

Joe Scalzo's

City of Speed and elsewhere

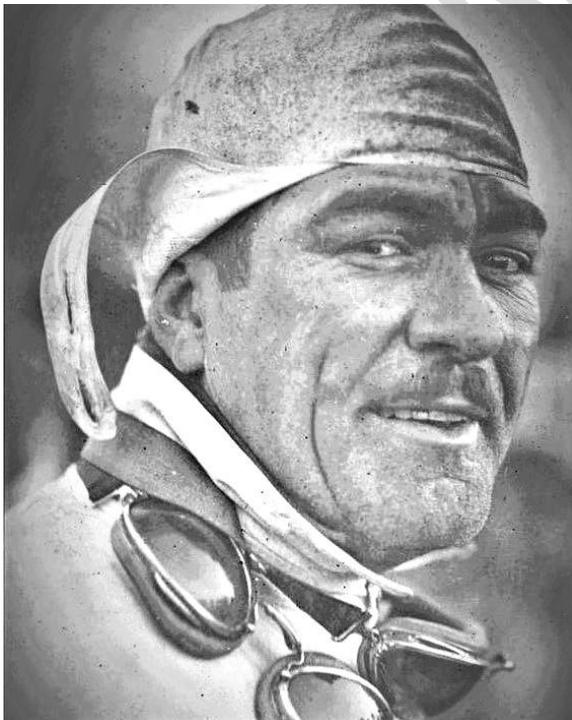
CARPETBAGGING

Carpetbaggers who try to export American racing abroad are likely to lose their undershorts.

That's the moral to be drawn from the foibles of a pair of foolish fellows who never knew each other but who were called Leon Duray and Bob Topping. Duray being a counterfeit Frenchman and Topping a tin-plate millionaire.

Both trafficked in carpet-bagging, but hardly anybody remembers them anymore. Topping, however, came in for some notice the summer of Lana Turner's funeral, when movie columnists spread the gossip that he'd been among the sweater girl's eight husbands. And Leon Duray surely would be better remembered if only that had been his authentic name.

"George Stewart" was how Duray was identified on his certification of birth, and at first

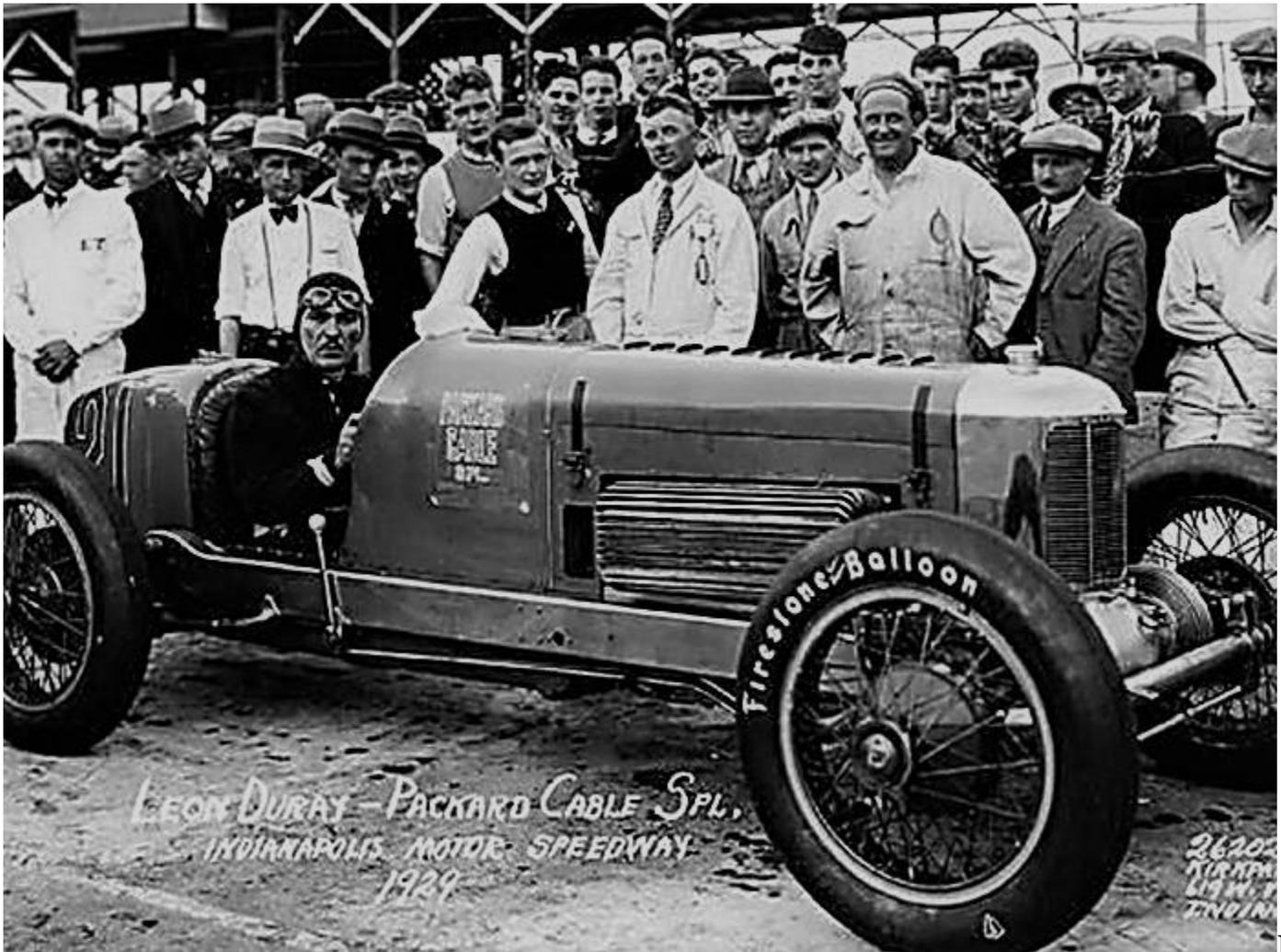


he was just a cabbie hack in either Detroit or New Orleans, and his life as the fraudulent M. Duray, "Gallic champion and decorated hero of the Great War," began the day he hacked to the city dirt oval J. Alexander Sloan, hippodrome promoter and mountebank impresario, who, with the use of undiluted flimflam ballyhooed racing's unknown and untalented into celebrities.

Duray was more talented than most of Sloan's fakes, and he raced with the impresario of legerdemain impresario only long enough to acquire \$15,000, sufficient mazuma for him to

acquire a couple of Harry A. Miller's supercharged front-drives for the Indy 500.

The season was 1928. Duray let fly, winning five Indy front row starting positions in a row; and setting lap records not just on the Brickyard but on all racing's cement *and* toothpick houses.



But Duray's decisions, in 1929 and 1932, to go carpet-bagging with his Millers in Europe, were mistakes he never recovered from. In 1929 he shattered their gearboxes at Monza, and, broke, to secure first-class passage home, he'd had to sell his cripples to Ettore Bugatti.

That should have taught him his lesson about carpet-bagging but didn't. Back at Monza in 1932, in still another Miller, he broke his gearbox anew, and, after the Italians had screwed him out of his starting money, he'd had to steam home, under protest, in steerage.

Tin-plate heir Bob Topping, meantime, had for an elder sibling the entrepreneur who owned a ball-and-stick outfit known as the New York Yankees. Baby brother Bob's



infatuation was buzz-bomb midget racing which, in 1948, had so played out the domestic market that Topping decided to play the role of carpetbagger and import a contingent of 23 buzz-bombs to the London with platinum blond Lana Turner his race queen.

Lana was Topping's newest spouse, and husband and wife were already dedicated advocates of wedlock, Lana marrying on three occasions, including two to the same groom, and Topping a three-timer himself, one of the times to the ex-wife on another of his brothers, a virago who'd split open his skull with a magnum of champagne.

All 23 buzz-bombs and Lana's 18 trunks of luggage made it across the big water safely, but the Atlantic crossing wasn't without hostility, Lana caustically observing: "I didn't go on my honeymoon to open a buzz-bomb race track!"



Open one at Chelsea Stadium she did, though, but racing wasn't for her and her ardor for Topping cooled quickly. So she drifted off to a lifetime of filming such masterpieces as "Peyton Place," and acquiring husbands and beaus like one of the hunks who played Tarzan the Ape Man and Johnny Stompanato, "Johnny Stomp," the hoodlum and Mickey Cohen protege who was famously murdered by Lana's 14 year-old daughter.

And Topping? Londontown masses hated his damn buzzbomb import. Grandstands booed, saboteurs slit tires and sugared fuel tanks, and after the

customs cops also found cause to punish, Topping's losses topped \$200,000.

The cost of carpet-bagging had been paid. -JS

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