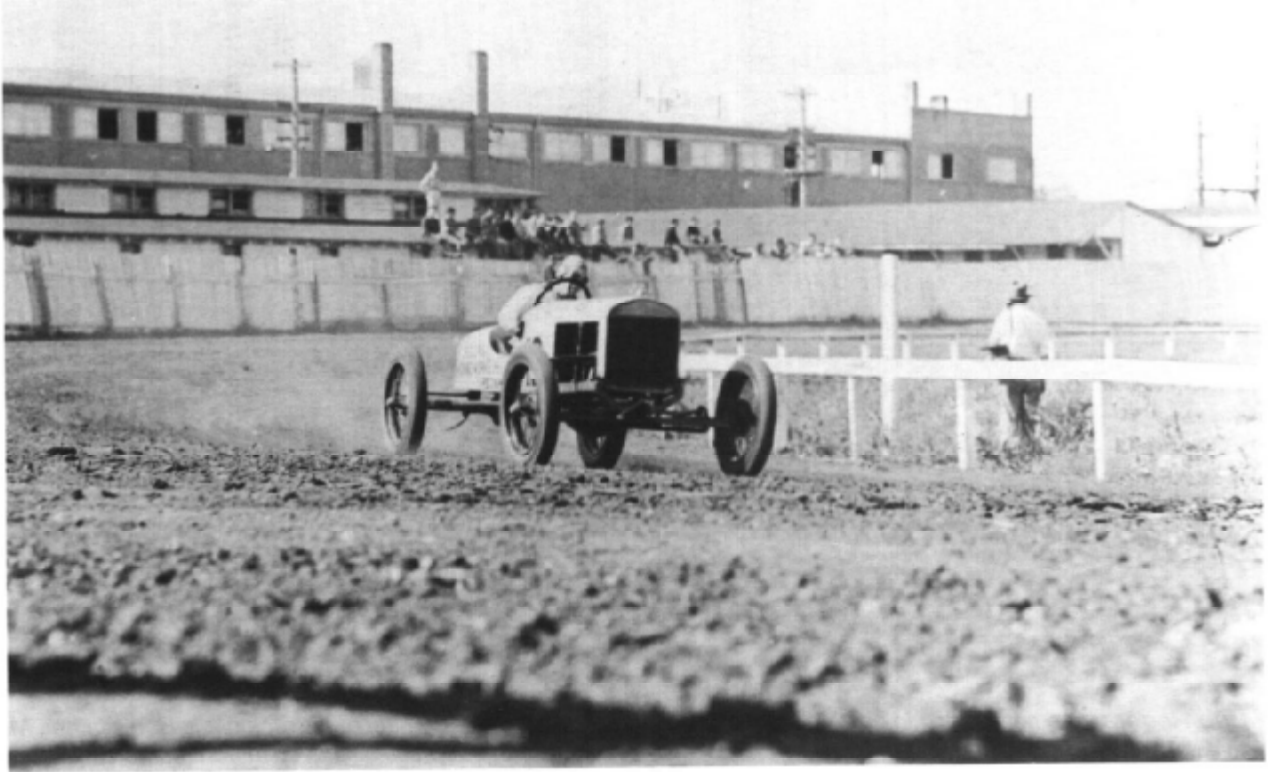


Racing Model Ts

by Bob Rogers



On one of the Canadian half mile dirt tracks, Bob Rogers, in "Lucky 13," is out in front of the competition.

Bob Rogers was born and raised in Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada. He raced and worked in numerous locales around Canada and the U.S., but is now retired and lives in Tahlequah, Oklahoma. While retired and his Model T racing days supposedly behind him, do not tell that to those at the Tulsa Model T Hillclimb. He still has one of the fastest T's around.

During the early years of the war when things were going badly at home and in England, the Regina Lions Club decided to hold Model T races on Labor Day. They decided to raise money to help the children of England by having 'T races with parimutuel betting. They called it "Milk for Britain. I was really interested in it that year and made up my mind that I would enter the next year. Even though my dad was dead set against my racing, I went ahead anyway and bought a '24 T coupe in July for \$20.

The cars had to be strictly stock, with no full bodies or fenders. All cars were taken to the local Ford dealer and were checked to be sure they were stock.

We were paid \$100 for winning the heats and \$300 for winning the main. Later they raised the money to \$300 for the heats and \$600 for the main. The first year there were about 25 cars entered and the prize money was about \$1,500. Between the ticket sales and betting, the Lions made money.

My dad had raced from 1909 until about 1916 and won a lot of races against some of the best in Canada and the United States. Then my older brother, Louie, got into racing and did fairly well. He ran against drivers like Emory Collins, and they became very close friends.

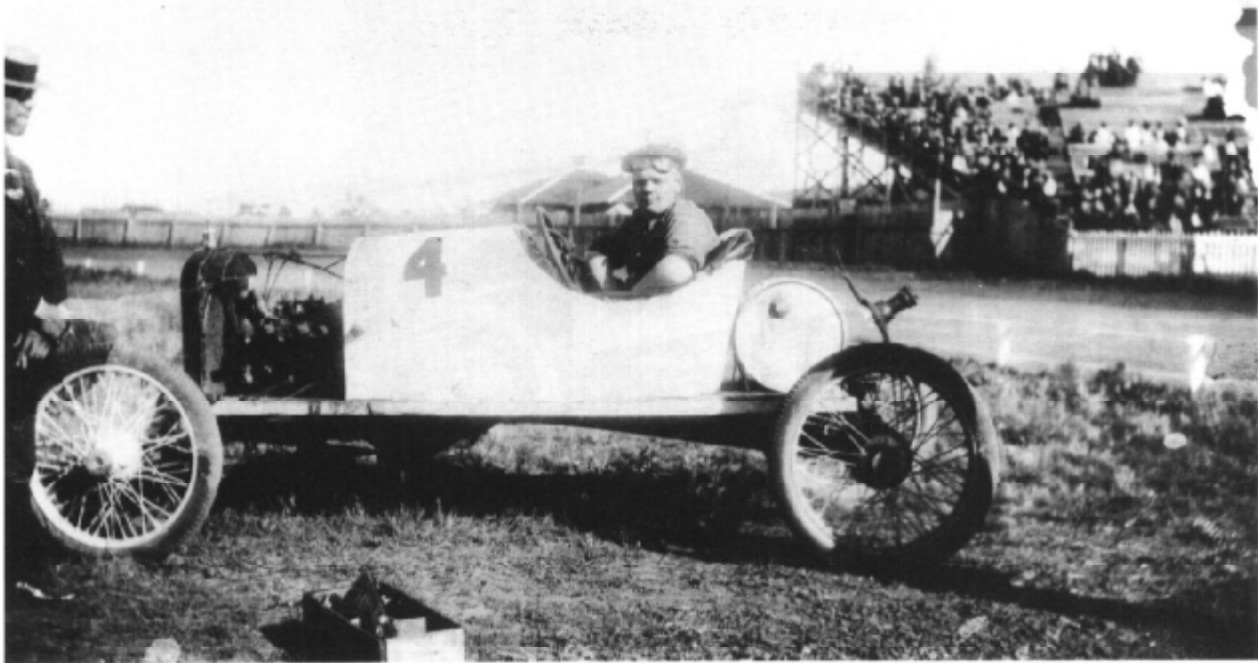
At the time I started racing, my family had a big machine shop in Regina, which was called Rogers Machine Works. My brother, Roy, managed the shop so I had a lot of back-up and knowledge behind me. My dad raised all kinds of hell over me racing, but I went ahead with my plans and started working on my car.

I took every nut and bolt apart on the T. Then I started to build it back up. I worked night and day on that car. Louie showed me how to balance the engine and make rods and mains hold together under racing conditions. The T has no oil pump at



Bob Rogers was not the first in his family to race cars. Seated behind the wheel of his race car is Bob's father, Mr. William "Bill" Rogers in a photo taken in 1915. As one can tell by the trophies displayed in front of the car, Bob's father had a certain degree of success as a race driver. The young lad at the left is Bob's oldest brother, Louie. Below is another picture of Bill Rogers and his repainted No. 1 racer - christened the "WhiteStreak."





Louie Rogers, Bob's older brother, is shown at the wheel of his racer. As can be seen, this racer affords the driver with only a little more protection than his father's racer. (Note the accessory wheels and the rear spare tire mount. The spare was necessary for driving the car to and from the races.)

all and I had to make changes in the system to make sure the engine was properly lubricated so it would last. We bored at .020 over size and used stock T pistons and rings. It took me one week to balance the crank and flywheel, and all moving parts—quite a trick to it way back then! But, I had the best teachers in the world. I learned how to set up the magneto to get the most out of it. You could light a 60-watt 110-volt bulb with it. I also learned how to set the 4 coils and make a coil tester. Boy, you could make the spark jump 3/4 of an inch—it would knock you on your bottom if you weren't careful! Roy let me have all the parts I needed.

Around August 15th, I finally had the car on its wheels (wooden wheels 21 x 4.50), but I also needed a seat. I had a real shock when my dad walked in the shop with the bucket seat he had used on his White Streak T, as it was called. My brother, Louie, also used it when he started racing. I really felt proud at that moment. I cut a board and bolted it on the frame, and then bolted the seat to the board. That's all there was to the car; no body, just a seat. It had a radiator shell, hood, and cowl; no gauges. I had to learn how to operate three pedals—no brake, only the brake in the transmission. It was really quick.

I had a friend, Norm Buckin, who had a Bug, or speedster as they were called. We did a lot of racing on the streets and dirt roads. We practiced

a lot of starts, as they started the races from a standing start. We used knobby tires on the rear—and wore a set out in a week.

Some of the guys I raced against in Regina were Harry Bell, Tom Strickland, Johnny Nestor, Ken Ganshore, and a guy named George LeMay. Labor Day, 1942, finally came and I was nervous as a cat. I won my heat, which put me in the second race, inside, behind a guy named Tom Strickland from Arcola, a small village in Saskatchewan. Louie must have preached to me for 10 minutes about what to do—stay low and follow him until he slips up. I followed him for three laps; then I screwed up. I decided I would go around him on the outside. I could stay even with him, but not pass him. Then two other guys pulled up behind him and I got sucked in good. I finally got by them but it was too late—I came in second! I knew when I pulled in I was going to catch flak from my family. Well, I did! I caught hell from my two brothers and my dad. It lasted all winter—and winters are long in Canada—believe me!! I really learned to listen to somebody who knows what they're talking about.

In 1943 they had two races for Ts - one in May at Moose Jaw and the championship race in Regina on Labor Day. I was ready this time! My dad had donated a big cup which he had won in 1912. It was called the Goodyear Cup. I wanted that cup bad! I won the race in Moose Jaw and could hardly wait



Bob Rogers, seated in his famous No. 13 racer in 1946, was more comfortable at speed than having his picture taken.

for Labor Day. I made a few changes to the car, and I finally found four wire wheels used on '26 and '27 Model Ts. I felt safer with these as some guys were breaking the wooden wheels and getting hurt.

I'm sure you've heard about the Model T and all the problems people had, how they couldn't go up a steep hill and do 40-45 mph. Well, let me tell you, I know a few that went better than 90 mph. Believe me, it's true! You must remember, the Ford T has about 173 cubic inches and turned about 3400 RPM.

Labor Day came and it rained in the morning. They were going to postpone the race, but the sun finally came out and the race was started. The crowd went up to 6,530 people and the Lions made a bundle on the parimutuel. I won my heat and started in the 5th row. By 15 laps I had passed 6 cars, and I won the race. I was one happy guy!

Again, 1944 was a long winter. The Lions Club increased the number of races to 9; Swift Current, Wayburn, and Estovan were some of the places we raced. Would you believe, I won 8 of the races? I lost the one in Saskatoon, but won the one on Labor Day for the championship. I really felt good all winter.

In 1945 we had 10 races in the summer and I won 7 of them, looking for the Labor Day Championship Race. I believe the crowd went to 11,000 people. The betting made a bundle for the Lions Club. If you bet on me at \$1.00 a ticket, I would pay \$1.05. I was even odds. Again, I won my heat race.

However, I was getting worried because I could see several drivers who were getting faster and driving better. There was Norm Buckin, Ernie Rumble and George LeMay, to name a few. George really bothered me as he had a good car and was one helluva driver. Later on in life we would continue our feud in big cars and become the best of friends. The "main started and I was positioned way back in the field. I worked my way up to 4th when somebody broke 2 wheels and there was a pile-up. Some cars had gone through the fence, one being my friend Norm Buckin. They red flagged the race and the Lions decided we did not have enough cars to put on the rest of the show. I ended up in 3rd place and was really disappointed, as I wanted that cup. If a person won it three years in a row, it was his to keep. Later in life I learned my dad was the principal person who had wanted that race stopped. I was one really mad man.

That was the last big T race we had in Saskatchewan because the police shut down the parimutuels and the Lions Club decided we were going too fast as people were getting hurt. I sold my car for \$600 in 1945; a lot of money then. By this time I was destined to become a race car driver.

If you are wondering what kind of speed we did, first let me tell you about the tracks. They were all flat 1/2 mile dirt as measured one foot from the rail, and were very wide. They were originally horse tracks. I don't believe there are many full 1/2 mile

tracks around today. Also, we had no practice time on any track. We had standing starts. We were lined up three abreast; when the green flag dropped, you had better be gone or somebody would run you over, which actually happened. In one race I ran 12 minutes and 31 seconds for 20 laps, or 10 miles. In 1946 I had a time of 11 minutes and 2 seconds for 20 laps.

I had a hard time getting approval to use the No. 13. They hadn't used it before and some on the Rules Committee and drivers didn't want it. A few of my driver friends stood up for me and I did get to use the No. 13. I've often wondered what would have happened if I had painted my car green and eaten peanuts around it.

In 1949 they stopped racing in Saskatchewan and I moved to Calgary, Alberta to continue racing. And who should be there but my friend George LeMay, plus Frank Janet, Jimmy Ward, Frank Taylor and Lem Erlam.

That winter we even raced on a half-mile track on Lake Louise at Banff. In late 1949 we quit racing

the Model Ts and went into "big cars, as they were called then, (now known as sprints). I ended up running a speed shop with Frank Taylor and George LeMay where we built flathead V-8 Fords. Looking back, I bet we were the only speed shop in Canada.

I have been in car racing and boat racing all my life. I've built my own Model T and sprints. I worked for Andy Granatelli when he ran the Novis, have entered a Riverside 600 and made the show. I have also built my own midget and sprint cars. I have helped drivers like Tom Roa of CRA and Charlie Brown of Arizona get started in sprint cars and sports cars. Charlie could have been the best if he could have stayed with it, but lack of money is a "bummer" for drivers.

I am older now and retired, but I am keeping busy by building a new T and beginning to write a full book on T racing. Racing has been good to me, as I have met many good people and have made many good friends. I wouldn't have missed it for anything.

The caption to this picture from The Leader-Post (Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada), dated September 4, 1945 read.. "LUCKY THIRTEEN: Bob Rogers is one man who doesn't avoid the number "13" because for two years straight he has won the seven-and-a-half mile feature race at the Lions Club Labor Day Model Races, and each year his car was No. 13. He is seen in this picture in his "rattler" holding the trophy presented to him before a crowd of over 11,000 at the exhibition grounds Monday." To us at the MTFCA and his many friends, Bob Rogers is still a winner. Look for his book on his racing experiences in the future.

