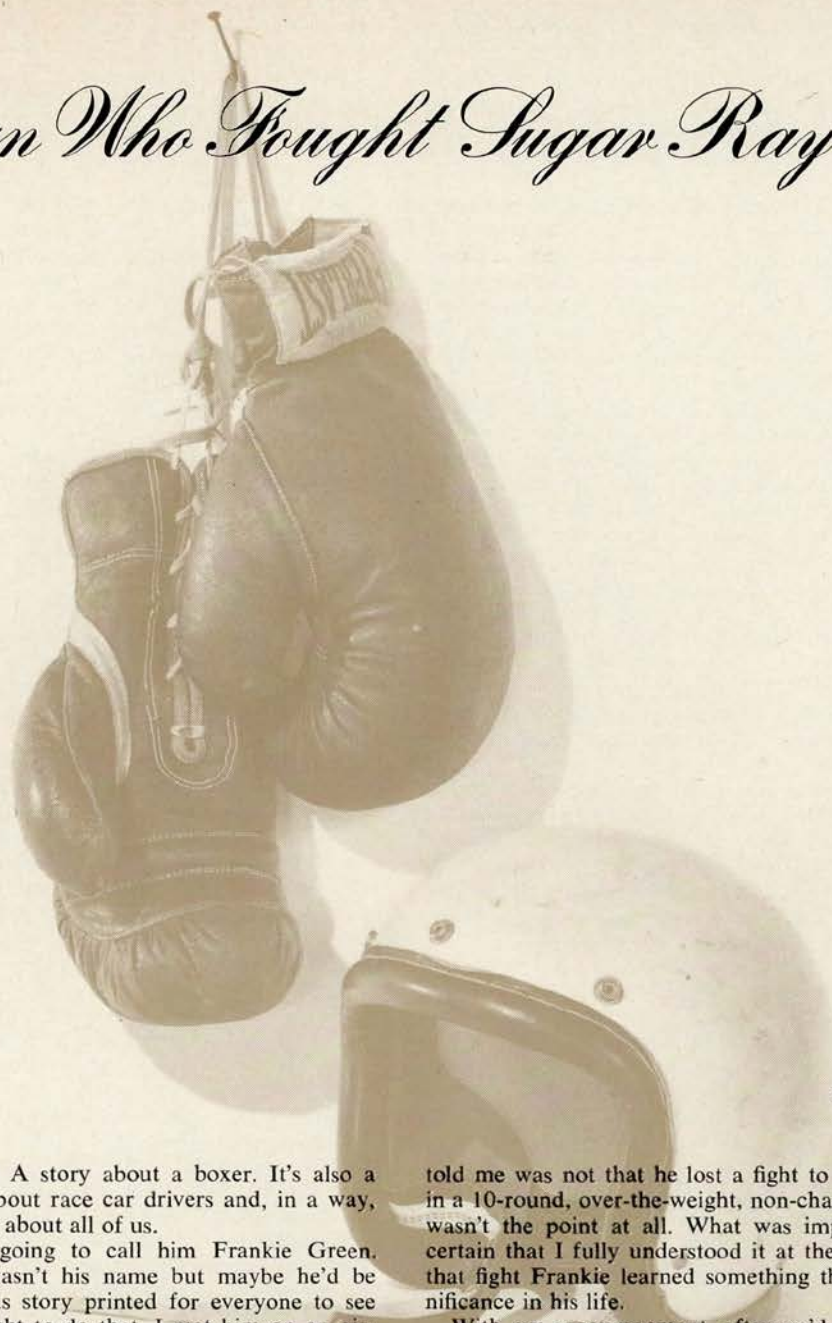


The Man Who Fought Sugar Ray



BY JAMES T. CROW

THIS IS A story about a boxer. It's also a story about race car drivers and, in a way, I guess, about all of us.

I'm going to call him Frankie Green. That wasn't his name but maybe he'd be embarrassed to have this story printed for everyone to see and I don't have any right to do that. I met him on an airplane flight across the country years ago when I was still working for Lockheed and didn't have any idea I'd end up as the editor of a magazine about sports cars. I had a window seat and he sat down in the seat on the aisle. He wasn't a big man, not as tall as me, but he was wide, with a big chest, big hands, and a square Irish face that had the thickened eyebrows and slightly out-of-focus nose that sometimes identifies the professional fighter. On his lap he held a thick leather briefcase and this, though he did nothing to attract attention to it, was fastened to his left wrist with a chain. Later, after we became acquainted, he explained that he was a State Department courier and was on his way to Honolulu, Manila and Tokyo. When the stewardess came by, taking orders for drinks, I had a scotch and water and he had coffee.

We were flying in a Constellation, a prop-driven plane that you may not even remember, and a cross-country flight in those days took a long time. A long time. Long enough to hear a man's life story.

What I found interesting about the story Frankie Green

told me was not that he lost a fight to Sugar Ray Robinson in a 10-round, over-the-weight, non-championship fight. That wasn't the point at all. What was important, and I'm not certain that I fully understood it at the time, was that from that fight Frankie learned something that was of major significance in his life.

With my encouragement, after we'd settled down and become accustomed to pitching our voices to be heard over the drone of the engines, he told me about his boxing career.

He was from Boston, the oldest son in a large Irish family and as his father was an ex-fighter, it was only natural that Frankie would be interested in boxing. He had gloves on as early as he could remember and by the time he was nine or ten he was participating in the kiddy bouts between the prelims in a local boxing club. In his teens he went into Golden Gloves, got to the finals twice and in his last year in high school, won a Gloves' title in Chicago. He was a fighter, a good fighter. "I knew," he said, "absolutely knew, that one day I was going to be world champion." It was as simple as that.

After high school he went to college for a couple of years, played football on the lightweight team, got his letter in baseball as a sophomore and continued to develop as a boxer. By the time he was 21 he had turned professional and ➡

The Man Who Fought Sugar Ray

was being brought along by a first-class trainer and by his father, who acted as his manager. He started in 4-rounders, worked up to 6-round semi-mains and, building up a good record, graduated to feature events where he was going the full 10-round distance.

"And all this time," he explained, "there was really only one thing I was after. The title. I wasn't ready yet—my trainer and my dad made sure I knew that—and it wasn't something I shot off my mouth about. But I knew, sooner or later, I was going to be the champ. Oh, I didn't have a perfect record. I lost a few along the way. But I never lost to the same fighter twice, even though my dad worried a lot about me being over-matched."

As he was maturing as a fighter he had a good series of 10-rounders with Luis Montoya, a Mexican boxer from San Diego. They fought three times in the old Hollywood Legion Stadium, three bouts that packed the house. Frankie lost the first of these on a split decision ("It could have gone either way," he said), then won the next two. In their third fight, a terrible thing happened.

The first three rounds were even, neither fighter having any advantage. A good, hard, clean fight. But in the fourth round, Frankie worked Luis against the ropes and got in a picture-book left hook that stunned the Mexican boy. He hadn't expected that. "If it had been any other guy I ever fought," he said, "I would have gone after him then. But it surprised me and when I saw he was hurt, I dropped my gloves for a second."

But the Mexican boxer came off the ropes with a right hand out of the 2-dollar seats and caught Frankie a tremendous wallop. "I turned my head, seeing it coming, and he got me right in the ear. Bam. You ever been hit in the ear? I mean really a clout? It does things to you. From then on, until we were back in the dressing room, I don't remember a thing. And my head rang for a week."

Frankie won that fight. Won it by a knockout in that round, fighting purely on that instinct that must be present in any good fighter when his brain is rattling around in his skull like a tire that's gone flat and instinct is all he has to fight with. It was during this time that the tragedy occurred. In knocking him out, Frankie got his thumb in one of Luis's eyes, an accidental gouge that resulted in the loss of sight in that eye and later, due to an infection, caused him to be totally blind.

"Maybe somebody who's not a fighter can't understand it, but it didn't really bother me. Sure, I felt bad about Luis. He was a good kid. A good fighter. I liked him a lot. I was sorry it happened. Nobody likes to do a thing like that. But it didn't change anything as far as I was concerned. I was still a fighter and I was still going to be the world champion."

I don't think I did understand at the time Frankie told me about Luis. Later, when I became more closely associated with racing, I understood a little better. Drivers don't quit racing when somebody gets killed. Even when they've been closely involved—maybe even the direct cause of a spectator's or another driver's death—it doesn't change anything for them. Or if it does, they probably shouldn't have been driving in the first place. I don't know.

Frankie's next fight, a major step up the ladder, was at the Garden. Madison Square Garden. That was the big time. For a boxer in those days it was like one of today's young drivers getting a chance in Formula 1. To get a main event in the Garden, you had to be good. Maybe not a champion—you could buy your way in, or your manager could, just like you can buy a ride in Formula 1—but you still had to be good.

Frankie fought four main events in the Garden before World War II, winning all four, and his name was moving

up the list of logical contenders for the welterweight title. He was almost ready. Then the war came and that changed a lot of things. Frankie went into the navy and ended up as a physical education instructor at Great Lakes Naval Training Station, a ploy that let him keep in shape, do exhibition tours and occasionally participate in a real fight for navy relief.

Sugar Ray was also in the service at this time, a member of the army's Special Services branch, doing about the same kind of duty as Frankie. "But Ray was a bad boy in those days. He didn't take much to army life and had a pretty bad reputation for mouthing off. He was the welter champ when the army got him and though he got a lot of heat, he wasn't about to put his title on the line for charity. But he did finally agree to meet me in a non-title 10-rounder."

In those years Sugar Ray didn't have the awesome reputation that later grew up around him but Frankie prepared for the fight as seriously as he would have for a championship fight in the Garden. The navy wanted Frankie to win this fight too and he went into training full time, released from all other duties.

"I'd seen Ray fight a couple times," Frankie explained, "and I knew he was good. But I'd never fought a man I couldn't whip and I never doubted that I would take him. Sure, it wasn't for the crown, but I knew, sooner or later, after I'd beaten him, he'd have to give me a shot at the title."

So Frankie went down the aisle to the ring that night full of confidence, trained to perfection, ready to give his best fight. "I was ready and I knew I was ready. We'd heard stories that Ray had been doing a lot of playing around and wasn't taking this fight very seriously. He looked good at the weigh-in—Ray always looked good—but he was well over his best weight and had a lot of fun clowning around with the newspaper guys. After he left, a couple of them had the nerve to ask me if I really thought I could give him a fight."

So they got their instructions in the middle of the ring, the house lights went down and Frankie went out to meet Sugar Ray. "It was a good fight," Frankie recalled, "no doubt about it. Even the newspaper guys admitted that. But what I learned that night was that I wasn't going to be the world champion. If I wanted to box, Ray would box with me and take me on points. If I wanted to slug, he'd slug with me and tear my head off. And if I wanted to get dirty, he'd have his laces up my nose before I could touch him. Anything I tried, he gave it back to me in spades and there wasn't anything I could do to take the play away from him. After the decision was announced—and I knew I'd been whipped before the slips were tallied—Ray came over to me, big laugh and all, and said, 'Good fight, kid.' Maybe it was part of his psychology, I don't know, but I couldn't help saying, 'Thanks, Ray,' just like he'd done me some kind of favor."

While Frankie had been telling me this story, our Constellation had droned its way half across the country. We'd eaten a meal off a tray, we'd stopped to refuel, I'd had another drink, smoked too many cigarettes and now we were drinking coffee again.

"Ray didn't hurt me in that fight," Frankie went on. "I didn't get cut, I didn't pull a muscle and I didn't hurt my hands. But I was never that good again. It's hard to explain but after that night I knew I wasn't the best there was and it took something out of me. For the first time in my life I knew, deep inside, that I wasn't going to be the champ and that sort of made everything pointless. Oh sure, I kept fighting after that. After I got out of the navy, I fought some pretty good boys. When I hung them up, my record was 74, 9 and 4. That's not bad. But after that night in the ring with Ray, I was never that good again."

Looking back on it, Frankie could see that his life had followed a pattern after that. He began to realize there was something more in life than being the world champion. He got married, for instance, when, before, he'd never even gone out with girls. He enjoyed the kids, four boys and a girl; he showed me a family picture. He drank a little beer with the boys in the neighborhood tavern. He still fought an occasional bout and he went into partnership with two of his brothers in a construction company even though he never got used to the regular hours and never liked the way the business tied him down. When, through a friend of his family, he was offered a job as a bodyguard for a vice presidential candidate, he took it. Later, after his man was elected, there was an opening and Frankie became a courier. He liked that job. He liked the traveling. He liked the feeling of responsibility it gave him.

At the end of my flight we had a cup of coffee in the old airport at San Francisco and when his flight was called, I walked to the gate with him. My last glimpse of Frankie Green was as he walked down the long corridor toward the plane that would take him on to Honolulu. After that, Manila, then Tokyo. He was very erect, his back flat and square, a man in a dark suit, carrying a fat briefcase and he walked lightly, like a man who had a lot to look forward to.

I've often thought about Frankie Green since that night. I don't even know if the State Department has couriers like him anymore. Maybe it's all done with closed-circuit teleprinters, the messages coded and de-coded by computers. The reason I've always remembered him is because, since then, I've realized that, in different ways, we've all had our fights with our own personal Sugar Rays. We all knew, when we started out in life, that we were going to be the world champion. The fact that we aren't doesn't come to everyone in quite so clear-cut or dramatic fashion as with Frankie Green, of course. In my own case, I was only going to be a great novelist and by the time I realized that I wasn't, I had almost forgotten and there was nothing in the least dramatic about it.

And it happens to race car drivers. It isn't an obvious thing. It's one of those incidents that happen and then, maybe years later, you look back on it and realize, yes, that was when it happened. Sometimes, most of the time, I doubt if the drivers are even aware of it. Maybe, if they aren't cerebral, and most of them aren't, they never realize it at all. But it happens nevertheless.

Maybe Chuck Daigh didn't know that morning at Monaco. Maybe Dan Gurney didn't know that crisp autumn afternoon at Laguna Seca. Maybe Billy Krause didn't know that day at Indianapolis when he went backwards through the southwest turn. Yet it happens. It happened to Daigh. It happened to Gurney. And it happened to Krause.

For Chuck Daigh it was during practice for the 1960 Monte Carlo Grand Prix when the Scarab Formula 1 cars made their first appearance in public. Chuck, if you remember, was a good driver. A very good driver. He'd won races in the old Troutman-Barnes Special and later he had beaten the very best sports cars (and drivers) in the world in the original Scarab sports cars. I don't know whether Chuck had visions of being the world champion driver but I'm sure he went to Monaco with every confidence that he was at least as good as any driver that ever sat behind the wheel of a racing car. When the Scarab Formula 1s were built, he was the test driver and he knew that car better than any other driver in the world. No doubt about that at all.

So when he drove the Scarab in practice at Monaco he was probably annoyed and disappointed because the car was so slow, but he didn't feel disgraced. So all the other cars were faster. That didn't prove anything; he knew he'd driven

that car around that course as fast as it could possibly be driven that day.

But then Lance Reventlow, who had the money that built the Scarabs, asked Stirling Moss if he'd take the car out and see if he could suggest anything that might make it more competitive. Moss was the superstar in Formula 1 in those days and in Rob Walker's Lotus he'd already been under 1:37. Daigh, in the Scarab, had only gotten down to 1:49, twelve seconds a lap slower. But so what? Chuck, I'm sure, was certain that 1:49 was all the Scarab had in it. A 1:49. Period.

So Stirling got into the car and left the pits. When he came past the pits the first time, the stopwatches clicked, timing his first flying lap. When he came by the next time, the clocks clicked again. A 1:49. That was Stirling's first flying lap and already he was as fast as the best lap Daigh had been able to do after miles and miles of practice.

The next lap Stirling came by in 1:46. And the lap after that, 1:45. Then he came in. In four laps he'd gone four seconds a lap faster than Chuck's best time. And in a car that he not only didn't know but one that he'd never even sat in before!

So in a period of just five minutes Chuck Daigh had found out that he wasn't as good a driver as there was and if he ever did have any visions of being world champion, they must have evaporated in the pits at Monaco. Chuck didn't bury his helmet that very afternoon; in fact, he got two more seconds off his own time before qualifying was over the next day. But I do know that Chuck never won another race after that and it wasn't too long before he sort of drifted out of sports cars.

With Gurney it was a more subtle thing. He was a better driver than Chuck Daigh, I feel sure, and he was also dedicated in a way that Chuck never was. But it also happened to Dan and, coincidentally, it was also Moss who did it to him. This was at Laguna Seca in a 2-heat race sponsored by the old *San Francisco Examiner* before the Can-Am came along. Moss and Gurney were both in Lotus 19s, the first great mid-engine sports-racing car. Both had the latest chassis, both had the latest 2.5-liter Coventry Climax engines and they were both great drivers. Moss had been comfortably the fastest qualifier during practice but Gurney made one of his patented late arrivals and on the very last lap of qualifying stole the pole and it was too late for Stirling to do anything about it.

They started side-by-side on the front row and it was probably the most beautiful race I've ever seen. In the very first lap somebody blew an engine in the fast sweeper going onto the backstretch, covering it with oil. Jim Hall went sideways down a bank and three other cars spun, knocking haybales everywhere and making a complete mess. Then Moss and Gurney came through and the two of them were simply incredible. Most drivers were getting off the gas and feeling their way very carefully but Moss and Gurney drove as if the oil wasn't worth worrying about.

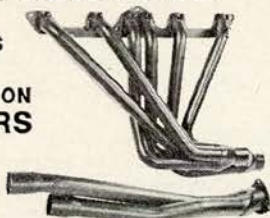
Moss led first, pulling away just an almost imperceptible amount every time they went through the oil. Gurney was good but Moss got through the oil just that little bit faster. By the time the oil dried, Moss had a lead that should have been comfortable but then he began having trouble with a sticking throttle. Having to kill the engine with the ignition switch when he had to slow down, his lap times fell off and Gurney caught him and took the lead. Now it was Stirling's turn to press Dan. And he did. They raced around that course together like two trained seals playing tag, nose to tail, a beautiful thing to see and those of us who were there will never forget it. Then Dan bobbled for an instant, only an instant, and Moss was back in the lead. Now it was Dan's turn to press Stirling. And he did. But just when the tension was becoming unbearable with only a couple or three laps

PINTO, TOYOTA, VEGA, DATSUN, PORSCHE, VW!

NOW AVAILABLE BY DIRECT MAIL AT LOW DISCOUNT PRICES

FAMOUS P/S COMPETITION HEADERS

Superbly Engineered. Highest Quality.



PINTO (2,000 cc)	Only \$59.95
VEGA	Only \$59.95
DATSUN Pick-Up	Only \$54.95
DATSUN 510	Only \$59.95
DATSUN 240-Z	Only \$74.95

All prices include shipping

Fully Polished DEEP DISH MAG WHEELS 4, 5 and 6 bolt patterns

Full range of sizes: 12" x 5" to 15" x 10".



13"x5½" fits PINTO & VEGA Full set (4) Only \$125.00

12"x5" fits TOYOTA Corolla, DATSUN 1200. Full set (4) Only \$119.00

14"x6" fits DATSUN 240-Z Full set (4) Only \$135.00

All prices include shipping

Send for prices and details on other sizes!

Bridgestone RADIAL TIRES

Guaranteed 30,000 miles! The world's finest tire. Race proved. Sporty. Better handling.



155x12" fits DATSUN 1200, TOYOTA Corolla... Set of 4 \$125.00

165x13" fits PINTO, TOYOTA, VEGA, DATSUN Set of 4 \$135.00

165x15" fits VW, PORSCHE, TRIUMPH... Set of 4 \$160.00

175x14" fits DATSUN 240-Z Set of 4 \$170.00

195x15" fits LARGER IMPORTS Set of 4 \$195.00

All prices include tubes if necessary, excise tax and shipping.

Send for prices and details on other sizes!

Offenhauser DUAL PORT 360° INTAKE MANIFOLD Boosts power!

For PINTO, VEGA, DATSUN (2 bbl. Carb. 70-72) Only \$69.50 ea. Includes shipping



We have many other beautiful NEW custom items for DATSUN, PORSCHE, TOYOTA, VW, etc. Send for free literature today! When ordering or inquiring, always specify make, model and year of car.

SATISFACTION GUARANTEED! SORRY, NO COD's. Check or Money Order ONLY. Calif. residents add 5% sales tax.

FOREIGN SPECIALTIES

Dept. R • 345 WEST VALLEY BLVD. ALHAMBRA, CALIFORNIA 91803

to go, Dan was the one who did something wrong. He spun at turn five and Stirling coasted home to win the first heat.

When the second heat started, Moss drove off like he was going to lap the field and Gurney seemed willing to let him, not showing anything like the fire he'd displayed in the first heat. He was still good, obviously, but he wasn't driving with the brilliance that had been apparent earlier. That was obvious too. But then, just when it appeared that Stirling had it wrapped up, his Lotus began to slow. Now, coming down the hill toward the pits, Moss was backing off much earlier than before and it was clear that he was either completely out of brakes or that they were almost gone. The signals went out to Dan and the chase was on. Gurney ate up the distance between them in great chunks, his driving suddenly inspired again, and my stopwatch showed that at this pace he would overtake Stirling before time ran out. Then Stirling did it to him again. When, to Dan, he must have looked like a sitting duck, Moss went a little faster. Just a little faster. And Dan couldn't catch him. Couldn't make up those tiny few precious seconds. So Moss led Dan home by three seconds and won the second heat as well.

It's possible that I'm reading too much into that race. It's conceivable that because I happened to see it happen, I'm letting my imagination run away with me. But I don't think so. They were in as nearly equal cars as possible. Dan had qualified faster than Stirling. And Dan had had not one but two shots at winning that afternoon. In the first heat he'd had Stirling get away from him because of the oil and then, when Stirling was having throttle trouble, he got into the lead only to be forced into the mistake that had let Stirling get by. In the second heat, Dan started the race like he already knew that he was going to be second, then caught fire when Stirling slowed. It was almost as if he was being given a second chance. But Stirling pulled out that little bit of extra speed and Dan had to know, I think, that he wasn't going to be the world champion. In addition, there was one more little clue that came later. Arleo, Dan's first wife, was a friend of mine in those days and together we sometimes worried a little about Dan. She told me that it was after that race that Dan, for the first time, talked about what he'd like to do after he retired from racing.

Dan didn't retire after that race, of course. I don't need to tell you that. He went on to win four Grand Prix races after that and had a glorious career; in my opinion, the finest Grand Prix driver America has ever had. But he was never the world champion.

Billy Krause's encounter with his Sugar Ray was plain and obvious. This was at Indianapolis during practice for the 500 in 1963. Billy was driving one of Mickey Thompson's roller-skate cars; you remember, the almost flat body and the little tires. The car that Graham Hill had tried and said no thanks to. But Billy was young and eager. At that time he was an outstanding sports car driver on the west coast. He'd beaten tough competition in his own D-type Jaguar, he'd won several good races for Dick Becker in a Chevrolet-powered Mercedes and he'd won the Times GP at Riverside in Jack Brumby's Birdcage Maserati. He was good, no doubt about it. I'm sure he went to Indy that spring, not so cocky that he thought he was going to win the 500 this year, but with the confidence that, given the right car and some experience, he certainly had the ability to win that race or any other race.

But the car was treacherous—Dave MacDonald was killed in a similar car the next year—and Billy lost it in a small way several times. Finally he lost it in the biggest possible way and while traveling backwards through the southwest turn at about 100 mph, Roger McCluskey, committed to the turn and unable to avoid him, drove into Billy so they collided nose to nose.

Billy wasn't hurt and the car wasn't badly damaged but the next day he had the courage, or whatever you call it, to say that he had lost confidence in the car and lost confidence in himself and that he was stepping out to give somebody else a chance to qualify. Billy was never as good after that either. He continued to drive for a while, I think, but before long he opened a Honda dealership and you know about Honda dealerships. He prospered. But he didn't race.

It doesn't only happen in racing, of course. I can think of dozens of examples of people I've known who started out on a path that was going to take them to a world championship of one kind or another, then lost their fight with Sugar Ray and settled for something less. Frankie Green was going to be the welterweight champion of the world. I was going to be a great novelist. Chuck Daigh, if not actually aspiring to be a world champion driver, at least knew, up till that day at Monaco, that he was as good as any driver in the world. Dan Gurney did have that ambition, I think that's obvious; but after those two heats at Laguna Seca, he knew he wasn't. And Billy Krause found out, in a fashion almost as dramatic as Frankie Green, that he wasn't going to be a champion either.

Like I said, we've all had our fight with Sugar Ray.

