven original Astronauts!**



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