

Twilight of the Trotters

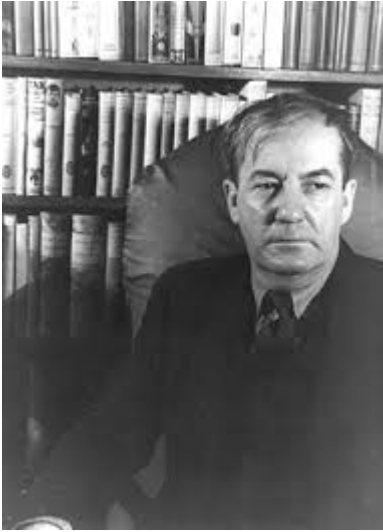
by Con Chapman

Neither you nor I is old enough, of course,
to remember that America's most
popular athlete once was a horse,



Dan Patch

but it's true. Back when Sherwood Anderson
wrote "I'm a Fool," Dan Patch--out
of Zelica by Joe Patchen--



Sherwood Anderson

was the main attraction at state fairs.
His owner made a million dollars a year.
Dan endorsed toys, cigars and other wares,

including washing machines and automobiles.
When I was boy, three score and ten years later,
the trotters still ran, pulling sulkies, the two wheels

spinning so fast the spokes were a blur.
Then came the stock car races,
with drivers like Keokuk's Ernie Doerr,

a new era's chariots, made of glass, rubber and steel.
After a while the harness racers complained that
the mile loop was ruined by the crashes, the wheels



that dug ruts into the dirt track.
They laid down an ultimatum; either the cars go
or the horses leave, and they won't come back.
It wasn't a tough choice. Who rode horses in carts
anymore? Cars were the present and the future,
the latest advance in the transit arts.
And so the trotters moved on, and the stock cars
stayed. I was standing at the first turn one day,
licking an ice cream cone behind a fence with bars;
then bored, I walked away. A minute or so after
a car came crashing through, killing several--
but not me. Where there had been gaiety and laughter
there was now blood and gore and remorse.
Gone were youth and comfort in old age;
that wouldn't have happened, I thought, with a horse.

