

## Ray Rairdon

Ray Rairdon emerged from the 50s as the Northwest's top big-bore production car driver of the era. After a start in smaller cars, Ray first in a Mercedes Benz 300SL "gull wing" coupe and then in a Corvette got into many a wild and wooly tussle with others in his highly competitive class. More often than not, he came out on top.

Like many other drivers of his time, Ray's first races were on oval tracks in a roadster. After a few years and some narrow escapes at that pursuit, Ray was introduced to sports car racing by Pete Lovely and saw his first event at Gray Field in 1951. He was hooked and soon joined the fray himself in an MGTD Mark Two, moving up to a TF model and then to a Triumph TR2 when he went to work for the Seattle dealer of the marque.

Ray raced a Cad-Allard a couple of times in those early years as well, but really hit his stride in 1956 when he began racing Franklin Eddy's Mercedes Benz 300SL. These were simpler times, Ray would drive the car hard in races and the next day Franklin drove it to work where he was vice president of a bank! One of the times this arrangement did not work out was at the 1956 Seafair Trophy race, where Franklin refused to let Ray use the MB to race with Paul O'Shea and Dick Thompson, fearing damage to his car. We would have loved to see Ray go against these guys.

In 1957 Ray was largely absent from the scene, taking the year to travel the world on business. But 1958 began three of his best years of motor racing. Myron Doxon signed on as team mechanic and managed to coax more performance out of the car just as Corvettes were making serious inroads in big bore production racing. Ray became the hero of the Old Breed who loved their sweet-handling foreign cars and disdained the noisy Corvettes and their brash drivers. Ray handled them most of the time, both in the Northwest and up and down the West Coast. The way he did it was pure joy to the purists. The Corvettes could get off the line faster, so Ray would often be in fifth or sixth place after the first couple of laps. But one by one he would push them to and beyond the point of brake fade and get by all of them by the last couple of laps for another win.

By the end of 1959, it was obvious that the best days of 300SL Gullwings were over. In February of 1960 Seattle Corvette dealer and racer Tad Davies offered Ray a shot at the SCCA national championship in a Davies Corvette. The championship in those days consisted of 12 to 15 races from Pensacola, FL, to the Pacific Northwest to Southern California and Texas. Races were every two weeks or so. The series started in Pensacola in March; so the

Corvette was shipped to the East Coast and trailered from race to race with Ray flying back and forth from Seattle.

Ray was leading the country in points that year until Davies sold his dealership and pulled the plug on the whole operation. Before then, the car came home twice for memorable races (detailed elsewhere in this book), especially with Dave Troffer who was driving a Mercedes 300SL roadster. Tough competition or not, Ray managed to win all the local races he entered that year in the Corvette

Ray raced a factory Corvette at Sebring in 1961, drove an older Cad Allard and the Chev-HWM with some success in 1961 and 1962, and retired from racing after the 1962 season. As he puts it, "I had thought that I would retire before I got too old. And, I could see that the days of the cars that I loved to drive, the big front-engine beasts, were passing—the days of the smaller cars with higher-revving engines was upon us."

Ray Rairdon Yacht sales in Seattle was active until Ray's passing in 2010.