



KANSAS LEGEND BIOGRAPHY

Jim Roper (1916-2000)

A Halstead, Kan., native, Christian D. "Jim" Roper helped put his hometown on the map after winning the first Winston Cup Series stock car race in National Association for Stock Car Automobile Racing (NASCAR) history. Although NASCAR was newly formed and Roper was new to the sport, he will forever be remembered for his memorable experience in Charlotte, N.C., in 1949.



Roper purchased his first race car, a midget car, in 1944 at the age of 27. However, he was unable to race until after the end of World War II, when he began racing stock cars and track roadsters in addition to the midget cars. Roper won his first race in 1947, the Beacon Championship at the CeJay Speedway in Wichita, Kan. Roper continued to race on the International Motor Contest Association circuit in Nebraska, Kansas, Oklahoma, Missouri and Iowa.

Roper earned his nickname "Alfalfa Jim" for a memorable performance at Agricultural Hall in Salina, Kan. After spinning out and driving through a wooden fence into an alfalfa field, Roper miraculously returned to the track to finish the race, the car full of alfalfa.

Roper learned of the first NASCAR Strictly Stock race to be held in Charlotte, N.C., while reading a syndicated comic strip in a local newspaper. He convinced local car dealer and friend Millard Clothier to drive two Lincolns from the dealership in Great Bend, Kan., to North Carolina for the 150-mile, 200-lap race.



At this time, NASCAR was quickly gaining momentum as the newest sanctioned motor sports racing series. NASCAR's first official meeting had just been held on Dec. 12, 1947, and the organization held its first official race on Feb. 21, 1948, at Daytona Beach. NASCAR planned to run three separate divisions: Strictly Stock Cars, Modified Stock Cars and Roadsters. The Roadsters category was soon dropped, and it wasn't until the following year that the first Strictly Stock car race was held.

A crowd estimated at more than 20,000 people showed up to watch the 33 cars compete on June 19, 1949, in Charlotte. At the end of the race, driver Glenn Dunaway finished three laps ahead of Roper but was disqualified for having rear springs that were not factory installed. The \$2,000 purse was declared Roper's, and his car was dismantled to confirm the win in a post-race inspection. With no other way home, Roper had to wait for a North Carolina car dealer to replace the engine before returning home to Kansas.



Roper competed in only one other NASCAR race two months later, finishing 15th at Hillsboro, N.C., and winning \$50. He continued racing cars for another six years until suffering a broken vertebra in a sprint car accident in 1955. Roper then retired from the sport but later worked as a flagman and built race cars for other drivers before moving to Texas to breed thoroughbred horses. Alfalfa Jim died in 2000 at age 83 from heart and liver complication due to cancer, remembered as a hometown hero and a legendary NASCAR driver.

