OTIS WILLIAMS

The irony of Otis Williams is that he initially doesn't come off like a leader. Interview the Tempts, and while Richard and Dennis are cracking off-the-wall jokes, Otis will be the quiet one who will give you a serious, candid answer to your questions. Catch the Tempts in performance and you'll see that onstage Otis takes only a very rare turn singing lead, spending most of his time in the background while the others strut their stuff.

However, Otis Williams _is_ the leader of the Temptations, the man who put the group together and managed to keep it together whenever things got shaky. Major decisions concerning musical direction, business, or possible new members have all rested, in the final analysis, on his shoulders.

Even Otis can't tell you what it is about him that makes him the natural leader he apparently is. "I don't know," he says. "I guess it's just...somebody has to do it. Everybody's down here to do some kind of function between the time they come here and the time they leave, so I guess that's part of mine."

Otis is a former farmboy, born and raised in Texarkana, Texas, where his paternal grandmother kept an eye on him. "I think about 1950 or so, we moved to Detroit" he says. "I grew up with the influences of Hank Ballard and the Midnighters, Billy Ward and the Dominoes, the Dixie Humingbirds, the Soul Stirrers.

Rock 'n roll was just beginning to break through and a lot of the rock shows were comin' to Detroit."

As a teenager, Otis ran into another young man who was a member of a singing group. The friend took Otis to a rehearsal and, almost from the moment he heard that group making harmony, Otis was hooked. He says he "started forming groups from whatever part of Detroit I was living in." One of those groups, which started when Otis was living on Detroit's west end, turned out to be the Temptations.

When he's away from the stage, the Temptations' quiet leader typically perfers quiet pursuits such as reading, cooking and song-writing, although sports also ranks high on his list.

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