

Andy O'Brien Says

# The Cleaning Women Saw The Greatest Race

Two Canadians who were the best in six-day bike racing recall the great days of a sport that's booming again



Torchy and Doug Peden in the big race they won in New York back in 1939.

THERE'S an off-beat sports yarn I have long wanted to write but never quite seemed to have an excuse for so doing — until now.

A news item announces that six-day bicycle racing is moving back into the Canadian sports big time — on May 22-28 with the full glamor treatment and stars from 11 nations wheeling right into the international hoopla of Expo 67 excitement in Montreal. Apparently, the sport of stamina, spills and speed spurts earned its way into the 15,000-capacity Forum, home of Les hockey Canadiens, after a surprise comeback in 1966 at the 5,000-capacity Paul Sauvé arena where the attendance totalled 60,000.

But back to the off-beat yarn.

It involves the storied Peden brothers, Torchy and Doug, natives of Victoria, and the race they won at New York's Madison Square Garden in 1939. Torchy is a six-day immortal. His world record of 38 wins lasted 28 years. Six of those wins came with Doug as partner in Buffalo, Toronto, San Francisco, Montreal, Chicago and New York.

Doug Peden, now sports editor of The Victoria Daily Times, and I were yacking about some famous six-days I had attended long ago. Often I had remained watching until 4:30 in the morning but lost interest when the "gentlemen's agreement" armistice would go into effect; nobody would try to sprint during those periods before dawn, thus allowing the teams to rest, eat and shower, one at a time while the other kept the wheels rolling.

I asked Doug: "Tell me honestly, when all the customers left for those two or three hours daily and the cleaners went to work, did the race come to a full stop behind closed doors?"

Doug laughed: "I wish I had a dollar for every time I've been asked that question. Actually, the answer is a flat no. We would slow down to just rolling as you described, range from there up to 50 m.p.h. in sprints, and average about three hours' sleep per day for the six days. But the toughest sprint I ever raced in my experience of 37 six-days, and Torchy agrees it was his toughest in 148 six-days, started near 5 o'clock on the final morning of that 1939 race at

Madison Square Garden.

"Torchy had gone over the track" [the elevated bridge from the mid-area to the seating area] for a decent meal in the cafeteria. I was rolling along at the base of the inclined raceway with one foot up on the handlebars and the other pedalling lazily. Madison Square had emptied except for the cleaning women.

"Suddenly, a jam erupted.

"It was the result of a grudge that had been seething for days. The team of Jules Audy and Cesare Moretti had a mad on at the team from Germany. We were on the eve of World War II and sharp arguments may have prompted some sharp riding tactics. Anyway, Jules and Cesare began going all-out. You've never seen such confusion.

"The racers who had gone over the track came scrambling back with the trainers. The lights that had been turned down were ablaze again. There was shouting and cussing. My lungs were beginning to scorch as I rode desperately to hang on to Jules and Cesare until Torchy could relieve me; we were in contention in the race. I guess I was saved by the referee's bell as one of the two spills occurring during the period provided a brief lull. Then Torchy was back.

"The bell was giving the go signal again when I looked up and saw 15 cleaning women seated in the box seats. Mops and buckets had been left

in the aisles. They had brought down their lunch pails and were cheering between bites of their sandwiches — having a whale of a time. They were the audience of perhaps the most savage, two-hour jam in Garden history.

"I looked around at the vast emptiness of the Garden and laughed outright. The laugh cleared the fog for me. I remounted and never looked back all day or into the evening when we ended up as winners with the joint packed.

"Normally I'd get my second wind on the second day. Until then everything would hurt and I'd be utterly tired and my lungs would burn. But thanks to Torchy's riding my prolonged wait for second wind had been overcome. The cleaning gals gave me back my feel of fun and desire and I enjoyed the rest of the grind."

When I finally got around to writing this article, I contacted Torchy — really it's William — Peden in Northbrook, Ill., near Chicago, where he is promotional sales manager for a sporting-goods manufacturer.

"I think Doug is inclined to be modest, unlike his big brother," laughed Torchy. "He pulled his load all the way in that terrific race. However, it's possible that he didn't realize it because, oddly, in a six-day the riders often get faster as they get more tired. I finished 145 of my 148 races but often had to read the papers to find out what happened in the

closing hours of the race."

The Pedens apparently had quite a job getting bicycles to take them through the abnormal stress and strain of six-days.

"I weighed 217 and Doug just under 200 and both of us are six-footers," explained Torchy, "while a bike, to be effective, shouldn't weigh more than 21 pounds. Our tires couldn't stand more than a half-hour of hard riding before a change.

"I guess the career wouldn't have been possible if, when I went East in 1928, I hadn't run into a Toronto race manager, William MacMorton. He got interested and we worked together in developing new ideas to handle my weight, such as a shortened wheelbase and the rake [bend] of the fork."

Torchy is particularly delighted over the six-day comeback in Montreal: "It was there and in the Forum that I won my first six-day, teamed with the great Henri Lepage, in 1931. And still in the over-all Canadian picture, it was in Toronto in 1937, teamed with brother Doug, that I took over the world's record from Holland's Piet van Kempen. It was in Toronto in 1965 that Belgium's Rik van Steenberghe tied my 38-win record, then went ahead with his 39th the same year at Quebec City."

Montreal won't be the only city to experience a revival of six-day interest this year.

A circuit is being established in the United States, embracing races in New York (at the old Armory in Easter Week), Milwaukee, Cleveland and Buffalo.

Overseas, 16 six-days are already slated for 1967, mainly in Germany but also in Belgium, Italy, Spain, Switzerland and Holland. London will see its first race since 1948.

In Montreal a group of four former riders have joined in the promotion — René Cyr, Guy Morin, René Paquin and Belgian-born Oswald van den Abele. It will be held under the



Doug is a sports editor in Victoria.