The comic side of Detroit Red-Wing's Gordie Howe

By FRED CEDERBERG
Toronto Telegram News Service

It's common knowledge that one Gordon Howe, a member of the NHL Detroit Red Wings for some 17-going-on-18 years, is a fair country-style hockey player.

But how many know that he has hit a home run off major league pitching; that he's enough of a comedian to make it big if he ever decides to acknowledge the fact that he's getting gray-haired and quit the ice game? Well, at least the managers and coaches of the other five NHL clubs know about the latter and there's a rumor on the rounds that they have offered to underwrite a "Howe Comedy Career" out of their own pockets — mebbe because it's the first funny thing they've ever associated with the slope-shouldered onetime native of Floral, Saskatchewan, today a citizen of Pres. John F. Kennedy's U.S. of A.

Howe has never been accused of taking a game with him into the dressing room. "Some nights, they're going in," he will say about goals or the lack of them, "others, a guy should sit on the bench."

But there's no doubt he sometimes thinks about those bad nights (although opposition types insist he never has a "bad" night) because he has funnies to make about 'em later.

Like his opinion of Leafs' Davey Keon and the trend toward lighter, faster, blue-darter type skaters.

"I'm going to have to carry a lightweight stick so I can take a whack at 'em as they skate by me. I'll never catch 'em with the regulation lumber.

"I saw a preview of the flickers coming out in the past season," he stated. "In one sequence Keon gets belted by Doug Barkley; he goes down hard, bounces three feet up in the air and keeps going, never missing a stride. Heck, I was never that high off the ice even when I was young!"

GORDIE HOWE

HAD JOHNNY ON THE SPOT . . . ALMOST

On the fifth game of the April Stanley Cup final in which Leafs took it all with a 3-1 triumph: The particular incident was when Howe lay atop Leaf goalie Johnny Bower, and Normie Ullman, with the whole net to shoot at for the equalizer, struck him on the leg with the puck.

"Everybody wants to know what happened, why I didn't get up faster," he says. "Well, it was like this: Johnny was underneath me, working like crazy, trying to get loose and I figured, 'a guy could get hurt if he stood up suddenly at a time like this,' so I just lay there. I had my man."

Then again, commenting on the moment during a delay when he dropped to one knee, resting in that same game:

"It takes a lot of practice and poise to look like you're just resting when you're in a state of collapse."

The bit about his hitting major league pitching goes back a few years to the days when he played for a Saskatoon club in that province's senior loop.

"We were in one of those tournaments that used to be popular," he related, "out at Indian Head, a little town of about 900 baseball crazy people outside Saskatoon. We get into the finals and the other entry—barnstorming Americans mostly — are really shooting the works for the $2,000 first prize, which proved to me those guys had to eat, too.

SUDDENLY HE KNEW SECRET

"Anyway, this pitcher is throwing peas over the plate. Yeah, I know a baseball isn't that small, but that's what he was throwing. After he fans me three times, I figure out how to handle him — I start swinging as he starts his windup.

"I guess I was due because I pick off this pea and ride it a mile with a mate aboard and we are the winners, 2-1. This big guy runs around inside the basepaths, calling me every name he can think of — and some I think he made up, he was so mad.

"It was several years later, I am in Washington, sitting in the sun, taking in a ball game between the Senators and Yanks. This big bird walks up, looks down at me and grins.

"'Hello, Farmer,' he says, 'you still look like a big rube — and I still have shreds of that baseball you drove out of the park on me up in Canada. What are you doing for a living now?"

Howe laughed, almost shyly, as though he was proud to meet the man in the Yankees' uniform. "The guy was Tex Clevenger—a real good head."

That's a tag which Gordon Howe wears — a real good head.

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Queen's plate has bettors wondering

By JACK SULLIVAN
Canadian Press Sports Editor

The Queen's Plate, Canada's richest and oldest horse race, still retains the glamor and color of an afternoon garden party with the women in furs and fancy hats and their escorts in toppers and tails. But the bettors must be wondering about the calibre of Canadian-foaled three-year-olds.

There isn't one in the barns that ranks as an outstanding favorite in Saturday's 104th running of the $50,000-added Plate over 1¼ miles at Toronto's suburban Woodbine track. Usually at this time, just hours before the big event, railbirds get excited about workouts.

This year, the field appears to be wide open and if there's a colt or filly with the credentials to overwhelm the field, people haven't heard about it. This could be the dullest Plate race in years.

JET TRAFFIC BARRED

Things were shaping up fine for an international race until a few weeks ago when the Jockey Club declared American-owned Jet Traffic was not eligible.

The colt was foaled in Canada but it was belatedly discovered that the entry, owned by Russell A Firestone Jr. of Palm Beach, Fla., was improperly nominated by breeder Frank Conklin of Brantford, Ont.

Jockey Club officials said it was too bad, but they had to take the action because the rules of racing were broken. They wouldn't want to admit it, but Jet Traffic's withdrawal lessened interest in the Plate.

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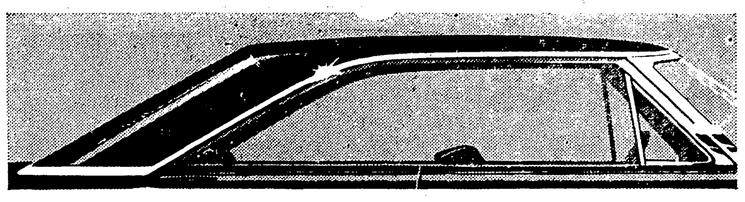

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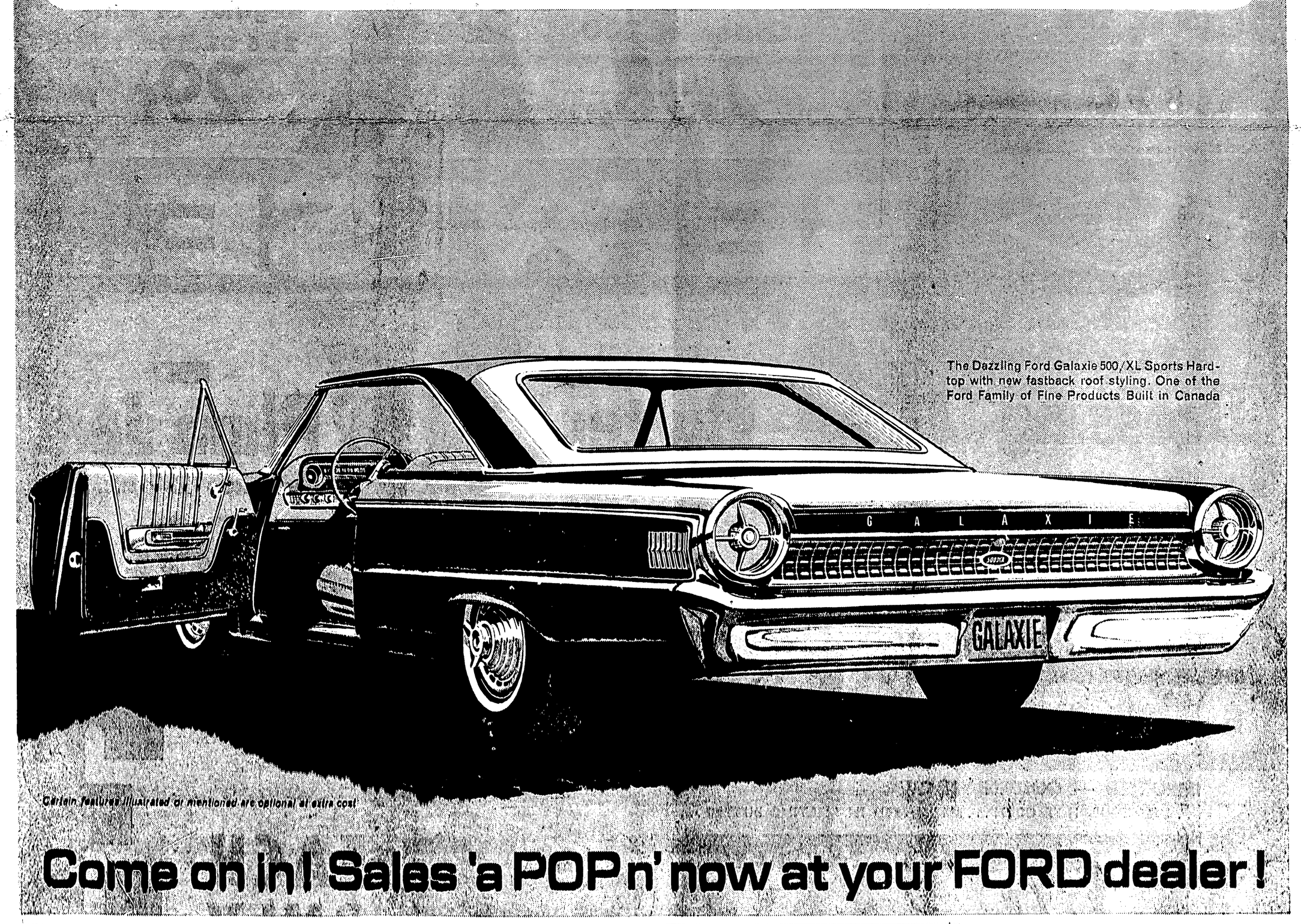

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