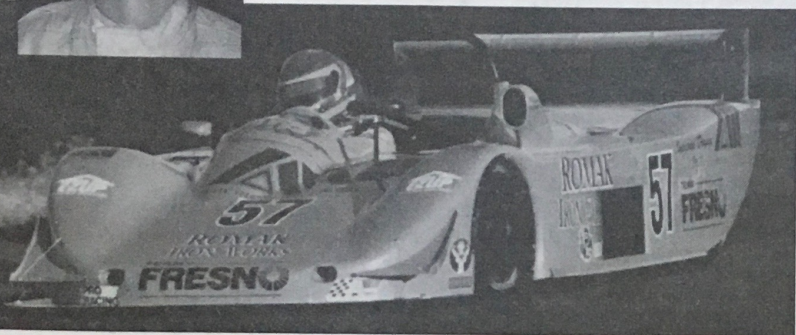
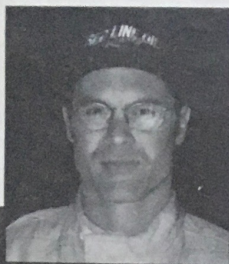


## Year of the Wing

by Roger Diez



Stephen Romak clinched the American City Racing League title in the final race at Sears Point.

pipe. Lombardo eventually let the car slide high out of Turn Two, and Glenn was by, holding the lead to the checker. San Diego took the team title with the one-two finish, while Arnold took the S2000 pole, but finished second to Spencer Trenery, the latter scoring his first professional win. Zarcades took the point lead, finishing fourth ahead of Romak's fifth.

The American City Racing League's 1998 season was as competitive as ever. Five drivers took pole positions, five won races and three different teams scored victories. The overall Team and Drivers Championships weren't settled until the last checkered flag flew. ACRL drivers raced on a variety of natural road courses, ovals and street courses, presenting a constant challenge to the drivers and crews. And technology reared its head, or should we say tail, with the allowance of rear wings.

The league returned to Las Vegas Motor Speedway for the season opener and the gauntlet was immediately thrown. Steve Romak had teething problems with his new Van Diemen and took his backup Lola to a win from pole position. Peter Zarcades' Swift proved as quick as ever, as he took a strong second. Romak led Team Fresno to a tight team victory over Las Vegas, and Frank Arnold dominated Sports 2000 with the class pole and win. Dennis Pavlina debuted the new Doran chassis for Team Seattle, backed by S2000 driver Erik Lunn. Team San Diego sported a pair of new drivers, John Lombardo Jr. and Fiorenzo Tirinanzi, both in Carbirs, with S2000 pilot Jay Messenger back again. Team St. Louis joined the series with Rick Eickoff aboard a Shannon chassis. The Bachofner brothers, Bill and John, changed allegiance to Team San Francisco, while the father-son team of Leo and Joe Giroski claimed Portland as their team for 1998. Edd Ozard in the ex-Rick Lee Lola represented Team Reno. John Ostlund and Frank Arnold joined Romak at Team Fresno while Chris Ronson and Spencer Trenery backed up Zarcades for Team Las Vegas.

At Phoenix International Raceway, Romak again wheeled the Lola to a pole position. An early spin handed the lead, and the win, to Zarcades, with Ostlund hounding him to the flag and Romak recovering for third. Fresno again took the team points. Lombardo jumped to the top of the rookie standings with a nice fourth, and Joe Giroski finished fifth for the second race in a row in his Tiga Wasp. Arnold again took the pole and the win in the S2000 class.

Memorial Day at the Mesa Marin half-mile oval saw 1997 Champion Jeff Glenn return to the series, taking over Tirinanzi's Carbir for a one-off drive. He was beaten for the pole by teammate Lombardo, but the San Diego cars started on the front row. Ostlund and Romak filled the second row, even though Romak walled the Van Diemen on his qualifying run. Lombardo led the first half of the race with Glenn glued to his exhaust

### Wings Appear at Portland

The Portland Rose Cup was the official beginning of "wing" season, as the optional rear wing for the SS2000 class was allowed for the first time. Zarcades' Swift was the only winged machine in the field and he qualified a full second and a half faster than second-place Romak. Zarcades won the race going away, and teammate Ronson added seventh-place points for a Las Vegas team win. Tom Kreger scored third-place points for Team Vancouver in his first outing of the season, and Joe Giroski took a well-deserved fourth. John Bachofner secured the S2000 category pole, but couldn't hold off Trenery, who scored his second class win in as many races.

At Portland for the July 4 weekend, plenty of wings were in evidence. Top-five qualifying was a very wet affair and the remaining qualifiers set much faster times later in a dry session. Brad Pierce sat in for Ronson and took the pole, with points leader Zarcades second and Romak third. The cars went six wide at the start, with Tom Kreger emerging at the front. Pierce lost his rear diffuser and slid backward in the field. Zarcades suffered a stop-and-go penalty and fell to 10th, recovering for seventh at the finish. Romak pressed Kreger unmercifully in the late laps, but the Vancouver pilot hung on to take the win. Joe Giroski scored his first podium finish in third, Edd Ozard took his best, placing fourth, and Pavlina rounded out the top five. Arnold again set the S2000 pole, but spun several times and finished third, behind Trenery and John Bachofner. Romak's second place, combined with Ostlund's sixth, gave Fresno the team win.

### The Turning Point

The Los Angeles Street Race course proved a challenge. The pavement was bumpy, with crowns, manhole covers and other obstacles to be negotiated. The ACRL cars were the fastest of all the groups on the program, including the Southwest Tour stockers. The race was also the turning point in the championship.

Zarcades took the pole, with teammate Ronson, now in a Carbir, second. Romak qualified third, but a crash damaged the Van Diemen beyond repair. The backup Lola was at Sears Point, so Romak and crewman John Thompson flew north and towed the Lola back for the race. While Zarcades disappeared into the distance, Romak worked his way up to second, overcoming a stop-and-go penalty on the way. Three

laps from the end, third-place runner Ronson came to grief in the tire wall and Margie Smith-Haas moved into third for a podium finish in her first 1998 appearance. Tirinanzi finished fourth, and this combo was good for a Team San Diego win. John Bachofner took the S2000 pole and win, with Trenery second and Arnold third.

At the new Pikes Peak International venue, Ronson used his new Carbir to good effect, qualifying on the pole ahead of Romak, Zarcades, Ozard and Pavlina. The race was the closest of the season, with Ronson, Romak and Zarcades all lapping within hundredths of a second. Romak moved into second when Zarcades dropped a wheel off and set out after the flying Ronson. The Carbir's low downforce setup utilized the very fast oval portion of the track, and Ronson held Romak off in the infield, albeit with black circles on the bodywork to show for it.

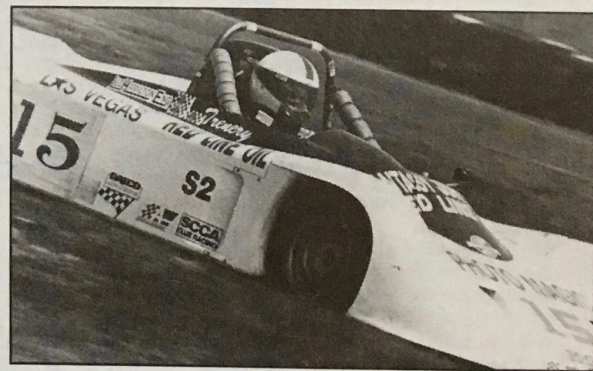
Behind them, Ozard took fourth and Pavlina finished fifth. Las Vegas took the team win with a first and third combo. S2000 had a new winner, Mike Johnson of Team St. Louis, who won from the pole after a race-long battle with his father, Duke. Local drivers Lee Johnson of Team Denver and Doug Allen of Team Aspen finished third and fourth in S2000, while Trenery took fifth. Arnold and Bachofner were both DNS.

### Showdown at Sears Point

Sears Point was the showdown for both the Team and Driver Championships. Zarcades, with a scant five points in hand over Romak, served notice with a 1:10.201 in practice, almost a full second quicker than Jeff Gordon's qualifying time on the NASCAR course. In qualifying, however, Romak took the pole and the associated two points at 1:10.522, narrowing the point gap to three. Zarcades qualified alongside, with Ostlund and Ronson third and fourth.

Ostlund slotted into second on the start, while Romak checked out. Zarcades got by the smoking Ostlund after two laps, and while he closed on Romak in traffic, the green Fresno Lola was untouchable on a clear track. Romak secured the championship in fitting fashion, with a win, while Zarcades had to settle for second on both counts. Ostlund, now smoke-free, finished third and nailed down the team win and championship for Fresno. Spencer Trenery won the S2000 class, becoming the youngest ACRL champion in series history.

At the banquet following the race, Zarcades' crew chief Lennie Gay was awarded Mechanic of the Year, while the Most Improved Driver award went to Chris Ronson. The Rookie of the Year was Fiorenzo Tirinanzi and the Rising Star award went to Spencer Trenery. Team Fresno won Best Team Presentation, John Lombardo Jr. took the Hard Luck trophy, while series registrar and unofficial ACRL den mother Marge Binks was selected Sportsperson of the Year. ■



Spencer Trenery won the S2000 title, the youngest title holder in series history.

### 1998 American City Racing League Scoreboard

Circuit	Winner	Team Winner	Pole (time)	Fastest Race Lap (time)
Las Vegas	Stephen Romak/Fresno	Fresno	Romak (1:20.910)	Romak (1:20.198)
Phoenix	Peter Zarcades/Las Vegas	Fresno	Romak (1:01.928)	Zarcades (1:00.488)
Mesa Marin	Jeff Glenn/San Diego	San Diego	J. Lombardo (0:19.337)	N/A
Portland I	Peter Zarcades/Las Vegas	Las Vegas	Zarcades (1:16.013)	Zarcades (1:17.326)
Portland II	Tom Kreger/Vancouver	Fresno	B. Pierce (1:24/053)	Zarcades (1:09.318)
Los Angeles	Peter Zarcades/Las Vegas	San Diego	Zarcades (1:03.397)	Romak (1:03.530)
Pikes Peak	Chris Ronson/Las Vegas	Las Vegas	Ronson (0:55.991)	Zarcades (0:56.643)
Sears Point	Stephen Romak/Fresno	Fresno	Romak (1:10.522)	Romak (1:10.567)

### 1998 ACRL Drivers' Scoreboard (Top 10)

Driver	Points	Wins	Poles	Fastest Laps
1. Stephen Romak/Fresno	666	2	3	3
2. Peter Zarcades/Las Vegas	662	2	2	4
3. Joe Giroski/Portland	568	0	0	0
4. John Ostlund/Fresno	550	0	0	0
5. Edd Ozard/Reno	521	0	0	0
6. Chris Ronson/Las Vegas	519	1	1	0
7. Bill Bachofner/San Francisco	505	0	0	0
8. Dennis Pavlina/Seattle	445	0	0	0
9. Fiorenzo Tirinanzi/San Diego	440	0	0	0
10. Spencer Trenery/Las Vegas	421	0	0	0