

FONDA!

An illustrated and documented history of the legendary
Fonda Speedway



Andy Fusco | Lew Boyd | Jim Rigney

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Introduction

IT'S HARD TO SAY just why it is so special. Why Fonda Speedway, so modestly placed in New York's Mohawk Valley, is unlike any of the 1400 other short tracks in the United States and why we would be writing a book about its history.

Perhaps it stems from the quirky way some farmers staked out a horse-racing track alongside the river in 1868. Or possibly from the decision 50 years ago to bring in NASCAR's Sportsman division for Saturday night stock car racing. Or maybe it is just the traditions of the place—and the way even today the aging grandstand seems to murmur whispers of distant summer nights past. For whatever reasons, the fairgrounds at Fonda represent a microcosm of the historical lineage of motorsports for the last three-quarters of a century.

More than anything else, however, Fonda is a celebration of people—drivers, owners, crews, officials, and fans—who shaped its legacy. Several of these people, including Kenny Shoemaker, Pete Corey, Lou Lazzaro, Don Wayman, Lee Millington, and Don Stumpf died in the months immediately preceding our decision to write this book. Their passing motivated us to get out there before it was too late. History has a statute of limitations, taking Bruce Craig, John Bacon, Jack Blackwood, and Tommy Wilson Jr. even as we were writing about them.

The book you are holding would not have been possible but for the late Shoemaker. Kenny's autobiography showed us how much interest there is in this type of work. More importantly, however, The Shoe taught us how to write this book. His autobiography was successful because it spun yarns and tales. Readers, we learned, want personal stories, not just statistics. So it is our hope that when you finish reading this book, you'll not only know the history of Fonda Speedway but feel like you know personally the likes of Steve Danish, Bill Wimble, Lou Lazzaro, Dave Lape, Jack Johnson, and all the other greats who have called Fonda Speedway their home. It is through their eyes that we have told this story. We interviewed hundreds of people and sifted through scores of photo collections to try to get this thing right. A picture of every driver who has won a modified/sportsman main event is included, and we've profiled just

about every heavy hitter who has graced its grounds. Our research turned up race results and events that have never been written about before.

To thank everyone who made this project a reality would itself be a 200-page undertaking. However, special thanks must go to three people who have been involved since the very beginning. Jim Rigney, editor of Shoemaker's *They Called me 'The Shoe,'* has once again brought to the table his considerable experience in book making as well as his passion for dirt racing. In no way could this complicated endeavor have been completed without his calm and guiding hand as our respected editor. Michelle Field, too, deserves major credit for cheerfully word processing at least 25 developmental drafts of the various chapters as they bounced endlessly back and forth between the authors. And we are equally grateful to MaryRose Moskell, who has choreographed the effort administratively and is the ever-pleasant phone voice of our racing book division.

We owe special thanks to our talented design and production staff. Sandra Rigney designed the book. Joyce Wells designed the cover. Meredith Gertz copyedited the manuscript. Jackie Davies scanned the photos and typeset the pages. Caroline Boyd prepared the Appendix manuscript. MaryRose Moskell created the index. Cary Stratton Boyd and Sandra Rigney proofed the pages.

We also owe our sincere thanks to Tom Boggie, John Canfield, Bruce Cohen, Les King, and Phlan Hart, who contributed text; Ed and Betty Biittig, John Grady, P.J. Hollebrand, who were statistical and anecdotal treasure troves; Ed and Ramona Feuz and Bill Williams (and his amazing, now classic book, *Mohawk Magic*), our guides to the early years; Alberta Oakley, Jake Sammons, and the rest of the Fonda Fair Board. In addition, we'd like to thank the following people for their support on this book:

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We wish also to express our gratitude to everyone quoted in the text and the sidebars because each one went the extra mile to help capture Fonda's story—and to everyone photo-credited herein, as they, too, responded generously with time and interest. (Our attitude throughout was to use photographs of historical significance even if their condition meant that they might not reproduce perfectly.) Finally, thanks go to the *Amsterdam Recorder* and the *Leader-Herald* for use of their microfilm libraries and to the *Gator Racing News* and the DIRT Hall of Fame for use of their photo libraries.

On behalf of all of us, happy 50th, Fonda! And here's to 50 more.

April 2002

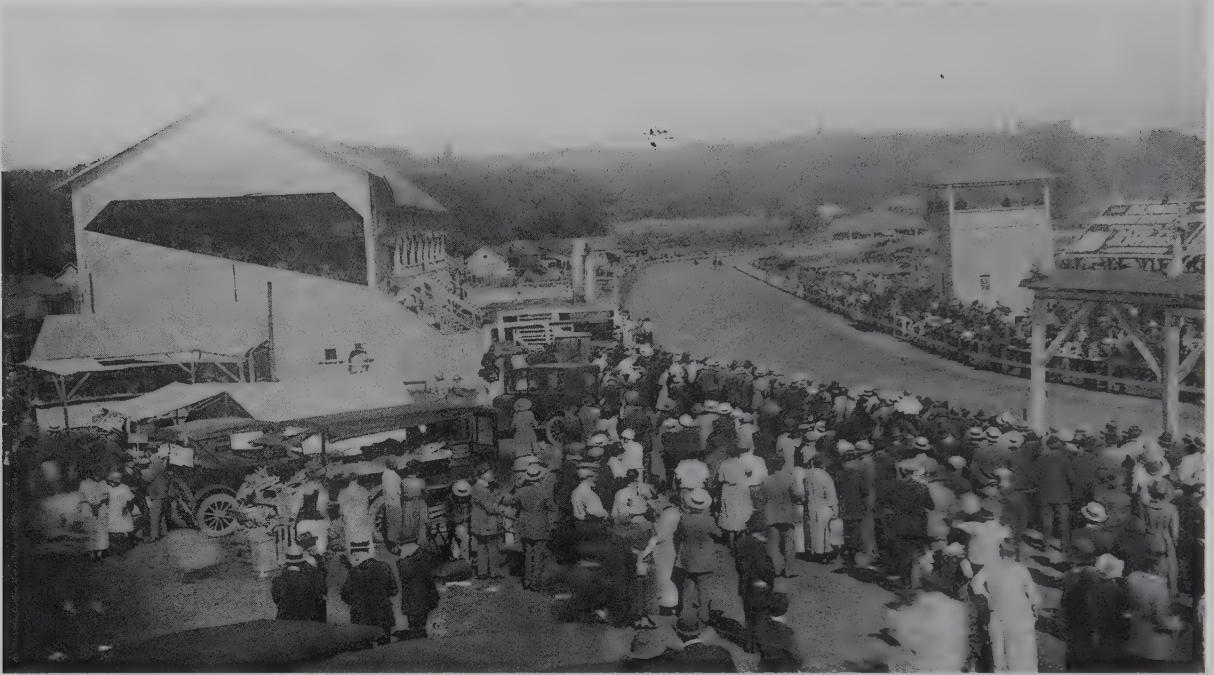
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FONDA!





And down the stretch they come... Harness horses turn for home in this Fonda Fair photo from about 1924. Evident are many of the track's early 1920s improvements, including a new grandstand section, the widening and guardrailing of the track, and a new finish line judges' tower. Approximately three years after this shot was taken, Fonda would host its first auto race. (Photo courtesy of the Montgomery County Department of History, Volkert B. Veeder archivist.)

The Fonda grandstand in 1968. Although it appears to be one long structure, the covered grandstand was built in three sections over a seventy-year time span. The different phases of construction can be discerned from the different roof lines. (Ed Feuz Collection)



In the Beginning: **1** *1927 to 1952*

THE RELEASE DATE OF THIS BOOK IN 2002 is intended to coincide with the 50th anniversary of continuous Saturday night weekly racing at Fonda Speedway.

But, truth be told, they've been racing at Fonda a lot longer than 50 years. The first auto race at the Fonda Fairgrounds occurred in 1927. Moreover, in 1948, an aborted season of NASCAR-modified weekly races was slated at Fonda.

Early motor racing at the track was part of the annual Fonda Fair. The fair featured agricultural exhibitors from Montgomery County; Fonda was the county seat. The first Fonda Fair was held in 1841. The exposition was conducted at several temporary sites in the Mohawk Valley until 1863, when a permanent site back in Fonda was purchased by the fair board on grounds that presently house Fonda Speedway. Once it owned its own property, the fair society began making improvements to enhance the fair's appeal.

The half-mile dirt oval was constructed in 1868. The first races on it were conducted during that autumn's fair on October 7-9, 1868. They consisted of a quarter-mile (half-lap) running race for men, a half-mile (one lap) gallop for saddled horses, and one-mile (two lap) races for trotters pulling sulkies. From day one, the track had an unusual configuration, such that the front and back straight-aways were not parallel to one another.

Construction of Fonda's signature covered grandstand, overlooking the half-mile oval, began in 1876. To the casual observer, Fonda's wooden grandstand looks like one long structure. In reality, it is three equi-distant segments, built in three phases over time. The westerly portion was built in 1876, the center section was built in about 1920, and the easterly side was erected in about 1947. The

easiest way to distinguish each of the three phases is by looking at their varied roof lines.

For its first half-century of life, the half-mile track's use was primarily equine. But in 1924, the track was widened and improved. Soon, Fonda fair board members were considering the possibility of racing horseless carriages. Car racing had become a popular new attraction at several other fairs in the East.

The first-ever automobile races at what is now Fonda Speedway were held September 9–10, 1927, as part of fair week. The contestants drove “big cars,” the era's term for what we presently think of as sprint cars. Big cars were also what raced in the Indianapolis 500 back then. A reported eight cars and their touring professional drivers participated. Friday, September 9, 1927 was for practice and time trials. Heats and a feature were conducted the next afternoon.

A very well-known racer at the time named Bob Robinson of Daytona Beach, Florida was the first-ever Fonda feature winner. The Saturday, September 10, 1927 main event lasted 20 dusty laps and was sanctioned by The Contest Board of The American Automobile Association (AAA). The AAA also sanctioned Indy. Robinson set Fonda's first official track record, 31.40 seconds, in his Dusenbergs Special. Today's DIRT modifieds circle the Fonda oval in 19 seconds.

The big cars returned to Fonda on September 7–8, 1928. A company called United Automobile Racing Association (UARA) promoted Fonda's 1927 and 1928 dates. UARA, which staged race meets at numerous fairs in the East, disbanded after the 1928 season. Famed racer-turned-promoter, Ralph Hankinson, picked up several ex-UARA dates for 1929, but Fonda wasn't one of them.

Following a year's hiatus, big car racing promoted by Hankinson resumed at the Fonda Fair as a one-day program on September 4, 1930. Like the 1928 show, the '30 race was a crash fest. Newspaper accounts of the 1928 and 1930 events concentrated on detailing the many wrecks, without bothering to identify the race winner. And many of the AAA records prior to 1931, including those of the Fonda races, have been destroyed. Hence, there is no known account of the Fonda winners in 1928 and 1930, much less confirmation whether those 20-lap features were run to completion, due to the accidents.

In 1931, the Fonda Fair was moved back one week on the calendar. This change created a scheduling conflict with other fairs in the region, and no auto racing date could be secured.

For 1932, the big cars were back at Fonda, but the results were disastrous. The contestants for the 1932 event were locals, organized by Gloversville racer Bill Troutwine. Rain postponed the race's running from fair time in September until October 23rd. The local drivers proved no match for the tricky Fonda oval. In time trials, Wes Sleezer of Mayfield lost control of his car and hit a tree, losing three



Bob Robinson of Daytona Beach, Florida swept the first auto race meet in Fonda history. He set fast time of 31.40 seconds in time trials on September 9, 1927, and won the 20-lap feature the following day. (Bruce Craig Collection, Kirkpatrick photo)

teeth in the process. In a heat race, Leo LaSalle of Rome hurtled through the flimsy horse track fencing on turn two and sank in the Mohawk River. Other drivers stopped their cars on the track and dove in to pull the unconscious LaSalle from the wreckage. The near-drowning victim was hospitalized in critical condition, but he survived. In the 10-lap feature, Butch Moore of Schenectady broke through the backstretch fence, ending up inches from the drink.

The 1932 debacle ended racing at Fonda until a 1937–39 revival by promoter Roy Peugh. The Capital District businessman had been the autoracing promoter at the esteemed Albany-Schenectady County Fairgrounds in Altamont. But in '37, when Altamont's fair board members decided to promote their races themselves, Peugh was trackless. He turned west to Fonda.

Mindful of the 1932 fiasco, Peugh commissioned a life saving boat from Troy Army Troop G to anchor in waters adjacent to Fonda's turn two during the 1937 fair race. Fortunately, the boat's crew wasn't called into action. With safety issues now seemingly less of a concern, another promoter named Earnest Allen tried to lease Fonda for a sprint car race on October 9, 1937, but the fair board rejected the idea, noting that a race was already scheduled for that very day at the nearby Fulton-Hamilton County Fairgrounds in Gloversville (on Fifth Avenue, where Wal-Mart is presently located).

Peugh returned as Fonda's promoter for sprint races September 10, 1938 and September 9, 1939. Like his 1937 event, these races were scheduled the Saturday afternoon immediately following the fair's official closing on Friday night. His 1937 event was topped by a 20-lap feature. The headliners in 1938 and 1939 were 30-lappers.

The 1938 race drew anemic paid attendance, which Peugh described as "poor" in his official report to AAA. He dropped the sanction for 1939 (saving fifty bucks in the process). The 1939 race drew a huge crowd—albeit freebies. Newspaper accounts described massive traffic jams on Riverside Drive in Fultonville and on the Mohawk River bridge. Both thoroughfares were clogged by cars and pedestrians, who watched the races without having to purchase a grandstand ticket.

Just as in 1932, the 1939 race was marred by a mishap in the Mohawk. During time trials driver Eddie Morgan crashed outside turn two and submerged. His car was fished out of the water and returned to running condition by feature time. During the main event, Morgan again lost it in turn two and slammed into a tree on the river bank. Had it not been for the tree, he'd surely have gotten wet again.

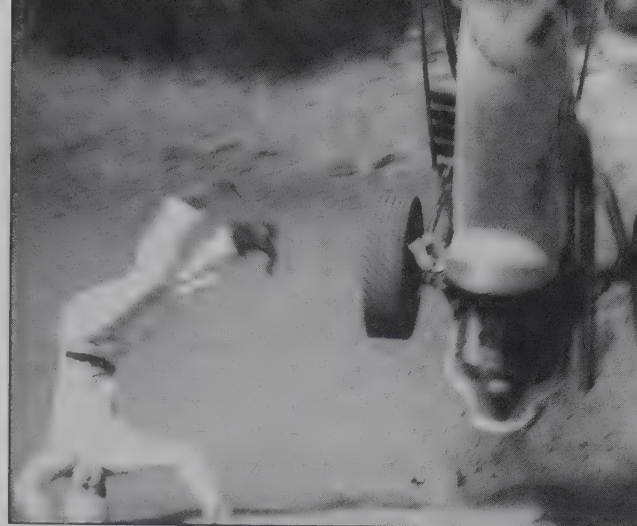
In all, four serious wrecks occurred in that treacherous Fonda turn two during the 1939 race. Ironically, the freebies in Fultonville had a better view of the accidents than did the paying spectators in the grandstand, according to Montgomery County assistant historian Harold Moore. He was 10 years old during that 1939 race and watched with his family from Riverside Drive. Moore vividly recalls seeing Morgan's car go into the river, but more vividly recalls the smell. "The whole area would smell of methanol," he says of the alky-burning sprinters.

As if the lack of paying spectators and the constant threat of the river weren't enough, Peugh had to endure a poor car-count. He advertised 22 entrants for the 1939 event, and 10 racers showed up. That 1939 fiasco would be Peugh's final Fonda production.

Two other would-be promoters made proposals to conduct racing at Fonda immediately after Peugh's exit, according to the meeting minutes of the fair board. In April 1940, a man named Bennett made a pitch to conduct a schedule of summer races at the fairgrounds. And in July 1941, an unidentified gentleman made a presentation to hold car racing. But nothing came of either proposal, and the "big car era" at Fonda had come to an end.

Big car feature winners in Fonda's early years included some very famous drivers like Bob Robinson, Bill Troutwine, Johnny Ulesky, Freddy Carpenter, and Lee Wallard.

Robinson was a real barnstormer, racing all over the United States. The Florida native died on July 27, 1930 when his car sailed out of the Woodbridge (New Jersey) board track. The board tracks

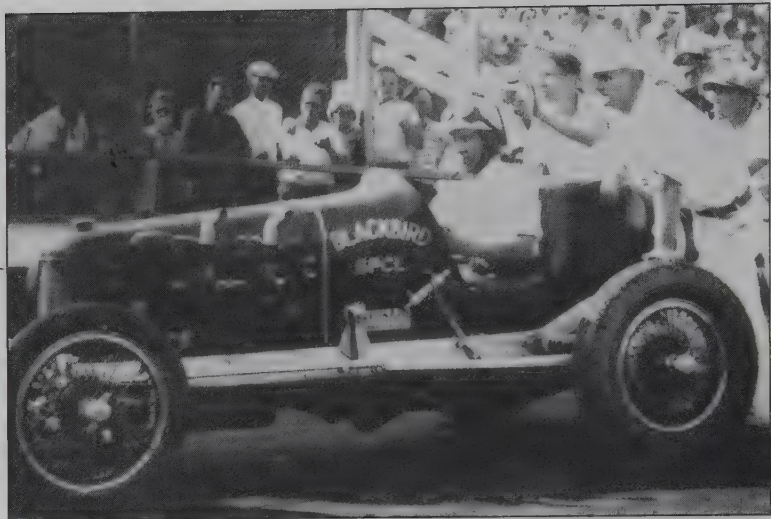


were America's original superspeedways. They were made entirely of wood, with the corners banked at incredible angles, sometimes in excess of 50 degrees. According to Allan Brown, publisher of the *National Speedway Directory*, board tracks were born of necessity. Early dirt tracks were too dusty and early macadam wasn't strong enough to withhold the torque of a race car. Thus, wooden tracks were the only raceplants that made for ideal spectator viewing. The high-banked board tracks produced huge speeds and numerous casualties. It was the Woodbridge death of Robinson, a highly popular driver, that is generally considered as the single act that resulted in the demise of the board tracks, claims *National Speed Sport News*' Chris Economaki.

In retrospect, it is mind-boggling to contemplate just how ridiculously unsafe early auto racing was. The cars provided the driver no rollover protection and just a loose leather lap belt; the gruesome sight of a racer being hurled from his car was an all-too-common sight during the "big car" era. And for spectators it was worse. Thin wooden horse rails were all that separated them from the speeding autos. At an early event on the Syracuse mile, a race car tore through the fencing and killed 11 eleven spectators. No wonder that for a time, auto racing in America was outlawed by order of President Theodore Roosevelt, himself, ironically, an avid auto racing fan.

Hailing from nearby Gloversville, Troutwine was the first racing star to ever emerge from the immediate Fonda area. Troutwine won the track's 1932 race, setting a one-lap record of 29.50 seconds in the process. He also won countless open cockpit races at numerous speedways east of the Mississippi in the 1920s and the 1930s. Troutwine and a trio of rivals—Bill Schindler, Bill Morrissey, and Bill Holmes—were successfully touted by promoters as "The Four Bills." Sadly, he was unable to capitalize on this racing success later in life and died a poor man, according to Economaki, who notes that

Auto racing was dangerous and unsafe in the early decades. On the left, Bob Robinson died in this gruesome 1930 wreck at the Woodbridge, New Jersey board track. Experts say the death of the highly popular Florida star brought an end to the board track era in America. On the right, 25 years later, Indianapolis veteran Johnny Thomson is hurled from his flipping sprint car at Williams Grove, Pennsylvania. Thomson and the car took different paths and he would walk away this day with minor injuries. A few years later the Lowell, Massachusetts, driver would die in a sprint car crash at Allentown, Pennsylvania. (left, Craig Collection; right, Gater News Archival Photo)



Bill Troutwine (left) won Fonda's 1932 Fair race.

Troutwine hailed from Gloversville, New York, just eight miles north of Fonda, and was the first race driver from the immediate area to gain widespread fame.

(Craig Collection)

Johnny Ulesky (right) won the 1938 Fonda Fair race and was a top car builder in his time.

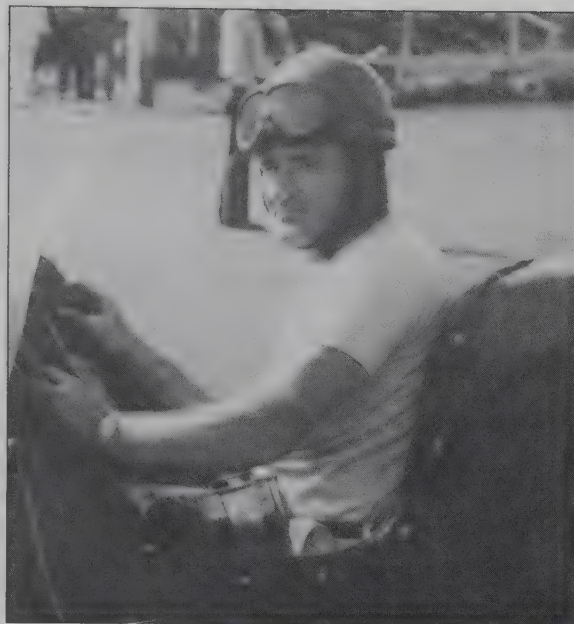
Ulesky, now 91, is a life-long resident of Newark, New Jersey. (Craig Collection)

Troutwine succumbed in a pauper's hospital in New York City. Economaki also says that Schindler claimed the body in order to give Troutwine a decent burial

Ulesky, age 91, lives in Newark, New Jersey. He still fondly remembers his 1938 Fonda sprint car win, which followed a tight battle with Leon Warren and Amos Hill. Ulesky set a track record of 29.00 seconds in time trials that day. "Fonda was a typical fair-grounds half-mile horse track," recalls Ulesky, "and the races were dusty affairs." Fonda's "guard" rails were thin wooden plank fences, which shattered into dangerous projectiles when struck by a race car, according to Ulesky. Back then, Fonda's track ran downhill in turn two toward the river and uphill in turn three, which explains why turn two was so dangerous. Also, it was almost impossible for fans to see the cars on the back straightaway, because the raised infield obscured view, says Ulesky.

Carpenter, who won Fonda's 1939 sprint race, had a promising career cut short by fate. Carpenter's ability caught the attention of famous open wheeler Ted Horn of Patterson, New Jersey. Horn was the 1946, 1947, and 1948 AAA National Champion. He put Carpenter in a team car and the Albany racer appeared destined for greatness. But in 1948, Horn and Carpenter were returning home from a race at Charlotte, North Carolina when they were involved in a highway crash. Carpenter's left leg was shattered, with fractures in 37 places, according to racing historian Les King. "Doctors gave Freddy a choice: they could set his leg permanently bent, or permanently straight," says King. The former would allow him to continue driving. The latter would not. "Freddy chose straight and that ended his career," according to King, who was a personal friend of the late Carpenter.

Wallard, of course, would become a household name in racing



circles not long after his 1937 Fonda win. He copped the 1951 Indianapolis 500 and nearly became Fonda's chief steward in 1953, as we shall discuss in the next chapter.

Immediately following World War II, midgets replaced sprint cars as standard short track fare in the North. Midgets usually ran on quarter-mile asphalt ovals. The half-mile dirt at Fonda was considered unsuitable.

But by 1947 a new type of motorsport was catching on in the Northeast: stock car racing. Stock cars—as the name suggests—were passenger cars, taken off the road and stripped for racing. Stock car racing had been a fan favorite down South since the 1930s, while midgets prevailed up North. But the midgets were dying due to increasing car costs and decreasing grandstand attendance. Promoters felt that if stock cars could compete on the little asphalt midget ovals that populated the North, a new cash cow was in the offing.

On October 26, 1947, New Rochelle, New York promoter Bill Tuthill hosted an experimental stock car race on the one-third mile paved Lonsdale, Rhode Island midget stadium. With heavy hitters Bill France Sr. and Ed Otto looking on, the event—won by Georgia's Fonty Flock in Red Vogt's #14—was a triumph. The low-cost coupes and sedans made for an impressive car count. The slam-bang nature of the game was a hit with fans.

Buoyed by the success of the Rhode Island show, promoters and racers from up and down the East Coast hastened to formally organize their new sport. France and 34 other pioneers convened at the Streamline Hotel in Daytona Beach, Florida on December 14, 1947,

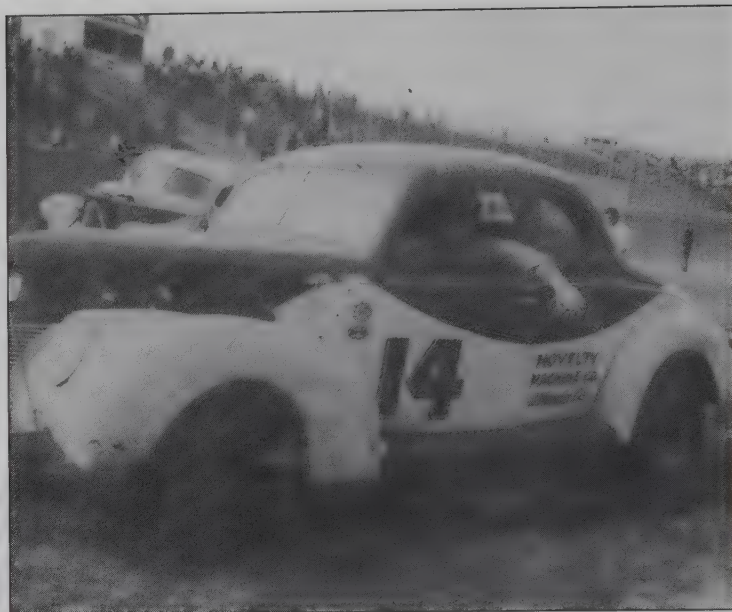
Fred Carpenter (left) won the final race of Fonda's big car era, a 30-lapper, in 1939.

Carpenter was on the fast track to Indy as part of Ted Horn's team, when a highway crash cut short his career.

(Les King Photo by McDowell)

Although he never won a Fonda feature race, Johnstown's Mike Zilka (right) was a consistent top five runner during the track's big car era. Zilka was also an outstanding motorcycle racer and is reputed to have won some motorcycle races at Fonda.

(Andy Fusco Collection, Frank Smith photo)



A pair of breakthrough races in 1946 and 1947 played a pivotal role in both the evolution of stock car racing in the Northeast and the opening of Fonda to stock cars in 1948. Roy Hall (left) motors around traffic to win at the Allentown, Pennsylvania, Fairgrounds on July 4, 1946. Fonty Flock (right) pulls into victory lane after winning at the Lonsdale, Rhode Island, midget track on October 26, 1947. Both Hall and Flock drove cars numbered 14, owned by Red Vogt and sponsored by Parks Novelty Machine Company of Atlanta, Georgia. (left, Eddie Samples Collection; right, R.A. Silvia Collection)

to establish the National Association for Stock Car Automobile Racing—NASCAR.

Consequently, the history books generally consider Lonsdale, Rhode Island as the birthplace of northern stock car racing. Alas, the history books are wrong.

A 200-mile stock car race had been tried at Langhorne, Pennsylvania in 1940, but World War II soon intervened. After the War, some fairgrounds horse tracks up North toyed with the notion of stock cars on dirt. When 10,000 people packed the Allentown (Pennsylvania) Fairgrounds for a special 100-lap (50-mile) stock car race on July 4, 1946—won by Atlanta's Roy Hall, who was also the 1940 Langhorne winner—it got the attention of Jack Kochman.

Kochman was a wily, but respected, motorsports maven. He had promoted several midget races but was better known for his automobile thrill show called "The Jack Kochman Hell Drivers." The Hell Drivers were a popular grandstand attraction at county and state fairs throughout the East. Kochman knew fairs and fair people. So while France and associates were waiting to see if stock cars were appropriate for paved bullrings, Kochman was already moving forward with plans to form a northern stock car tour of fairground dirt tracks.

Backed by a group of New York City venture capitalist lawyers, Kochman created the Speed Corporation of America (SCOA). His thrill show background gave him valuable influence with fair boards when the SCOA sought to negotiate stock car leases. Soon Kochman had contracts with six northeastern fairgrounds, including Fonda, to present a full season of weekly stock car racing in 1948.



Meanwhile, NASCAR was incorporating on February 21, 1948. For 1948 it would sanction only one division, called "modified stock cars." The oxymoron was a reference to rules that allowed a racer to modify the engine of an otherwise stock coupe or coach. Kochman immediately obtained a NASCAR sanction for his fledgling SCOA circuit of fairground ovals in Allentown; Kingston, Rhode Island; Lewiston, Maine; Fonda; Palmyra (near Rochester); and Dover, New Jersey. Hence, Fonda became a charter member of NASCAR. The 1948 Fonda schedule was to have been 16 consecutive Friday nights headlined by modified stock cars. When car counts in the modifieds at Fonda soon became a problem, Kochman tried to secure local "hot rods" as a support class.

It had been customary for midgets to run several times in a row. Often, a midget driver could race eight times a week, every night, plus twice on Sunday. Jack Kochman mistakenly believed he could create a similar schedule for stock cars. Kochman got commitments from several of the top drivers of the day, including many Southerners like Frank "Rebel" Mundy of Atlanta, Lewis "Buddy" Shuman of Charlotte, and Bill Snowden of St. Augustine, Florida.

It was an easy sell, according to Mundy. Down South, stock car racing was a once-a-week proposition. For throttle jockeys eager to race, Kochman's six-night-a-week circuit seemed too good to be true.

Alas, had the racers studied a map, none of them in their right mind would have agreed to Kochman's plan. The tour's weekly geography was an inhuman grind. It started Tuesday nights in Allentown. Then it was five hours up to Rhode Island for

Probably the most important meeting in auto racing history occurred at the Streamline Hotel in Daytona Beach, Florida, on December 14, 1947. Bill France Sr. (center, seated) conducts the meeting of 35 movers and shakers who would form the National Association of Stock Car Auto Racing (NASCAR). In 1948, Fonda became a charter NASCAR member. (Samples Collection)

Wednesdays, followed by another long haul up to Maine for Thursday night's Lewiston race. Then it was nearly 10 hours back to Fonda for Friday. Fonda to Palmyra was the shortest hike, a mere four hours on Saturday. Then it was all night to Dover, New Jersey for Sunday. Mind you, the racers and officials were expected to make this same swing every week for four consecutive months. And this was before the days of Interstate highways.

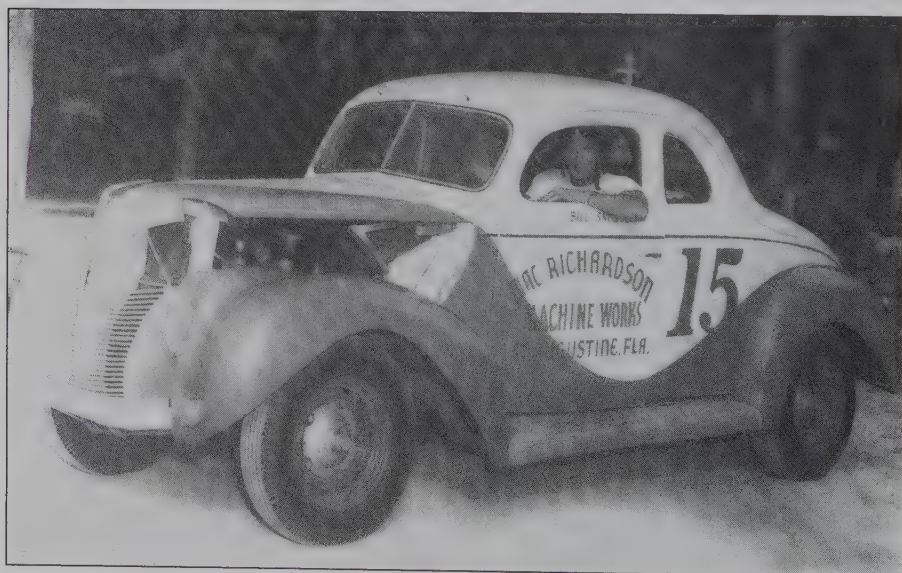
"It was brutal," acknowledges Mundy. "We'd have to tow all night and part of the next day. My mechanic and I would take turns driving and sleeping in the backseat." Kochman's drivers seldom got to sleep in a motel, almost never ate a square meal, and didn't even get to shower. "We'd carry soap and towels with us and stop in a filling station and wash up in the men's room," says Mundy, who still lives in Atlanta, retired at age 83. "You wouldn't want to have stood down wind of me."

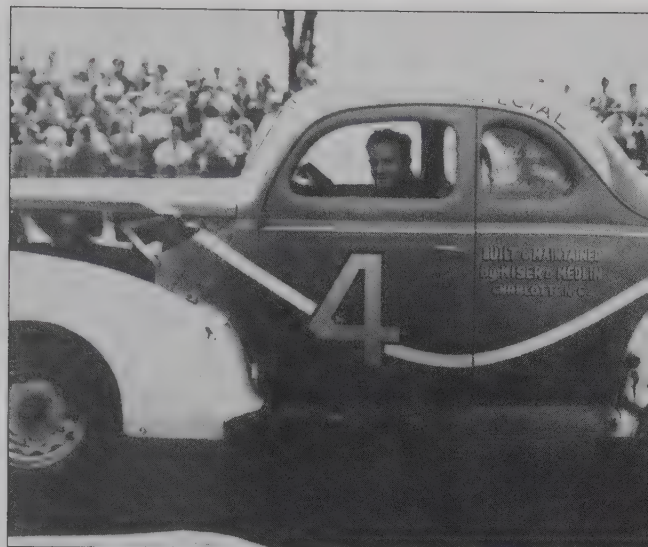
The SCOA hired a top-flight crew of traveling officials, including announcer Jimmy Roberts of Florida and flagger Craig Mellinger of New Jersey. The chief steward was New Jersey's Bob Sall, who would play a role at Fonda for decades to come.

The first stock car race ever at Fonda was scheduled for Friday night, May 21, 1948. It was an inclement day and at 6 p.m. officials canceled the event. The rainout was a precursor of doom to come.

The following Friday evening, May 28, 1948, saw good weather and a large crowd. Unfortunately, only seven modifieds showed up. Sall told the press that the short field was due to a nine-car wreck in Allentown on Tuesday and four drivers being arrested in Maine on Thursday for vehicular violations. While many teams used to tow bar their stock cars from track to track, some simply drove the racers on the highway, to the consternation of police. Because of the

Florida's Bill Snowden poses with his new #15 prior to the start of the 1948 season.
(Samples Collection)





small field, the May 28, 1948 Fonda show also was canceled. Star drivers Shuman and Snowden got on Fonda's public address system and urged fans to be patient, promising a full field the following week. The fans were given rain checks and as they filed out, five more race cars arrived, too late to salvage the event.

Stock car racing as we now know it at Fonda was finally born on Friday, June 4, 1948. Twenty NASCAR modifieds signed in. However, only a handful of the "hot rods" came, and that support class was scrapped after one show. A light rain fell in the early evening. However, mindful of fan discontent over the two previous cancellations, Kochman decided that the show must go on.

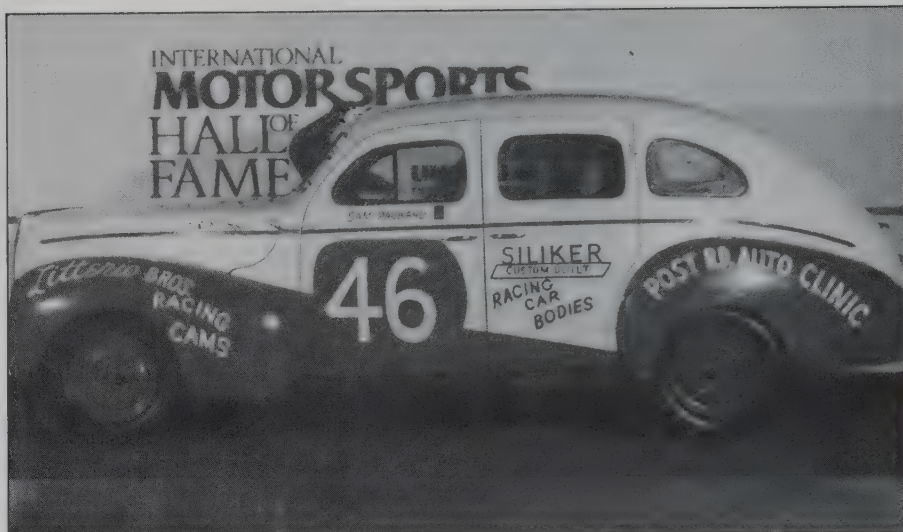
The first heat was green flagged at 8:45. Mundy won it in his 1938 Ford coupe, becoming the first-ever stock car winner in Fonda history. Other preliminaries went to Long Island driver Joe Ledegar, New Jersey teenage wildman Wally Campbell, and Shuman.

Shuman won the 15-lap main event in seven minutes and 58.31 seconds, becoming the first Fonda modified feature winner in history. Shuman drove a red, white, and blue alcohol-powered 1939 Ford coupe #4. Second and third went to Campbell's #90 and Johnny Rogers' #89, team blue and orange 1939 Ford coupes owned by Patterson, New Jersey's W.O. Taylor. Rhode Island star Sammy Packard edged Maine standout Ken Littlefield for fourth. The car Packard drove that night, a red and white 1940 Mercury four-door sedan #46, still exists and is housed in the International Speedway Museum in Talladega, Alabama.

Packard, 82, now lives in Daytona Beach. Not only did he race for Kochman, but he was the SCOA's "advance man," arriving in town early for every event to hang advertising banners and posters. Packard was also Shuman's closest friend and travel mate. "Buddy

Fonda's first-ever stock car winners. Frank "Rebel" Mundy (left) poses with his 1938 Ford coupe after a win at Kingston, Rhode Island. Mundy won the first Fonda heat on June 4, 1948. Buddy Shuman (right), shown in the red, white, and blue #4 modified, won the first Fonda feature race later that night. Legend has it that Buddy used this coupe to haul moonshine and outrun the law before making it into a race car. (left, Silva Collection; right, Samples Collection)

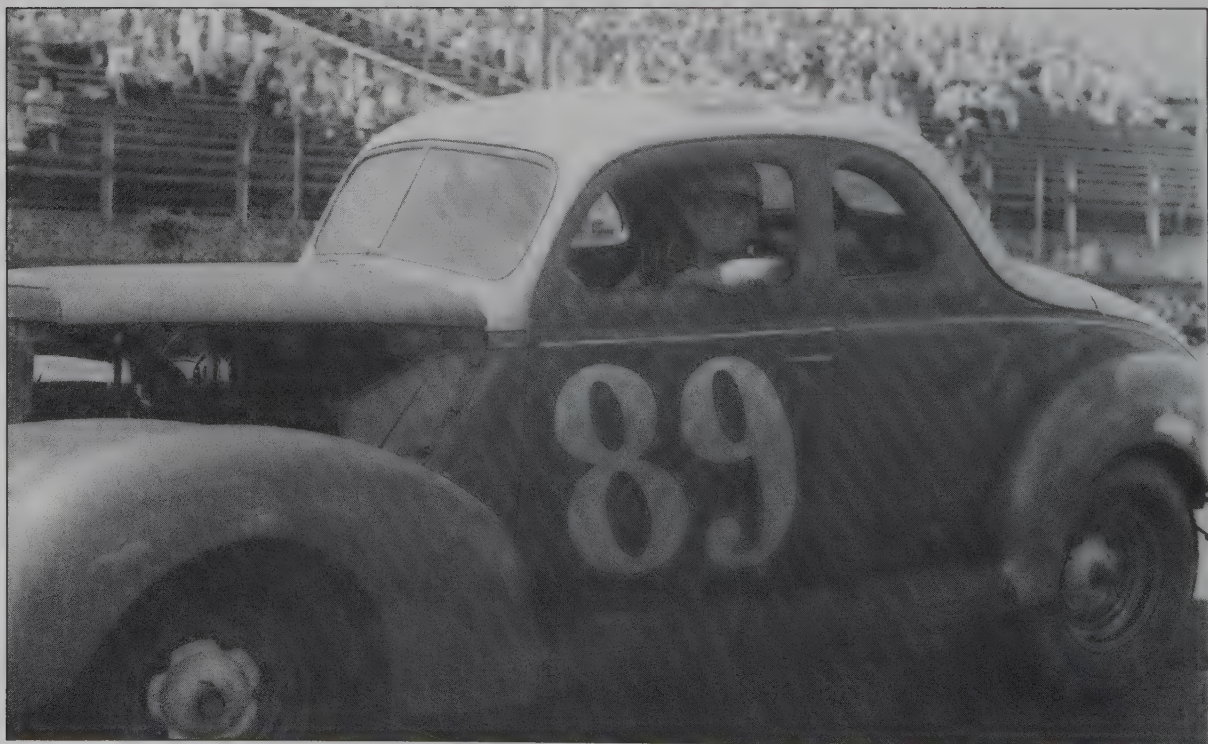
Rhode Island's Sammy Packard drove this Mercury sedan to a fourth-place finish in the first-ever Fonda modified feature. Today, it is enshrined in the famed racing museum in Talladega, Alabama. The car was street legal and Packard would drive it from race to race. (photo courtesy of the International Motorsports Hall of Fame and Museum.)



Johnny Rogers, pictured below in the W.O. Taylor pristine #89, would later become an official at the Flemington Fair Speedway. (Craig Collection)

and I opened our pay envelopes together after that first Fonda race,” laughs Packard. “He got \$125 for winning. For finishing fourth and being the advance man, I got \$150.

“Buddy won easily, because he had the best equipment,” Packard says. “Buddy was a bootlegger and he had built a very fast car to haul moonshine and outrun the revenuers. He just painted it and put a number on it and it became a race car. A very good race car.”

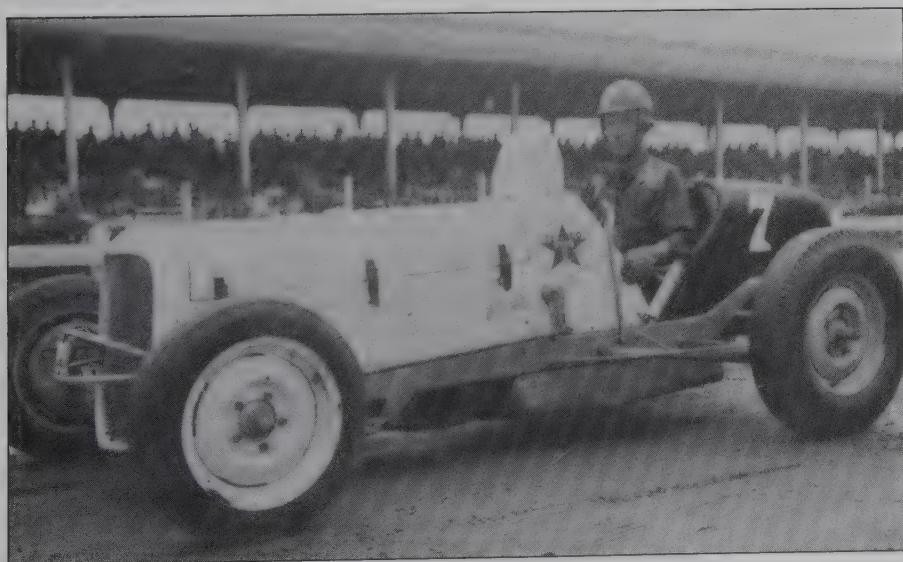


The “hot rods,” local Model A and Model T cut-down roadsters that ran regularly at tracks in Canajoharie (just west of what is now Thruway exit 29) and near Schenectady (on Spring Road), only ran one heat and a feature on Fonda’s historic first night. Canajoharie’s Bob Whitbeck, who would go on to become a Fonda phenom, won the heat in his #7. Newspaper accounts credit the hot rod feature win to an Al Noakes of Canajoharie, but that may be a pseudonym or a typographical error, since no one in the area can remember a driver named Al Noakes. In any event, due to the slim car count, the hot rods weren’t invited back the following week.

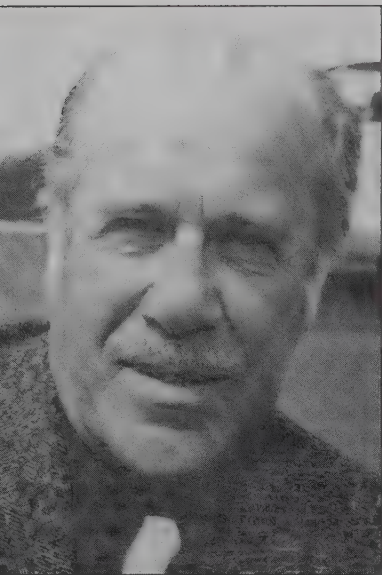
The announced crowd for that first stock car race in Fonda history was 4,000—which was preposterous, considering the place only had about 2,000 seats. One of the spectators was Orville “Bud” Countryman, who would later serve as a Fonda official for 36 years. “The crowd was just fair, maybe three-quarters of the covered



This 1949 photo taken at Hemlock, New York, typifies the cut-down “hot rods.” Ironically, Ed Feuz drove these cars before becoming Fonda’s promoter. (Bob Chaddock Collection, Len Campage photo, courtesy of Don Radbruch)



Before he became a famed stock car builder/owner, Bob Whitbeck was a successful hot rod driver. This July, 1948 photo was taken at Williams Grove, Pennsylvania. A month earlier, this car carried Whitbeck to a heat win at Fonda. (Carl Sweigart Collection, courtesy of Don Radbruch)



Jack Kochman was the first stock car racing promoter in Fonda history.
(Fusco Collection)

grandstand, remembers Countryman, age 74, of Canajoharie. "And there weren't any bleachers back then."

Kochman's NASCAR-sanctioned SCOA tour was now only about a month old, but the strains were already evident. "Everybody was just wearing out," admits Packard. "The cars were wore out and so were we. It was just too hard of a circuit."

"At first it seemed like the thing to do", echoes Mundy. Jack Kochman was a real promoter. I thought he might be able to make it work, but with that impossible travel schedule, soon it was obviously just a hare-brained deal."

When the SCOA limped into Fonda on Friday, June 11, 1948, insiders knew that the tour was in trouble and that Fonda was on its last legs. Lousy attendance exacerbated the dilemma. The announced crowd for Fonda's second stock car race ever was 2,200, but observers place the real number at less than a thousand. Inconsistent car counts and dubious cancellations had cost Kochman his credibility in the Fonda market. Shuman repeated as the winner, in a time of seven minutes and 26.99 seconds. He was followed in the 15-lap main event by Campbell, Ledegar, Ben Cannaziario, and Littlefield. Ledegar, Rogers, Littlefield, and Ernie Palmer won preliminaries. Packard missed the second Fonda event because his race car, which he also drove on the highway, blew its motor in Springfield, Massachusetts on the trip down from Maine.

The small crowds at Fonda evidenced another Kochman miscalculation. His premise was that fans would flock to see imported talent. None of the modified drivers who competed at Fonda in 1948 lived within a 150-mile radius of the track. As we now know in short track racing, local drivers bring local fans. Immediately upon conclusion of Fonda's June 11th feature, Sall announced that there would be no more races at the Montgomery County venue until further notice. That notice never came. Within a month the entire SCOA, or "The Kochman Circuit," as it became known, was history. The Southerners went home. Kochman left the walls, fencing, and some lights that he had erected at Fonda in place. Some of the SCOA tracks, like Kingston, Rhode Island, were able to survive because they had built up a core of local drivers. Fonda wasn't as fortunate. However, many of the luminaries from the ill-fated 1948 Fonda season became racing legends.

Shuman returned to Charlotte to compete in the National Stock Car Racing Association (NSCRA) circuit in North Carolina, Tennessee, and Georgia. NSCRA was short-lived. Shuman became NSCRA's national champion in 1948. and later went on to the Grand National (Winston Cup) division, winning one GN race at Niagara Falls, Ontario in 1952. Sadly, the popular Shuman died in a hotel fire in Hickory, North Carolina. in 1955, where he was staying to oversee the Ford factory GN team. The prestigious Buddy Shuman Award,



A victorious Buddy Shuman exits his car in 1948. Notable recipients of NASCAR's prestigious Buddy Shuman Award include Bill Wimble, who earned the distinction in 1964. Note the stock interior of Shuman's racer. By the time Fonda would re-open in 1953, safety rules were stricter: doors were welded shut, glass and flammable upholstery were removed, and roll bars were required. (Samples Collection)

given annually by NASCAR for outstanding contributions in racing, still bears his name.

Campbell, reputed to be one of the most fearless, chance-taking chauffeurs of his era, died in a sprint car practice session at Salem, Indiana, July 17, 1954. He was only 25 years old.

Mundy appeared destined to become a NASCAR standout. But he became estranged from the organization due to a nasty dispute with Bill France Sr., when "Rebel" reportedly got disqualified from an event on the beach course in Daytona for not having a spare tire in his stock car. In 1951 and 1952, he was a stunt driver with the Kochman Hell Drivers (once busting his nose during the Fonda Fair when he came up short on the ramp-to-ramp jump). Mundy was the AAA Late Model National Champion twice: in 1953 driving a factory Hudson and in 1955 driving a Kiekaefer Chrysler 300.

Packard was one of New England's more successful stock car drivers and good-will ambassadors. He is still frequently seen in television documentaries about the history of racing, because he was one of the 35 men who participated in that first-ever organizational meeting of NASCAR in December 194 in Daytona Beach's Streamline Hotel.

New Jersey's 19-year old Wally Campbell was the runner-up to Shuman in both 1948 modified features. Campbell would go on to race Grand Nationals and open wheelers, before being killed in a sprint car in 1954. (Craig Collection)



Following Kochman's departure, the Fonda Fairgrounds languished for four years. Other than the annual Fonda Fair, the track's only other use during that span was as a drive-in theater. The movie screen was mounted on the front of the grandstand, and patrons parked their cars on the pitched infield, facing the stands.

Fonda might never again have become a speedway, but for Ed Feuz.

Although he was a stock car fan, Feuz hadn't attended either of Fonda's 1948 races. Feuz had briefly raced "hot rods" at Floyd Coffey's farm speedway near Esperance prior to going into the service for World War II. When the war ended, he returned home to the Schoharie Valley and started a construction company. He was a frequent spectator at local stock car tracks in Sharon Springs and Brookfield, and dreamed of building his own speedway.

In 1952, at age 30, Feuz formulated a plan to re-open Fonda Speedway. By then, NASCAR had grown tremendously from its meager 1948 roots. Feuz met with Bill France Sr. in February 1952. Impressed by the man and his vision, Feuz became both a France and NASCAR loyalist for life. NASCAR's guaranteed purses and driv-

er insurance, Feuz reasoned, would attract race drivers. This was an era when the purses weren't usually guaranteed. It was all too common to see the promoter drive off during the feature, keeping the gate proceeds for himself and leaving the racers unpaid.

Feuz knew that Fonda's fairgrounds would be an ideal race setting. "That it was laid out right in between those two villages (Fonda and Fultonville)," recalls Feuz, "you didn't feel like you were out in the boondocks somewhere," a definite problem for the rural Brookfield oval, for example, which was the pre-eminent local track at the time. Feuz, a fan of President Dwight Eisenhower's planned interstate highway system, also knew that Fultonville would have its own exit by 1955. As attractive as Fonda's locale seemed, Fuez soon discovered a major roadblock: The Fonda Fair Board didn't want any more auto races on its grounds.

"The (fair) board of directors was controlled by horse people," according to Feuz, "who didn't want anything to do with auto racing." Only one board member, Paul Conway, was initially favorable to motor racing. But that one member gave Feuz the "in" he needed. Following the 1952 county fair, annual elections were held for the 1953 board. Feuz and Conway put together a slate of prominent local fair members, including Sheriff Ralph McLaughlin, Judge Charles Vedder, and Fred Lowe, who all supported car racing and who were willing to challenge the horse-loving incumbents. "Then Paul Conway and I went around to the houses of all the lifetime fair society members who had a vote and got them to sign proxies for our candidates," Feuz continues. The written proxy votes would be legal ballots on election night, even if the members who had signed them didn't attend in person, according to the fair board's by-laws.

"At the election meeting, all the horse people looked around the room, counted noses, and figured they had it won," laughs Feuz. "But when the vote came up, we shoved that pile of proxies on to the table and it changed the entire board." With a favorable board in his pocket, Feuz and his lawyer, Jim Gage Sr., quickly negotiated a lease for the 1953 stock car season. Ironically, Gage, also of Esperance, was more than just Feuz's lawyer. He was a silent 50-50 partner in the new speedway business and it was his legal advice on proxy voting which resulted in the plot to overthrow the existing fair board.

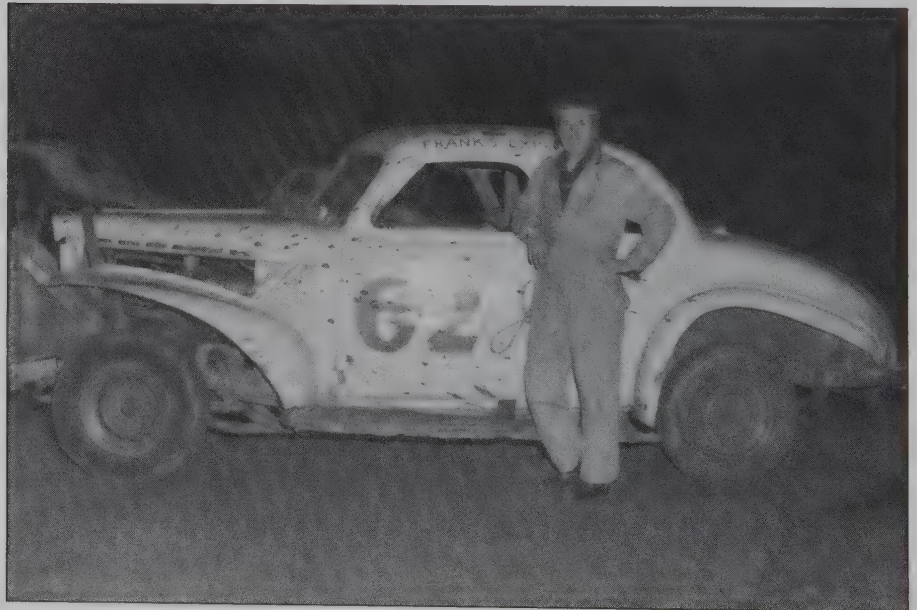
Fuez and his crew worked throughout the fall of 1952 to prepare the facility. The first step was to change the configuration of the backstretch and turn two. Previously, the back straightaway had run directly along the Mohawk River shoreline. Fuez brought the back chute in on a plateau about 40 feet from the river. A new turn two was cut further in from the State Route (30A) to meet up with the new back chute. A precarious wooden wall was erected outside of turn three, in order to separate the track surface from the graveyard of Fonda's early settlers.

Next, Fuez's crew installed a drainage system, catch fences, and additional hub rails. A new lighting system was erected in the spring of 1953, because as Sammy Packard recalls, "Kochman's lighting was awful."

Construction of the speed plant was ongoing during the early Feuz/Gage years. The covered grandstand held 1,860 people (at 18 inches per seat) and existing bleachers in front of the grandstand facilitated another 300. This capacity proved woefully inadequate by mid-1953. So the track bought bleachers for the rest of the front straight from Frank Trinkhaus, co-promoter of the then recently-closed Sidney (New York) Speedway. Trinkhaus would go on to become a Hall of Fame Fonda car owner. A Fonda-record eight different drivers drove Trinkhaus' yellow and blue #62 to Fonda wins from 1956 through 1970. (The Trinkhaus drivers included George Gallup, Steve Danish, Pete Corey, Ken Shoemaker, Jeep Herbert, Irv Taylor, Don Wayman, and Lee Millington.) Additional bleachers, which wound around turn four and turn one, came from Aquinas High School's football field in Rochester in 1955. They sat at the ill-fated Richfield Springs Speedway for its only year of operation as Fonda's sister speedway, before coming to Fonda in 1956.

The earthen fill on which those turn-four bleachers sat came from the track's infield. In the early years, spectator views were obscured by a mound on the infield. Feuz excavated a portion of the hill and moved the earth north to outside of turn four in order to raise the ground beneath the bleachers. Those wooden bleachers served Fonda Speedway until 1997, when the current promoter, Ric Lucia, brought in the aluminum bleachers presently in place and paved the area beneath them.

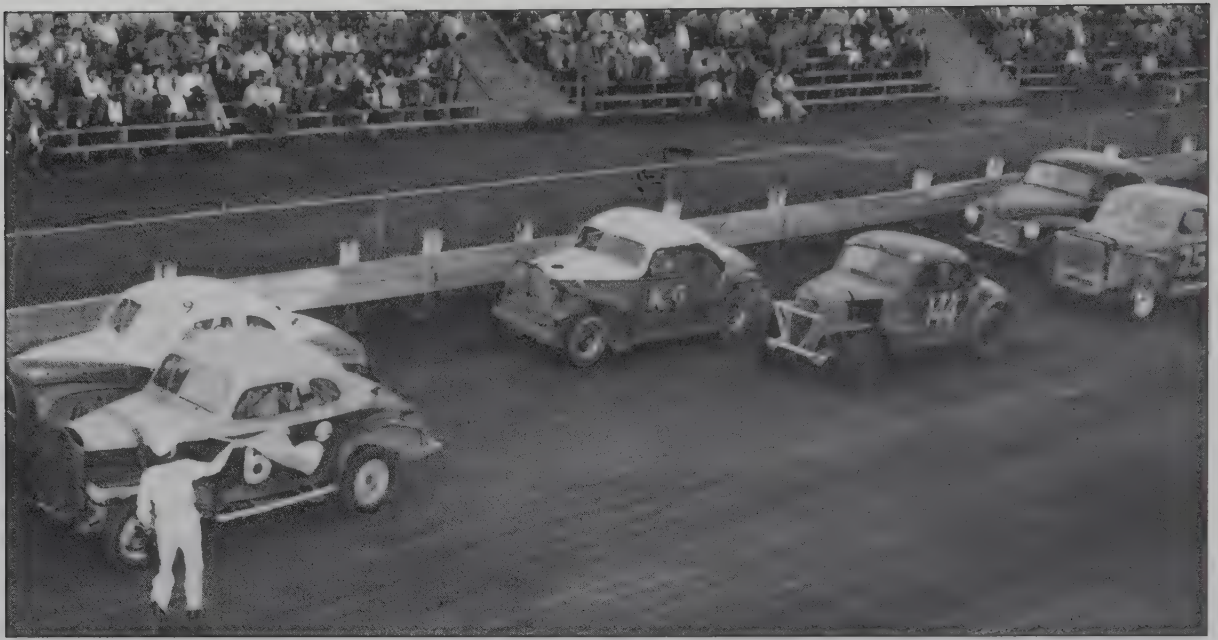
Frank Trinkhaus actually
drove his own #62
before hiring his first
driver, Richfield Springs'
Joe Ciganenko, during
the 1953 season.
(Jim Putnam Collection)



By the time the winter snows of 1952-53 had thawed, Fonda Speedway was ready to host weekly Saturday night stock car racing—for 50 continuous years and beyond.

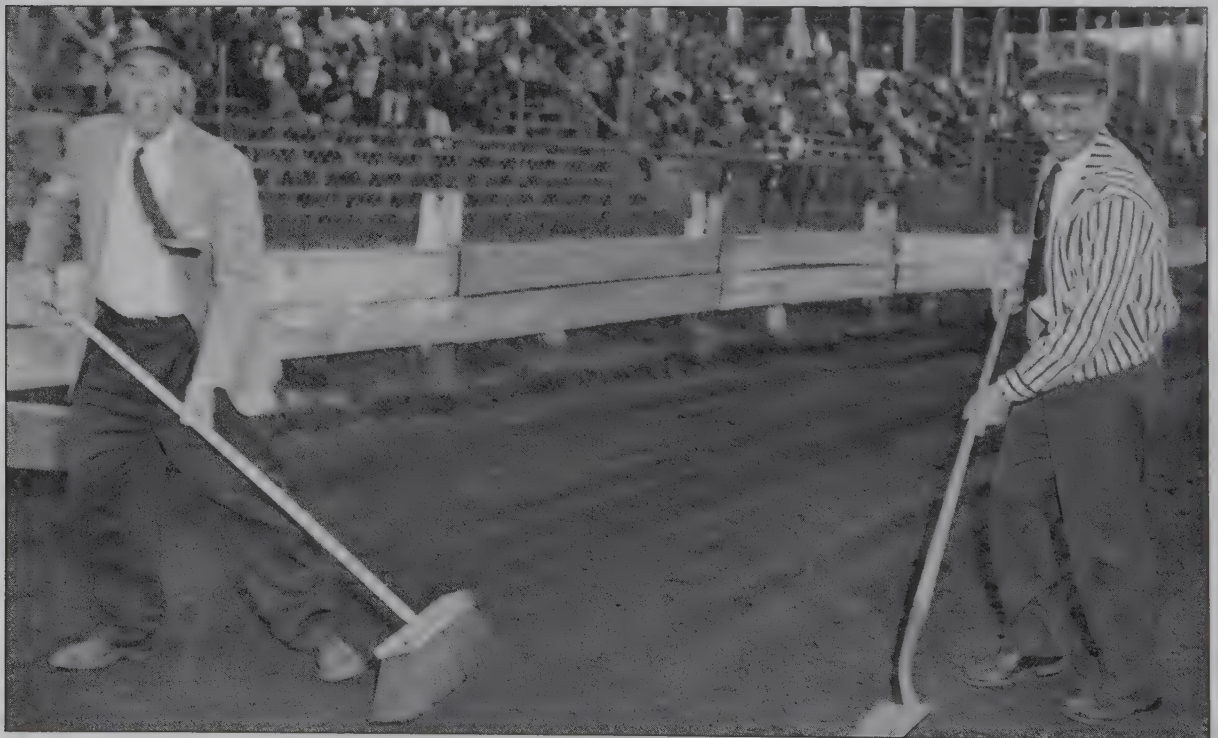


(Feuz Collection)



Legendary starter Chet Hames is close enough to shake hands with Dusty Smith (#6) as he drops the green on this 1954 field. Also pictured are Harold Murphy (#9), Ken DeLong (#K-9), Fred Gerow (#144), Nick Carter (#25), and Jerry Bohling. (Feuz Collection)

Fonda was an immediate success under promoters Ed Feuz (right) and Jim Gage (left), shown here tending to some funny business on the front stretch. (Feuz Collection)

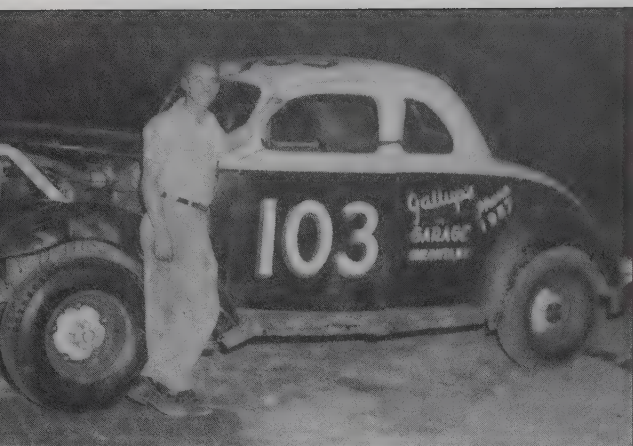


1953 and the Formative Years: The Steve Danish Era **2**

FONDA SPEEDWAY IMMEDIATELY THRIVED under the leadership of Jim Gage and Ed Feuz. Together they made an awesome combo. Gage was one hell of a smart lawyer. He knew it, but he didn't want you to know it. Feuz had been one of Gage's clients. He was a young (thirteen years Gage's junior), aggressive, construction contractor, who loved auto racing and racing people. Each man complemented the other perfectly. One had the mind of a steel trap. The other, the glad hand of some stump politician. But in the beginning, no one outside their immediate partnership could have even known they were a team.

A search of official records in 1953 and 1954 would not have revealed Gage's co-ownership. The Fonda Speedway operation was filed as "Edward G. Feuz doing business as Fonda Speedway," with no mention of Gage's under-the-table co-ownership interest. Fearing liability for a catastrophic racing accident, Gage had wanted to remain quite silent. Feuz protected his assets by putting everything in his wife's name. The Feuz/Gage "partnership" was a handshake deal for two years. In 1955, when they opened Richfield Springs Speedway, they incorporated their business as Thruway Speedways Inc. and Gage's role became public knowledge; he and Feuz were equal shareholders. Thruway Speedways Inc. would hold Fonda Speedway's lease until 1980. Over the years, the company would also try to promote several other speedplants: Richfield Springs in 1955, Syracuse in 1958, Albany-Saratoga in 1974, and Chariot Park in 1978. All, except Fonda, were flops.

In retrospect, the Feuz/Gage plan to revive racing at Fonda in 1953 was a no-brainer. Much of the track's infrastructure was already in place. Stock car racing had thrived in eastern New York since Jack Kochman's 1948 Fonda failure. NASCAR had boomed as well. It now boasted several divisions, including a class called



George Gallup (left) and Fred Gerow (right) were two of the star drivers at Brookfield in 1952 who made the switch to Fonda in 1953. (left, Fusco Collection, right, Putnam Collection)

sportsman: cars that looked like modifieds, but had less expensive stock engines. Feuz figured that sportsman cars would be more plentiful than the mods that had run at Fonda in 1948. And he knew that Saturday night was America's race night, as opposed to Kochman's feeble stab at Fridays.

He was right on both counts. But there was one problem. The area's established tracks—Sharon Springs and Brookfield—already ran sportsmen on Saturday nights, and they wouldn't go down without a fight. Sharon didn't pose much real competition. The facility was second rate and the races a bit unorganized. Brookfield was another story. In fact, as a fan, it was Feuz's favorite local track. Yet, Brookfield did have flaws. The venue was a lovely fairground, but its paperclip half-mile oval was a car killer and a dust bowl. Located in the sticks south of Utica, Brookfield lacked both a nearby fan base and easy access. The road to get there didn't even have a line down the middle. Yup, Brookfield was ripe for the picking. Soon Fonda had taken Brookfield's night (Saturday), its star drivers—like George Gallup, Fred Gerow, Jim Luke, Tom Wilson, and Chuck Kotwica—and even its nickname, "The Track of Champions."

Feuz's first hire for Fonda was Lee Wallard of Altamont. Wallard was something of a local god. He had won a sprint car race at Fonda in 1937. And he had topped the entire racing world by winning the 1951 Indianapolis 500, with Howard "Jeep" Herbert in Wallard's pit that day to cheer him on. But a week after his Indy triumph, tragedy befell Lee Wallard. He was back in a sprinter at Reading, Pa. on June 3, 1951. During the feature, Wallard's #3 became engulfed in a nearly invisible alcohol fire. He leaped from the burning car, having suffered significant burns. The injuries he sustained that day at Reading would plague Wallard until his death in 1963 at age 53. During his lengthy recuperation, Wallard accepted Feuz's offer to become Fonda's chief steward. The move garnered the track immense positive publicity.



This dramatic sequence depicts the end of Lee Wallard's driving career at Reading, Pa, on June 3, 1951, one week after he won the Indianapolis 500. On the left Wallard poses while waiting for the feature push-off. Note he's driving in a t-shirt. On the top right he's shown bailing from his burning car, and below he's rolling on the track surface trying to peel off his burning uniform trousers. (Bruce Craig photos)

Wallard owned and operated a restaurant near Schenectady. His facility hosted Fonda Speedway's first-ever drivers' meeting on Friday night April 10, 1953. There, Fonda officials unveiled their plans for the year: weekly Saturday night racing for one class only (NASCAR Sportsman) with a guaranteed total purse of \$900. The feature would pay \$125 to win, heat winners would get \$25, and there was \$10 tow money. The opener would be on May 30, with a practice session the week before. The practice night was uneventful but did produce an often-used publicity photo of Walt Roberts, Herb Root, Steve Danish, and Spencer Parkhurst with their race cars parked on Fonda's start-finish line.



Wallard's Bar and Grill.
(Jim Rigney Collection)



Walt Roberts (#9jr), Herb Root (#104), Steve Danish (#61), and Spence Parkhurst (#36) pose on Fonda's start-finish line. (Bittig Collection)



Track photographer Russ Bergh caught this action shot of Herb Root (#104) and Walt Roberts (#9jr) at Fonda's first practice night. (Feuz Collection)

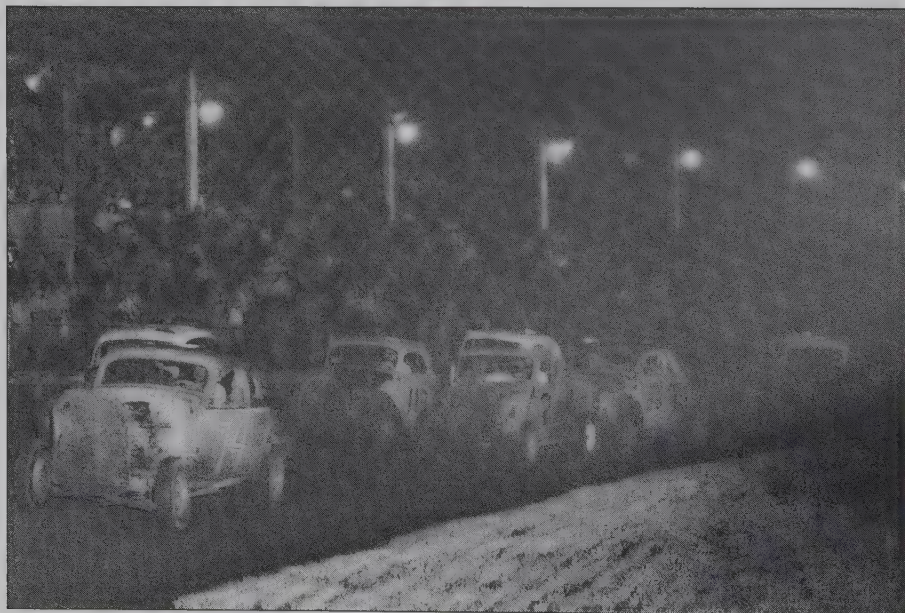
But Wallard's tenure never made it to the first race. "AAA (the Indy sanctioning body) found out that Lee had taken a job with a NASCAR track," Feuz remembers. "So they told him it's either got to be NASCAR or AAA. Well, Lee was hoping to race some more, so he had to quit Fonda." Tom Carpenter of Rutland, Vt. was his replacement. Six thousand race programs had already been printed for Fonda's 1953 season, every one with Lee Wallard's picture on the cover. Ramona Feuz (Ed's wife) was assigned the unenviable task of manually de-stapling all 6,000 programs and replacing every cover.

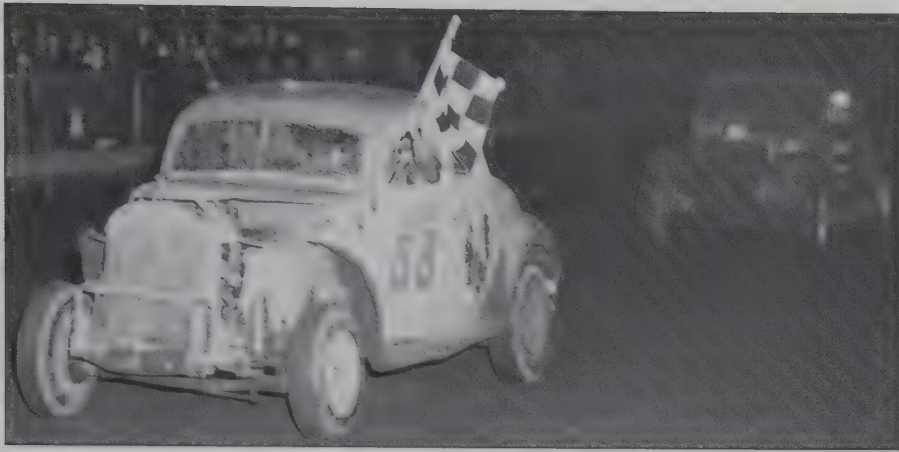
Less than favorable weather greeted Fonda's opening night race on May 30, 1953. It was cool and there had been afternoon sprinkles. But an enthusiastic, near-capacity crowd was on hand.

The car-count was a respectable 25 teams. It was an eclectic bunch. The field included some genuine local stars of the time (like Danish, George Gallup and Jim Luke), a trio of youngsters who would become Fonda legends (Kenny Shoemaker, Jeep Herbert, and Don Wayman), three New England heros (Hully Bunn, Dick Egan, and Ballston Spa transplant Smokey Stover), and a host of lesser-known chauffeurs. Ironically, largely due to poor track conditions, it was these lesser-known drivers who would grab the laurels on opening night.

"The track was awful that night," concedes Feuz. The rookie promoter had purchased calcium chloride from Solvay Process near Syracuse for dust control. After asking how to apply the chemical, Feuz was told by a Solvay Process consultant to disc it four inches into the track surface. "Nobody told me that you then have to water and repack the track, and I didn't know any better," Feuz giggles today.

Opening night feature race, May 30, 1953. Pole sitter Bob Ruchsdeschal (#74) leads the pack into the first turn, followed by Mike Truelove (#X) outside, Jeep Herbert (#3), Paul Korman (#113), Chuck Kotwica (#88), and a host of others. (Feuz Collection)





Charlie Kotwica (#88) moved from third to first on the last lap to become Fonda's first feature winner. He's shown here with the checkered flag and a relatively clean windshield as Paul Brozyna, the runner-up driver behind, sticks his head out for a look. (Feuz Collection)

The result was predictable. After warm-ups the top four inches of clay had been blown up to the hubrail. The groove resembled a one-lane minefield. Gallup and Shoemaker won heats one and two from the pole. Egan and Paul Brozyna won heat three and the consolation, respectively, from the outside pole. All four races had been wire-to-wire jobs. There'd be little passing this night. Obscure Scotia, New York driver Bob Ruchsdeschal started on the pole for the 25-lap feature and he nearly pulled off the upset of the half-century. Ruchsdeschal held his #74 in the fast lane and was tough to get around. Meanwhile, Brozyna in Monty Allen's #63 was putting on the show. Qualifying out of the consolation, Brozyna started in the rear and charged forward. He wasn't shy about using the chrome horn to make passes, but in his defense, he could barely see due to mud caked on his windshield. Brozyna soon passed Rome's Chuck Kotwica, who had also started near the front, for second, and headed out after Ruchsdeschal.

Ruchsdeschal was going just fast enough to hold the lead. But, on the final lap, Brozyna let him have it in turn three. Both cars went out of control from the collision, and Kotwica slipped under for a surprise victory. Brozyna recovered for second and Ruchsdeschal ended up third. It would be Kotwica's only Fonda win. Brozyna would cop the final race of the 1953 season for his sole Fonda career triumph. The unexpected ending had pleased the crowd, which was hungry for more.

Kotwica's moment in the spotlight was very short lived. "I only got two weeks to enjoy it," recalls Kotwica, now a 79-year old trucking company operator in Rome. "I went back to Fonda the following Saturday night and finished fourth. Then the next week, there was a car rolled over on its side on the straightaway and I didn't see it until it was too late. I hit hard, demolished my car, and ended up in the hospital with a concussion. That was it. The end of my racing days."

Feuz learned from his first-night track preparation mistake and



Steve Danish
(Lew Boyd Collection)

from that point on, Fonda was usually known for its smooth, tacky surface. Good track conditions allowed the faster cars to pass anywhere, and soon Fonda was being dominated by top runners . . . or shall we say top runner: Steve Danish.

To look at him, you'd never know that Steve Danish wasn't a professional race driver. His neatly pressed tan driving uniform and meticulous grooming were quite a contrast to the "grease 'neath the nails" look of many of his competitors. His dent-free, immaculate, finely lettered and painted #61 stood out among many of the bent-up junkers it raced against.

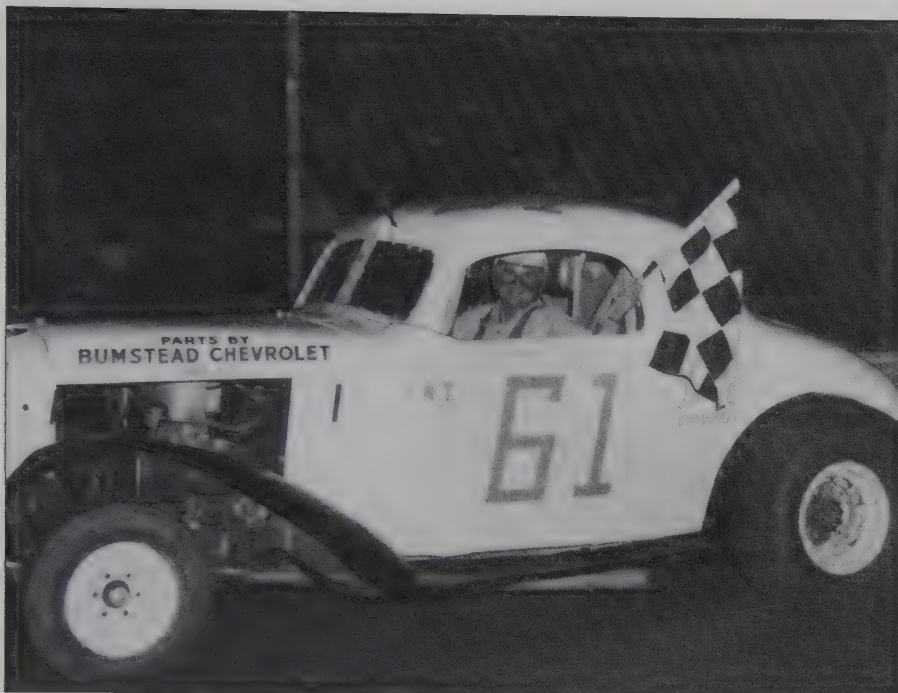
But Steve Danish wasn't a professional. By day, he operated his own business, Pleasant Valley Garage, in his hometown of Cropseyville. For him, racing was strictly a hobby—a successful hobby—but a hobby nonetheless. When so-called "professionalism" crept into the sport by the mid-1960s, Danish complained and quit. Steve Danish viewed time and effort—not the expenditure of money—as the honorable course for auto racing success.

Steve Danish was a proficient racer from day one. A late bloomer at age 30, Danish built his first stock car in 1949. He appropriated the #61 from Johnny Carpenter's midget racing team, on which he'd been a mechanic. Danish hired others to drive his stocker at first, but soon believed he could do better himself. He was right. Before Fonda opened, Danish had already become an established winner at tracks like Metowee Speedway in Granville, New York, and State Line Speedway near Bennington, Vermont.

In many ways, Steve Danish was quite a bit ahead of his time. He had a sponsor before anyone else. He'd take his race car to store openings and ribbon cuttings for autograph sessions. And he was the first area driver to wear a driving suit. "I tried to set a standard in appearance and in everything else I did," says Danish, now age 82. "Not only was I the first guy with a sponsor and the first guy with a uniform, but I was the first guy to haul my stock car on a trailer."

From the outset, Steve Danish was a solid supporter of Fonda Speedway. He was one of only a few people to attend the organizational meeting at Wallard's Restaurant, plus the first practice and opening night. He fielded a pair of cars in the first race, #61 for himself and #61 Jr. for Hully Bunn. The #61 broke in the heat, sidelining Danish for the evening. It would be one of the few disappointments suffered by "The Cropseyville Courier" in what evolved into an incredible 1953 season.

Starting the second night, Danish assembled a run of five consecutive feature wins. He strung six more together later in the year. That, plus one additional win in between, made 12 for the season—a Fonda Speedway season win record that still hasn't been topped, (although Jack Johnson tied the mark in 1985). Danish easily took Fonda's 1953 track championship and captured the '53 point tallies



Steve Danish collects a feature win at Victoria Speedway.
(Ric Lucia Collection)

at Metowee and State Line, too. The third win in Danish's 1953 Fonda streak occurred on what was undoubtedly the oddest night in Fonda history. It was the closest the track has ever come to going under. Here's the story.

Fonda was unbelievably successful in its first weeks of 1953 operation. Opening night had been a hit with fans despite awful track conditions. The second event drew such an overflow crowd that Fuez and Gage immediately began searching for additional bleacher seating. The third race was rained out on Saturday, June 13, 1953, and rescheduled for Tuesday night June 16. The place was absolutely packed for the Tuesday make-up. These achievements were unwelcome news for other neighboring speedways. They were losing their fans and their race teams to the new operation in Fonda. The honchos at these other tracks knew that if they didn't do something quickly to derail Fonda, their own businesses were doomed. So they reportedly conspired to sink Fonda's fourth show by bribing drivers to stay away.

Another huge crowd was on hand June 20, 1953. But Fonda track officials looked on in disbelief as a mere seven cars signed in to race. Feuz would later learn that his enemies had even stationed operatives on Route 30A just outside of town. Their job was to intercept race teams and pay them to turn around and go home.

At first, the speedway officials tried to salvage the night by grouping different sets of the seven competitors for heats. But the sham failed to placate an increasingly angry crowd. "This is the end



Fonda announcer Red Wildey at work in 1954.
(Fusco Collection)

of Fonda. This is the end of Fonda," the spectators chanted, according to Feuz. He knew they were right and he huddled with cohort Gage. Something very drastic had to be done . . . and soon. Track announcer Red Wildey reacted quickly and told the crowd, "Ladies and gentlemen, you are guests of the house tonight. Your rain-checks are good for free admission here next Saturday, and we promise you a better show next week." The announcement quelled the fans' tumult.

It was Fuez's idea to give the spectators a freebie and also to pay the purse, split evenly among the seven participating drivers. Gage Sr., never one to eagerly spend money—much less give it away—hesitated. But he gave in to his partner's wishes, realizing they had little other choice. "If you let these people go outta here with a lousy show, they aren't ever coming back and they'll bad mouth us all over the area," Fuez argued to Gage.

Ironically, the free show announcement—made just before the feature—came in the nick of time. The 25-lap main even soon turned out to be, without question, the lousiest in Fonda history. Seven cars started, but five dropped out. Only winner Steve Danish and second-place Johnny Perry were running at the end. Smokey Stover, Chuck Mahoney and Hully Bunn were scored in third, fourth, and fifth, even though they were parked on the infield when the checkers flew.

The evening had been a promoter's nightmare. But how management reacted to the predicament is the stuff from which legend is made. "I spend the entire week going to all of the race drivers, personally right to their garages, asking them to come back," remembers Feuz. "The following Saturday night we had 54 race cars and a big crowd. That was the real beginning of Fonda Speedway. We had survived a near disaster. Right then, that's when we knew we were onto something big."

Danish's 1954 Fonda totals nearly matched his 1953 accom-

Here's a shot of Smokey Stover in the pits, which is exactly where he was when he finished third in the feature on June 20, 1953. (Fusco Collection)





plishments. Danish was credited with 11 feature wins, including a record seven in a row. Both numbers would have been higher, but for Danish's controversial disqualification from a July 24, 1954 victory. Author Bill Williams tells the story in his book *Mohawk Magic*.

"The rhubarb began when Pete Corey experienced motor troubles and stalled on the speedway apron. Starter Chet Hames threw the yellow and during this caution period, Danish allegedly passed two cars to get to the front. A protest was lodged by Penn Yan, New York, wheelman Dutch Hoag," according to historian Williams. "Danish contended that he couldn't see Hames' yellow flag because the track surface was unfit to race on. He said there was too much mud on his windshield and the track was like soup. The track had been swamped by showers. The races were delayed for more than an hour past the scheduled 8 p.m. start time, as the track used primitive methods to dry the clay. The crew burned gas on the speedway and dragged big tree tops behind trucks to solve the problem. NASCAR upheld Hoag's complaint and one week later Danish was disqualified and Lee Bliss of Fairport, New York, was declared the winner." For Bliss it was his only Fonda career win, driving Frank Michaelson's #51 that night.

The brouhaha resulted in a bit of a rivalry between Danish and Hoag. "Dutch would get uptight," Steve recalls, "because he couldn't understand why he couldn't win at Fonda when he'd win easily

(top) Joe Ciganenko (#62) leads Pete Corey (#3) and Jim Luke (#45) through turn two in 1956. (Lucia Collection)

(bottom) Lee Bliss celebrates a 1956 Oswego Speedway victory. (George Caruso Collection)





Lou Lazzaro (left) and Dave Lape (right) flank Steve Danish as he is inducted into Fonda's Hall of Fame on August 22, 1988. (*Gater News* photo)

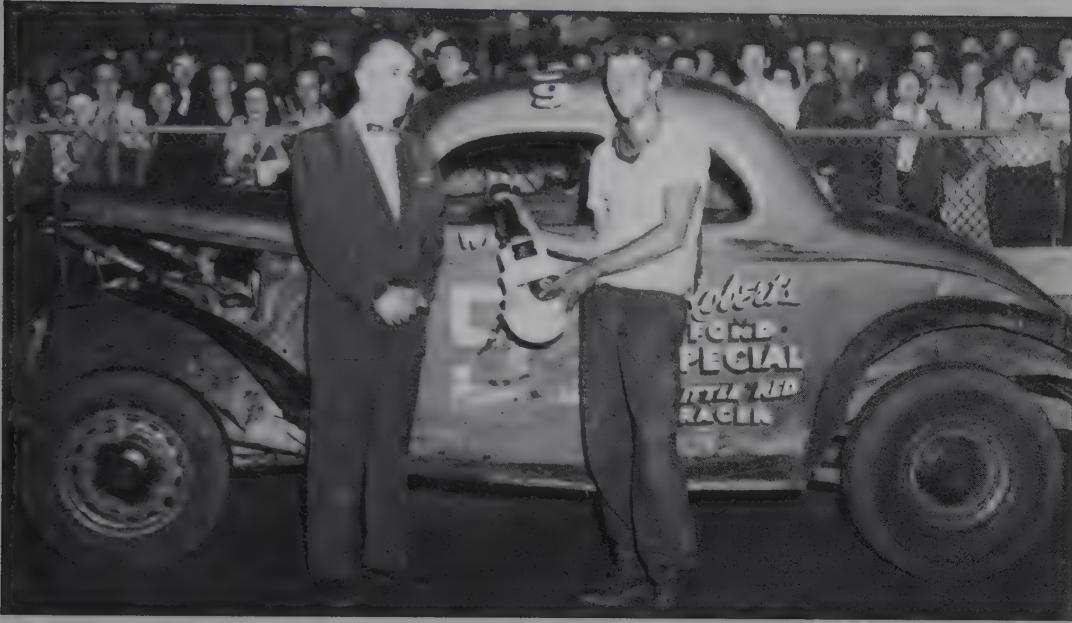
everywhere else." Hoag's successful protest of Danish cost The Cropseyville Courier a potentially unbeatable Fonda record: Had he not been set down on July 24, 1954, Danish would have won an incredible nine straight main events. Still, his 1954 seven-straight stands as a Fonda record, although Jack Johnson matched it in 1981 and 1985. "I definitely cheered for Jack when he closed in on the record, because I hoped that if someone was to break my records, it would be a local guy," says Danish. He even donated a trophy to Fonda Speedway earmarked for the first man to surpass his records. Nobody's claimed it yet.

Those drivers who actually outran the #61 during 1953-54 seasons were few and far between. The select circle included George Gallup, Earl Maille, Don Courtney, and Paul Brozyna.

Gallup was a glasses-wearing veteran who was already an accomplished racer by the time Fonda opened in 1953. He won a 1954 feature in a Ford coupe #103, which he fielded from his Oneonta service station. His 1956 and 1957 victories came at the wheel of Frank Trinkhaus' Chevy coupe #62. Trinkhaus himself had driven the #62 prior to giving way to Joe Ciganenko during 1953, and then Gallup.

Maille was the first of a long line of Glens Falls-area drivers to

Don Courtney and the Life Guard



Don Courtney wins Fonda's "Langhorne Elimination" feature on August 8, 1953.
(Don Courtney Collection)

Times were different in the 50s, and even renowned drivers could ham it up a bit without worrying about their media program or their sponsors. Have fun they often did, and the river played its part.

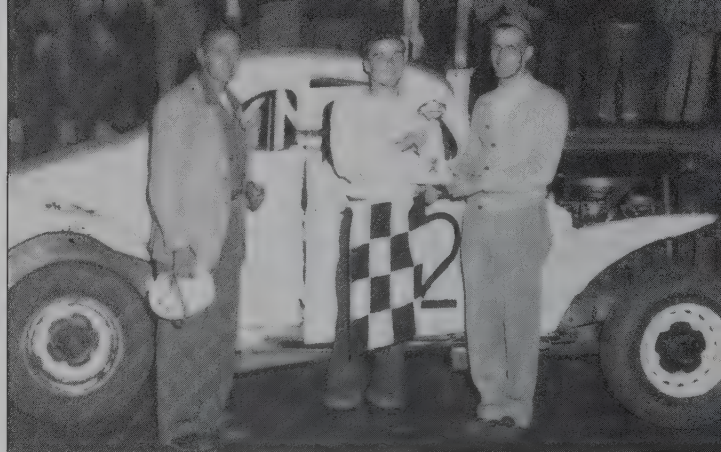
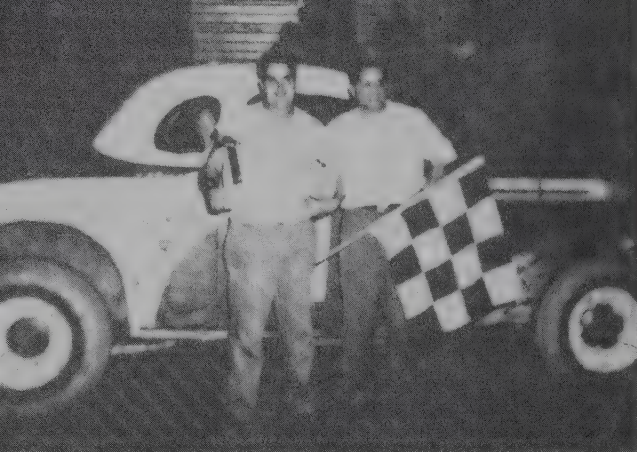
Don Courtney was a standout runner in the pioneering jalopy days. In the fifties as stock cars matured, he continued driving somewhat sporadically, sometimes in his own car and sometimes hired by others. Though he is certainly remembered as a hard charger, Courtney was not as serious about his driving as some others. He often traveled as a mechanic for his buddy Rollie Johnson (Jack and Joe's dad).

The high point of Courtney's history at Fonda came on August 8, 1953. Aboard Walt Robert's famous Ford coupe "The Little Red Racer," Courtney swept a wild and action-packed "Langhorne Elimination" 25-lap feature, leaving Steve Danish and

Bernie Ingersoll steaming in the infield. His only other top five at Fonda was on the first of August, that same year.

Courtney had a playful side in spades. Partly as a goof and partly to avoid the pit entrance fee, Courtney and his buddy Little Caesar began accessing the speedway on Saturdays by swimming across the Mohawk. Needless to say, word soon got around the infield, and it wasn't long before promoter Ed Feuz got wind of it.

On the next race date Feuz hid along the backstretch until he spotted the two splashing their way toward the speedway. The formidable Feuz stood tall as he greeted their arrival and announced with authority, "I sure am pleased to see that you boys are such good swimmers, but you might not be so pleased to hear that I'm the life guard."



Earl Maille (left) and Paul Brozyna (right) both managed to outrun Steve Danish during his dominant 1953 and 1954 seasons. Maille is pictured in the Caputo and Hansen #11 and Brozyna, in the Allen #32, is flanked by Ed Feuz on the left and owner Monty Allen on the right. (left, Birttig Collection; right, Feuz Collection)

succeed at Fonda, winning in 1954 and 1955 in the Henry Caputo and Ken Hansen red and white #11 coupe. A body man by trade, the rotund and outgoing Maille had his brief career cut short by racing injuries—a broken back at Fairhaven in 1955 and a broken neck at Warrensburg in 1956. He remained a Fonda fan right up until his death in 1998 at age 72, supporting the efforts of his nephew Mark Maille, a Fonda modified regular.

Schenectady drivers Courtney and Brozyna also had short careers. Courtney much preferred wrenching cars to wheeling them. But he subbed for Walt Roberts in the red #9 on occasion in 1953 and won Fonda's Langhorne Qualifier. Brozyna was a home builder by trade. He won Fonda's 1953 finale in Monty Allen's #32 and hung it up not long thereafter to devote full-time to the construction industry.

Steve Danish's Fonda domination in 1953 and 1954 provided impetus for other teams to build better cars and to race harder to compete. Indeed, Danish had set the bar and was an inspiration for would-be contenders. "Steve Danish was my hero," said Ken Shoemaker in his autobiography, *They Called Me "The Shoe."* "He was the man to beat on the East Coast if you wanted to be anybody. I said to myself, I'll never be a real racer until I can beat Steve Danish."

Stock car racing in the early and mid-1950s saw many significant changes in the motor department, due to newer and better engines being recurrently devised by Detroit's manufacturers. And Steve Danish was on the cutting edge of the each revolution.

By way of background, the motor of choice for most stock car racers in the 1940s and early 1950s was the Ford flathead V-8. Debuted in 1932, the Ford flathead V-8 was a motoring milestone. The V-shaped block increased motor rigidity and minimized engine



Lynn DeLong rides out a thriller in the "Picker Six." The left shot depicts the violence of the crash and the right shot shows the door open and a safety worker inside the car: Lynn's dad, Ken "Pappy" DeLong, was also a Fonda driver and sometime White's Beach promoter.

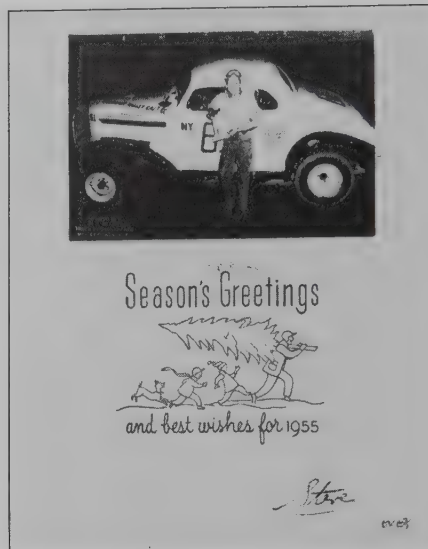
(John Osterhoudt Collection)

failures at high speed. Straight eights were no match for the V-8. But the flathead did have a drawback: Its intake and exhaust valves were positioned at the bottom of the stroke. This limited the distance a piston could travel in the cylinder, compromising cubic inch displacement.

The 1953 Ford flathead V-8 displaced out at 239.4 c.i.d. The '53 Ford OHV straight 6 was 13 cubes smaller, and had a horsepower rating that was far inferior to the flathead's. Hence, nobody figured that sixes could run with the eights—at least until Steve Danish came along. As stunning as Steve's mastery of Fonda was in 1953 and 1954, it became even more unbelievable once it was disclosed that he was doing it with a six-cylinder motor. How in the world could a six banger consistently whip the eights?

The answer was that Steve Danish had done his homework.

Chevy had introduced the Corvette sports car in 1953 and unveiled a new OHV 6 to power it. Unburdened by the flathead's inherent limitation in stroke, the Corvette 6 had an impressive displacement of 236 c.i.d.—a mere three cubes less than the Ford flathead V-8. More importantly, the new Chevy engine had a higher horsepower rating than the flathead Ford, it had much lower reciprocating mass (which allowed higher rpms), and it weighed a lot less, facilitating Danish's corner handling. The new motor wasn't



SONN:
NOTICE YOU STILL ARE INTERESTED
IN RACING, ACCORDING TO MENTIONS
IN RACING PUBLICATIONS.
AM GIVING UP THE 6 CYL. 500 NEXT
YEAR, HAVE PURCHASED 1955 BUICK
SPECIAL TO RUN IN MY CHEV. NAME
STILL WITH RUN SPORTSMAN.

AS EVER

Steve

The Steve Danish 1955 Christmas card. (Speedway Illustrated Collection)

easy to come by. But Danish had connections. His sponsor was Bumstead Chevrolet, a huge dealership in Troy.

Danish's six provided an edge in 1953 and 1954 at Fonda. But even so it was about to be eclipsed by automotive technology. The Eisenhower Years were a boom time. Every ten minutes, it seemed, Detroit was taking the wraps off of some new automotive improvement. Motown designers were about to unleash the ultimate stock car engine: an overhead valve V-8. For a racer, the combination of a V-block, eight cylinders, and overhead valves was the best of all worlds. Steve Danish sent Christmas cards to close friends in 1954 announcing that he would forgo his trusty six in 1955 in favor of an overhead V-8. His selection was the 1955 Buick Special 264 c.i.d. V-8. The high-end General Motors lines—Cadillac, Olds, and Buick—had been toying with the new-fangled, albeit somewhat troublesome, overhead V-8s since 1949. Buick's 1955 version showed the most promise, according to publicists.

Danish was obviously the kind of guy who had studied the rule book. A loophole in 1955 NASCAR sportsman rule 8 (c)(1) allowed you to put a Buick motor in a Chevy chassis. But that same rule restricted the powerplant to 300 cubes; hence Danish's selection of the 1955 Buick Special 264, instead of its bored big brother the 1955 Buick Roadmaster 322. (Oh, had Grand National Buick driver Fireball Roberts simply read those rules prior to the 1955 Daytona Beach race). Doubtless, Danish figured he was on the verge of another engine coup by going Buick.

But this time, Detroit surprised him. The ink was barely dry on Danish's Christmas cards when Chevy went public with its own 1955 version of an OHV V-8. Ford had also unveiled one in 1954. Lower in

cost and eminently available, now any racer who wanted an overhead V-8 could get one. And Chevy's 283 overhead V-8 proved to be far superior to Buick's. Over time, Chevy's 1955 overhead valve V-8 has become revered as an absolute engineering masterpiece. It hasn't really been improved upon since. All of the DIRT sportsmen and most of the DIRT 358s that race at Fonda today use essentially the very same small block design unveiled by Chevrolet back in 1955.

So immediately successful were the overhead small block V-8s, that the flathead competition instantly became obsolete. It is interesting to note how some non-NASCAR tracks around New York State reacted. Outlaw speedways in Waterloo, Weedsport, Brewerton, and Watertown banned the overhead V-8s. Some drivers to the west, such as Cliff Kotary, (see sidebar) became flathead specialists. Oswego broke cars into separate divisions: an A-class of overheads running for a higher purse, and a B-class of flatheads running for lesser money. At Lebanon Valley, if you wanted to run a coupe or a coach, you had to run a flathead; if you wanted to run an overhead, you had to have a big, heavy, full-fendered late model body.

But Fonda's NASCAR rules dictated that overhead and flathead motors would compete together in identical cars. It was no contest. Almost overnight, flathead-powered cars, which had previously been front runners, were relegated to consi car status. Management did throw low-buck flathead runners a bone by giving them their own "feature" event about once a year. Jerry Jerome (real name George Emden) won it in 1958. Bobby Adams and Johnny Gruner were 1959's winners, and Paul Roberts won the finale in 1960. Another special event in the early years was the Fulton-



Bobby Adams poses with the winner's flag following his 1959 Fonda "flat-head" win. (Feuz Collection)

The Kotary Brothers: Themes and Variations

Some called them the Terrible Kotarys. If not to be feared, they were certainly to be taken very seriously. They were hammer-down, successful racers; they stuck together; they were quick to show a fist to any detractor. However, beneath the surface, the three were as different as the twig, the leaf, and the branch on the same tree.

Cliff, Tom, and Robbie Kotary were born into very modest circumstances—a family of 13 children outside of Rome, N.Y. Forced to be self-reliant, they became mechanically inclined, entrepreneurial, and they just plain loved stock cars.

Robbie, the youngest, was a construction supervisor by trade who raced widely—dirt and asphalt—on the weekends. Among his most memorable rides were the pink and white #148s of Ward Petit. Robbie garnered two features at Fonda, both for Petit. The second of the two, on August 7, 1965, involved a stirring duel with second-place finisher, Cliff Parker, driving the huge yellow humpback #114 out of Connecticut. Kotary later steered the familiar 27 JR owned by his friends the Fowlers from Schenectady. Frail by comparison to his brothers, Robbie nonetheless got it done, recording dozens of top-five finishes.

Severely wounded during the war and institutionalized for a period thereafter, brother Tom struggled to stay cheerful and balanced throughout his life. He was uncommonly bright and an accomplished wheeler-dealer, with his scrap metal busi-

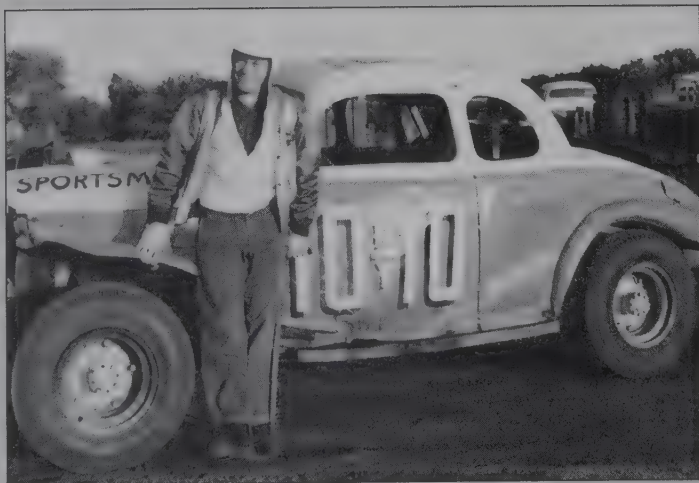
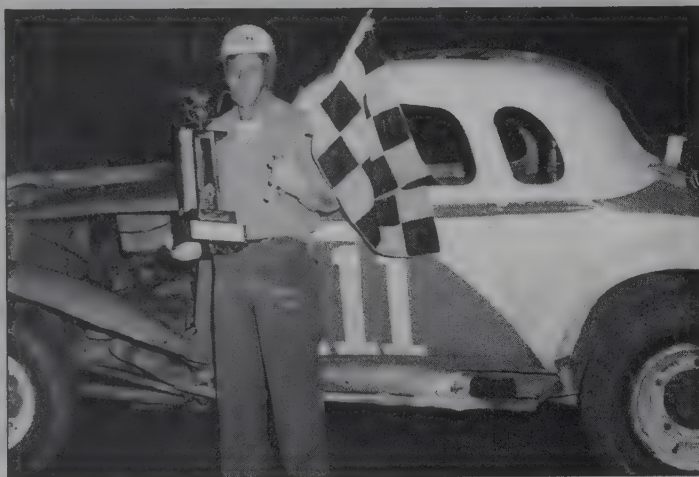
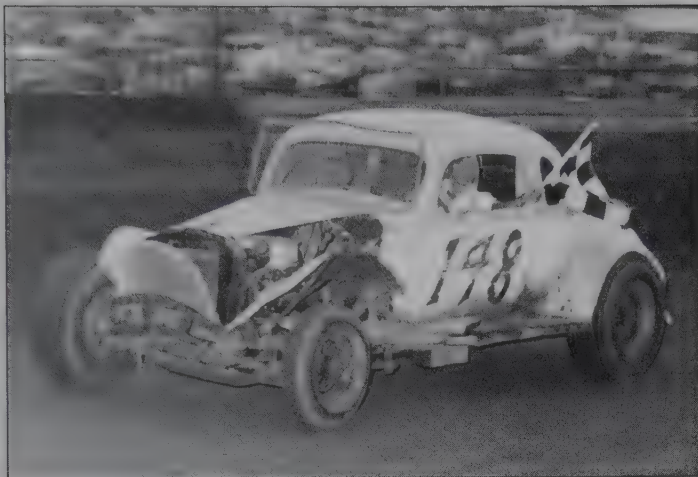
ness as a base. He is said to have made a fortune and to have spent another. He was no light-weight racer and, like Robbie, he drove for notable owners like Hal Kempeny, Joe Romano, Theron Moore, and Henry Caputo. Though he is credited with three Fonda mains, he is perhaps even better remembered for an unquenchable rowdy streak. He would simply not turn down a beer or a fight. One night Ed Feuz was overheard to say, "Tom, it's gettin' a little quiet around here. I'll give you 25 bucks to start a little trouble." You can bet that Tom complied.

Cliff, the oldest, was by far the most serious and today, at 81, he has long outlived the other two. His turned out to be the better racing resume. With over 300 career feature wins, "The Copper City Cowboy," as he was known, currently sits in five halls of fame. His crowning achievement was an incredible and unequalled string of six straight Syracuse Fair victories in his flathead-powered coupe. He won by meticulous mechanical and physical preparation and cognitive driving. The less focused bothers Tom and Robbie both tried the Fair, but both crashed and were hurt.

Cliff's seriousness was reflected in the rest of his life as well. When still winning stock car races, he was the highest elected official in his town. Though he has prospered over the years, Cliff continues to work today and to campaign for political office.

Unlike Tom and Robbie, Cliff usually fielded his own cars—all flatheads—with brother Al. They made occasional (and unremarkable) jaunts to Fonda before the square-top coupes were banned in 1955. However, in 1956, Cliff ventured back in Mike Michaels' potent 10-10 with its barking overhead engine, and he demonstrated that typical Kotary testosterone. When he logged an impressive third-place finish the final night of the year, he was working all the pedals with his left foot, an amazing feat. His right leg was in a full plaster cast from a hunting accident and he had fastened it down on the right side of the cab.

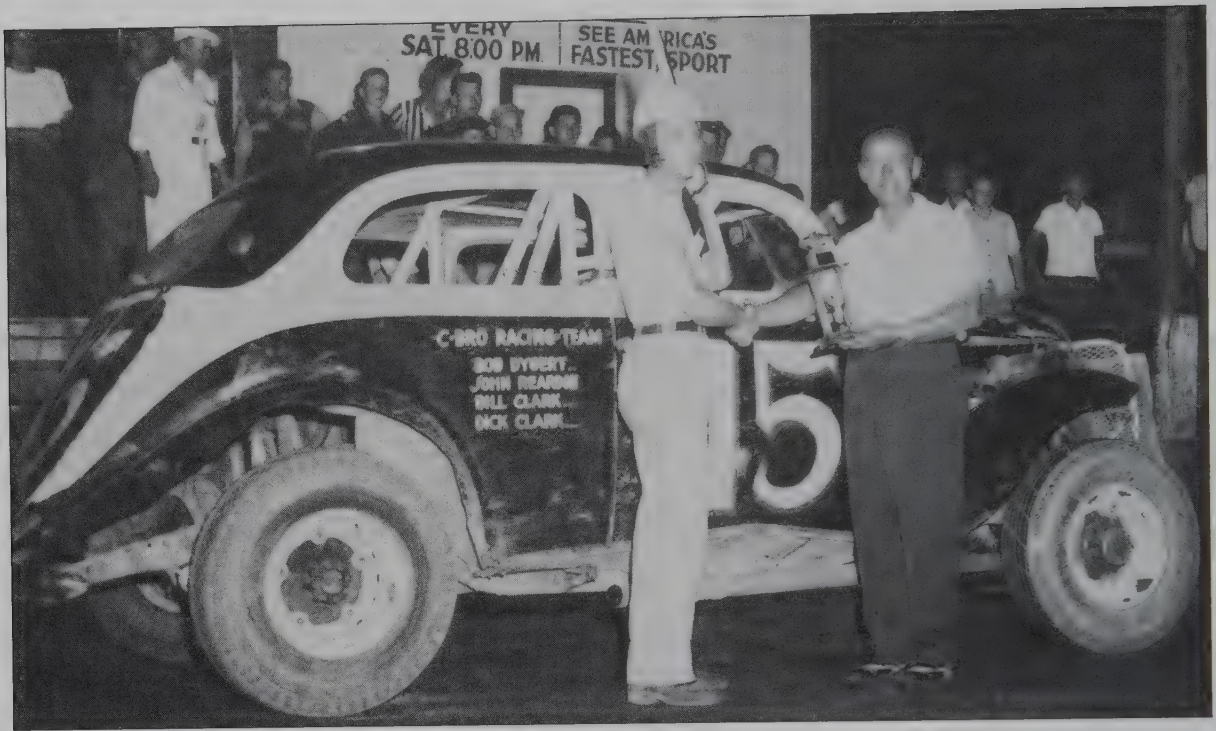
Cliff Kotary's sole victory at Fonda came in a 50-lapper on August 24, 1957. He had swept a 100-lapper at Rochester the night before; he would win a 100-lapper at Stateline the next night. But it is Fonda he remembers. "I'll tell you, I was some happy guy to win. They were the fastest dirt trackers in the world. That 10-10 had its handling problems, and I had to keep talking to myself so I wouldn't make mistakes. 'Easy, Cliff, easy. This is Fonda. Pete Corey is right on your bumper. Easy, Cliff. The best there ever was is right behind you.' "



(top)
Robbie Kotary grabs a win in the Ward Petit
pink and white #148s. (Feuz Collection)

(middle)
Tom Kotary in victory lane with the Henry
Caputo #11. (Feuz Collection)

(bottom)
Cliff Kotary poses with the Mike Michaels
#10-10 before warmups in 1957. Note
that his right foot is still in a partial cast.
(Feuz Collection)



Bobby Fiske grabs a 1955 feature in the Clark Brothers #45 coach.
(Feuz Collection)

Montgomery County championship, a race open to only local county residents. Johnstown's Jerome won all three runnings in 1953, 1954, and 1955. It was this event that evolved into the flathead race-only special, because most all of the locals had flatheads.

The widespread availability of the Chevy and Ford OHV V-8s leveled the engine playing field. And with it, Steve Danish's domination of Fonda subsided. A quartet of competitors, Pete Corey in Bob Mott's #3, Bob Fiske in the Clark Brothers #45, Jeep Herbert (see sidebar) in the Whitbeck/Kitler #37, and Jim Luke in the Burns & Wilson Garage #100, became Danish's equals by 1955 when their new Chevis and Fords proved equivalent to, if not superior to, Danish's Buick.

The 1955 season was Bob Fiske's brief moment in Fonda's spotlight. Fiske is a testament to the proposition that even an unheralded backmarker can become a winner in the right equipment. The bespeckled Sidney driver "was a decent guy," according to longtime Fonda official Bud Countryman. "But he never did anything 'til he got into that Clark Brothers #45 coach (in 1955). That sedan was a hot piece of material. But then he wrecked it bad one night, ended up losing the ride, and went back to being an also-ran." Fort Plain's Bill Clark hired Jim Luke in Fiske's stead for 1956.

The late Luke was an enigma: impressively successful in the 1950s and disappointingly unsuccessful in the 1960s. "I'll always remember Jim Luke as a very nice person and a good, clean, and



consistent driver,” says Dutch Hoag. “He was a good guy to spend time with, and a good man to race with.” Hoag often stayed in Utica with Luke or car owner Bob Burns on his journeys to Fonda. And briefly, in 1957, Hoag was Luke’s teammate on the Paul Pankorik/Hal Kempney #113/#213 team.

Luke spent 1953 driving the Burn’s and Wilson back-up car to Bernie Ingersoll. In 1954, he became the team’s primary driver and pushed their car #100 to a Fonda win. In 1955 he won the Fonda track champion for Burns and Wilson without benefit of a feature victory; his eight straight second-place finishes that season is a dubious record that will never be broken. Luke won two main events in 1956 in the Clark Brothers #45 coupe, including the track’s first-ever 100-lapper, though Don Hendenberg would end up track champion, again without a victory. Luke reeled off three straight 1957 wins in the #113, spent a couple of years in Bernie’s Liquor Store #71, and snagged another win in #113 in 1960.

Then things seemed to fall apart for the quiet Utica fuel oil salesman. He had some trouble getting rides until he landed the potent #32 of Floyd “Pop” Wilcox out of New Berlin in 1962. But his three years with Wilcox were winless at Fonda. Bud Lyons was a mechanic on the Wilcox team. “Jimmy just seemed to lose his concentration on racing. It was like his head wasn’t into it anymore.” Wilcox eventually ended up firing Luke and replaced him with Jerry Townley.

The 1955 season was a trying time for the once-invincible Steve

Jim Luke drives the Burns-Wilson #100 to his first Fonda feature win on May 15, 1954. (Feuz Collection)

“Lil’ Jeep”

Back in the mid-40s, Howard Herbert, a diminutive but spunky teenager originally from Wisconsin, worked at Bill Kugler’s gas station in Schenectady. One day Herbert spaced, accidentally dropping the left side of a customer’s car into the pit. Surely Bill Kugler (father of Alan Kugler, 1970’s Fonda modified car owner) grimaced as he shouted, “Goddamn it, Jeep!,” referring to a ne’er-do-well comic-strip Dalmation that was always in trouble.

Well, the nickname stuck for Jeep Herbert, and for the first few years of his racing career it seemed decidedly appropriate. Wheeling several ‘34 Ford flatheads of his own construction—and by Ray Weakly—Jeep raced all the local dirt tracks, but with little success. Even today a humorous Herbert wryly contemplates the difficult “management of forces” on the clay—that is, racing counterclockwise but steering and facing clockwise in order to do it. “When folks get carried away, they often drive clockwise right into the fence.” Jeep did a lot of that himself. “I was fracturing all the metal,” he recalls.

That all changed over the winter of 1952-53 when Herbert suddenly wondered, “What in the world am I doing? I have to clean up my act. I have to finish in order to finish.”

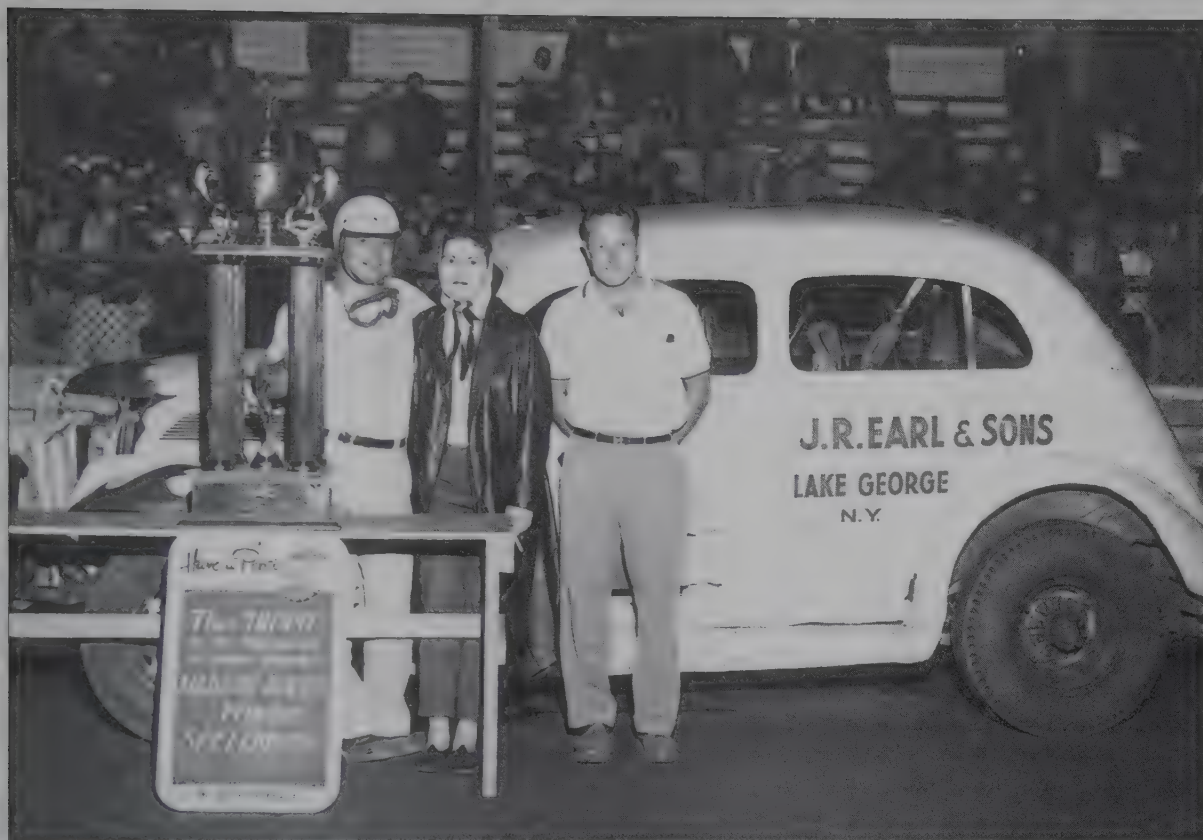
Clean up his act he did, and the Electric City speedster went on to become one of the steadiest, most successful, and certainly most popular chauffeurs in Fonda annals. Aboard Bob Mott’s #3 for the 1953 campaign, on July 11 Herbert punctuated Steve Danish’s early season win streak at five. Jeep muses that, “I never knew whether to be proud of that original #3 or not. It was so beaten up. But we won a lot. You look

at Bob Mott (and Bob Whitbeck, Bob Burns, and Steve Danish)—they were the Ray Everhams of our times. You had to be very smart—to use your own ingenuity.”

Jeep was to go on to shoe for Gibby Wolf and Sam Kitler in the Whitbeck-built #37, a car he eventually bought and drove to the New York State Championship in both 1956 and 1957. He later drove and won for J.R. Earl (the #1 and the #991), Pete Hollebrand (#53), Frank Trinkaus (#62), Henry Caputo (#11), and a host of others. His widespread travels saw him compete at 40 speedways including the old beach course and the international tri-oval in Daytona.

However, Fonda was always the epicenter, as Jeep found the “wide circumference and egg shape” perfectly suited to his stylistic approach to driving. Herbert was essentially a Sportsman driver. In his words, “I always listened very carefully to the engines. They had to be running pure to get me down the chute. I learned that from Bob Mott. I fiddled with them to get them pure. I didn’t bellyache about the handling. I would manhandle the car and I would get those rear tires to chewing through the turns. That’s what I wanted.”

When the modifieds made their entry in the 1960s, the money in racing skyrocketed. New tire compounds were introduced to give “bite” rather than “chew,” and Jeep put his helmet on the peg for good. It was time to dedicate more to his job and to his wife, Delores. Today, thinking back to the intensity of the endless racing of the 50s and 60s, Jeep smiles. “No one could ever figure out how Dee put up with me!”

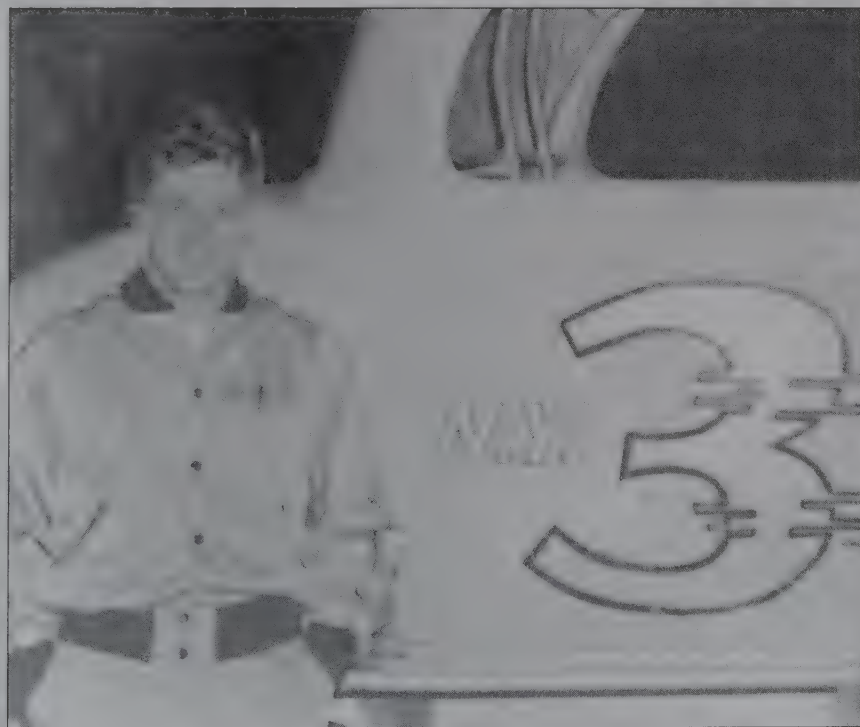


(top) "Jeep" Herbert poses with his wife, Dee, car owner, J.R. Earl and the 1957 Fonda track championship trophy.

(Jeep Herbert Collection)

(right) Jeep in front of the trailered Bob Mott #3.

(Jack Johnson Collection)



Danish. He crashed badly a couple of times, dropped out often, and recurrently second-guessed himself on his Buick engine selection. "I bought that Buick new in a crate," he recalls. "It had so much power that it would keep breaking axles and clutches. It had lots of low-end torque, but it didn't help me with rpms when I needed them. So I ended up selling it and went with a Chevy V-8 myself.

"In 1956, I started to lose interest and was on the verge of having enough," Danish says. He made a decision to stop fielding his own #61s and to start driving for others. For the rest of the decade, he drove for owners like the Clark Brothers, Frank Trinkhaus, and Pete Hollebrand. He had occasional wins in Clark's #45 and Trinkhaus' #62. Yet, Steve Danish was nowhere as successful driving for others as he had been driving for himself.

For the decade of the '60s, Danish returned to his roots—the cream and black #61. He had acquired a partner and co-car owner, Sam Hill. Again in his own equipment, Steve Danish enjoyed an impressive comeback.

This 1955 shot captures a crumpled Danish #61 lying in the Fonda's first turn with smoke pouring from its Buick engine. It wasn't a great year for the gentleman from Cropseyville. (Feuz Collection)

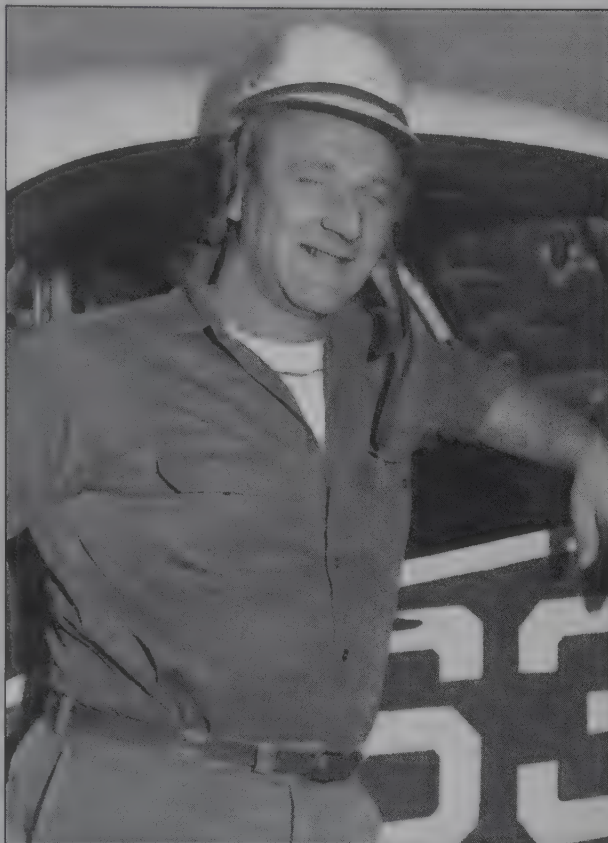


Don Hendenberg: A Champion's Sad Tale

They say he was perfectly built to drive old-time dirt cars. "Don Hendenberg had the biggest arms I've ever seen," recalls master photographer John Grady, while in Jeep Herbert's words, "he was the bear that walked like a man." When the burly truck driver came to Fonda in 1953, he and rival Cliff Kotary were already heroes in the Rome, New York, area, each with credentialed win lists. And Hendenberg caused a particular stir as the appointed chauffeur of the famous red, black, and white S-33 sportsman owned by Dave McCredy, the Chevrolet dealer from Sherburne.

Hendenberg would not disappoint Montgomery County railbirds. He immediately began copping top-five finishes. In fact, in 1956 his enviable consistency earned him the track championship without winning a single feature.

Very much a man of the 50s, Hendenberg lived to race, to joke—and to party. One Saturday night he tooled into Fonda straight from a wedding, and no small number of folks took notice of his condition. Several drivers marched up to the tower demanding that they not race against an inebriated competitor. Quickly and profoundly, the officials responded that they could not police the drivers but that they would support any reasonable action the drivers wished to take themselves. The competitors went off, huddled, and came back with the following request: let Hendenberg go out and run five hot laps by himself. If he does okay, okay. The officials agreed. Hendenberg went out, ran three laps, and crashed through the fence.



Don Hendenberg with Dave McCredy's S-33.
(Feuz Collection)

Early on, 1957 had the look of a good year for the fun-loving Roman. In June he snagged a fourth, a second, and his only two Fonda feature wins, back to back. However, fate was to have its own sad and unexpected twist. Delivering papers one morning, Don slammed a tree at the sharp bend in the middle of Lee Center, New York.

The popular bear man, driving his tiny early Volkswagen bug, was dead.



July 26, 1958 was a huge day in Fonda history with a visit from Miss America, Marilyn Van Derbur, of Colorado.

Jeep Herbert, Ken Shoemaker, their race cars, and local TV crews greeted Miss Derbur at the Albany Airport (left), but it was Steve Danish, driving the Trinkhaus #62, who got to meet her in Fonda's victory lane that night (right).

(left, Feuz Collection; right, Biittig Collection)

Danish won the 1962 Fonda point title and scored five wins from 1961-63, including the 1963 Fonda 200, his final Fonda victory. His last career win came in October of 1963 in a 100-lapper at Victoria Speedway, near Schenectady. He remained competitive, albeit winless, thereafter. Danish was becoming increasingly disenchanted with the advances and costs of the sport. Modified engines were legalized at Fonda in mid-1965, dwarfing Danish's sportsman power. Upright cars like his would be relegated to dinosaur status when Cliff Wight and Bob Zaunter unveiled Ken Shoemaker's revolutionary low slung offset chassis the following year. Danish and partner Hill sold their racing equipment at the end of the '66 season and Steve bought an airplane. "Racing took a toll," he recalls. "My kids had started to grow up without me and that worried me a lot. But, I'm glad I had flying because I didn't miss racing that much by having another interest."

When Danish retired prior to the 1967 season, he wasn't alone. After a drought of a couple of years in substandard equipment, Jeep Herbert landed a hot seat in 1966 in an immaculate coupe #56 fielded by Connecticut owners Burley Hammond and Lou Strong. But an early 1967 crash at Stafford Springs, Conn. broke Herbert's ankle and foot, and ended his career. A third Fonda hero, Jim Luke, also had hung it up in 1966. With the 1965 legalization of modifieds at Fonda, the famed Sharkey Gaudiosi's #44 had invaded "The Track of Champions" in '65 with Luke at the controls. The pink and white Dodge coach, powered by a Chrysler Hemi, was an absolute rocket, but Luke fell disappointingly short of expectations.



Steve collects his 31st, and next-to-last, feature win at Fonda in the prestigious Empire State Championship. The date was July 13, 1963. (Feuz Collection)

Sadly, Steve Danish, Jeep Herbert, and Jim Luke moved to the sidelines. Overnight, Fonda Speedway lost a trio of first-night pioneers—Hall of Famers all. It was a foreshadowing of a severe talent depletion that would trouble Fonda into the early 1970s. But more on that later; we're getting way ahead of ourselves.



A pensive Steve Danish contemplates his future in this candid 1966 shot. He would retire at the end of the season. (Biittig Collection)

"As for the drivers at Fonda in the early days, here's the deal: Corey was it. Period. He was the one with the balls and he ran it right. You just didn't shut off in the third turn at Fonda if your name was Pete Corey."

Ted Vogel



Pete Corey (Dave Lape Collection)

Pete Corey: “The Track of Champions” Earns Its Nickname 3

THE LATE PETE COREY was the most popular driver in Fonda Speedway history. He was also the most difficult for the establishment to deal with. And were you to plot the course of Corey's career and the destiny of Fonda from the early 1950s to the early 1970s, the lines would coincide.

Largely due to Corey's mystique, fans flocked to Fonda Speedway. Love him or hate him, you just had to watch him. Pete Corey wrote and re-wrote stock car history so often that you refrained from blinking for fear of missing something.

His influence is still with us today. Just ask Jack Johnson. Every time somebody goes three-wide in turn three, some old timer will remark: “That's the way Corey used to do it.” Every time a racer gets screwed by an official and threatens to leave, the promoter has to take it seriously—thanks to Pete Corey.

He was larger than life. If Hollywood ever made a Pete Corey biographical film, nobody would believe it.

Born in Bennington, Vermont and raised in the Troy suburb of Lansingburg, Corey was one of 13 siblings. Perhaps the autonomy of growing up in a huge family led to his individuality as a racer. As a boy in Lansingburg, he befriended Ken Shoemaker. They would remain close pals for life. According to Shoe, he and Pete were only 15 years old when they decided to enlist together in the Navy. They doctored the dates on their birth certificates. A recruiter, however, knew Shoemaker's family and alerted his mother. Corey wasn't as fortunate and ended up serving in World War II.

After the war, Corey and Shoemaker both married and their families shared a Troy apartment. In 1949, they chipped in together to buy a 1935 Ford coupe and made it into a stock car. They numbered the black racer #35 to represent the purchase price. Corey was

Pete Corey's first ride. The number 35 represents the amount of money he and Kenny Shoemaker paid for the car.



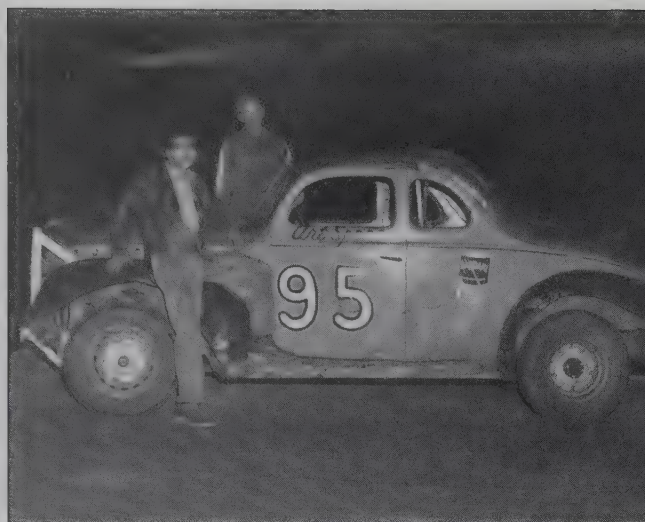
Changing of the guard: exit Whitbeck, enter Corey. Pete Corey gets strapped into Bob Whitbeck's #7 roadster at Perth in this 1951 shot. The two men would remain a team for most of the 1950s. (Pete Corey, Jr., Collection, courtesy of Don Radbruch)

tabbed to drive it at the nearby Burden Lake Speedway in Averill Park. "Pete was just a natural born race driver. It was a little harder on me. I had to learn to drive them," said The Shoe in his autobiography.

In his rookie and sophomore seasons, Corey was a notorious crasher and banger, but with a zany sense of humor. He welded a pair of red roller skates upside down on the #35. "I remember asking him at Carroll's Grove Speedway in 1950, 'Why ya got those roller skates up there?'" smiles Irv Taylor. "Pete said, 'Cause I spend more time on my roof than on my wheels.' He and Taylor would be tight from that day forward—no small feat on Taylor's part because Pete Corey was distant, leather-souled, cantankerous, and he never uttered the words "I'm sorry" during his entire life. You could count on one hand the fellow racers he allowed within his realm. In fact, you only needed three fingers for Shoemaker, Taylor, and Ed Pieniazek."

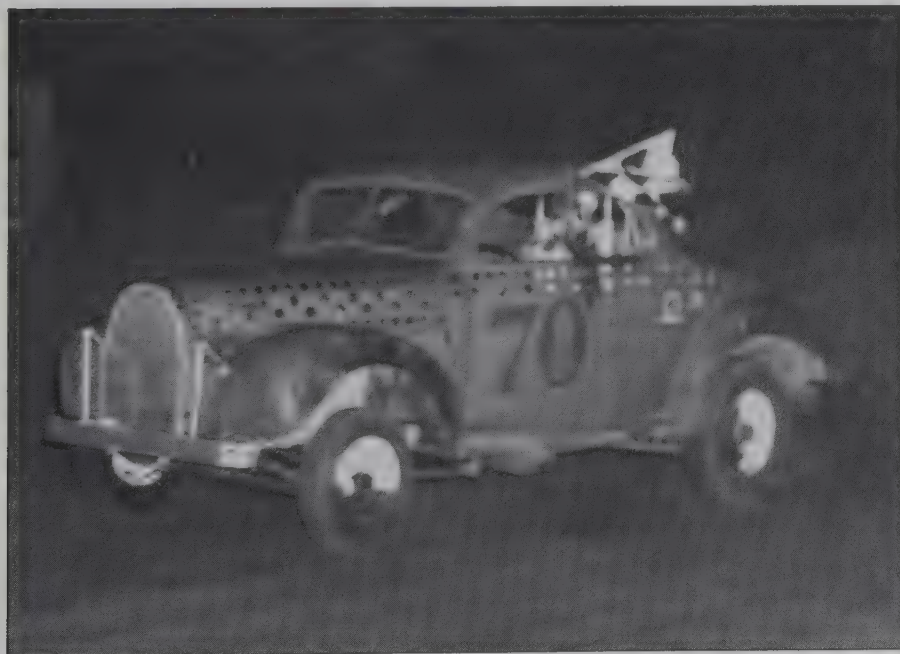
Corey soon caught the eye of Canajoharie's renowned Bob Whitbeck. Whitbeck had been a successful "hot rod" driver on dirt ovals in New York and Pennsylvania. Hot rods, also called "roadsters" and "jalopies," were cut-down roofless Model As and Model Ts, sometimes equipped with a single metal hoop behind the driver for rollover protection. But Whitbeck preferred race car construction to race car driving. In 1951, he put Corey behind the wheel of his cut down roadster #7, and the duo became top runners at places like Willett's Speedway near Perth, and Adirondack Speedway in West Glens Falls, New York. It would be the first of many times the paths of Pete Corey and Bob Whitbeck would intersect.

The increasing popularity of stock cars ended the roadster era. In 1952, Corey landed the first good stock car ride of his career, Art



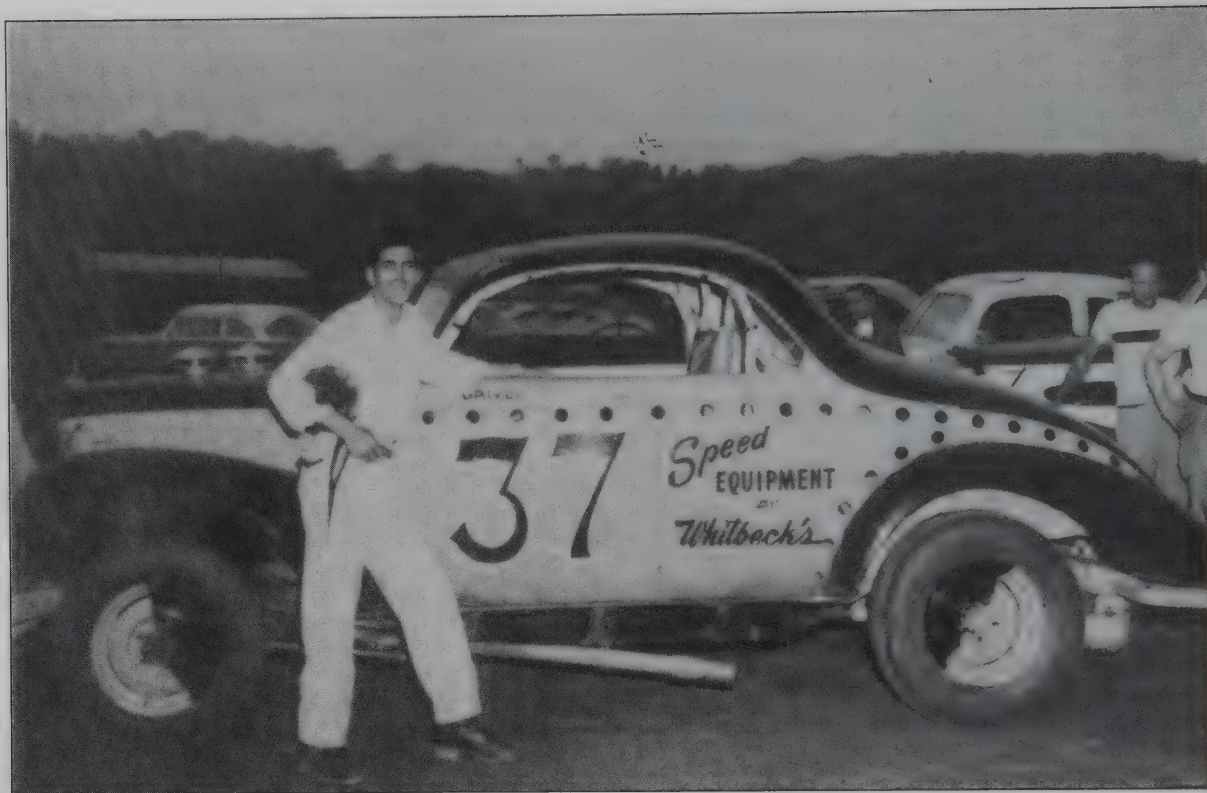
Spoar's #95. Corey was supposed to drive for Spoar again in 1953. However, Whitbeck built a stock car to race at the new Fonda track slated to open in his backyard. He registered himself as its driver and was assigned #70—"his" familiar #7 belonged to Smokey Stover. But when Corey started coming around to Fonda, Whitbeck again relinquished his seat to the young charger. Corey won his first-ever Fonda feature with that #70 on July 25, 1953. The Whitbeck car had a cut-up body, peppered with holes to lighten it. This attention to detail wasn't lost on Corey; it took a multitude of little things to make an overall fast package.

(top left) One of racing's first "speed shots." This 1951 action at Perth shows Corey (white car) in the Whitbeck roadster running with an unidentified competitor. The photo effect was obtained by holding the camera still and having the cars race into the frame. (Corey, Jr., Collection, courtesy of Radbrunch)



(top right) Pete Corey in Art Spoar's #95 in 1952. (Putnam Collection)

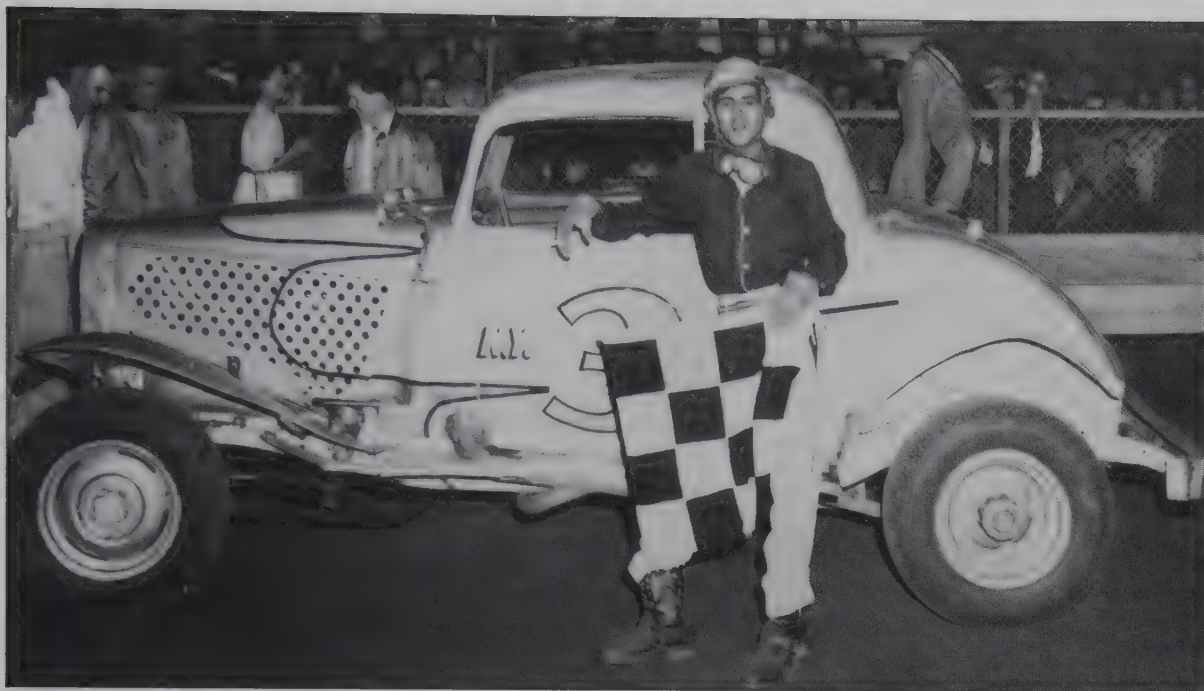
(bottom) Corey carries the flag after his first-ever Fonda feature win on July 25, 1953. The Whitbeck-owned car was lightened by drilling holes in the body. (Feuz Collection)



Pete Corey with
Whitbeck's 1954 entry.
The ill-performing coupe
was sold to Jerry Jerome
by season's end.
(Ed and Betty Blittig Collection)

In 1954, Whitbeck and Corey debuted a new entry that would become a Fonda institution for four decades. Car #37—yellow, black, and fast—was to be a fixture at Fonda through the 1980s. Team #37 was unusual in that its stewardship would be handed from owner to owner several times over the years: first Whitbeck, then Kitler-Wolf, Al Caprara, Tony Vilano, and finally Hank Spetla. Fonda's first #37 was low and light, but temperamental and unreliable. In 1954 it carried Corey to eight Fonda heat wins, but no top-five feature finishes. Disgusted, Whitbeck sold the car to Jerry Jerome during the season.

The following year, 1955, would prove to distinguish Pete Corey for life. Whitbeck had cultivated Sam Kitler and Gibby Wolf to become the #37's car owners. If they were going to pay the bills, they wanted to pick the driver. And they selected Jeep Herbert—not Pete Corey—as their chauffeur. So, Jeep jumped to the #37 and Corey assumed Herbert's old ride, the Bob Mott #3. Mott's '34 Ford coupe had been a front runner previously, producing six feature wins for Herbert in 1953-54, including four straight in '54. But nobody expected the success that the Mott-Corey pairing would generate. Corey's "Lil' Yellow 3" went undefeated during the first five weeks of the 1955 season, kick-starting a legend. The key to why the car was so much faster with Corey than it had been with Herbert lay not so



much inside the cockpit as beneath the hood. Ford's new 292 c.i.d. Thunderbird V-8 far out-performed its flathead predecessor. But there was a problem. The car was illegal.

NASCAR rules prohibited cars that came equipped with a "rag top." The rag top was a square canvas roof-center, considered stylish in the 1930s. NASCAR regulations called for a full factory steel roof, as opposed to a rag top. Mott had riveted a replacement sheet-metal roof on Corey's car. People might have cared less that it was technically illegal, until the car became unbeatable. When the car was banned after winning six of the first seven Fonda 1955 features, Corey was enraged. "How come this car was legal for two years when Jeep drove it"—Peter wondered—"and now that I drive it, it's illegal?" "Don't blame us. NASCAR makes the rules," Fonda officials shrugged.

In actuality, the officials were right. In 1953 and '54, the NASCAR rule had read as follows: "Sportsman Division races are open to any make or model of American closed car with a steel top. Models older than 1937 may compete if passed as mechanically fit by NASCAR officials and conform with conditions of entry at each track." In 1955 NASCAR amended the rule's language to read: "Sportsman Division races are open to any make or model of America closed car with a factory-made steel top." The matter was quite clear: Fonda officials had the discretion to allow Herbert to use the car in 1953-54, yet had no choice but to outlaw it in 1955. No amount of reasoning quieted Corey. He'd take to the grave his bitch about the

Corey's 1955 ride, the Bob Mott "Lil' Yellow 3," the car, number, and color that made him famous. (Boyd Collection)

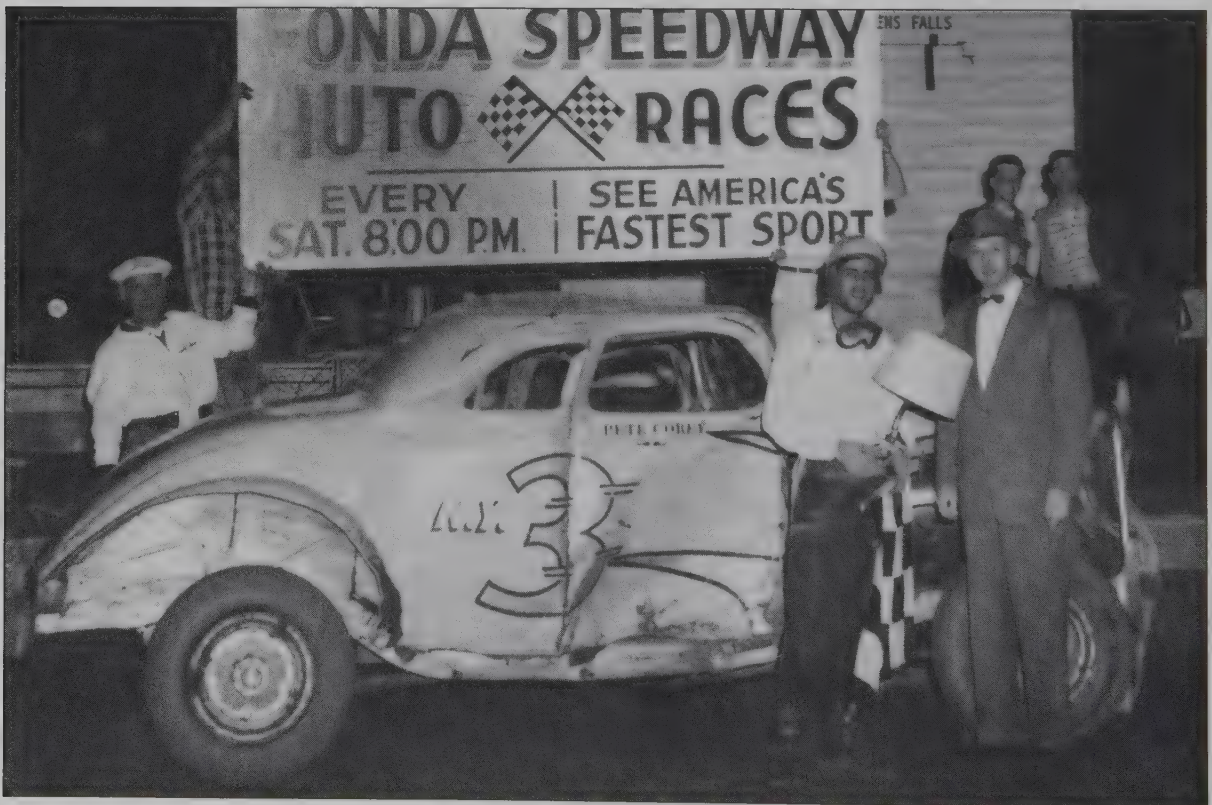
1955 banning of his all-time favorite car. Mott and Corey quickly threw together a later-model, and legal, Ford coupe. It wasn't nearly as fast as its predecessor, and each week's futility angered Corey more. But he'd have the last laugh.

The biggest event in dirt stock car racing at the time was the National Open 100 on the circular dirt mile in Langhorne, Pennsylvania. It was then what Super DIRT Week in Syracuse is today, if not bigger. The new Mott/Corey #3 might not have been dominant at Fonda, but it flew at the 'Horne. Corey won the 1955 Open with Pieniazek as his crew chief. As his yellow #3 sat in victory lane, Corey hopped on its roof to greet his fans. Victory lane roof celebrations are common place nowadays. Pete Corey invented it on October 9, 1955. Ironically, the tin roof on the car, which had been outlawed months earlier, might not have held him.

Langhorne was considered stock car racing's national championship at the time. Previously, Fonda had toyed with the slogan "The Track of Champions." Now, the nickname was Fonda's to keep. Corey was Fonda's son—even if his best car had been thrown out. Ed Feuz and Jim Gage felt proud. Pete Corey felt used.

The Mott-Corey pairing lasted until August 1957, when Mott sold out and Corey jumped into Whitbeck's brand new #22. Again, Whitbeck (the Ray Evernham of his day) had created a new team by

The date was May 12, 1956. In Dave Lape's words, "Pete went over the backstretch fence and flipped down onto the lower road and then he came roaring right back out. It was nuts. I was nine years old. I remember replaying it on my rug with model cars—Corey flips but still wins." This was the same car that Corey won with at Langhorne in 1955.
(Feuz Collection)





inating a new car with an enthusiastic owner (Harold Smith), and an established driver. The Mott-Corey team had produced 18 Fonda feature wins in a little over two and a half years. And Corey had become the speedway's biggest star in the process. His legend grew even larger in the #22. It had an eye-catching combination of dark colors, white flames, and red numbers—a paint scheme and number that Dave Lape still uses today. The #22 carried Corey to 15 feature wins through 1959, when it was destroyed in a garage fire at the Johnstown residence of the car's owners, the Smith family.

Corey had now passed Steve Danish as Fonda's all-time winningest driver. His swash buckling driving style and Errol Flynn-like good looks earned Corey a legion of supporters and Fonda's biggest fan club. His daredevil characteristics were best described in his 1994 DIRT Hall of Fame induction commentary: "Corey's moves on a racetrack were somewhere beyond brave. No gap was too narrow for him to fit through. Three-wide passes were a trademark. And that his car had to be equipped with a hand brake, after he lost his leg, seemed immaterial. When you watched Pete Corey, you got the impression that he never bothered to use brakes."

With the #22 lost in the garage fire, Corey was hired to drive car #37 in 1960. The #37 team's current owner was Al "A.C." Caprara. On the first feature lap of 1960's second show at Fonda, Pete Corey's life changed forever. Corey took the car three-wide at the drop of Chet

Pete Corey beats George Welch to the line for one of his 15 feature wins at the wheel of Bob Whitbeck's #22. (Boyd Collection)

Pete and Ted, Baumpy, and Shoe

"As for the drivers at Fonda in the early days, here's the deal: Corey was it. Period. He was the one with the balls and he ran it right. You just didn't shut off in the third turn at Fonda if your name was Pete Corey."

The speaker is owner/builder Ted Vogel. And the man should know. His white #95s won all over in the '50's era, and Ted sure liked forceful drivers. His hired guns included not only Corey, but also wildmen George "Baumpy" Baumgartner of Saratoga Springs and Westmere's young Kenny "The Shoe" Shoemaker.

Baumgartner and Shoemaker alternated as Vogel's appointed jockey for the first three seasons at Fonda. In 1955, Baumpy, who was both impish and on the hammer, pleased Vogel with many strong performances, including four top fives at Fonda. The high and low points of the season, though, came at Langhorne. Baumgartner blasted the white coach to a top time trial and subsequently ran tight with eventual winner Pete Corey until the rear broke. Vogel remembers that October 1955 afternoon at the treacherous circular mile. "Baumpy ran right up on the rail and never took his foot off it, all the way around. We were really fast. I wasn't letting him drink that year.

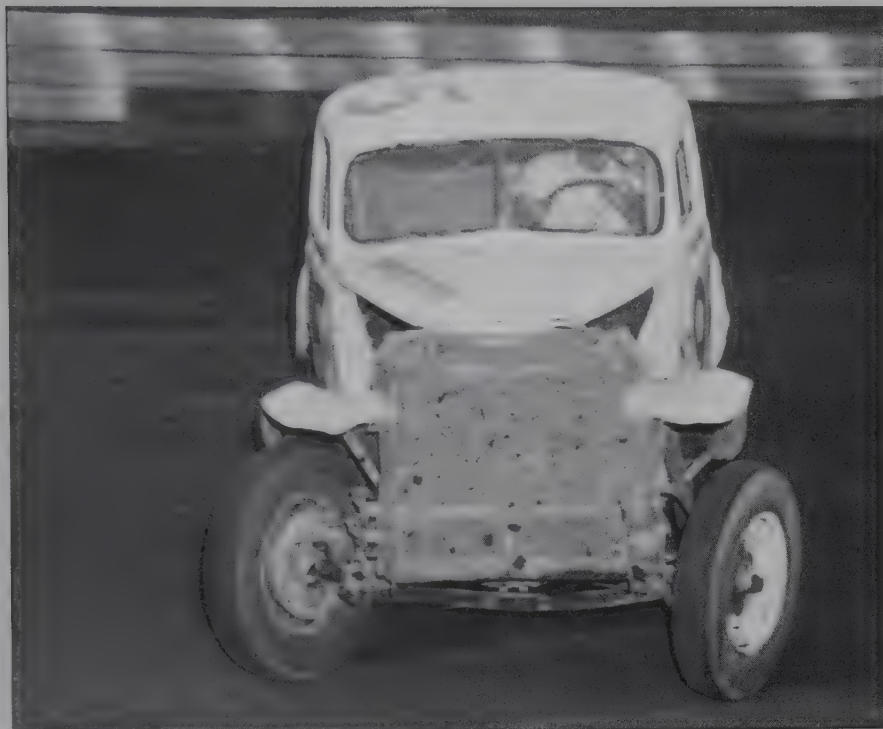
"The cars weren't too much then," reflects Vogel. "We had cast iron roll bars; we cut our own rears, and made our wheels. You wouldn't even sit in one today. A lot of guys got hurt unnecessarily. The only thing we put money into was the engine. Bert Brooks, the midget champion from New Jersey, built me a good one. It cost \$800."

When Baumgartner took his helmet to Henry Caputo's #111, Shoemaker, still struggling to master his trade, became the #95's regular driver. He tested Vogel's endurance mightily. In 1957 the hyper-aggressive Shoe crashed at every Fonda race for a two-month period. The culminating blow to Vogel came when The Shoe drove deep into oil from Jeep Herbert in Caputo's #77 Plymouth. Vogel's coupe started flipping off the second turn and continued all the way down the backstretch. The belts broke from the violence of the crash, and The Shoe came flying out the window like a missile. Vogel and the rest of the astonished crowd watched as the motor was subsequently ejected and actually kept the car from landing on its driver.

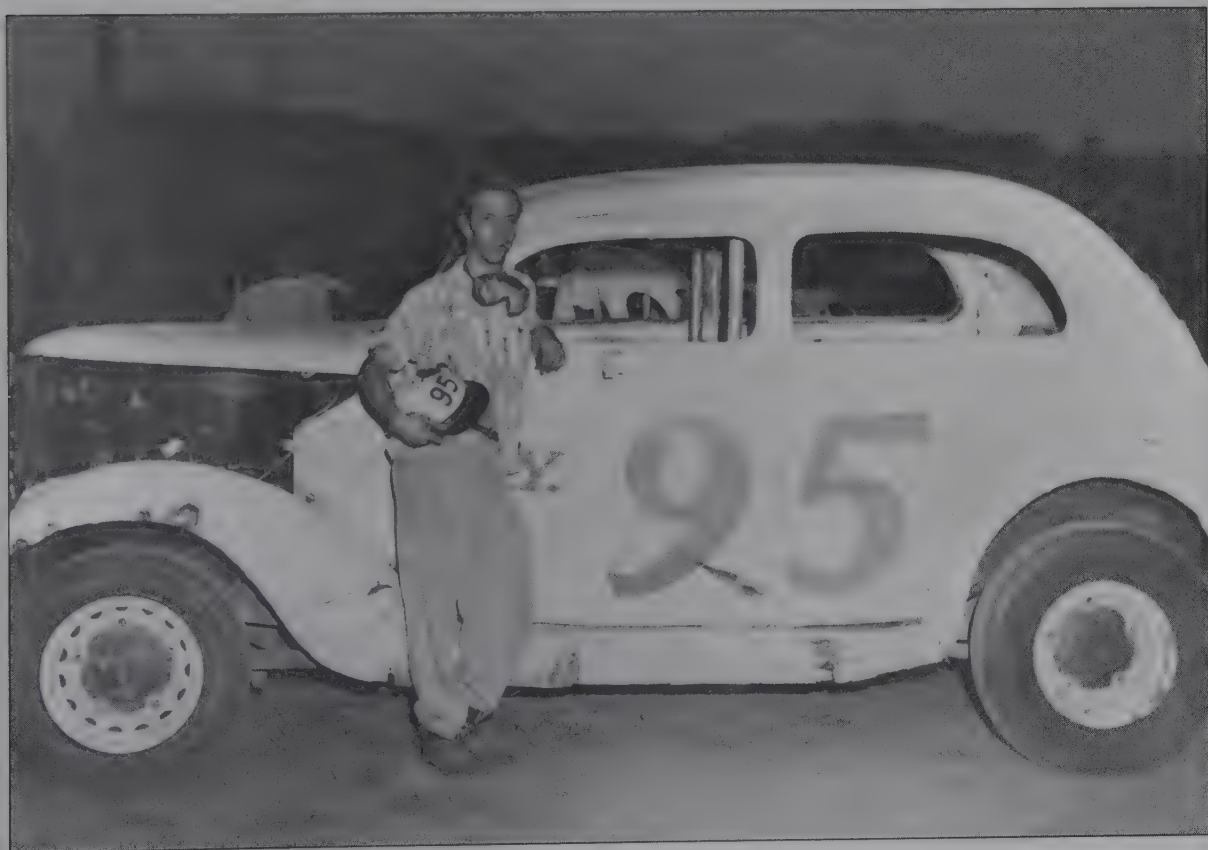
One Friday night, in the middle of Shoemaker's eight-week crash fest, the long-suffering Vogel decided to take a "vacation" night and tow down to Alcyon Speedway in Pitman, New Jersey. Because Shoe was driving a truck on Friday nights at the time, Ted invited Corey to join in on the Garden State lark. It was a modified show and the #95 was a sportsman. No matter. Corey cleaned house anyway.

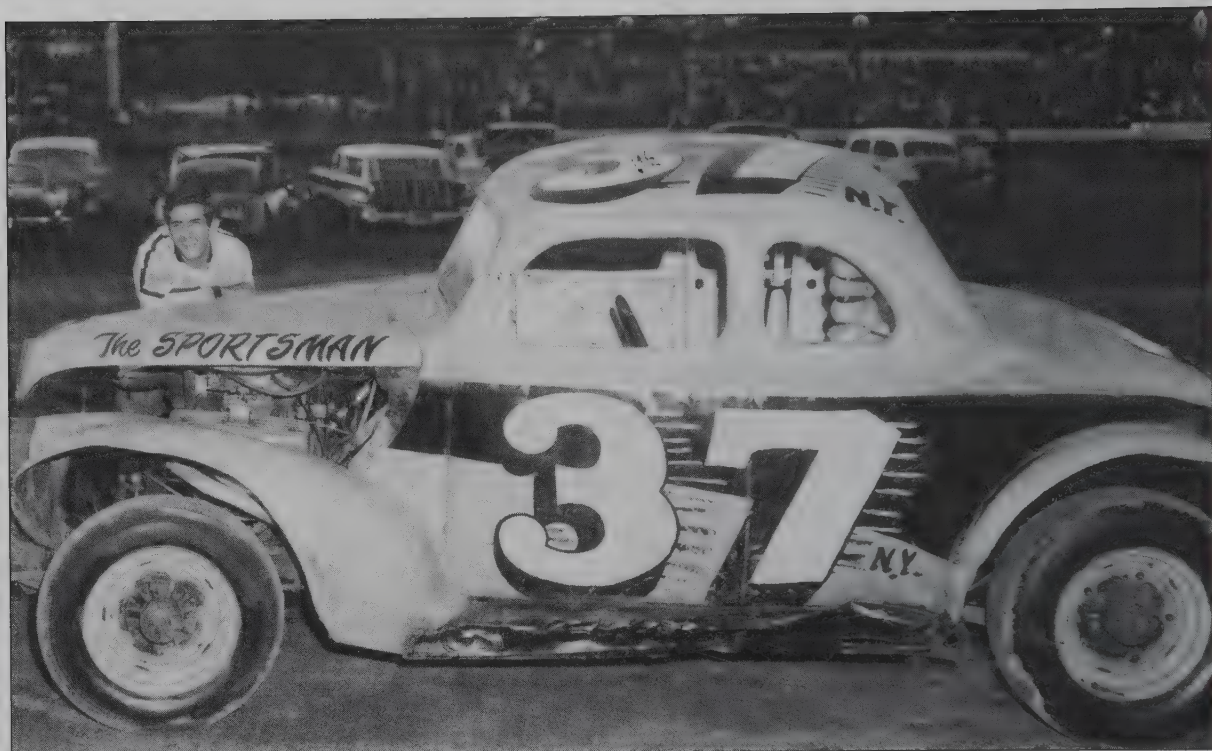
Although Vogel's cars won at Alcyon, Sharon Springs, White Beach, State Line, Warrensburg, and Metowee, none ever won a feature at Fonda until he sold one. The buyer of one of the #95 coaches? Glens Falls Ford dealer J.R. Earl. He renumbered Vogel's creation #991 in '58 and #1 in '59 for his driver Jeep Herbert. Jeoper went on to win seven Fonda mains and the 1959 Fonda track championship for Earl.

Kenny Shoemaker pitches
Vogel's #95 coupe into
the first turn at Fonda on
July 4, 1956.
(Boyd Collection)



George Baumgartner is
shown below with Vogel's
Langhorne coach.
(Biittig Collection)





Corey with A.C. Caprara's #37 in the Fonda infield on July 4, 1960, during the Pete Corey Benefit Race.
(Rick Lucia Collection)

Hames' green, and was high outside of the groove heading toward turn two. Observers wondered whether Corey would either make the turn or head down the lower "escape" road, which flanked the Mohawk River. He did neither, instead smacking the butt end of the hubrail that separated the two routes.

Soon it was obvious that Corey was in peril. The wooden guardrail had perforated the #37's firewall just behind the right front wheel. Corey's left leg was pinned beneath the seat by the wooden intruder. At first, the track crew (led by Ron Compani and Gigi Conover), tried to remove the plank by cutting it with a chain saw and pulling it free. But the hubrail would not budge. Meanwhile, Corey sat helplessly.

Fruitless attempts at extraction had now consumed valuable time. Corey took matters into his own hands. Track welder Milt Foote was on the scene with his cutting torch. But, since Corey was in the cockpit, Foote couldn't fit inside the car to work. "Finally Pete said to the welder, 'Hey Footie, give me the torch.' So Milt handed him the torch and Corey cut the seat and the flooring to get himself loose," says Ed Feuz, who witnessed the rescue.

Early in the half-hour ordeal, Corey was in excruciating pain. By the time he cut himself free, his leg was numb to the heat. It was a terrifying foreshadowing. He was rushed to St. Mary's Hospital in Amsterdam, where doctors had no choice but to amputate his mangled left leg below the knee. Pete Corey was often prone to bitterness



when matters in racing didn't go his way. But if he was bitter about losing his leg, he never let on. "I visited him in the hospital," remembers Feuz. "He wasn't bitter at all. He treated it like any other racing injury."

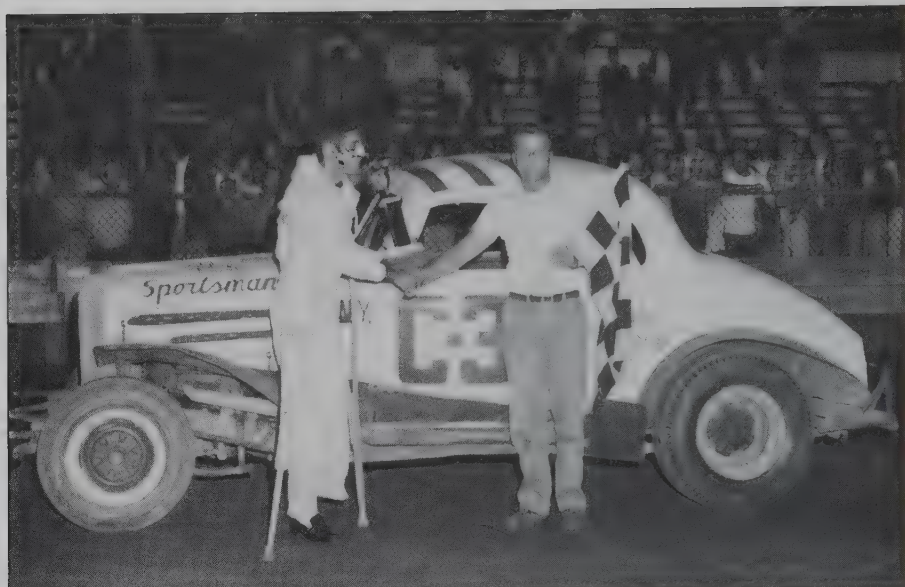
Corey was an occasional visitor to "The Track of Champions" during his recovery, greeting fellow racers with one leg and two crutches. Soon Corey was fitted with a wooden prosthesis and began the arduous physical therapy of learning to walk again. He carved a slot in his wooden leg and inserted a transistor radio and would take delight when people looked around, confused by the source of the music.

The thought of retiring due to the disability never crossed Corey's mind. In fact, the dream to again drive stock cars with the assistance of a hand brake fueled his recovery. Corey knew that eastern sprint car legend Bill Schindler had overcome a like injury, so he never doubted that he could do the same. His first race back, driving Frank Trinkhaus' #62, was May 5, 1961 at Victoria. In storybook fashion, Corey won the feature. Switching between the #62 and Caprara's #37, Corey had an amazing 1961 comeback season. He won five Victoria features and the track's point championship. At Fonda, he garnered a pair of feature wins, including the biggest race of the year, a 100-lapper in September 1961. He was also a runaway victor in fan voting for Fonda's "Most Popular Driver" award.

Although Corey was never comfortable with publicity, he never

Corey is pictured cutting himself out of the #37 with a torch. He was severely injured at the time. (Feuz Collection)

Pete Corey is a temporary spectator as he congratulates Buck Holliday after his win on August 20, 1960.
(Feuz Collection)



shortchanged his fans. They would surround him and his car for hours after a race. Leaning on a fender to support his left leg, Corey dutifully answered every query and signed every autograph. He was free with his time and his opinions. His caustic, independent attitude was a fan magnet. Anybody who'd been stepped on, anybody who had ever answered to "da' man," and anybody who felt oppressed had to worship Pete Corey. He became a genuine hero to many. Pete Corey was the Dale Earnhardt, Sr. of his generation.

Local singer Gordy Watson recorded a song about Corey: "The

A young Fonda fan presents Pete with a model of the Chris Drellos #11. (Feuz Collection)



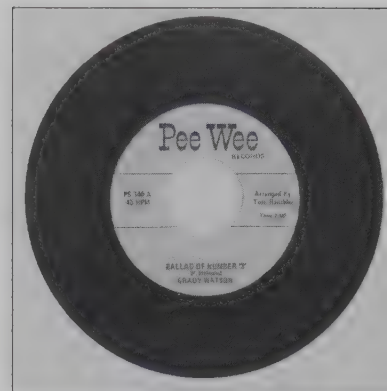
Ballad of Number 3." The record became a regional hit on country and western radio. Legendary status notwithstanding, the sad truth is that Pete Corey simply wasn't as successful a race driver after the accident that cost him his leg as he'd been before. Of his 50 Fonda career wins, only 15 occurred after the 1960 tragedy.

Corey spent the next couple of years interchangeably driving Caputo's #37 and a #11 coupe teamed with Kenny Shoemaker's #111. The red and white #11/#111/#111A squadron had been Fonda regulars since 1953, with drivers like Earl Maille, George Baumgartner, Irv Taylor and Tom Kotary preceding The Shoe. Kenneth Hansen and Henry Caputo had originally formed the team, and Chris Drellos bought it in 1959. Drellos routinely fielded a pair of coupes, with Jeep Herbert, Buck Holliday, and Paul Marshall in the second seat to Shoemaker before Corey came along.

The Shoemaker-Corey pairing was an awesome combination. They started invading Stafford Springs (Connecticut) Motor Speedway on a weekly Friday basis, and they converted thousands of New England fans. One of those fans was an impressionable 20-year old college student named Dick Berggren, who is now a television analyst with Fox Sports and executive editor of *Speedway Illustrated* magazine. "When Shoemaker and Corey started coming to Stafford you could almost sense fear, raw fear, in the pits and grandstands. One of those guys was gonna win and the other one was either gonna finish second or wreck." The success of the #111/#11 invasion soon brought other Fonda stars to Stafford, like Wimble, Herbert, and Wayman. "They just killed our locals like Ernie Gahan and Ron Narducci," remembers Berggren "The Fonda cars cleaned us out and they weren't very polite about it. They simply took names and kicked ass."

"It got to a point where Pete and I were frequently running one-two and battling each other," fondly recalled Shoemaker. "So we made a decision to take first and second place money and pool it together. I wouldn't pass Pete unless he made a really bad mistake. And unless I screwed up, he wouldn't pass me—he'd just stay behind." Shoe's fond recollections belied Corey's private resentment. He didn't like playing second fiddle to anyone—even Shoemaker. And there was no doubt that the #111 was superior to Corey's #11. His opportunity to politely leave the arrangement came in the 1963-64 off season when Drellos sold out.

Corey decided to form his own team with the financial backing of Danny D'Annunzio. Grabbing a bit of his past magic, Corey revived both the yellow and silver colors and the number 3, which had carried him and Bob Mott to national prominence a decade earlier. But this new "Lil' Yellow #3" was to be quite different. More than anything, Pete Corey strived to be unique. So Corey built a car that was unlike anything either Fonda or the world had seen previously.



"The Ballad of Number 3" became a regional hit. (DIRT Motorsports Hall of Fame Collection)

Hired Gun: “The Shoe” Tells It Like He Was

When legend Kenny Shoemaker finally retired from driving in 1978, he had won 54 features at Fonda alone and had built up a reputation for being one of its toughest competitors of all times. Sadly, within five years, he was to endure a series of major heart attacks that essentially confined him to his Westmere home for the rest of his life. Convinced he had to keep his mind active even as he approached his death, the resilient Shoe spent much of his last two years working on an autobiography, *They Called Me The Shoe*. In the following excerpt from the book, The Shoe justifies his legendary career.

“I’ve been working on this book in spurts, and now it is time to thank the people I have known over the years, especially the people I raced against when I was starting out. Maybe they didn’t realize they were teaching me, but all the time I was driving behind them I was learning something. After I got faster and was able to catch them once in a while, I suppose they wondered why the old Shoe would run up against them. If we got in a tight position, I didn’t back off. You gotta understand: I was a hired gun. A hired gun does what he is supposed to do—go out and shoot down the winner. If I hadn’t done my job, the owners wouldn’t have needed me. I wasn’t the only race car driver out there.

I don’t believe that I was a reckless driver. I was a hard driver, but I tried not to cause problems for other guys.

Anything I did purposefully that was a little bit shady, it needed to happen. A driver did something to me and he got retaliation. That was the way I raced. They knew that before they did it, and if they didn’t know, they should have. Yeah, I wrecked my full share of cars. You don’t wreck cars not trying to go to the front. It’s easy to set back in the pack and watch the other cars race. But if you are trying to get to the front, there are going to be some accidents and bent up race cars. Naturally an owner does not want to see his race car get wrecked, but he doesn’t want to see it running tenth, either. Not when he’s paying a man to run up front.

So I want to thank all the owners I’ve driven for over the years, all the drivers I’ve raced against, and all the race drivers I’ve rubbed wheels with because they all made a better race car driver out of Kenny Shoemaker.”

Kenny Shoemaker died on March 22, 2001.

(top) Retaliation at Plattsburgh.
Rene “The Champ” Charland happens by at the wrong time and “The Shoe” drills him.
(Barbara Shoemaker Collection)

(bottom) Shoemaker savors a quiet moment with the trophy after driving the Chris Drellos #111 to a Victoria win.
(Boyd Collection)



Pete Corey leads Steve Danish and Lou Lazzaro in the new "Lil'Yellow 3" Ford Falcon. (Feuz Collection)

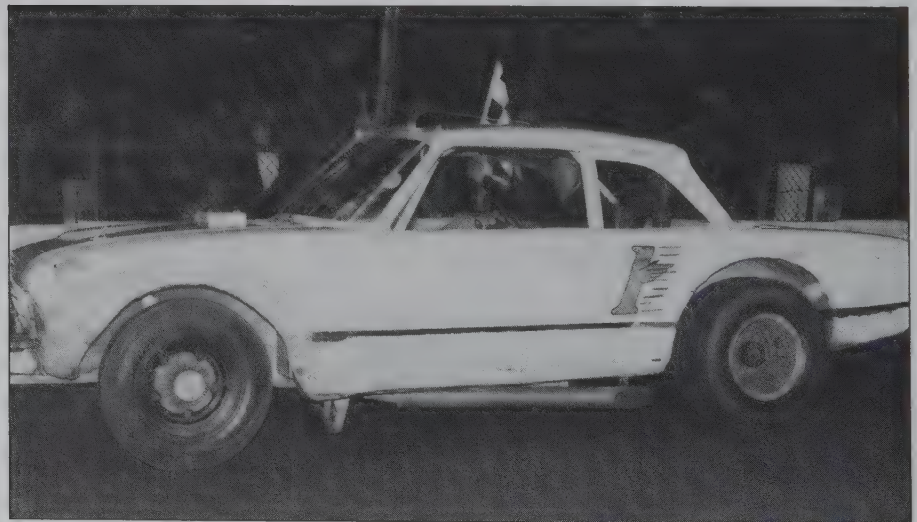


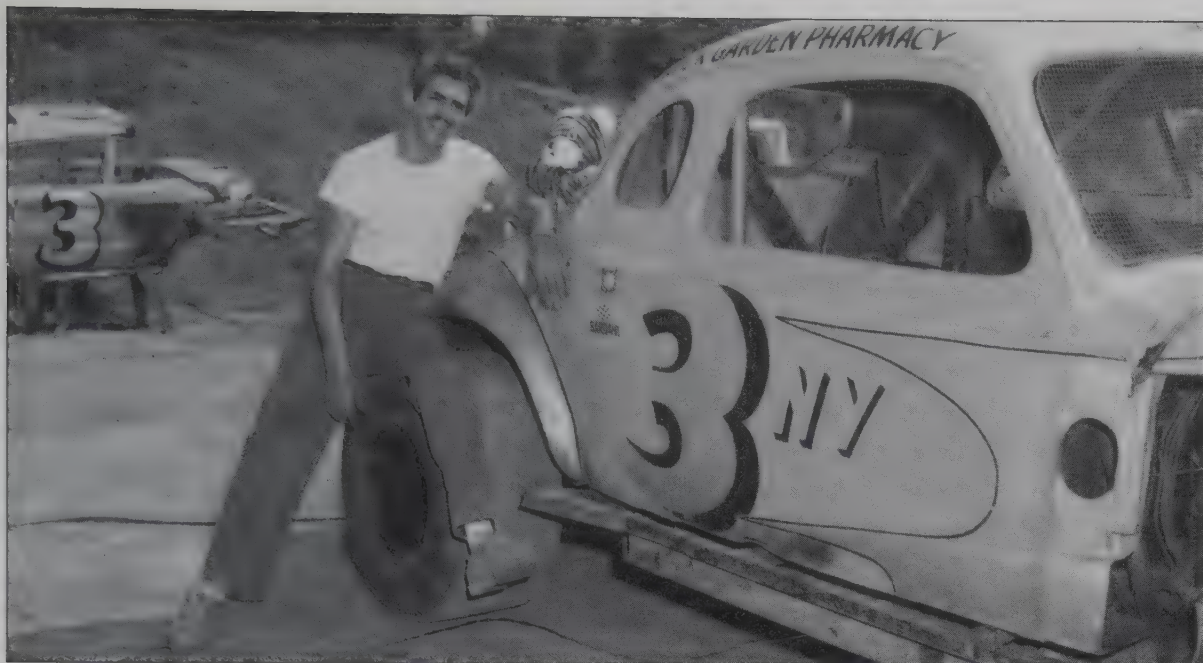
Coupes and coaches were still plentiful in junkyards at the time, but Corey shunned the obvious. Instead, he constructed a Ford Falcon-bodied car. It was wild looking, but gave birth to a revolution.

Soon Corey friend and neighbor, Irv Taylor, had a Falcon, too. "It was all Pete's idea. He wanted something more modern," says Irv. "I just copied him. And when we starting winning, lots of other guys started building them." Not long after, NASCAR was offering bonus money to modifieds that had late-model bodies. And then Martinsville, Virginia, one of the jewels of the modified world, restricted entries to only those mods shrouded with late-model sheetmetal. The late-model body revolution started at Fonda; its birthfather: Pete Corey.

The 1965 and 1966 seasons saw Corey (in another Falcon, which

Corey's neighbor, Irv Taylor, wins in his Falcon. This shot was taken on May 5, 1964. (Biittig Collection)





he destroyed in a wicked flip, and then a '38 Chevy coupe) earn his final Fonda point titles, but on a technicality. Corey and all of the other Fonda drivers began the season with sportsman engines limited to about 327 cubic inches. In July, however, a pending drivers' boycott resulted in a rules change. To stave off the insurrection, Fonda obtained at mid-season a second 1965 NASCAR sanction for modifieds. If the sportsman drivers struck, Fonda's plan B was to bring in outsiders with big blocks.

The boycott was avoided, and most of the drivers saw the opening of the rules to big engines as a face slap. Pete Corey saw it as an opportunity. If the modifieds and sportsman were going to race together, why bring a knife to a gun fight, he reasoned.

Corey immediately dropped an injected 396 c.i.d. honker in his #3. The fuelly big block took time to tune and Corey only garnered one top-five finish with it. But his quick action gave him a huge head start in points over others like Ernie Gahan and Jim Luke, who'd eventually go modified as well. As such, Pete Corey was Fonda's 1965 modified point champion. In reality, the "real" track champion that year was Shoemaker, who topped the full-season sportsman standings. In 1966 Corey was again modified champion and Bill Wimble collected the sportsman crown.

Perhaps it was the Bob Whitbeck influence, or the buzz created by the Falcons, but whatever the reason, Pete Corey was becoming a prolific car builder. He debuted two new cars in 1965, one in 1966, two in 1967, one in 1968, and another in 1969. Mind you, this was long before tube chassis and mass-produced modifieds, a time

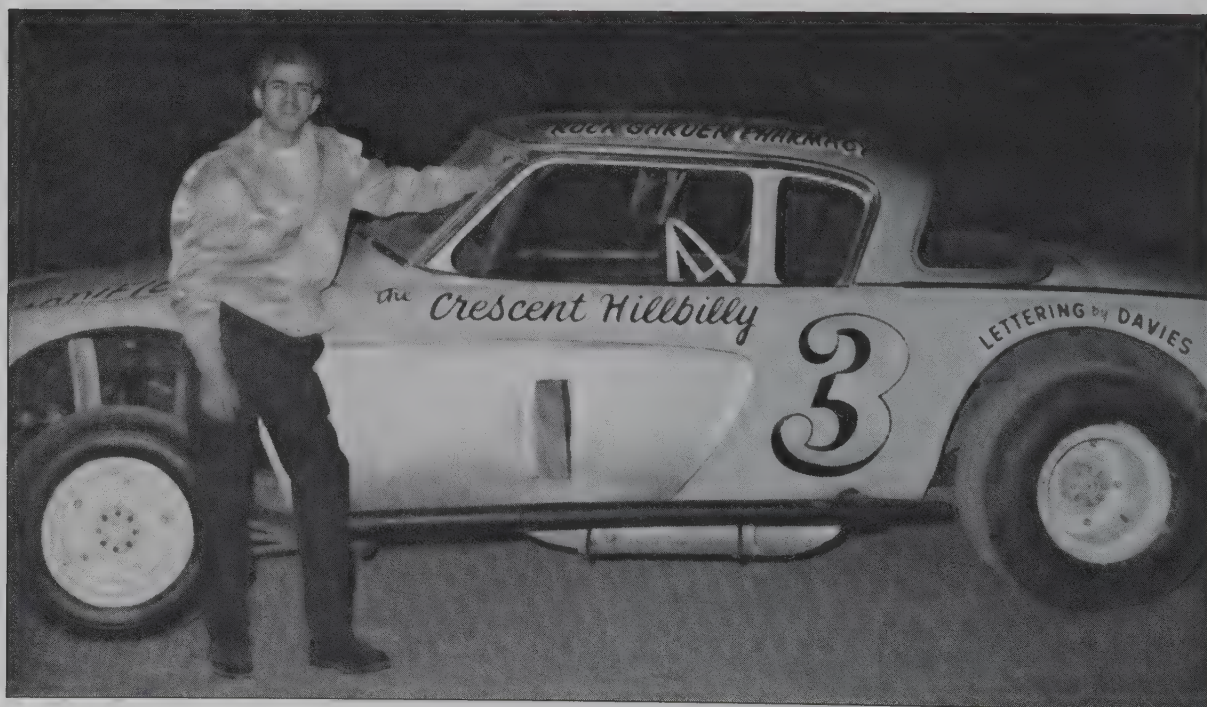
Pete Corey at home in August, 1965. He flipped the Falcon in the background one week and had the new coupe in the foreground ready the following week. Note the precise body work that was required to make the coupe's front window and side window enlarged, but still stock-appearing. Corey operated a body shop by day. (Lucia Collection)

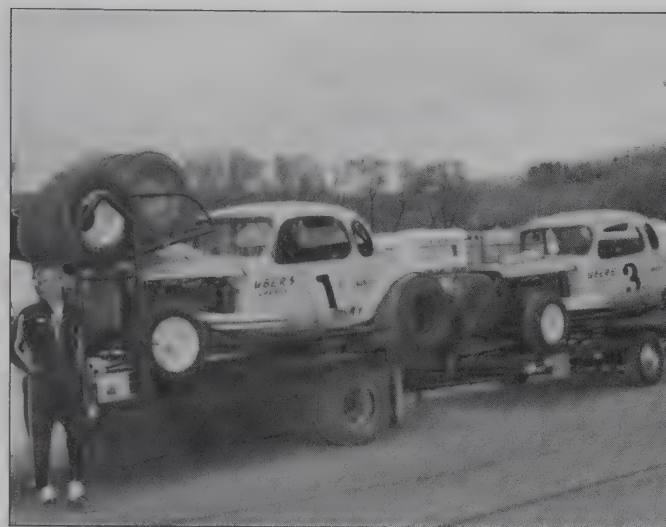
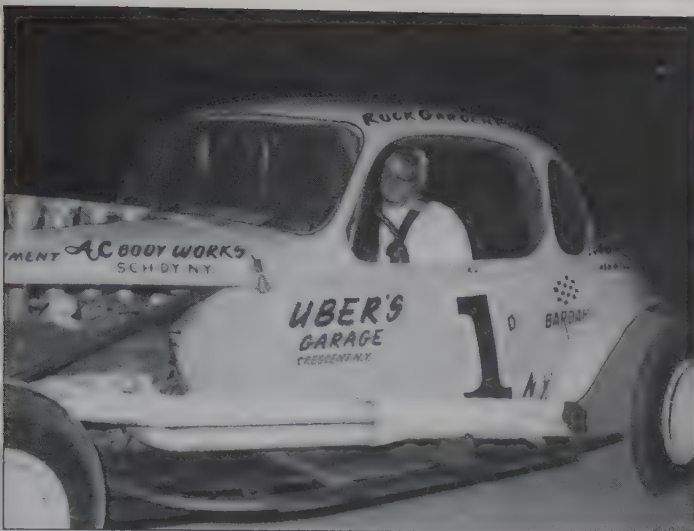
when constructing a stock car would often be a winter-long project. Corey was also becoming known for the unusual vehicles he was crafting. From the Falcon days onward, Corey almost annually introduced a body style that was out of step with conformity. His 1966 ride, a Studebaker, was the most infamous example. An early 1950s vintage Studebaker two-door was a fairly aerodynamic piece for its time. And as such, it had become a popular body style for mid-60s big track modified shows down South. Corey liked the look and unveiled his own version at Fonda in 1966.

Corey's Chevy-powered Studebaker was an attention getter. Big and full-bodied, the thing looked like a yacht in a speedboat race. At first it was very fast and handled well, even though it spotted the competition nearly five hundred pounds. Early in 1966 when Corey could throw the Studebaker around in the slop, the big car was quite impressive. Corey had six early wins with the car, three each at Fonda and Stafford. But as the season ensued and the tracks dried up, the Studebaker was a sled. Corey took a torch and tried to cut out as much extra weight as possible. And as he became increasingly dissatisfied with the car, holding that torch became too much of a temptation. "One night, he chopped the car up into scrap," remembers Irv Taylor. "That was Pete. If it didn't work, he'd cut it up."

With the Studebaker junked, Corey pulled from the mothballs the '38 Chevy coupe with which he had finished out 1965 (after totaling the Falcon). And he went on a tear, winning seven of the last 10 at Stafford and the final two at Fonda. Pete Corey was back.

The Crescent Hillbilly moved to a Studebaker body style in 1966. The nickname "The Crescent Hillbilly" was given to him by Kenny Shoemaker. Sponsor Rock Garden Pharmacy was a drug store owned and operated by Corey backer Danny D'Annunzio. And sign painter Dave Davies became a Fonda legend by lettering colorful race cars, beginning with this Corey Studebaker. (Grady photo)





Corey built two new coupes for 1967 with a unique twist. One was for him and the other for his new hired gun, Irv Taylor. The mounts were identical, except one was number 1D and the other numbered 3. Taylor usually drove 1D and Corey usually drove the 3, but periodically, they'd flip-flop. "Pete was very tough to drive for because he was so demanding," says Taylor. "I only won one feature for him (at Fonda May 27, 1967, edging Lou Lazzaro) and when I got into the pits, he chewed me out for not winning by enough. I told him it was because there was something wrong with the car, like a slipping clutch. We replaced the clutch and a week later I was out of the ride." And one month later, Pete Corey was out of Fonda.

Corey was driving his #3 coupe on June 24, 1967 when he became involved in an ugly incident that ended, for all intents and purposes, his Fonda career. The feature race was a 50-lapper with added prize money. Corey clearly had the fastest car that night and he had a huge lead over Rene Charland when the yellow came out as the leaders crossed the finish line with one to go. The field circled the track under yellow for countless laps while officials privately debated a subject that would soon become public. Finally, the field was stopped on the front chute. While the cars waited to be regrouped for a restart, a melee started. Numerous witnesses stated that the flagger had actually displayed the checkered flag instead of the white flag when Corey crossed the stripe for the 49th time. Honest mistake or otherwise, NASCAR rules were clear: the race should have been over.

The starter denied the error and Corey supporters were incensed. Jaw-to-jaw yelling contests broke out throughout the front straight staging area, while Corey fans screamed disapproval. Finally, peace was restored and officials decided to restart the race from lap 48, the last full lap completed by the entire field.

Corey went back to the coupes in 1967. On the left is a close-up of Irv Taylor in the #1D, and on the right is a shot of the two-car team on the highway. Note the injector stacks beneath the hood. Fuel-injection was legal at Fonda from mid-1965 through the end of the 1969 season. Pete Corey was the first guy to have it. (left, Grady photo; right, Rich Zagata Collection)

Irv Taylor: Utility Driver

His first racing operation was less than spectacular for sure. During his second race, young Irv Taylor noticed something flying from the front of his car as he came off the turn. Turns out that wooden spokes were shearing off his front wheels and being thrown forward. It was a four-cylinder, early-thirties Plymouth coupe at Carroll's Grove, the hillside track near Troy, spring of 1950.

By 1956, Taylor was at Fonda playing with the big boys, but his car was still modest. It was the resurrection of a pile of parts brought home from Syracuse by Hoppy Redner after a bad wreck. "They blew me off pretty bad in my little flat-head."

By February of 1959, however, Taylor was tooling around the new 2.5-mile Daytona asphalt tri-oval in Henry Caputo's 283-powered III coupe at 142 mph average. "As I recall," says Taylor, "we might have been seventh at the end. First Sportsman. I do know this: I couldn't get out of bed the next morning I was so sore. It was hang on and hold your breath. If we had ever hit that wall, wow."

By the early 1970s as he gradually retired, Irv Taylor had become a highly respected racing figure who had competed on 32 tracks in the state of New York alone. At Fonda, arguably his home, he is credited with 10 feature wins.

Taylor's way was a little different. After always fielding his own cars on the smaller tracks in the Eastern part of the state, he usually brought a piece of his own making as a backup at Fonda. Whenever he ran

for himself, he would end up pumping all the purse money back into his equipment. So, he usually sought out a ride. He figured the 40% he made as a driver went right into his pocket. "That way I always made some money." An interesting result of his utility driver approach is this: Of his 10 features, two came in Mike Michael's famous 10-10. Amazingly, he delivered trophies to eight other car owners as well—Vince Barbuto, Frank Trinkaus, Ray Vine, Henry Caputo, Al Caprara, Pete Corey, Dick Munroe, and, of course, Irv Taylor.

A utility driver sees lots of stuff. "I remember so many incidents. How about the night the steering wheel in the #75 spun in my hands in the second turn. Broken drag link. What an experience. Through the fence, off with the front end, way up in the air like a rocket ship, and, bang, down in the river. I just held on. When I landed, the part of the car that wasn't in the water was on fire. Then, there was the night in Caputo's car at Middletown before Fonda opened in the Spring. I tangled that Sportsman with a couple of modifieds and started flipping. I closed my eyes and we ended up upside down in a gully. I opened my eyes and couldn't see anything, but I didn't hurt. I thought, 'death ain't that bad.' Eventually, I saw a track light and knew I had more life to deal with. They had been burning garbage down there and the soot was unbelievable. We jacked out the roof and qualified through the consi. Henry wasn't happy. That was okay. I had other stuff to drive."



(top) Irv Taylor takes the Jim Young/Ray Vine #75 for a bone-jarring ride through the second turn fence, heading for a swim and cookout.
(Boyd Collection)

(right) The Utility Driver scores again. This August 12, 1964 shot shows Taylor in Fonda's victory circle with the Dick Munroe #1.
(Biittig Collection)



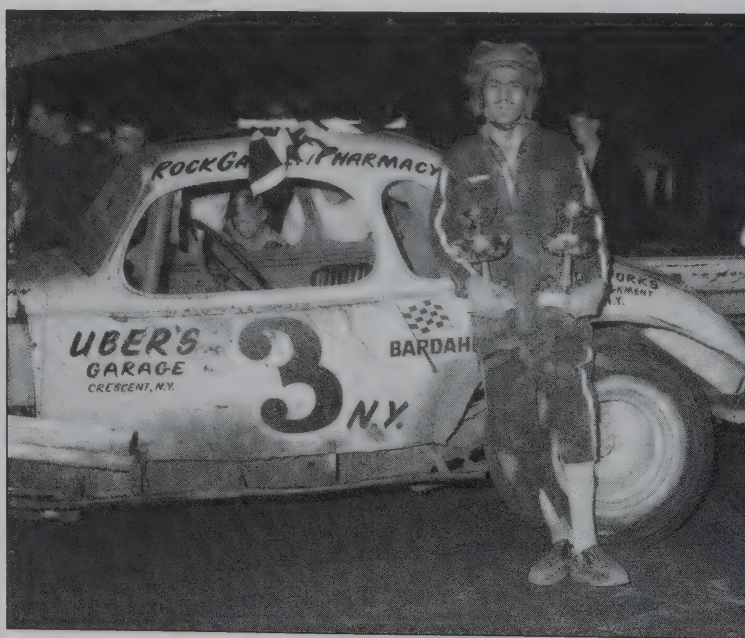
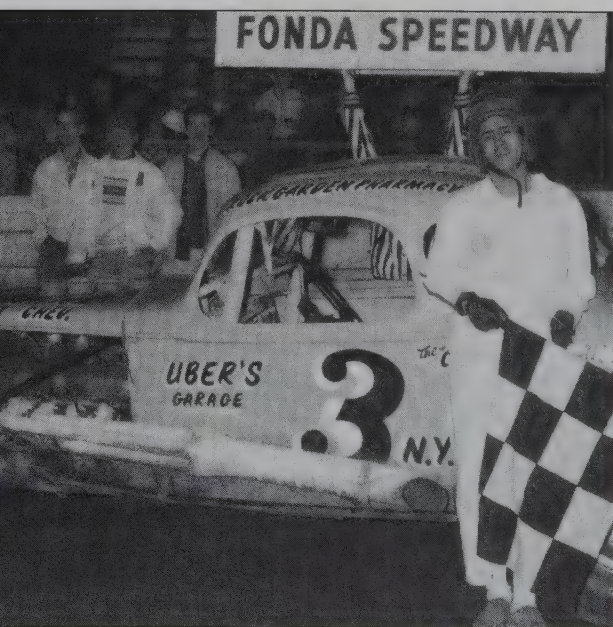
When the order to refire came, Corey's lead car wouldn't respond. Reportedly, it had run out of gas due to all of the unnecessary caution laps minutes earlier. Now all hell broke loose. Charland tried to pace the field, while Corey, his disabled car, and an army of fanatics blockaded the front straightaway. Verbal argument became shoving matches, and then fist fights. Angry fans hung off the wheel fence like caged monkeys. And numerous spectators showered the entire riot scene with beer cans. The tumult was so heated that officials decided to call off the rest of the race. Armed deputies descended on the site to restore order. It may well have been Fonda's blackest hour. No winner was declared that night and the entire issue was reportedly sent to Daytona Beach, Florida for resolution by NASCAR.

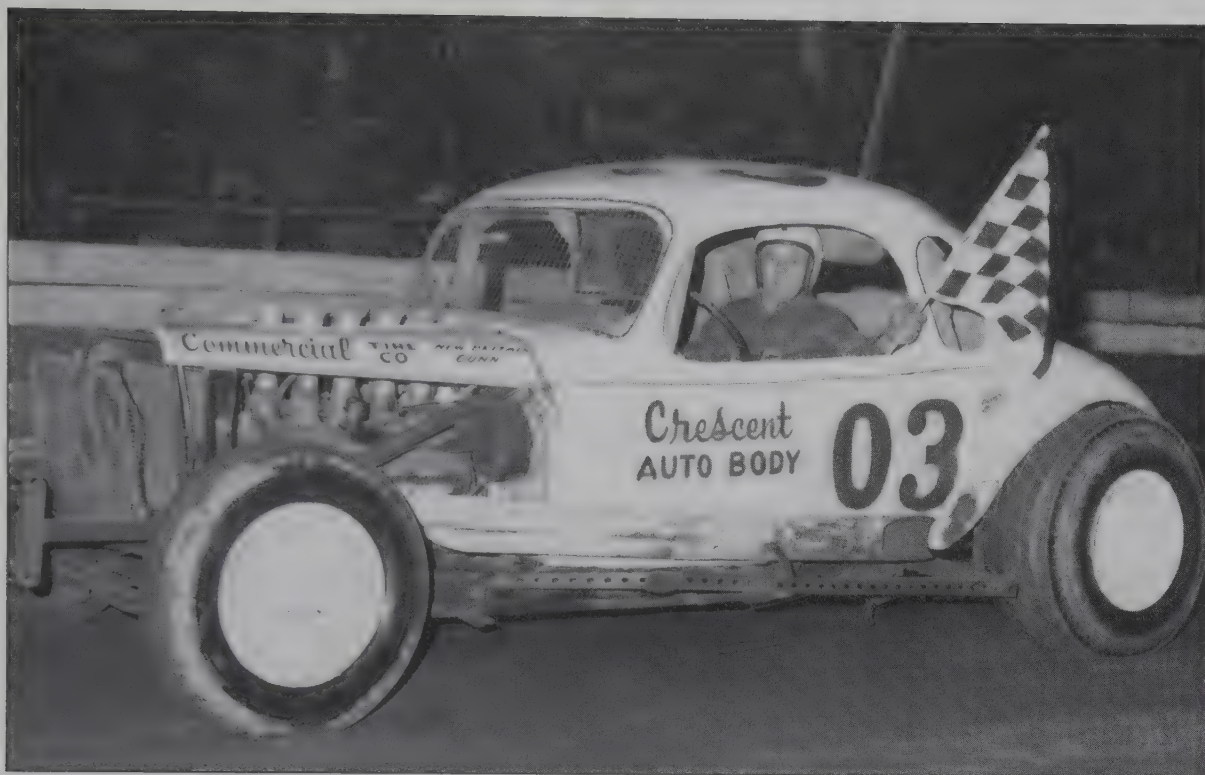
When Corey arrived at Fonda the following Saturday, he learned of the verdict. NASCAR had decided to consider the race complete as of 48 laps, to declare Charland the winner, and to place Corey fourth, one lap down. "The Crescent Hillbilly," a nickname bestowed upon him by Shoemaker, was livid. Especially since there was no question whatsoever that he had led the 48th lap and that he felt he had done nothing personally to get docked a lap.

The furious Corey went out that night on a mission. He won the feature, gave the middle finger to Fonda management, and resigned from NASCAR. From now on, he vowed to his loyalists, you'll have to go to Lebanon Valley to see Pete Corey race.

And his minions followed him to The Valley. It was a sorry time for Fonda. Popular veterans Steve Danish, Jeep Herbert, and Jim Luke had just retired. Ken Shoemaker was racing blacktop at

In 1967, Pete Corey left Fonda and took up Saturday night residence at Lebanon Valley. The left photo shows Pete after an early year victory at Fonda, and the right photo shows him in the same car, with a slightly different paint scheme, after a late-season Lebanon Valley win. (left, Biittig Collection; right, Gater News photo)

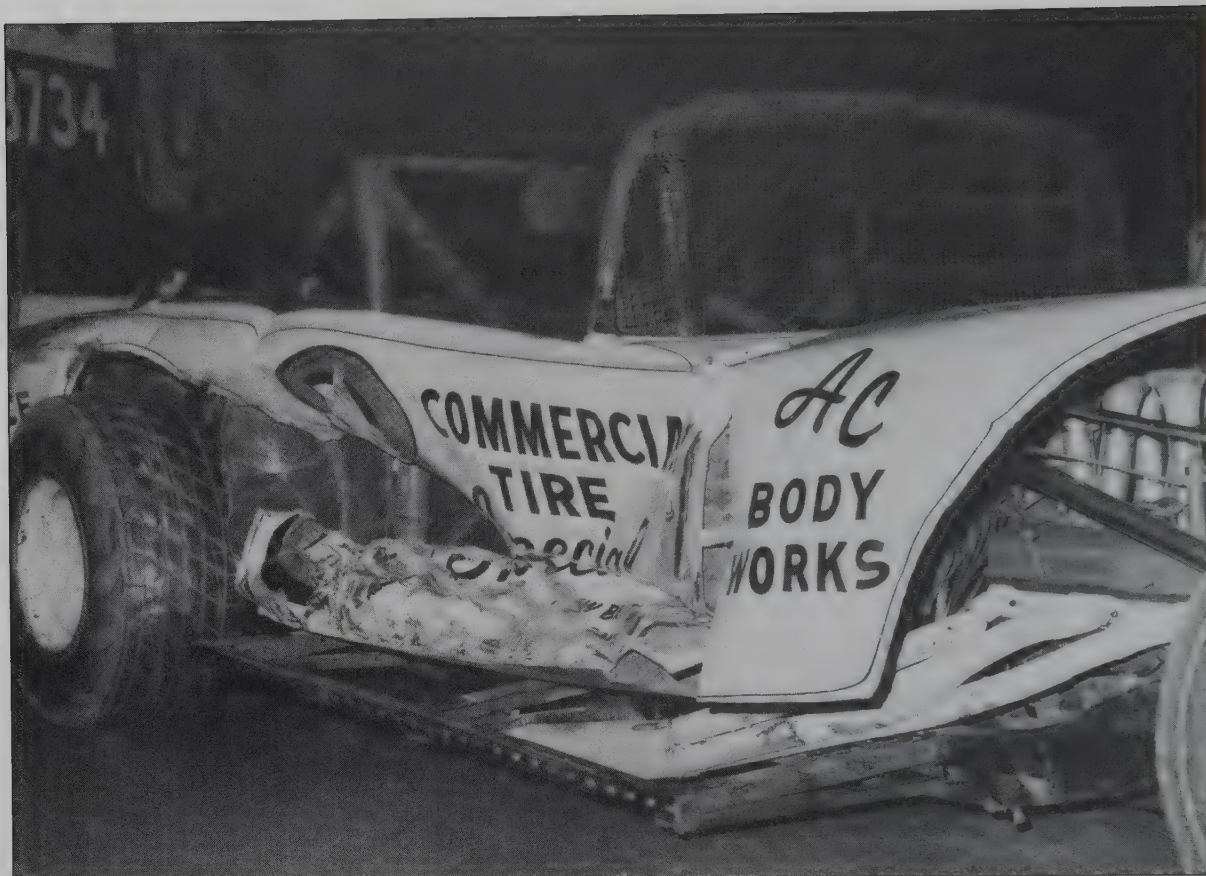




Plattsburg every Saturday night per the wishes of his car owners. And now Pete Corey was gone. Brash outsider Rene Charland, was Fonda's new kingpin. And when Bill Wimble, irked by NASCAR's seeming indifference to dirt racing, soon joined Corey at Lebanon Valley, it was almost more than Fonda could handle. Just a few years earlier, you had to get there by 5 p.m. to get a good seat. Now, you could shoot a cannon into the stands and not hit anybody.

Corey's coupe captured three Lebanon Valley features during the balance of the 1967 season. For 1968 he built another new car—a 1955 Chevy mod that he dubbed “The Valley Stagecoach.” And he gave his reliable coupe to Pieniazek to run at Fonda. The dichotomy of 1968 for Camp Corey was profound. Once separated from Pete's penumbra, Pieniazek became a bona fide Fonda star. Meanwhile, Corey struggled mightily at Lebanon. His '55 Chevy-bodied racer had seemed like an oddball choice to many. But it was Corey's way of tipping his hat to the Valley's lineage, a thoughtful reminder of the track's early-'60s rules that mandated such body styles. The symbolism, however, did little to endear his Valley foes, who viewed Pete Corey's immigration to Lebanon as payback time. “The people at Lebanon Valley did not like Pete,” says Irv Taylor. “He'd end up bringing home the car in a basket most every week. Pete had raced against a lot of those Lebanon guys in the old days at Route 66 and Burden Lake. Pete was rough and they remembered it.”

Eddie Pieniazek in Corey's #03 at Fonda in 1969. (Biittig Collection)



Corey's #3 at Lebanon Valley in 1968. It was payback time, according to Irv Taylor, and Corey often brought his '55 Chevy home in a basket.

(Gater News photo
by John Grady)

He'd win only a single 1968 Valley feature by late July, when the crash-fatigued Corey decided to not only leave the Valley, but stop racing altogether. However, Pieniazek had other plans. He knew that his boss still had some laps left in him, so he pulled that old ex-Irv Taylor team coupe out of mothballs and readied it for Corey. Eddie and Pete ran as a team at Fonda during August 1968, and Corey scored three top-five finishes in four outings. But such promising runs failed to mollify an increasingly disenchanted Corey. For 1969, he proudly unveiled his most beautiful creation to date—a Mustang 2 + 2 modified. But like U2's Bono, Pete Corey still hadn't found what he was looking for. In the first half of the '69 season, Pete made his Saturday night home on the pavement in Plattsburgh. The unexplainable appeal of Fonda, however, continued to lure him. Fonda's 1969 \$1,000-to-win purse—the biggest in the nation—had attracted Ken Shoemaker back to "The Track of Champions" in an asphalt car, Ed Flemke's back-up #2x owned by Bob Judkins. When Shoemaker won with it, Corey figured he could do the same.

Like a moth to the flame, Corey brought his blacktop 'Stang to Fonda—and promptly destroyed it. The experience left Corey seething. Fonda had jaded him in '67. Lebanon Valley had failed to

Eddie Pieniazek: The Pete Corey of the Pits

He won the first car race he ever drove in 1950, and he ended up compiling nine wins at Fonda between 1968 and 1975. Somehow, however, Eddie Pieniazek is almost better known for things other than driving.

Those in the know have said that Pieniazek was the Pete Corey of the pit area. He was an innovative builder, a clever and tireless mechanic, and a crew chief fast on his feet and brave enough to do whatever was necessary—and more. Looking back, it seems natural that he and Corey would team. And quite the team they were. Corey was the driver who would play tunes in the race car on the radio in his leg; Pieniazek was the mechanic who would chill out by cutting up a brand new snowmobile to install a Volkswagen motor. (It was very fast.)

The dynamic duo first got together on Bob Mott's yellow #3. One day they towed over to White's Beach for testing. When the motor started bogging, they roped Pieniazek to the left front fender, removed the hood and air filter, and sent Corey back out. Pieniazek diagnosed the problem by watching fuel dump into the carburetor at high speed.

Other moments were even more spontaneous. Corey pulled into the pits at Langhorne in Whitbeck's #22, a rock having punctured the oil pan. Without one second's hesitation, Eddie was underneath with a torch, seeking to weld up the hole. Within about two seconds, the whole affair exploded from the gas fumes in the



Eddie Pieniazek (Boyd Collection)

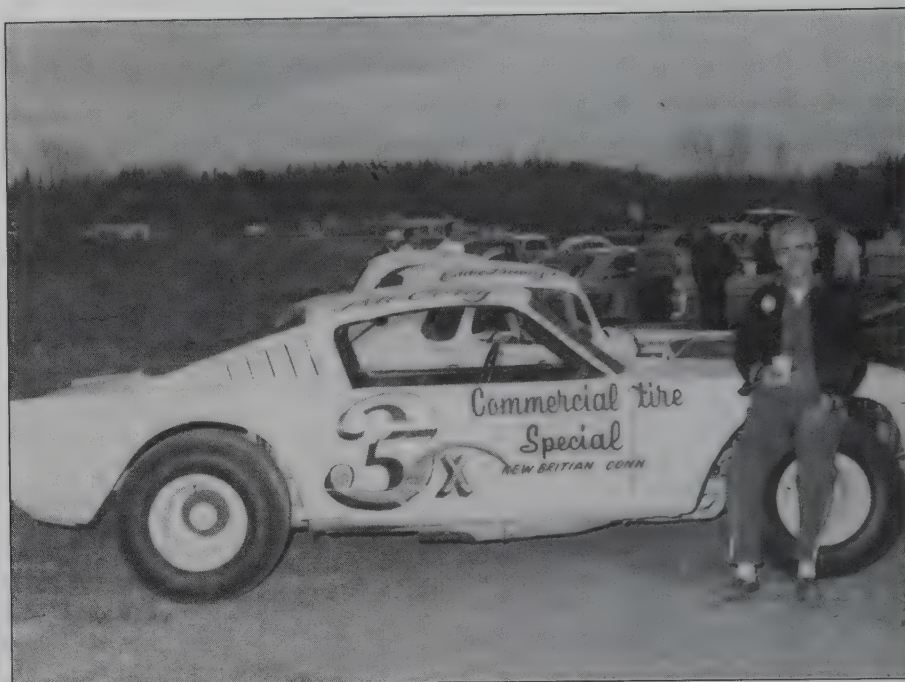
crankcase. When he returned to work the next week, A.C. Caprara, his boss, said, "He looked like a mummy with all that gauze wrapped around him, but he went right to work."

Pieniazek clearly put enormous energy and devotion into his supportive mechanical role, whether for Corey, Shoemaker, Taylor, or anyone else driving the cars he tooled. He is particularly remembered for his all-night marathons, refortifying cars wrecked at Rochester or Stafford on Friday in time for war at Fonda. He was an absolute wizard.

During the 1960s, Pieniazek joined Corey at Crescent Body Works. He began following his bliss for driving more seriously. As Corey would fade from the scene, Eddie kept the yellow #3 image alive with coupes and pintos, winning masterfully on both the pavement of Malta and the clay of Fonda. He continued driving well into the 1980s.

Although Pieniazek died in July 1993, his tradition at Fonda is being carried on in open comp events by his son Eddie, Jr. The 36-year old pro stock chauffeur showed promise in his initial year, 2001, and will return in 2002 with a brand-new yellow piece, dutifully numbered #03.

Corey proudly displays
his blacktop 'Stang at
Fonda in June of 1969.
Note the tire mark on
the door:
(John Maeder Collection)

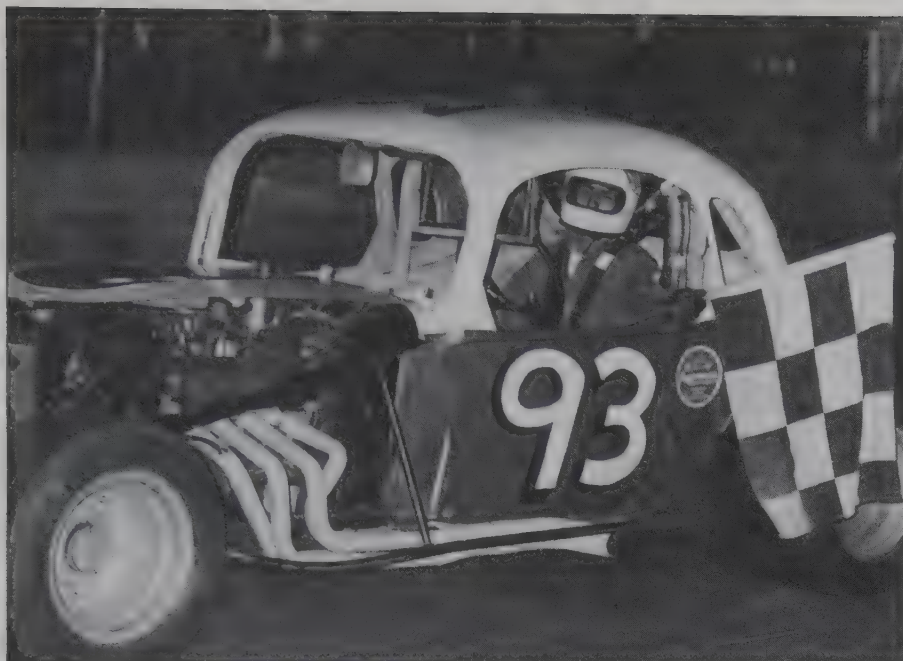


Corey in action the
same night, leading Lou
Lazzaro through the
third turn.
(Gater News photo by
Norm Patrick)



embraced him in '68. Plattsburgh had been motorsports purgatory. And now his showpiece of a stock car was trash. So during the summer of '69, Pete Corey, age 40, simply decided to lock up his race shop, walk away from the sport, and go fishing—for good.

But when you least expect it, the great ones seem to muster a final shining moment. Like an old Muhammad Ali somehow taking the title from Leon Spinks. Like an over-the-hill Babe Ruth some-



Pete Corey wins at Albany-Saratoga on June 5, 1970. (*Gater News* photo by Gary Circe)

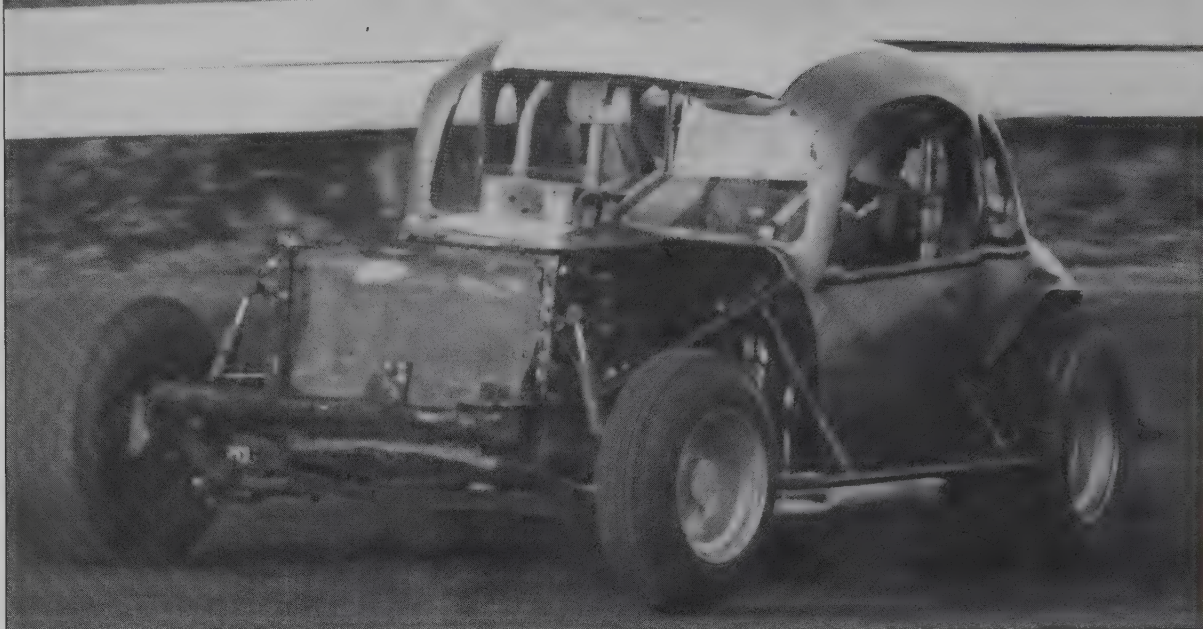
how pounding three home runs in his final game. Like Pete Corey on the weekend of June 5-6, 1970.

Corey had sold his 1955 Chevy "Valley Stagecoach" to Ballston Spa's Jerry Rose. Rose's driver, a very young Brian Ross, was inexperienced and unsuccessful at Fonda with the car. Rose and Ross begged Corey for help. He finally agreed to assist them in setting up the car, now painted blue and numbered 93, but he refused to drive. Rose didn't push Corey, the key to getting anything done with the stubborn Lebanese iconoclast. A friendship evolved and Rose offered to build Corey a car for 1970. It would be the first time Corey would drive for anybody other than himself in seven years.

Corey was rusty and the new #93 coupe had bugs. But wonderment happened the first weekend of June, 1970.

The Rose/Corey combo raced at Albany-Saratoga Speedway on Friday, June 5. Corey had never liked the Malta speedplant, located only minutes from his Crescent home. It wasn't the track's fault; Corey simply disliked blacktop racing. He had only one career Malta win, back in 1968. But on this night, he'd shine. Corey took Rose's #93 to the point early on and held off Jerry Cook for victory. The following night they brought the #93 to Fonda. In the first of twin-25 lap features, Corey was a distant second to Don Wayman's Russ Betz-owned #59 in the late going. Then Wayman's car began to slow noticeably. Corey sensed an opportunity and charged like the Pete Corey of old.

On the final lap, Wayman limped to the finish line, while Corey damn near put his right foot through the floor. The two cars crossed



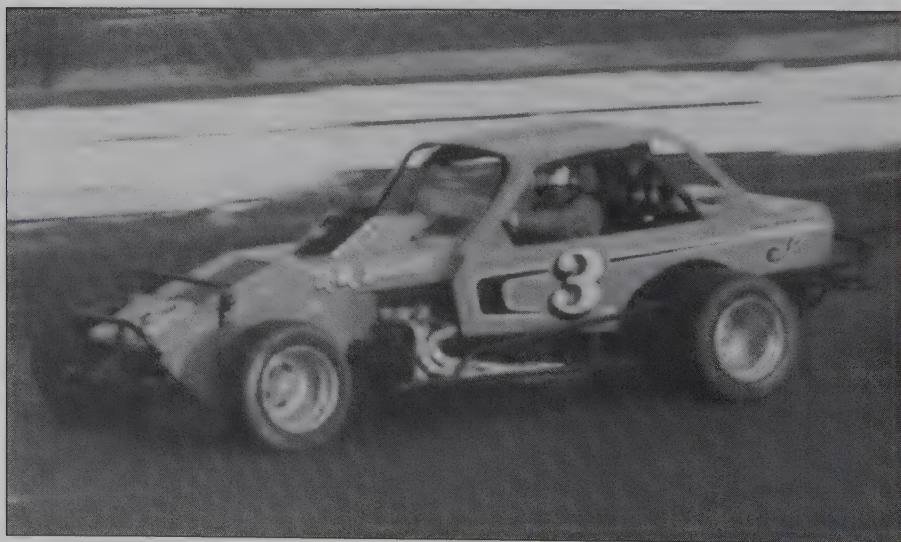
Pete Corey in Jerry
Rose's coupe, exiting
Fonda's turn four on July
18, 1970.
(Charlie Squires photo)

the line in a side-by-side blur. Corey never lifted and the Rose coupe crashed hard into the wall between turns one and two. It finally came to rest a few feet from the second turn fence where Corey had lost his leg 10 years earlier.

As the wrecker hoisted Corey's #93 for the trip back to the pits, p.a. announcer Mike Valachovic revealed that officials had declared the race a dead-heat. Pete Corey had won his second feature in as many nights. Fonda's old wooden grandstand shook from the applause.

"The Crescent Hillbilly" pretty much absented himself from Fonda Speedway thereafter. "I don't like racing," he said in a 1971 interview. "I like fishing." Even when his son, Pete Corey Jr., tried his hand as a modified driver at Fonda in the 1980s, Corey seldom came

Pete Corey Jr., hammer
down, at Fonda.



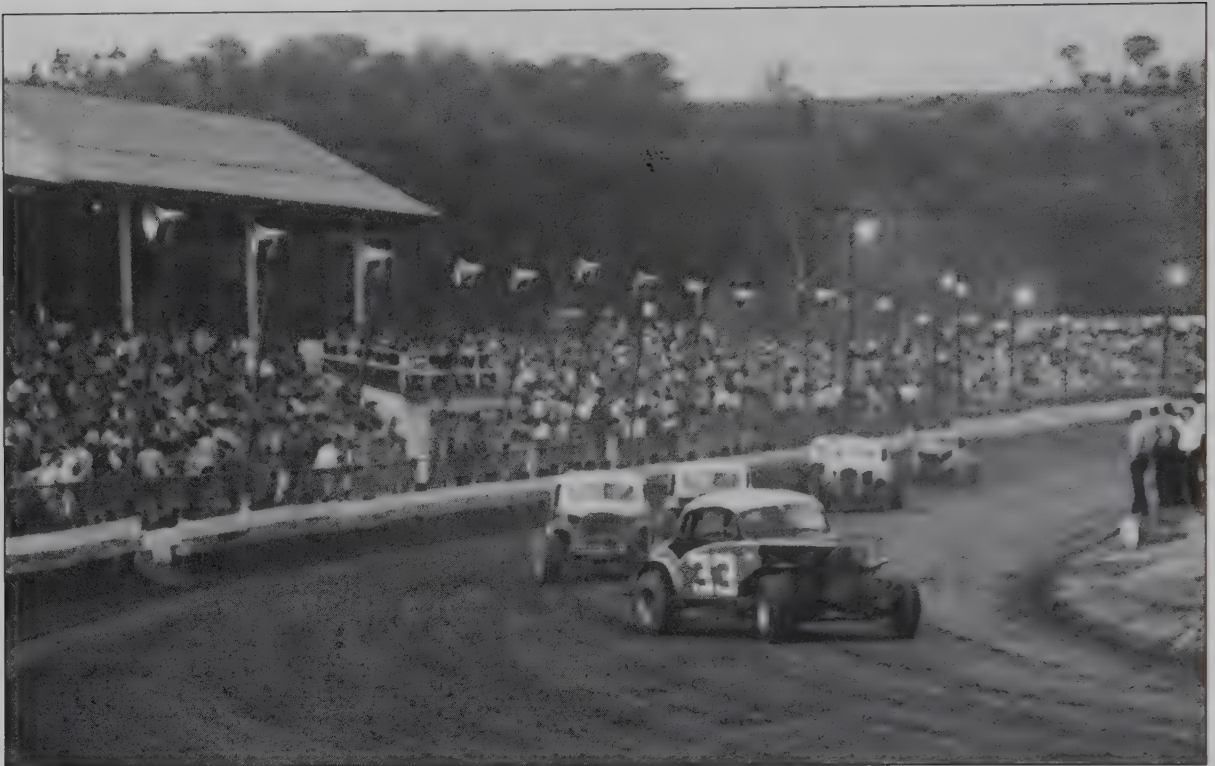
around to watch. Corey did remain somewhat in the public eye in the 1990s as a cable TV handicapper of the August thoroughbred horse races at Saratoga. He succumbed in his sleep to leukemia in August 2000 on a fishing trip in Rockford, Illinois. He was 71.

"He knew he was dying," laments loyal Irv Taylor. "He called me up to come visit. When I got there, Pete told me he wanted to say "goodbye," that he was going on a final fishing trip and he wouldn't be back. I told him he was tough as nails, too tough to die. He smiled. Two days later, he was dead."

Corey never formally announced his retirement from auto racing. And in the early 1970s, he was constantly besieged by hangers-on who wondered when he was going to make a comeback. But in his mind, Pete had quit in 1967—when he felt that a sport and a speedway that had been his life and his love had irrevocably betrayed him. Fonda Speedway claimed Pete Corey's left leg in 1960. Seven years later it took his heart.



(Feuz Collection)



Bill Wimble leads the pack into one. Wimble made his first Fonda appearance in 1956 and went on to become a focal point during the track's Glory Years. (Feuz Collection)

The Glory Years were a time of huge crowds, big fields, and national attention. (Blittig Collection)



The Glory Years: Bill Wimble and National Prominence **4**

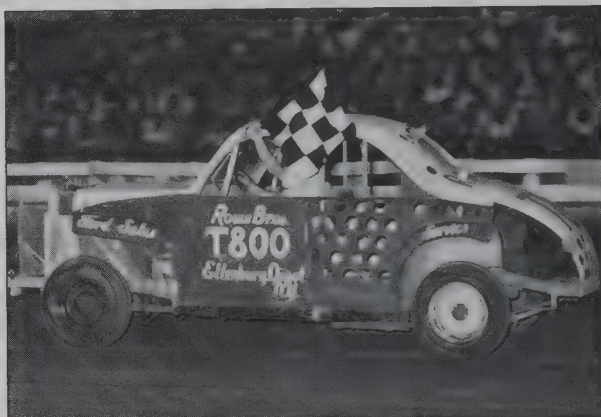
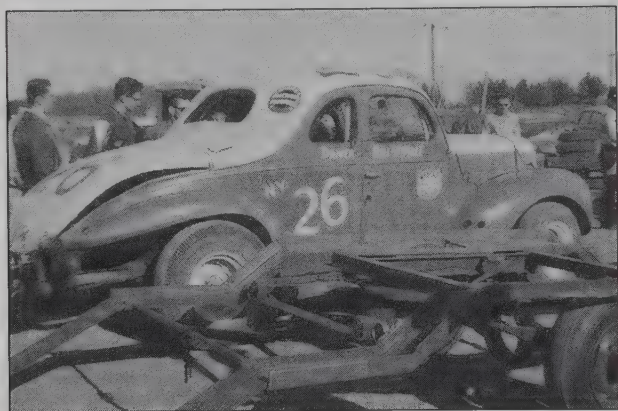
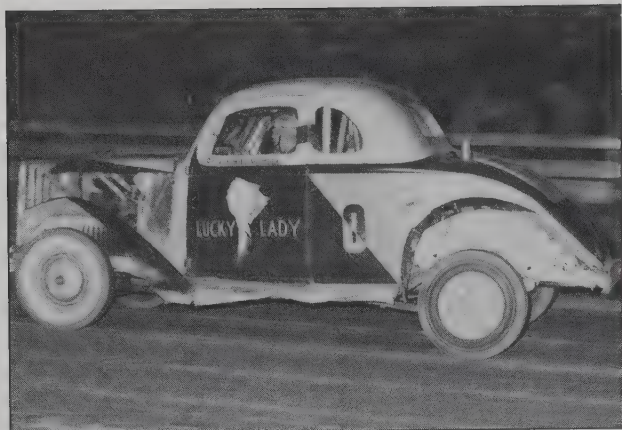
BY ALL ACCOUNTS, the period from the late-1950s into the mid-1960s was Fonda Speedway's Glory Years. Astronomical crowds, star-studded weekly fields, and high quality racing led most experts to pinpoint Fonda as one of the best tracks in America. It was also a time when a young, quiet dairy farmer from the St. Lawrence Valley burst onto the scene, bringing national prominence to himself and to "The Track of Champions."

His name was Bill Wimble.

Early on it would have been oh, so easy to discount the soft-spoken newcomer. After all, he was thought to be a hayseed, tied down by the strenuous hours of a marginal dairy farm way up in Lisbon, New York, a full 200 miles of bad road due north of Fonda.

Things would change quickly, however, and any short-term detractors ended up eating the bespectacled farmer's dust. Curiously, 20 years later the exact same turnaround would happen for him in the world of business. But his success in every phase of life has come as no surprise to those who know Bill Wimble well. Trouble is, few people really know him. He is a guarded man of much thought and few words. Suffice it to say, this guy is no dumb farmer.

The son of a college professor, Wimble had been educated since age 6 in the private and highly esteemed St. Albans Boys Academy in Brockville, Ontario. He was so superior in scholastics that he passed the admissions test for the prestigious McGill University in Montreal at age 14. But Bill bypassed college at the behest of his maternal grandparents, who wanted him to come back to Lisbon to operate the family farm. By now they were too old and too ill to run the 160-acre spread. Wimble felt indebted; his grandparents had raised him ever since his folks separated just before his birth. The loyal and obedient grandson honored his grandparents' wish, and he would



It's difficult for hard-core Fonda fans to fathom that Bill Wimble had a life before Fonda and the #S-33. But proof is above. Clockwise from upper left: 1952 in his own "Lucky Lady" #0, 1953 in Darryl Close's #21, 1955 in Gaylord Rowe's #T-800, and 1957 in his own #26.

(#26 courtesy of Chartrand Collection, all others courtesy of Bill Wimble Collection)

continue to manage that dairy farm throughout most of his racing career. Alas, Bill Wimble had grown up way too fast. By age 16 he was a full-time agriculturist. By age 17 he was married. And at 19, he'd become a racer.

Bill Wimble first climbed into a stock car in 1951. "The race cars were very, very crude, and ours probably crudest of all. It was a black sedan #3 with white lettering. Our total cash outlay was \$256," he remembers. "We proudly towed our car to the speedway in Canton, New York, behind my passenger car with a log chain. I had a plastic football helmet, and my driving uniform was a blue work shirt and cowbarn jeans."

Very much resolute from this modest start, the cash-strapped and mechanically challenged Wimble focused on driving ability as his way up. His initial feature wins came in 1952, first at Ottawa, and then Canton, racing a Wimble-owned coupe #0 dubbed the "Lucky Lady." A succession of car owners like Darryl Close, Hermie Graf, and Leon "Sliver" White took notice and gave Wimble opportunities at various North Country ovals. "I was a wild child in my early days," Bill admits. "If you wanted to see how fast your car could go, put Bill Wimble in it. But not for long, because he'll break it."

"Yeah, that's what I recall most about Billy in those early years—the wrecks," says DIRT Hall of Famer Bob Ziegler, who with car #90 was very much the St. Lawrence River Valley's big dog back then. "I remember one day havin' to steer around him while he was flipping down the front chute at Canton. I looked out the window and all I could see were the words "Lucky Lady" rolling end to end."

Wimble's first shot in real top-notch equipment came when an adventuresome Gaylord Rowe offered him the chairs in the well-tooled Rowe Brothers Ford Sales team cars, #T-800 and #26. The rapidly improving young driver returned the favor, wheeling Rowe's #T-800 to the 1955 Plattsburgh track title. Bill began to think about going on the road and maybe winning NASCAR's New York State point championship. During those mid-'50s summer seasons, Wimble and his North Country buddies were hearing tales of Fonda, "the greatest thing going . . . the place you had to go to test your skills." The Wimble/Rowe combo would first venture down to Montgomery County when they had a rain-out in the St. Lawrence region. Wimble's initial impressions are still vivid. "Its unusual configuration required a different style from anything I had developed. I thought, 'Wow! This is a brave driver's race track.' I just loved it."

That loving feeling was not mutually shared by Bill's competitors. After one early Fonda appearance in Rowe's #26, Wimble incurred the wrath of an otherwise staid Steve Danish. In a heat race, Danish didn't dare pass, because Wimble was running so wildly out of control. Afterwards, Danish came over, finger pointing, and said, "Wimble, you just ran a whole race spun out."

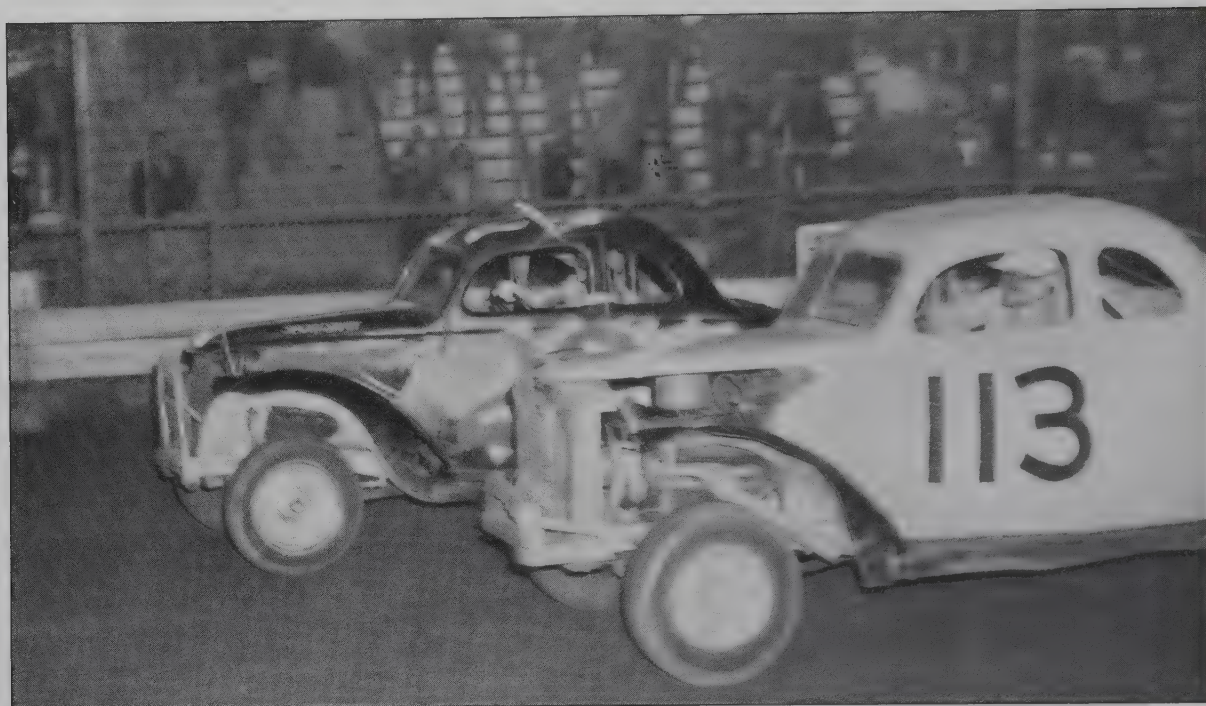
Rowe's two-car Ellenburg Depot, New York stable afforded Wimble the metal necessary to pursue his personal goal of winning the state point championship. His first stab at it occurred in 1957. "Whenever and wherever there was a race, we'd be there," says Wimble of the Rowe team. Ultimately, Jeep Herbert nipped Wimble for that Empire State crown. But the impact was unmistakable: Bill Wimble had caught the point-chasing bug.

In October 1957, Hal Kempney hired Wimble to team with the master, Dutch Hoag, at Langhorne. Wimble recalls being fast on the circular oval until there was a massive and unavoidable pileup, in which he was collected. (Pete Corey's car ended up in the infield, and there were fatalities.) Nonetheless, Kempney was impressed by what he saw, and the car owner of the #113 brought Wimble to Fonda in the spring of 1958.

Number 113 out of Utica was a Fonda institution (and a tradition that Tommy Wilson would revive in later years). It was one of 25 cars that participated in Fonda Speedway's historic first night back in 1953, with Paul Korman as its pilot. Korman's successors included Jim Luke and Hoag, who both won at Fonda with the car. The team had been founded by Paul Pankorik back in the old Vernon



The 1957 Langhorne Open was marred by this fatal crash.
(Corey Jr., Collection)



At the end of 1957, Wimble teamed with Dutch Hoag for the first of what would become numerous pairings of the two. They drove cars #113 and #213 for Paul Pankorik and Hal Kempney of Utica. On September 23, 1957, Hoag drove the #113 to his only Fonda career win. He nearly made it two in a row the following week but was nipped at the wire by Pete Corey in the above photo finish.
(Feuz Collection)

Fairgrounds and Brookfield Speedway days, preceding Fonda's opening. In 1958 Pankorik's ownership was assumed by the car's chief wrench, Hal Kempney. The #113s were never much to look at: school bus yellow with numerals that looked affixed by somebody who had dipped a broom in a bucket of black paint. But appearances can be deceiving; the #113 was one hot rod. And 1958's version was the former Bob Mott car with which Pete had won Langhorne. No doubt that young Bill Wimble had landed himself a potent ride.

Bill quickly responded to the task, earning his first career features at Monroe County and Fonda in #113 on consecutive nights, May 30 and 31, 1958. But his enthusiasm was soon dashed. Kempney abruptly decided to quit racing two weeks later. "It was a total shock to me," remembers Wimble. "One day Hal just said 'I can't do this anymore. I can't keep going.'" Wimble was somewhat of a demanding chauffeur, in that he'd race seven nights a week if you'd let him. Kempney was more of a once-a-week type of guy. With the #113 parked, Wimble groveled for any car available. The experience served him well. Ride-begging would later carry him to two national championships.

Despite Kempney's premature retirement, Wimble miraculously managed to stay in the top ten of both Monroe County's and Fonda's 1958 point standings by driving for any car owner who'd have him. Between Memorial Day and Labor Day in 1958, Wimble drove for seven different car owners. One of them was Lyle Sokoll, hailing



from the Catskill Mountain ski resort town of Windham. "I just knew Bill Wimble was gonna be somebody. The way he talked, the way he acted, and the way he drove. You just knew he was special," says Sokoll.

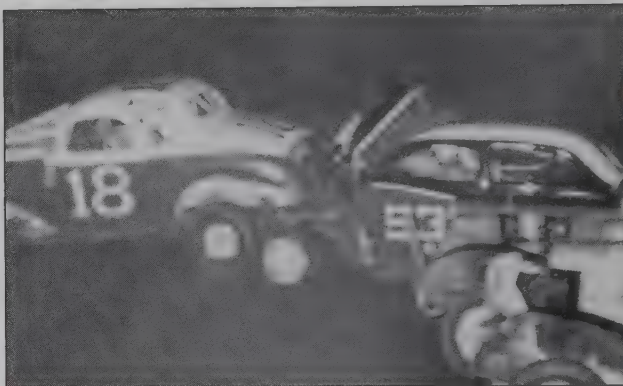
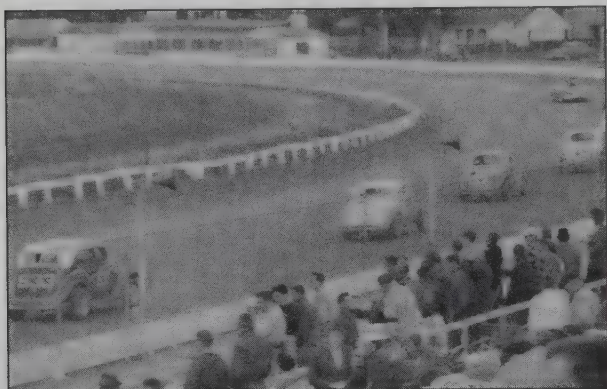
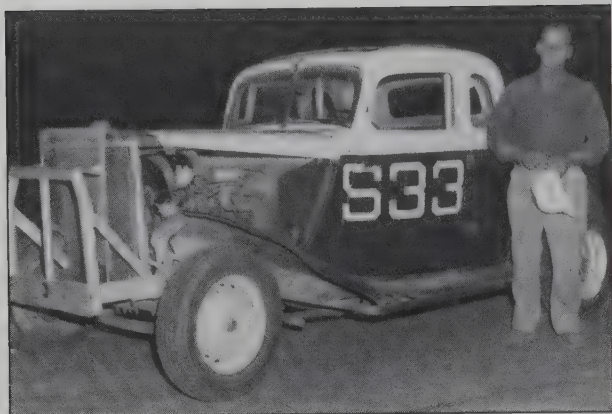
Some divorces have happy endings. Such was the case with the Kempney-Wimble split. Kempney sat out a half-year and then reunited with fellow Utican Jim Luke in the #113, winning a 1960 Fonda feature. In 1961, Rome's Tom Kotary (who previously had a 1959 Fonda victory in Henry Caputo's #111) succeeded Luke in the #113 seat and scored two more Fonda triumphs. Meanwhile, Wimble fell into the deal of a lifetime.

Its number was S-33.

The red, black, and white #S-33, fielded by Sherburne, New York Chevy dealer Dave McCredy, had been a Fonda staple since 1953 with Don Hendenburg, and occasionally George Gallup, as drivers. Following the untimely death of Hendenburg, capable leadfoot Chuck Mahoney subbed at the helm for McCredy. Wimble says that he didn't actively chase the job as Hendenburg's eventual successor. "I was inhibited by a little bit of an inferiority complex. I was still the farm boy. I knew I could drive a race car, yet I couldn't promote myself. But, I was friends with Fred DeCarr (McCredy's motor man) and on a couple of occasions we got to talking 'what if.'" Little did Wimble realize that DeCarr was having that same "what if" conversations with McCredy. On August 23, 1958 at Fonda, the match was made.

The first of Bill Wimble's 43 Fonda feature wins came on May 31, 1958, driving the #113. Two weeks later he was out of the ride.

(Feuz Collection)

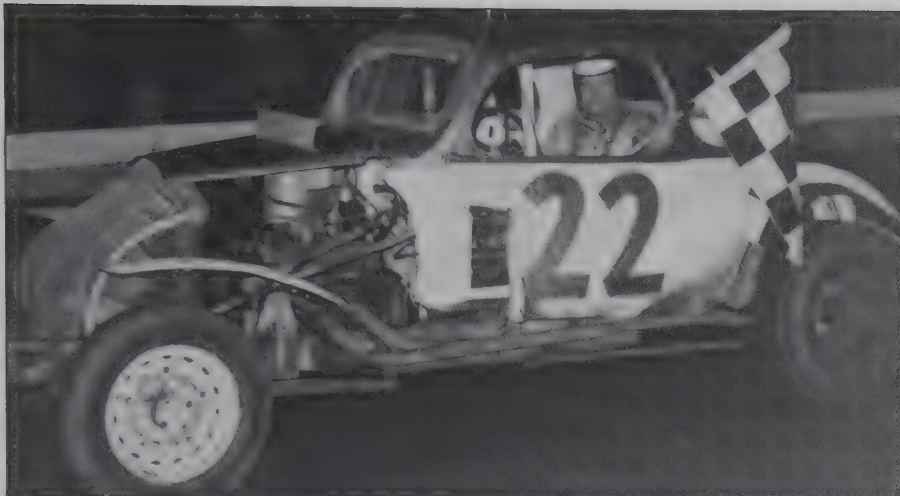


Dave McCredy
(Grady photo)

Dave McCredy's #S-33 had several drivers before Wimble took the helm. Clockwise from upper left: Don Hendenberg in 1953 (Fusco Collection), George Gallup in 1955 (Boyd Collection), Chuck Mahoney shown clobbering Lynn DeLong in 1957 (Feuz Collection), and Dutch Hoag at Syracuse in 1958 (Putnam Collection). Hoag won the 1958 Langhorne Open in the #S-33. No one knows for certain what the "S" stood for. Some say it stands for sportsman, for Sherburne, (McCredy's hometown), and even for September (McCredy's wife's birth month).

For 1959 Wimble disclosed his state point ambitions to McCredy, but the 33's car owner was cool to the notion. He'd field a car for Wimble at name tracks like Fonda and Monroe County, but if Wimble wanted to chase NASCAR points at every Podunk place on the map, he could arrange his own rides. And that's exactly what Wimble did.

Wimble privately resented McCredy's decision not to support him in the point hunt, especially since his chief competition, Buffalo's Bill Rafter, was backed 110% by his car owner Gil Bruss. "I'd go to Saranac Lake and grab a ride in a B-class car just to get some points, and Rafter would tow in with Bruss' #22," says Wimble. "I'd go to Islip and beg a ride, and Rafter would show up with his own car." Wimble kept his displeasure over McCredy's separate agenda a secret. No use pushing things, for fear that McCredy would pull a



Bill Rafter drove Gil Bruss' #22 to the 1959 New York State NASCAR point title, despite a stiff challenge from Wimble. (Bittig Collection)

Hal Kempney on him. But if anything, Bill Wimble was determined. Incredibly in 1959, he finished in the top 20 in points at six different New York speedways: Fonda (2nd), Monroe County (3rd), Saranac Lake (3rd), Canandaigua (7th), Islip (20th), and Plattsburgh (20th). The quest carried a price: Point chasing and winning can be mutually exclusive. Wimble won but a single Fonda feature in 1959, the head end of a twin-25 show on August 29. Even more disappointing, Wimble fell a few points shy of Rafter when the State's title was tallied.

Undaunted by another runner-up finish in the state, Wimble set a higher standard for 1960: the National NASCAR Sportsman Championship. It seemed like an unrealistic dream. No northeasterner had ever won the NASCAR point title, and the schedule seemed to favor southerners like Ralph Earnhardt and Ned Jarrett, or West Coasters like Rick Henderson, who had been the immediate



Ned Jarrett brought Dink Widenhouse's #B-29 to Fonda on September 27, 1958, but the show was rained out. The next day he won the Syracuse 100, promoted by Ed Feuz and Jim Gage. At left, NASCAR Vice-President Ed Otto is shown with Jarrett in victory lane at Syracuse. (Feuz Collection)

past champs. Plus, it would require a mean travel slate for Wimble: Riverside Speedway in Montreal on Wednesday nights and Sunday afternoons; Monroe County on Friday night; Fonda on Saturday night; Plattsburgh on Sunday night; Stafford Springs, Connecticut, and Colchester, Vermont for specials; and regular trips below the Mason-Dixon line for any extra point race that the South had on tap.

"I was tired so much of the time, it was unimaginable," recalls Wimble of the 1960 grind. "I slept in my car along the way when I couldn't go any further. I was often in bed only two nights a week." Again, McCredy was less than entirely supportive of the scheme, forcing Wimble to drive for several different teams in that 1960 point pursuit. In the end, Wimble copped the national championship by an astounding margin of 1,445 points over Dick Nephew. The honor brought coast-to-coast prestige to Fonda, further bolstering its claim to "The Track of Champions" moniker. Wimble had taken the 1960 Fonda point title and three features there in the process of winning both the State and National crowns.

Weary of the routine, Wimble initially planned not to defend his NASCAR national championship in 1961. Dick Nephew, who was Wimble's biggest competition on the Montreal/Plattsburgh circuit, had already announced his intention to knock Wimble from the throne. "Let him have it," Wimble thought to himself. The similarities between Nephew and Wimble were uncanny. Both had been born and raised on St. Lawrence Valley farms. Both had honed their skills on the North Country's dustbowl bullrings. And now their names were about to be linked in perpetuity.

Although their paths had crossed recurrently during the 1960 season, they seldom raced against each other in 1961. Nephew usually stayed up north in Quebec City, Montreal, Fabreville, and Plattsburgh. Wimble toiled along the thruway belt: Rochester, Fonda, and Victoria. By now, Wimble was famous and fame brought police privilege. That section of the New York thruway was free game for the popular racer. He was "immune" and could travel at his own pace without fear of being stopped. And there was usually quite a tilt to the speedometer needle. His road car (a red and black Ford) housed a Holman and Moody 312 with two four-barrel carburetors. In fact, in that same car Wimble had outsped the Ford Factory entries in the timed mile on the sands of Daytona Beach in February. He was clocked at 138 mph.

Wimble's plan to let Nephew win the 1961 sportsman national title by default eventually detoured. "We were having a heck of a year and with a month to go, I did the arithmetic," Wimble recalls. "Dick had a good lead, but I figured that if we went for it, I could make up the deficit." Again, McCredy told Wimble he was on his own. Chasing points would mean having to bypass the 1961 Langhorne Open for regular NASCAR point shows at Stafford and



Flemington. McCredy put Mahoney back in the #33 for The 'Horne. Pete Hollebrand lent Wimble his #53 for Stafford and Flemington. The #53 carried Wimble to his first-ever Stafford win.

Like another legendary sporting chase that same season—the Roger Maris-Mickey Mantle home run derby—the Wimble-Nephew '61 duel became nip and tuck. It was nearly deadlocked with a week to go. And like Maris' asterisk, the Wimble-Nephew contest would end in controversy.

The final NASCAR race of the season was scheduled for Bristol, Tennessee. Wimble called the track and was told both sportsman and modified points would be issued. Nephew also called the track, but he was told modified points only would be given. McCredy had allowed Wimble take the #33 south and when he arrived, Wimble learned that Nephew had skipped the show in favor of a lesser point race up north because he had been told no sportsman points were at stake. After some deliberation, the Bristol officials recanted and ultimately agreed to award sportsman points. Wimble nursed a badly vibrating #33 to what he thought was his second consecutive outright national championship.

But when the final point totals were unveiled later that week, it was a dead tie at 5,578 points. "President Bill France declared them (Wimble and Nephew) co-champions after their points had been re-checked and canvassed by the National Stock Car Racing Commission," a NASCAR announcement proclaimed. Wimble viewed the decision as baloney. NASCAR, he felt, had decided to call

Because of the highly unusual chase for NASCAR's 1961 National Sportsman point title, history will forever link the late Dick Nephew, shown above, with Bill Wimble. (Feuz Collection)

How Tough was Chuck Mahoney?

Pretty darn tough, reputation would have it. Physically rugged and uncommonly brave, with a side dish of boisterousness.

Otto Graham, a journeyman combatant in flathead wars at places like Morris and Brookfield, came rather tentatively to Fonda in 1958 with a 283 Chevy bolted in his coupe. His words say it all. "One of the first incidents that was burned into my memory came about the third week when I was unlucky enough to finish third in my heat race, placing me on the pole for the feature. I'm sitting in my car on the drag strip waiting for the field to line up behind me when, "thunk," Chuck Mahoney, who had third starting position, purposefully coasts into the back of my car. Next Chuck sends one of his boys up to me: "Chuck wants to know which way you're going to go when the green drops." I was shaking in my boots, but I was not a total greenhorn. I pointed toward the front of the car. (It would have been a very big mistake to give the messenger the finger!) I got beat up pretty good in the opening laps. I did bring it home in one piece—in 10th—but at a very high price to my nervous system."

Mahoney had a knack of commanding attention off the track as well. Old timers smile about the night he pulled into Fonda somewhat late, with a line of state police cars with sirens blaring, in hot pursuit down Rt. 5.

Mahoney, from Utica, New York, was a well-known runner to the west of Montgomery County, particularly at Rochester. A participant at Fonda the night

it opened, his record is highlighted by five podium finishes, including three seconds and two thirds. Though he did not race as regularly as the Herberts and Danishes of the times, he approached the sport with notorious abandon, most notably at Langhorne. One year he offered to show Ernie Gahan the hot groove around the dangerous circular mile. "It scared me just following him," admits Gahan, hardly a push-over himself. "He'd bounce the right rear continuously off the wall in the fourth turn. No way I was gonna run like that!"

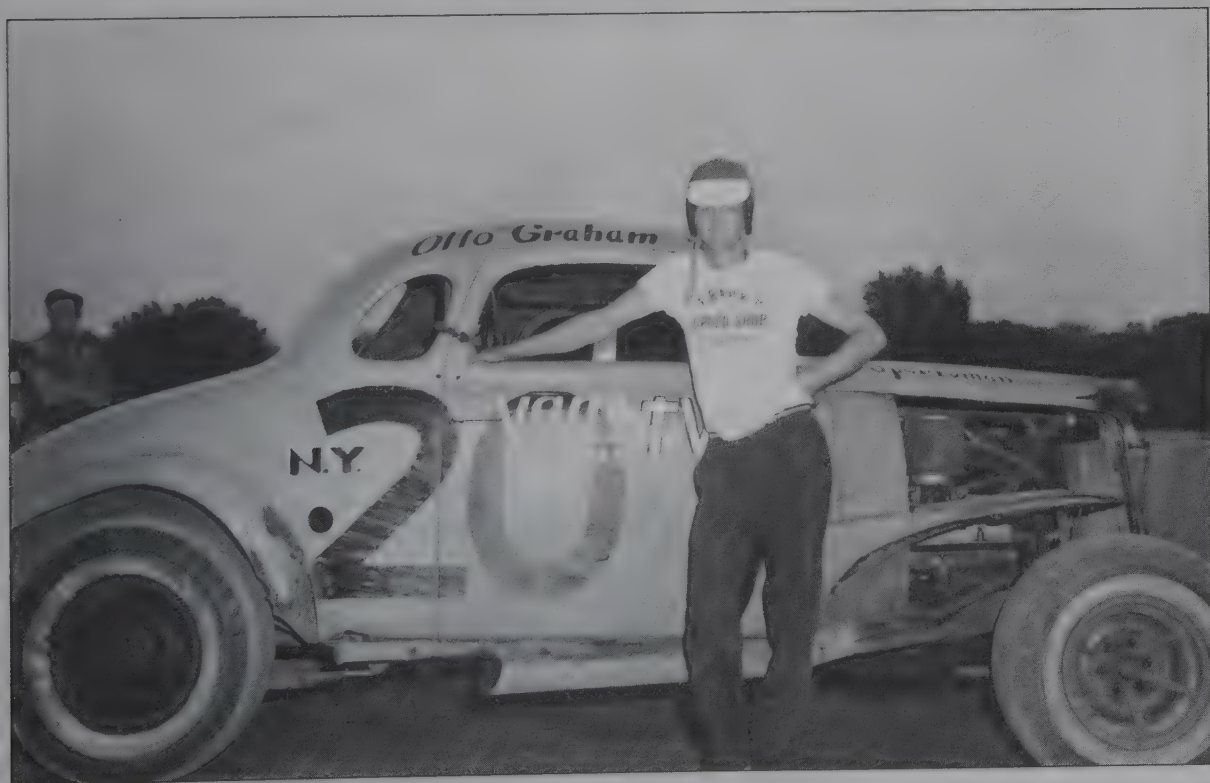
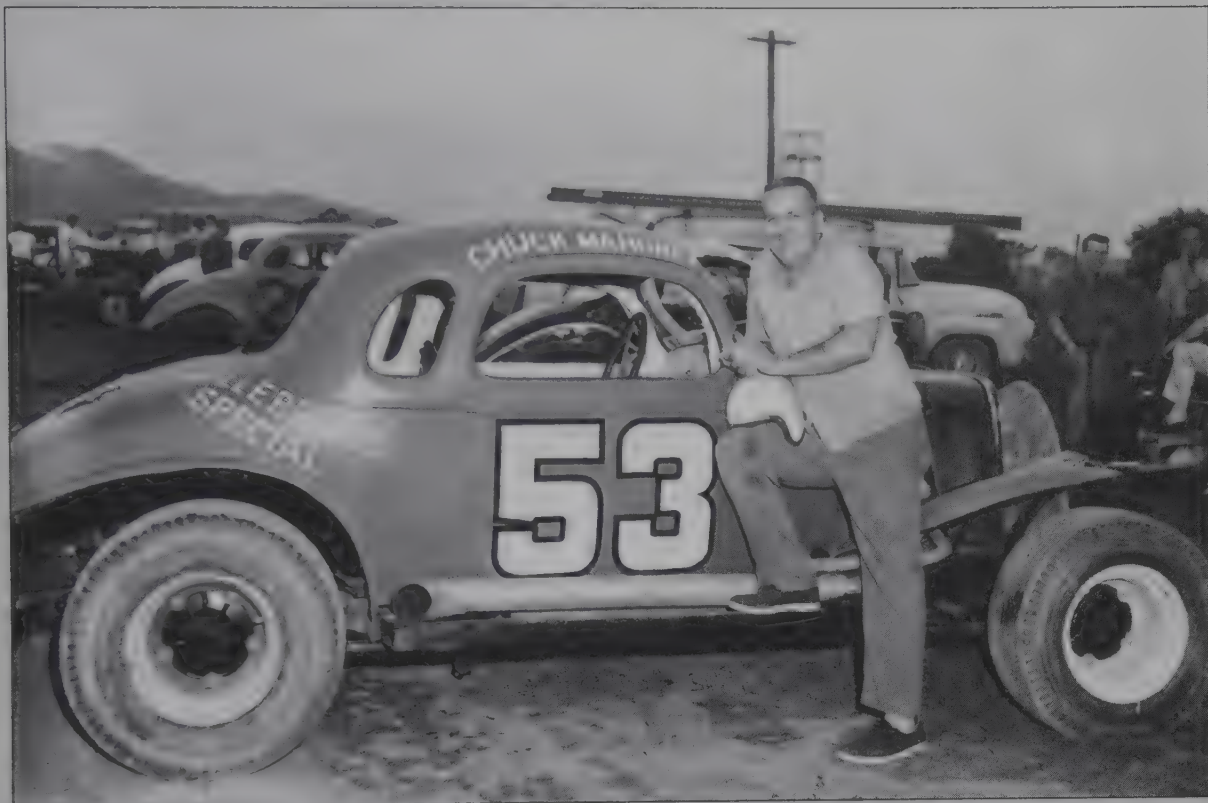
The world must have been a different place for Freddie DeCarr when a soft-spoken Bill Wimble replaced the irreverent Mahoney in Dave McCredy's car. Otto Graham, active today as a racing photographer and Web master, speaks about a night when Mahoney kept jazzing the throttle of the S-33. "Will you PLEASE stop revving that thing!" pleaded DeCarr. In classic, wired Mahoney style, Chuck snapped back, "What the hell's with you, Fred? That's a racing motor, ain't it?"

(top) Chuck Mahoney poses with Pete Hollebrand's #53. The abnormally brave Mahoney was an early Grand National driver, earning a fifth-place finish in the 1950 Darlington Southern 500.

(Grady photo)

(bottom) Otto Graham poses with his 1958 Fonda machine. Graham remains active today as a racing photographer and Web master of his own old-time racing site, www.o-graham.com.

(Grady photo)



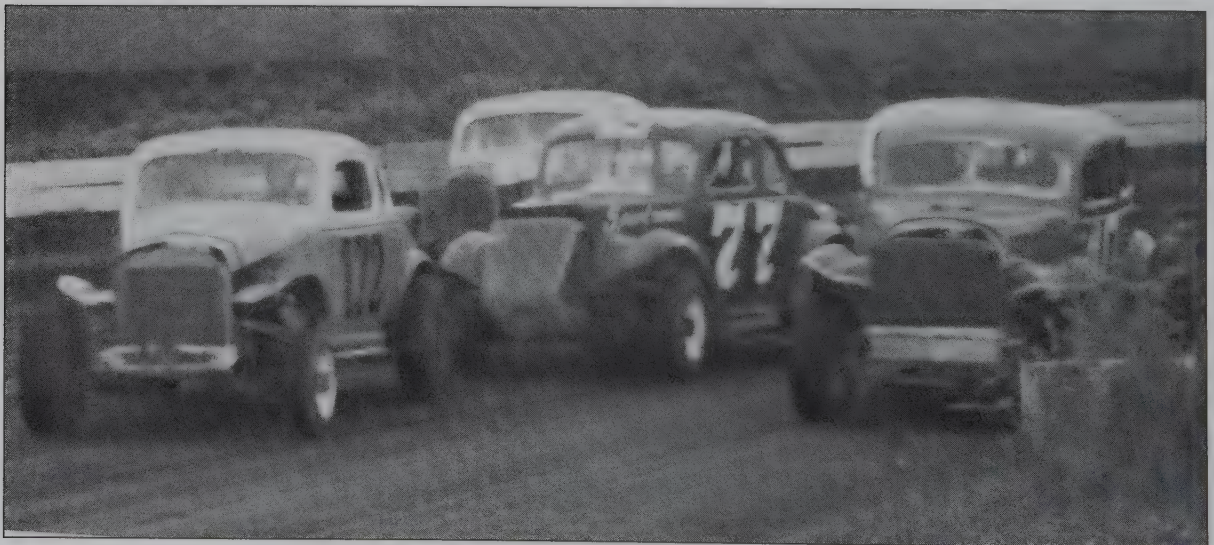
it a tie in order to cover the mistake by Bristol officials who had told Wimble one thing and Nephew another. "In later years Morris Metcalf, NASCAR's chief scorer, personally assured me it was an honest tie. So maybe it was," says Wimble.

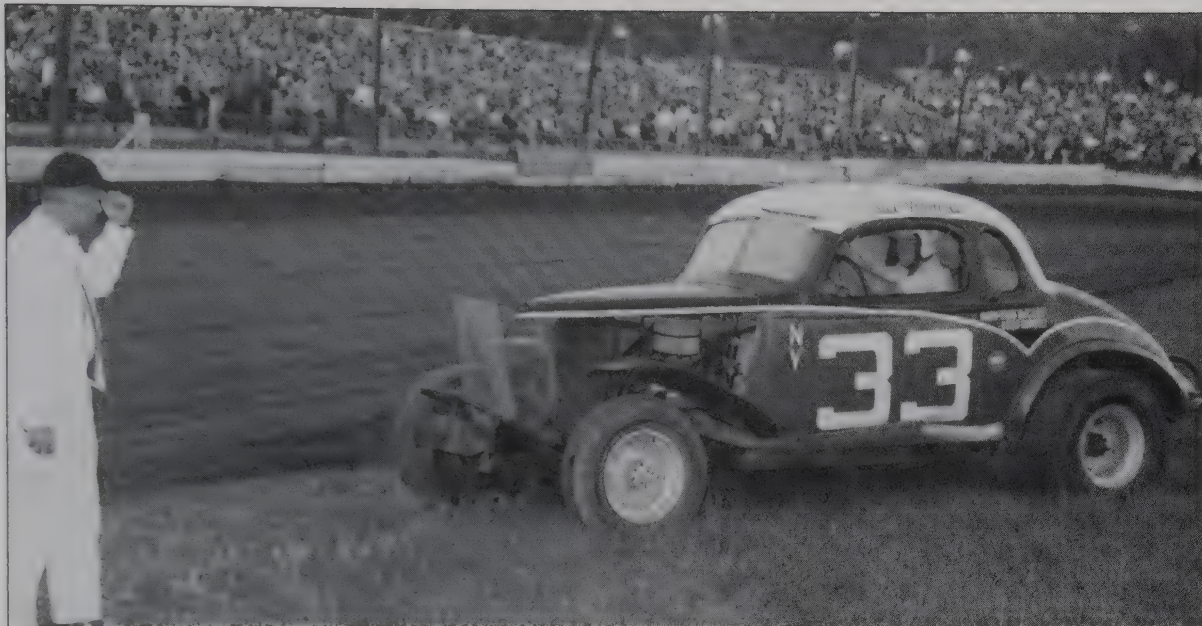
For the record, Wimble won 19 features in the co-title year, including eight at Fonda. He also won his second consecutive Fonda track championship. (Wimble would win five Fonda titles before retiring.)

The intensity of the 1961 title grind had taken a toll on both red-eyed combatants. Neither Wimble nor Nephew would ever again chase national points, leaving the playing field clear for Rene Charland to grab the next four championships from 1962-65. Nephew, tired of the taunts that he was ducking tough competition, made Fonda his Saturday home in 1962. Wimble, tired of the taunts that he was a mirror driver and a point stroker, set out to win races like a charger. Today, he testily rebukes even the suggestion that his driving was ever laid back. "You know, I hear that all the time. . . how smooth and conservative I was. Actually, I was running on the edge," says Wimble. "You had to run on the edge to win. Now there's this talk about how you can't win a race on the first lap. Well, I can't tell you how many races I won on the first lap by getting out of traffic ahead of my competitors. I went for it, fast as I could go. They could catch me later, but they would have a heck of a time passing me. I wonder sometimes if my critics were paying attention to how I got up front in the first place."

Bob Zimmerman (#172)
leads Harold "Bugs
Bunny" Betts (inside), Irv
Taylor (#77), and Jim
Luke (outside) through
turn two on June 30,
1962. (Feuz Collection)

His protests notwithstanding, statistics prove that Bill Wimble was a very different driver once he stopped running for points. From 1962 through 1967, Wimble was overwhelmingly Fonda's winningest driver. His 10-win 1963 Fonda season was the first-ever serious challenge to Steve Danish's 1953 12-win Fonda record. His 11





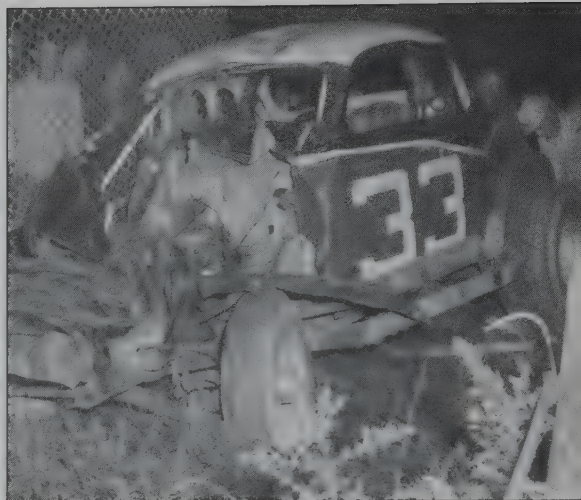
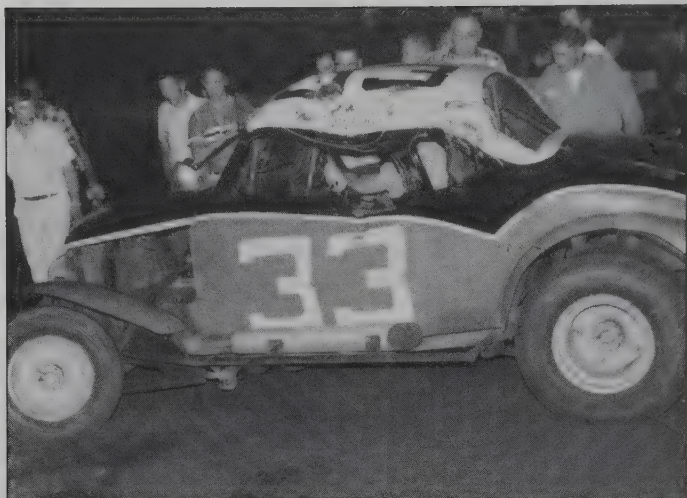
feature victories at Victoria that year set the all-time record at that now-closed speedplant. With 28 wins overall, 1963 was Wimble's career year. And in 1964, he set Stafford Springs' all-time win mark with 11 feature victories.

"We hit it pretty well most of the time after we had developed a system. Dave McCredy was a good owner—a businessman who insisted that we make money with the car. It wasn't easy, but we did it. Fifty percent of our win money would go to maintaining the car; I took 30% (less than most drivers took); 10% was Fred DeCarr's; 5% went to Freddie's assistant, Dougie Rundell; and Dave had his 5% for profit. Dave stuck to this in a strict business-like manner," says Wimble.

Sometimes, however, the rewards of dirt tracking defy business-like division. Wimble's sole Canandaigua career win occurred July 28, 1963. For that victory, the promoter gave Wimble a pure-bred Holstein calf. He rented a U-haul to trailer the prize back to his Lisbon dairy farm, where she caught pneumonia. Bill nursed her back to health and sold her for a nifty profit before McCredy figured a way to divide a cow into 50/30/10/5/5% shares.

The 1964 Fonda season saw both the biggest win and also the biggest dispute in Wimble's career. The victory was the second annual Fonda 200 on August 15th. The controversy occurred on June 27th during a 50-lapper. On the last lap, Lou "Monk" Lazzaro came hot into the first turn. Going to the inside of leader Wimble, The Monk commandeered liberal infield real estate before sliding back out into the groove and into the side of the #33. Wimble was forced high. Lazzaro stole the checker. And the fans went right out

Bill Wimble heads out to time trial for the August 18, 1962 Fonda 100. He and Ken Shoemaker tied for fast time that day, each clocking in at 24.28 seconds. (Grady photo)



Things didn't always go according to plan, and hard charging occasionally produced hard crashing. On the left, a crewman backs the #S-33 off the Fonda track surface as Dave McCredy looks on. (Bittig Collection)

On the right, a hook snakes the #S-33 out of the fence at Stafford. (Fusco Collection)

of their socks. But the evening was not yet over. Corner steward Theron Moore had been standing right there at the end of the drag strip and watched the whole deal. He was immediately off to the tower to deliver his eye-witness account, and minutes later Lazzaro was set down for rough riding. Promoter Ed Feuz declared Wimble the winner. During the week following the disqualification, Feuz received a letter from Lazzaro's wife Philomena. "You couldn't shine Lou Lazzaro's shoes," it read.

Fonda's transitional years from sportsmen to modifieds occurred in 1965-1967. Wimble had been running a modified at paperclip Stafford since 1964, but at Fonda the McCredy team hung long with small block power. At first it looked like a mistake. Wimble won only one Fonda feature in 1965. But in '66, the DeCarr's 327 was stout and the handling superb. Wimble in his sportsman and Corey in his big block tied atop Fonda's win list with five features each. That list, however, was very nearly six to four. On June 18, 1965, Corey bumped Wimble out of the lead, not unlike the Lazzaro incident two years earlier. Corey refused to pull his car into victory lane, walking to the homestretch, instead, in order to offer officials his concession of the win to the #33. Officials summoned runner-up Wimble to the scene, but Wimble declined Corey's offer. "It was just a racin' incident," he shrugged.

Once they had ceased their search for NASCAR championship grail, Wimble's squad occasionally invaded non-NASCAR tracks like Lebanon Valley and Orange County. Previously, Wimble had been afraid to run non-sanctioned events for fear that NASCAR would dock him points. His #33 won back-to-back Lebanon Valley 100 opens in September 1963 and July 1964. At Orange County, the McCredy team was frequently an early season entrant, getting the #33 dialed in a week or two before Fonda opened. Wimble won three such Middletown sojourns, the most memorable of which may have



been April 3, 1966, according to former McCredy mechanic Jerry Gould. "We went down to Middletown in '66 with that sportsman 327 and there's guys like Schneider and Cagle and Tasnady with alcohol-injected big blocks," says Gould. "They'd all go like hell down the straightaways. But in the corners, Billy just went underneath them and drove away 'cause he handled better," remembers Gould. "After the race, everybody came over asking, 'Whatta ya got in that thing?' We told 'em a 327 with a carb and gas. I don't think anyone believed us."

The 1967 season saw vast changes for Fonda Speedway and for the Team McCredy. The #33 was finally outfitted for Fonda with modified power. More importantly, the Wright-Zaunter team had just revolutionized dirt track chassis thinking by debuting an asphalt-like offset #24 for Kenny Shoemaker the previous year. Suddenly, if you didn't have a low, light, wide chassis at Fonda, you were toast. Over the 1966-67 off-season, the McCredy team built a new car much like the Wright-Zauntner design. Such changes didn't sit well with Wimble, who was always a dirt driver by preference. He did not appreciate what he considered NASCAR's growing pre-occupation with asphalt racing. Indeed, by 1967, Fonda was a dirt

Following a bumping incident at Fonda on June 18, 1965, Pete Corey (left) offered to concede his victory. Wimble (right) refused.
(Feuz Collection)



Wimble won back-to-back Lebanon Valley Opens in 1963 and 1964 driving Dave McCredy's Pontiac-powered coach.
(Lucia Collection)

track island. Bad enough that Victoria closed and you had to run macadam on Fridays (at Albany-Saratoga) and Sundays (at Utica-Rome). Bad enough that Stafford had paved. Now you had to have a special car for Fonda, and the guy who was building Fonda's best stuff at that time was New England's Fred Rosner.

The McCredy team wasn't alone in perceiving that cars like Shoemaker's #24 were the future. Rene Charland's new Dick Czipiel #888 team was re-tooling as well. During the 1966-67 off-season, Rosner built Czipiel a pair of low-slung three-window coupes numbered 888. One was white with a black roof, the other was purple with a white roof. The cars were constructed side-by-side in the team's Agawam, Massachusetts shop, on matching jigs. Each car was built identical to the other. One was going to be for dirt, the other for asphalt. Trouble was, the white one was a rocket on either surface and the purple one was lousy everywhere it went. So much for being identical. Go figure.

Wimble and Charland dominated Fonda in 1967, between them taking 11 of the track's 17 feature events. But this was no friendly rivalry. Charland's 888 was faster than Wimble's 33 and Charland loved to brag about the superiority. On August 5, 1967 Wimble's accelerator broke on the last turn of the last lap and Charland slipped by him to win the feature. After the race, Charland grabbed the microphone in victory lane and boasted, "Bill Wimble just committed Hari Kari in turn four." Certainly trash talk wasn't Bill



"Bill Wimble just committed Hari Kari in turn four," declared Rene Charland on August 5, 1967. The infamous moment was preserved for posterity by lensman Bob Hunter.

(Gater News photo)

Wimble's style. He quietly won the last race of the 1967 season—the 43rd and final triumph of his Fonda career—loaded up, and left. For good.

Much to the disappointment of Fonda fans, the #33 team went "outlaw" in 1968, running Spencer Speedway near Rochester (where Bill won one feature) on Fridays and Lebanon Valley (where he won six features) on Saturdays. "I hope people understand," says Wimble of the decision, "that I had no problem with Fonda. I had a problem with NASCAR — with their emphasis on blacktop racing. I wrote a nice and respectful letter of resignation (to NASCAR) stating why."

The Lebanon Valley clique didn't really embrace Wimble with open arms. It wasn't his fault. The Valley folks simply weren't ready for the onslaught of Fonda defectors that decimated the high banks in 1968. Fonda "sons" Wimble, Jerry Townley, Jack Farquhar, and Pete Corey all won Saturday night shows at Lebanon that year. Heck, even Jeep Herbert briefly came out of retirement that year to run The Valley in a car #6 out of Connecticut. Promoter Lou Spanier was offering a huge bonus to anybody who could win consecutive Valley features in 1968. Wimble was the only recipient. Moreover, he clinched the track's point title with nearly a month to go in the season. Such virtuosity by Team 33 should have been cause for celebration. Underneath, however, the picture was changing. Dave McCredy had died. His widow, Marg, vowed to keep the #33 tradition alive. The crew and Wimble decided that they'd keep the team together through the 1969 season. But fate changed all that at The Valley on Saturday night August 24, 1968 when Bill Wimble was involved in the worst crash of his career.

"I can't remember the accident," says a reflective Wimble. "I have retrograde amnesia and I've lost the last three or four laps.

\$250 a week, plus expenses— Freddy Rosner, Master Car Builder

Agawam, Massachusetts' Fred Rosner was one of the most successful early car builders, and he was unique in that he took his torch and tools on the road. His was the era in between the weighty, top-heavy dirt cars of the 50s and the tubular chasses of the 70s. Heavily influenced by his close friend Ed Flemke, the renowned New England asphalt builder/driver, Rosner was a major factor in the changing technology at Fonda in the 1960s.

"I started coming to Fonda with Rene Charland. We were collecting points for the national sportsman championship in the early '60s. People—lots of people. That was my first impression as we towed over the bridge about 3:00 that first Saturday afternoon. People were hanging from the fences already. They were all so enthusiastic, so knowledgeable.

The cars I was building then had '50s-era Chevy frames with coupe and sedan bodies. They were fly-weights—that was how to be fast on asphalt. I noticed right away that the Fonda cars were pretty rugged. It seemed that if the dirt guys broke something, they just made it bigger. Eventually they got pretty heavy, while my cars could run on either dirt or asphalt.

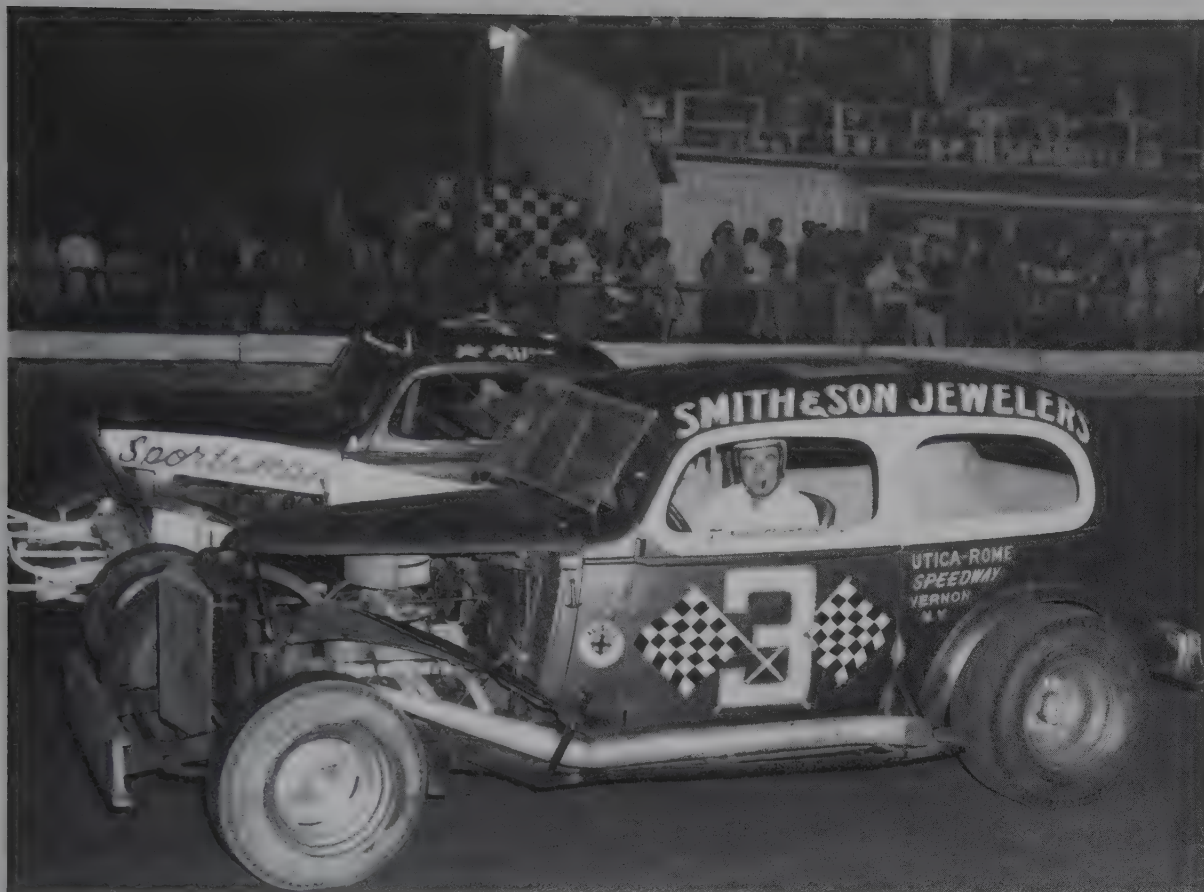
One of my first Fonda cars was for Sam Smith, the Springfield jeweler. It became the #00 coach for Donnie Wayman. I would take my truck and go to their shop

for \$250 a week plus expenses to build them a car. I did that for Frank Trinkaus, Dave McCredy, lotsa guys.

One of my favorites was Dave Lape. He was working from a little shop behind the Beechnut Factory in Canajoharie and they had great equipment. I stayed right there with the Lapes—a neat antique house with a canopy bed. Dave was 18, and everyone was behind him. I went to the races with him after the car was done and the first night he did not run too well. After the feature no one could find him. Finally I did. He was all alone in the infield, crying his eyes out. "I've got all the good stuff—everything I could ask for and I still can't win," he said. Can you imagine that! Eighteen years old! And just think how many races that guy ended up winning!

Kenny Shoemaker really made my cars sing. So did Luke and Wayman, though Lazzaro was probably the best driver. He owned Fonda in his own cars. All those guys were characters, and sometimes the characters clashed. We were at Menands one night and in comes Corey with his dirt car. He comes over and asks Rene what gear to run and Rene gives him some ridiculous answer. Pete goes out for two laps and comes back in hoppin' mad. He pulls a gun out of that leg of his and starts chasing Rene around the pits!

Sure, I built the cars, but it was the tal-



ent of the driver that was important then. We just did not have the technology that DIRT and BUSCH teams have today. You needed driver ability.

It's amazing that some of these guys are still around. Some of the stuff we built was very shaky, but the cars were fast. We never threw stuff away like today. We kept welding things over and over until they broke again.

In the late-'60s I started getting involved in the late models on asphalt, and I moved away. But Fonda was really something. Most of my cars ended up winning and that was a real accomplishment."

Rene Charland smiles over his cigar in this Fred Rosner-built sportsman coach. The car would later become the #00 driven by Don Wayman, and eventually become the #03 modified driven by Irv Taylor as a team car to Maynard Forette's #03 sportsman. (Feuz Collection)

The Catskill Comet



Jerry Townley (Feuz Collection)

Jerry Townley of Athens, New York had a distinguished and well-traveled racing career from 1948 to 1973. Quick with his smile, the witty and wiry Townley was a consistent fan favorite. His best finishes at Fonda were back-to-back seconds in April of 1964 aboard the Cross #47, while his best year came in 1965 when he tooted the Wilcox 32 out of Berlin, New York to nine top fives.

"I loved it. Fonda was where you raced with all the national champions. The track was so good. When you were fast, you threw dirt to the top row of the stands down past the starter's stand. You had to be completely sideways. The fast ones were more sideways than you thought was possible to go. The only one who wasn't was Danish. He set his car up to take a straighter line.

I came there with car #108 and we won at Victoria, but not at Fonda.

I damn near killed myself there one night. I was driving the Cross Boys' #47.

Wimble and Charland locked wheels and stopped right in the middle of the front stretch. I came out of the fourth turn and there's Chet Hanes dancing all around with the red flag. We had no right front brake back then—that would help you get into the turn. So, when I stabbed the brakes there on the straightaway, the car went left and I hit that inside wall. Knocked me sillier than a cucumber. Next, I was on my way flying out the front window. You see, back then we'd attach the seat belt to the seat and not the frame. On impact, the whole unit with me in it broke away. But the seat caught the window frame and I settled in on the floor. Broken hand, nose, concussion, and all that. Out for six weeks. This car was wrecked. The center of the frame sat on the ground.

Then Pop Wilcox, who had the #32, had a big fight with Jim Luke and he quit racing. That winter I got a Christmas card from Emma, Pop's wife. It said that Pop was done sitting around and that he wanted to go racing. After all, he was only 65 and diabetic. I said to my wife Betty, "This looks like a hint." We sent them back a card and said, "if you are thinking of me as a driver, you would need a left foot brake." I had no idea if they had one or not. But I did know that Pop had seen us run pretty fast with that #47. He knew we were on used parts, 'cause we bought 'em from him.

Well, after a while, someone called and I went up there to get fitted in the car. I think the first race at Fonda was rained out, but at the Victoria opener I remember passing Shoemaker off the fourth turn for third. Pop was real happy; The Shoe wasn't.



Jerry Townley (#47) starts this June 20, 1964 heat from fifth spot. Other starters are Spencer Parkhurst (#36), Ron Quackenbush (#G-2), Skip Roots (#H-2), Jack Rood (#67), George Janoski (#40), Tom Kotary (#11), and Kenny Shoemaker (#24). Later in the evening Townley would destroy the #47 in a grinding crash with Bill Wimble and Rene Charland. (Feuz Collection)

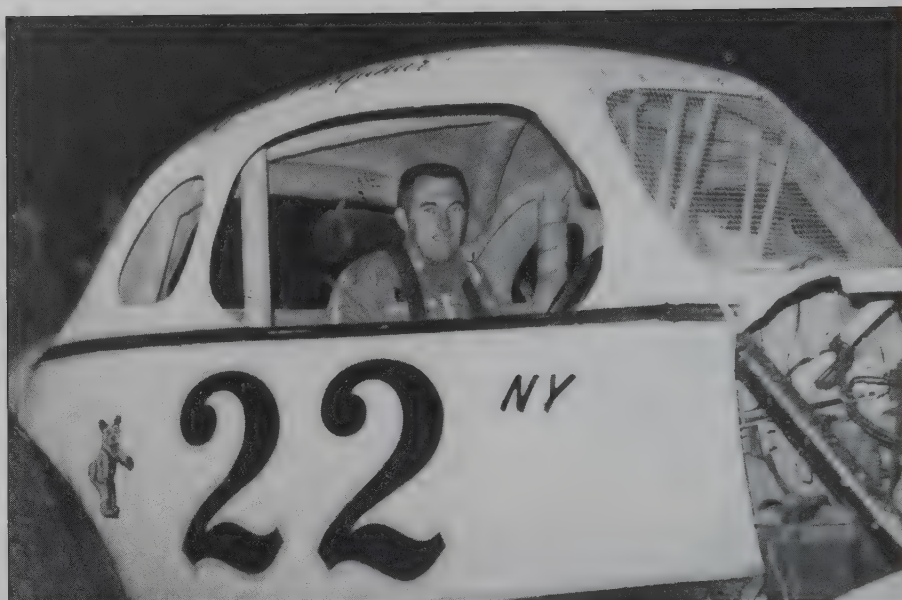
1965 turned out to be a real good year for us at Fonda, but like everyone back then we started running some open shows. Sometimes I called myself "Jay Tee" and sometimes we renumbered the car #62. We weren't out to cause trouble, but they took our points away. And then one night Jim Gage comes up to me right in front of the grandstand and says, "We don't need you here." It made me feel like a knot on a log. But I don't lay down and play dead unless I'm dead.

Pop was that way, too. He heard Gage and he said in his slow way, "I think you will be seeing us tow past here next year."

That was it. Off to Lebanon Valley. You know, it was too bad. We had been so consistent that year at Fonda that we had a real shot at the championship if they hadn't stripped those points.

Anyway, in the middle of the next summer Fonda went into a real slump. Next thing you know I got a letter from Jim Gage saying, "We need you at Fonda." I got a chuckle out of that. I took the letter with me to Lebanon Valley and tacked it up on the electric pole next to where we

Jack Farquhar, shown in Vince Barbuto's #22, was one of several drivers who abandoned Fonda in 1968 in search of victory lane at Lebanon Valley. (Chuck Ely photo)



I had a few to go in the feature and I thought I would win. Apparently I was up to the lead car when I hit oil and got sideways on the backstretch. The cars right behind split to avoid me, but Joe Messina couldn't. My wife thought for an hour I was dead as they were extracting me from the wreck." Wimble had suffered a badly fractured skull. He would be hospitalized 10 days. Although Wimble can't recall the mishap, he knows what time it happened to the precise moment. His wristwatch broke in the wreck, forever frozen at 9:50 p.m. and 32 seconds. Wimble has donated that stopped time piece for display at the DIRT Motorsports Hall of Fame.

Over the years, Donald "Dutch" Hoag had been often called upon by McCredy to drive a #33 in big events, like Langhorne and Syracuse. Once again, the Dutchman was summoned by Marg while Wimble recuperated from his head wounds. Keep the seat warm, Dutch, Team McCredy implored, because Billy will be back soon.

But Bill's wife, Nancy, horrified by the wreck, had already made her own decision: She wasn't ever going to watch another race. "Nancy was scared for the first time, and she said she couldn't go with me anymore. Why, I thought, should I go ahead and race when I was gonna quit the following year anyway? The team really hadn't been the same without Dave, anyhow, so we all decided to pull the plug together, right then and there."

The racing wars were behind him. As Wimble recovered his health, he turned his attention—and all that proven focus and energy—on how to get from the back to the front in the world of commerce. He had sold the farm in 1964 and was trained for nothing but farming and racing. Much to his surprise, he was contacted out of the blue for a sales position with AR Gundry, a bulk petroleum

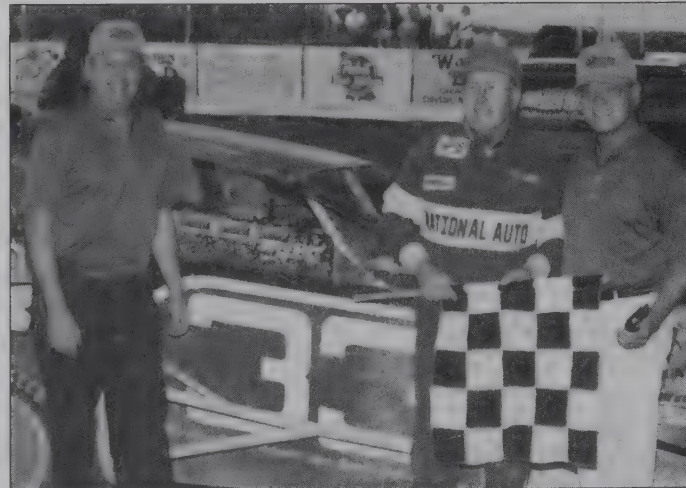
transporter in Rochester. Mert Gundry, company partner, had been the Pit Steward at Monroe County. Wimble suddenly put together the connection between his racing and job opportunities. Once he understood it, he became brilliant at leveraging his racing relationships. While at Gundry, he applied every effort imaginable to learn the trade, bought into the company, and sold it in 1976 for a healthy multiple. Then he used the exact same model with a trucking company in Florida that he built to almost five-times the size of Gundry, before going ahead and selling that one for a handsome profit, too. Bill and Nancy presently reside in Valrico, Florida. At age 70, Wimble is still in the fast lane of entrepreneurialism, managing his own factoring business and investment concern.

As Wimble's fortunes have compounded, he and Nancy have become avid travelers and dedicated race fans. Not only is he a VIP regular for Winston Cup events at Daytona and Charlotte—using races to entertain clients—he also spends a couple of weeks each summer back in New York, touring his dirt track roots. It was during such a visit to Can-Am Speedway in LaFargeville, New York in 1993 that co-promoters Dave Lape and Andy Fusco cajoled Wimble into driving a modified one last time. He'd steer Lape's #22, repainted and renumbered #33 for the night. "It had been 25 years since he'd driven a stock car," says Lape. "We just didn't want to see his career end on a down note, sprawled against that backstretch wall at Lebanon Valley." Lape and Fusco arranged a special legends event for a number of Wimble's '60s peers like Andy Romano, Bud Ward, Carl "Fuzzy" Van Horn, and Maynard Forrette, as part of a Super DIRT Series Show.

On the left, 14-year-old Dave Lape practices his victory lane stance with Bill Wimble in 1962. (Lape Collection) On the right, 31 years later, Lape (left) and partner Andy Fusco (right) bring Wimble (center) out of retirement for one last trip to victory lane. (Ken Dippel photo)



The racing wars behind him, and his helmet on the peg, Bill Wimble is ready for new challenges. (Feuz Collection)





Billy "The Wild Child" Gray, himself a two-time Fonda modified feature winner, was the guy assigned to teach Bill Wimble how to drive today's modern mods at Can-Am in 1993. (Clancy Miller photo))

The afternoon of the comeback, Lape's brother-in-law Billy Gray, who would become a two-time Fonda mod winner in 1997, schooled Wimble on how to drive today's cars. Then when the DIRT modifieds took to the track for hot laps, Wimble went out in his ersatz #33. Within a couple of laps, he was up to speed, wheel-to-wheel with guys like Hearn, Decker, and McCreadie. Twenty five years be damned. Nearly 65, it was as if Bill Wimble had never left.

For the legends feature, Fusco and Lape did grant Wimble the pole. The rest was up to him. He raced astonishingly hard, held off Van Horn and Buzzie Reutimann and won by a car length. "Bill Wimble won the last race of his career," smiles Lape. "Not many drivers can say that."

As a national symbol of precision, Bill Wimble personified Fonda Speedway's Glory Years. He was a master of consistency, winning routinely and routinely avoiding disaster. This man of uncommon clay conceived a specific methodology for winning races. Quite simply, Bill Wimble would blast from the back to the front just as fast as possible. Then he'd run smoothly and mistake-free, daring anyone who might envision passing him to take the high road around the outside. Precious few were equal to the challenge.

Once Bill Wimble made the successful transition to Fonda from the anonymity of the North Country, an old nemesis from back home soon followed: Sterling "Buck" Holliday. Wimble and Holliday had grown up in the neighboring hamlets of Lisbon and Waddington. They vied for the same rides, the same girls, and the same checkered flags. After Wimble exited the St. Lawrence scene, Holliday became virtually unbeatable at obscure tracks like Canton, Fort Covington (New York) and Landsdowne, Ontario. But Buck and his car owners, Floyd Geary and John Bacon, longed for a greater challenge than Fonda would provide.

Buck and Bill:

Bill Wimble Remembers Buck Holliday

"Buck and I grew up together. He came from Waddington; I came from Lisbon. In fact, he went with my first wife before I did, and visa versa. When racing began, Buck was really strong and he became famous before I did. He had much more support from the Waddington community than I had from Lisbon.

Things got a little sticky the winter of 1954 when Floyd Geary and I decided to get together and build a car. The car wasn't finished for the first couple of races in the spring, so I picked up rides. This burned Floyd, and, innocent farmer that I was, he canned me. Not long afterwards Buck got the ride. The car was numbered C-38 and they won hundreds of races together, though mostly at pretty obscure tracks up that way.

I soon would venture out on the road, and I guess, as my fame began to pass his, Buck and I became rivals, though still friends. When the two of us showed up to race at the same place, there were only two of us there and one of us was going to win. I recall one night at Plattsburgh, a 100-lapper, when we confronted each other. It was two people as far out as you can get, so far beyond the zone that you wonder how we both stayed on the track. We passed more than 10 times each way, sometimes twice a lap. I won, but that doesn't matter. What a memory!

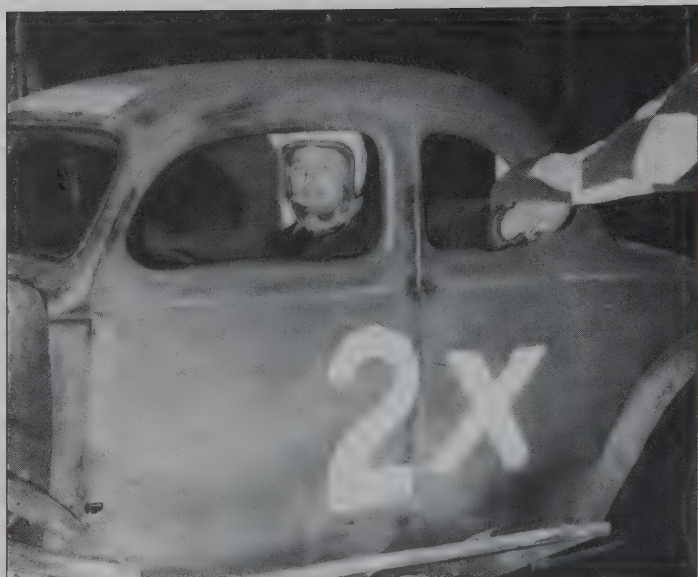
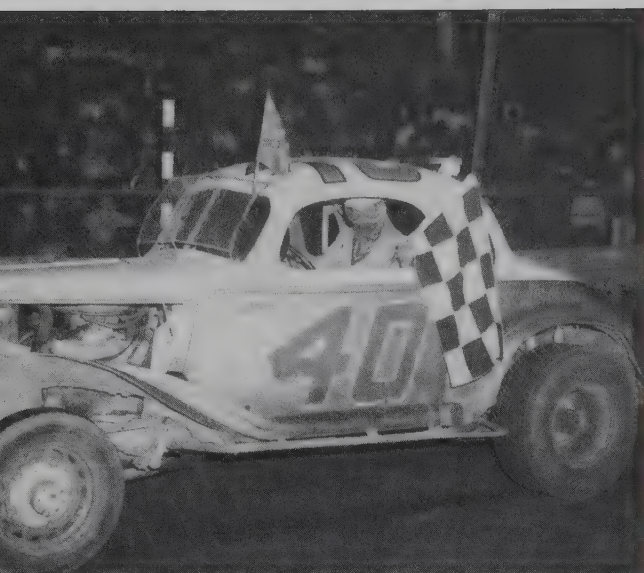
Eventually Buck came to Monroe County and Fonda with the C-38. He and Floyd did real well, winning a bunch of features before Floyd was killed in the pits in Canada by an out-of-control race car. However, over time as my world contin-



Owner Floyd Geary (left) and driver Buck Holliday in Fonda's victory lane on May 21, 1960. (Feuz Collection)

ued to improve, Buck's worsened, and we lost touch for a number of years. He did race for quite a while, but his family life was difficult. Finally, he ended up moving to North Carolina where he had a lady friend.

A year and a half ago, Buck fell over dead with a heart attack. It hit me so hard. I came to Oswego and gave a eulogy. I am a sentimental old fool. I told them that if Ole Buck knew I was up there being teary, he would blow me away. So, as I spoke, I tried not to choke up. "So long, Buck", I concluded. "You're a tough act to follow." He sure was."

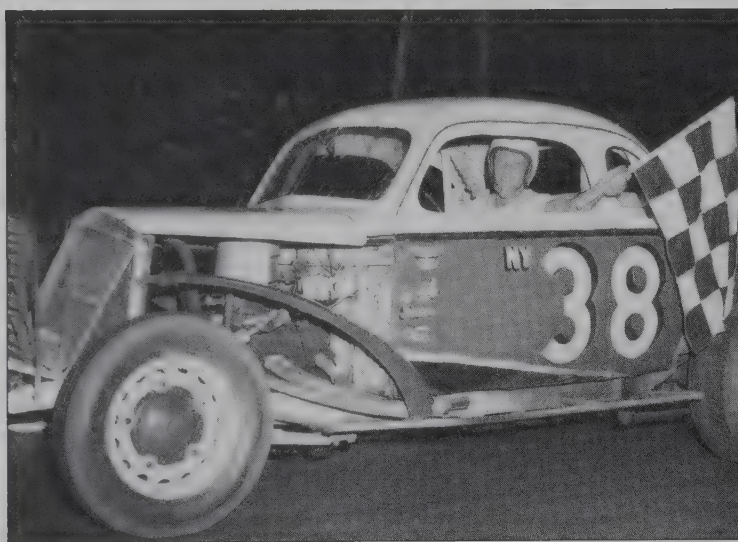
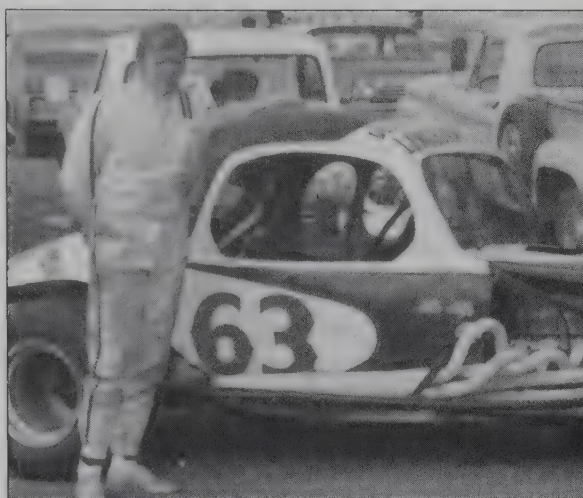
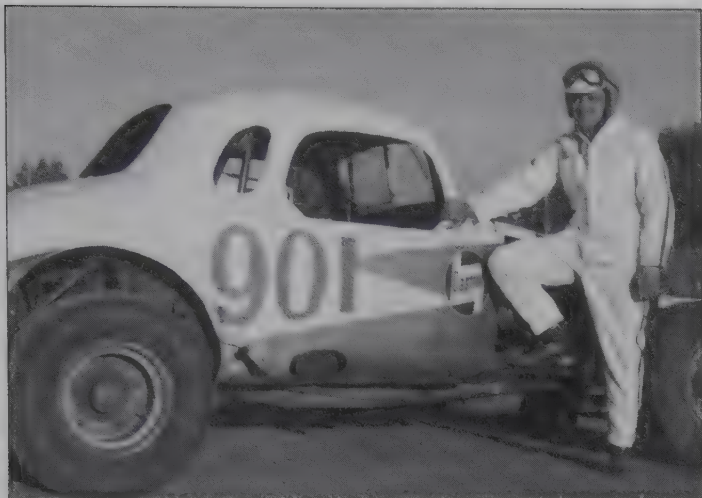


George Janoski (left) and Gene Bergin (right) were among the New England contingent that descended on Fonda during The Glory Years. (left: Feuz Collection; right: Grady photo)

Their #C-38 was as fast as it was beautiful. Holliday scored eight feature wins at Fonda in 1959-60. And then Bacon became a Fonda official, and Geary sold out, leaving Holliday rideless. Buck got some part-time work in Chris Drellos' #11, as a teammate to Ken Shoemaker. And when Drellos sold the car to Rochester's Cliff Barcomb, the Holliday/Barcomb combo actually copped a 1964 surprise Fonda win. After his stint with Barcomb, Buck Holliday returned home to the North Country ovals for the balance of his racing career.

The successful importation of Wimble and Holliday soon ushered in other big-name invaders from the four corners of the eastern stock car world. During The Glory Years, Fonda was a hub. Bill Rafter, Ed Ortiz, and Ken Meahl (in a car built and owned by 14-year-old Jerry Cook) came from the Niagara Frontier. New England produced Rene Charland, George Janoski, Ernie Gahan, Gene Bergin, Maynard Forrette, "Black Jack" DuBrul, and Ron Narducci. The Plattsburg/Montreal corridor contributed Dick Nephew, Jim Hoyt, Bob Bruno, Wes Moody, and Jean Guy Chartrand. Mind you, the drivers listed above, who drove hundreds of miles every Saturday to race at Fonda, were not only abandoning their home tracks, but were towing past scores of other Saturday speedways in the process. However, the proliferation of new talent found Fonda's victory lane frustratingly elusive.

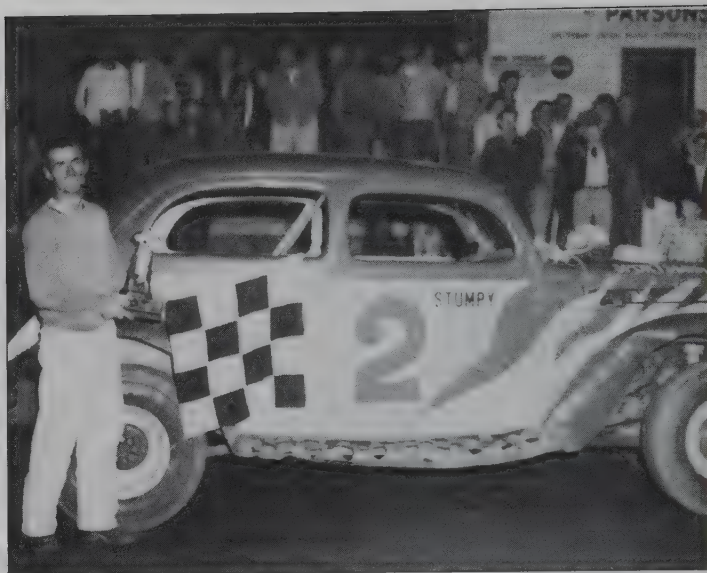
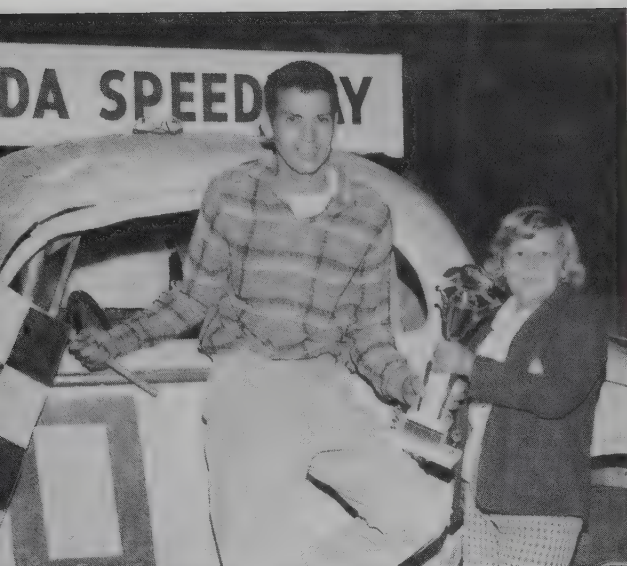
As a result, some of the greatest names in modified racing history were Fonda regulars at various times in their career but never won a Fonda main event. They would dominate elsewhere on Fridays and Sundays, but be denied on Saturday night. Nonetheless, they would return to Fonda, like it was Mecca, week after week. Rafter, Meahl, and Bob Ziegler are in DIRT's Hall of



Top left: Jean Guy Chartrand (Lucia Collection), top right: Wes Moody (Grady photo).
Bottom left: Bill Rafter wins Syracuse in 1959 wearing a Fonda t-shirt, with Ed Otto on his left. (Feuz Collection), Bottom right: Ken Meahl takes a Fonda heat win in Jerry Cook's #38. (Feuz Collection)

Fame, but they never were in Fonda's winners' circle. Janoski was a standout at Stafford and a victor at Victoria, but he never won at Fonda. The best Nephew ever did at Fonda was third. And the list goes on. In The Glory Years, just finishing in the top 10 in a Fonda feature was a significant accomplishment.

Indeed, Fonda had been cruel to invaders. The track's asymmetric layout—no two turns the same radius, no two straights the same length—favored the hometowners. Other than Don Stumpf, no import won at Fonda until Holliday came along. And speaking of Stumpf, old timers still talk of his 1956 shocker.



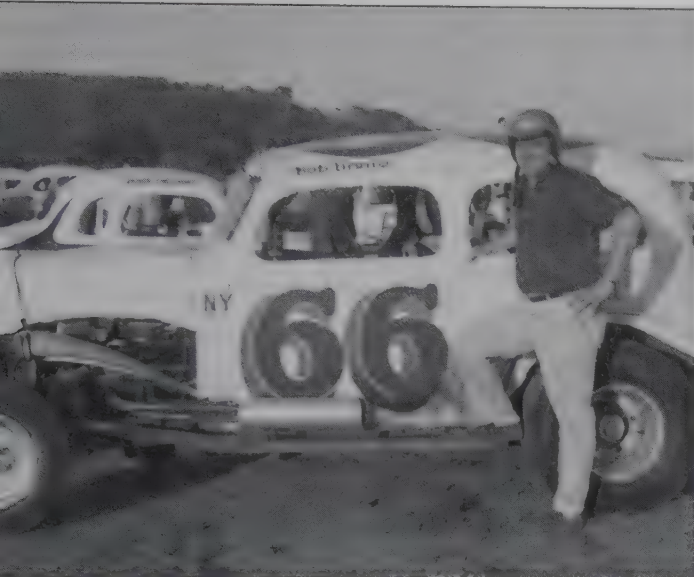
Ed Ortiz (left) won two Fonda features in 1962 and continued to race in the western part of the state well into the 1990s.

(Feuz Collection) The stunned railbirds lined up to see Don Stumpf (right) collect his hardware on July 14, 1956.

(Grady photo)

Stumpf's home track, the macadam Wall (New Jersey) Stadium had rained out. So the Garden State wheelman towed his coach #2 north in search of a place to race. He ended up winning at Fonda the very first time he ever laid eyes on it. Only Chuck Kotwica, Ed Ortiz, Jimmy Horton, and Gary Balough can make the same claim. Steve Danish remembers Stumpf's win well. "The groove at Fonda had been in the middle of the turns," says Danish. "Stumpy came in, started in the back, drove the very bottom, and went under everybody. From that night onward, the groove at Fonda moved to the inside of the corners."

Few "outsiders" conquered Fonda, and those that did had usually become entrenched as regulars by the time they finally won. Ed Ortiz was an exception. His Fonda career was highly unusual. The DIRT Hall of Famer would race Friday nights at Victoria, but then head west to race nearer his Ransomville home on Saturdays. His successes at Victoria against the Fonda cars motivated Ortiz to take a stab at a couple of extra-money 50-lappers at Fonda in 1962. He won 'em both in his Pete Hollebrand-sponsored, John Clement-wrenched #0. Thereafter, Ortiz became a Fonda weekly regular, but he would never win another feature at the track. Imports Bob Bruno and Maynard Forrette also pulled off surprise Fonda wins. Bruno's 1965 shocker and Maynard Forrette's 1967 inaugural Fonda victory both came in sedans: Vic Wolfe's #66 and Godfrey Wenzel's #03, respectively. Moreover, both came courtesy of a starting line-up procedure that benefitted their sportsman cars. From mid-1965 through 1967, the small-block sportsmen and the big-block modifieds raced together. Line-ups would be handicapped with the sportsmen starting up front and the modifieds starting in the rear. If

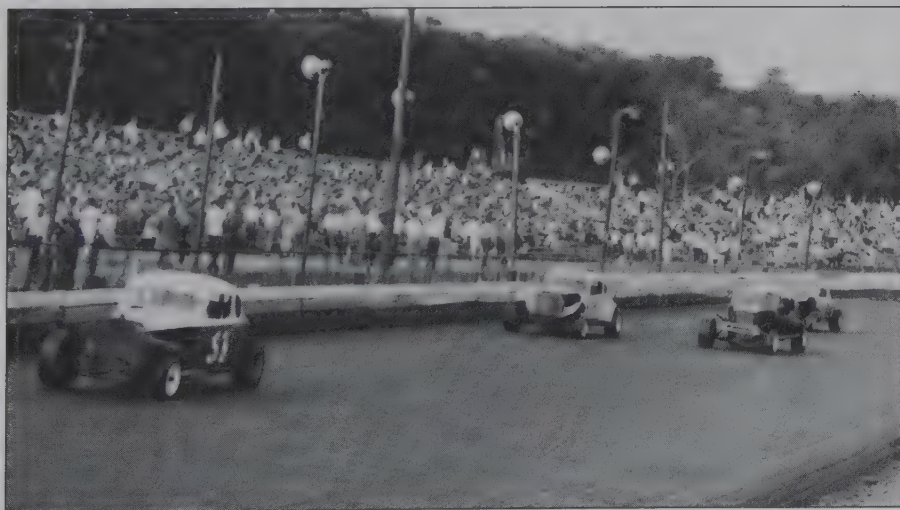


a sportsman car could get out there and there weren't many cautions to bunch the field, the mods could run out of time getting to the front. That's precisely what happened for Bruno and Forrette.

It wasn't only outsiders who pulled off Glory Years upsets. Long-time, albeit winless, contender Paul Marshall broke his Fonda draugh in 1965. Driving Allie Swire's #51, Schenectady's Marshall held off a pack of charging superstars to win the 1965 40-lap spring championship. A recurrent, if unexplainable, quirk during Fonda's first 25 years of operation was that extra-distance races very often produced first-time and surprise winners (such as Marshall). Ironically, in the last 25 years, first-time winners mostly have come in shorter than normal features, like twin-20s. As Yogi Berra would say, "You can look it up." (See appendix.)

(top left) Bob Bruno won at Fonda in 1965 driving Vic Wolfe's #66 coach. (Lucia Collection)

(top right) The first of Maynard Forrette's nine career wins at Fonda came on June 3, 1967. The bionic Forrette is still active as a driver today, racing regularly at Lebanon Valley and Syracuse. (Feuz Collection)



(bottom left) This July, 1964, photo shows Paul Marshall in Allie Swire's #51 leading the field out of turn four. Paul's son, Kenny, is now a respected DIRT flagger. (Feuz Collection)



Paul Marshall relaxes in the pits in this 1963 shot. (Feuz Collection)

Save Holliday, Ortiz, Bruno, Forrette, Rene Charland, and Ernie Gahan, all of the long-distance travelers who descended upon Fonda during The Glory Years went winless during that span. They shouldn't have felt too demoralized: It was tough for most of the locals to win back then, as well. The quartet of Bill Wimble, Ken Shoemaker, Pete Corey, and Lou Lazzaro were so dominant during The Glory Years, that from 1958 through 1966, they accounted for 74.7% of the track's feature wins. You read correctly: During that nine-year stretch, a mere four drivers won an incredible three-quarters of Fonda's feature races.

Knowing who the likely winners were going to be didn't hurt the front gate. "We were getting an honest 4,000 to 5,000 fans every Saturday night," remembers Feuz. The largest crowd in Fonda history? We'll never know for sure. "There was a night back in 1962 or so where we had about 5,000 people the week before and got rained out and gave rain checks," says Feuz. "The next week we sold 4,500 tickets and I swear almost all 5,000 rain checks from the week before came back. I estimate we had 9,000 people in the place, but we'll never get an exact count. One thing is certain. It was the biggest crowd ever at Fonda."

Fonda's amazing attendance figures enhanced the track's reputation. One of the beneficiaries was Lou Figari—he was Fonda's concessionaire. The Long Islander was one of the most respected behind-the-scenes people in northern racing. Figari had the concession rights at many of the most prominent speedways in the Northeast, so he knew first-hand which tracks were doing big business and which ones weren't. "Lou Figari was a good man and an

Lou Figari (center) Jim Gage (left), and Ed Feuz (right) celebrate Fonda's 1967 All Star Racing League Championship. (Grady photo)



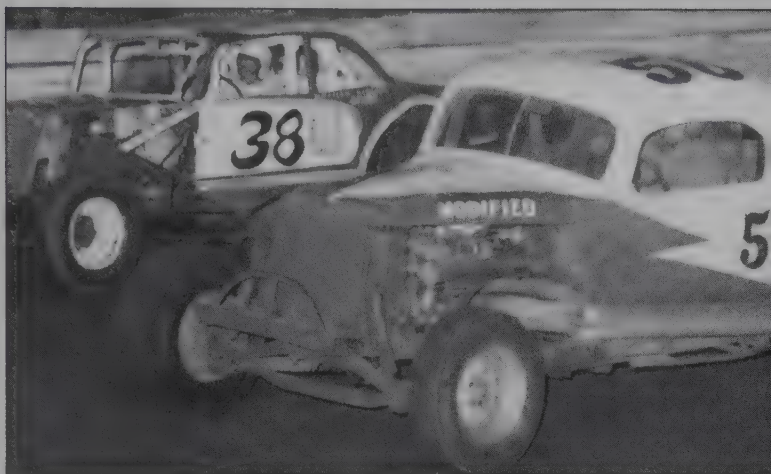
Ernie from “Cow Hampshire”

Very much the definition of a New England Yankee, Ernie Gahan, from Dover, New Hampshire, was frugal, self-sufficient, and an independent thinker.

Gahan had many victories throughout New England in the '50s, and he took frequent jaunts above the Canadian border. Track size and surface was immaterial. His was a woefully under-financed operation from which he somehow made a living. At times it got downright dicey. Ernie recounts his anxiousness before the start of the sportsman-modified race on the Daytona Beach course in 1956. “Ralph Cusack (a talented driver himself and now owner of Beech Ridge (Maine) Speedway) and I were down there with a tow vehicle, sleeping bags, and the race car. We had \$9 between us to get home. I got pretty concerned when I heard our starting position—I 13th of about 120.” Gahan ended up sixth. With \$600 in prize money, the team from Dover was eating lobster.

One night in 1961, Gahan, alone as usual, left Stafford (Connecticut) Speedway and headed west. He had decided to try Fonda. He'd heard about the competition. Never mind that the #15 Wood Chopper Special he was towing had just gotten wrecked. At the Fultonville tollgate the next morning, Gahan asked about someone who might have a frame machine. He proceeded to West End Garage in Fonda and introduced himself to Jack Brookman, proprietor. It was instant chemistry. The two worked all morning on Brookman's high-end clientele's cars. They shut down the business at 1:00 and were all over the Gahan-built Sportsman. They got to the track just in time to pick up the tail of the consi and miraculously they qualified.

The new friends were soon joined by



Ernie Gahan (#50) beats Jerry Cook (#38) on July 23, 1966. (Feuz Collection)

Jack Blackwood and George Snyder. Blackwood would become starter at Fonda in the early '70s, while Snyder's son Randy is an active, feature-winning Fonda modified driver today. The team was crackerjacks, and they were in the top three by August 5—and second to Corey on September 23 in a 100-lapper Ernie still contends he won. “We really had that 301 Chevy wound tight that year,” he says.

Given his competence and popularity, Gahan represented Fonda in the All Star Series in 1967 with Corey and Wimble, and the trio knocked off the championship. Curiously, his best night at Fonda came on July 23, 1966, the same year he won the NASCAR national modified championship. The race was a 107-lapper because of a rather childish competition with Albany-Saratoga about which track would host the oddest long-distance event. Gahan passed Jerry Cook on the third turn of the 107th circuit. Ironically, he never would have ended up winning had the race been a normal 100-lapper.



Schenectady native Shirley "Cha Cha" Muldowney gets ready to blast off.
(Grady photo)

Steady campaigner Doc Blanchard would field an array of unusual cars well into the 1970s.
(Grady photo)



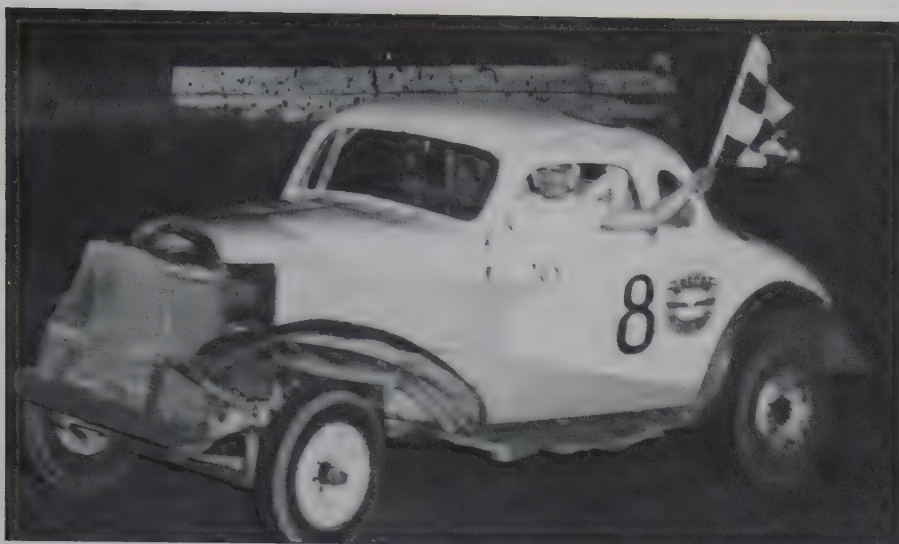
honest man," says Feuz. "He called us too late to get the (concession) rights for 1953, but from 1954 until I left, Figari had this track. And we never had a written contract. Just a 22% of the gross handshake deal." Figari's clout served Fonda well. Lou was tight with Islip, Long Island promoter Larry Mendelsohn, who coordinated the Grand National Northern Tour. If Fonda wanted a GN race, Fonda got a GN race. Figari single-handedly created The All-Star League, perhaps the high watermark in the history of northeastern modified racing. Fonda was a charter All-Star member.

Indeed, Fonda had friends in high places. Bob Sall, who was the track's chief steward in 1948, was now NASCAR's Eastern Field Manager. Ed Otto, a Buffalo-area native who had been one of NASCAR's founders in 1948, had elevated to NASCAR's Vice Presidency. Otto and Feuz had been cronies from way back, and whenever a good deal came along, Fonda Speedway was a recipient. "Ed Otto's the one who convinced me to put in a drag strip," says Feuz. Otto knew that drag racing was a low-cost, high-profit endeavor. The notion of paving Fonda's pit road and dragging souped-up street cars and rods down the center of the oval seems bizarre today. During Fonda's Glory Years, it was a financial home run.

The dragsters would race about 1/8th of a mile from a starting line on the pit road (near turn one) to a finish line on the pit road (adjacent to turn four). Then they would have to cross the stock car track at speed in order to reach the cool-down lane, which ran east from the Fair's Cow Palace building. Crossing the race track was especially tough on driver and suspension. From 1959 through 1965, hundreds of drivers would pay good money every Wednesday night to drag for trophies at Fonda. The strip produced one of the most famous drag racers in American racing history: Schenectady's Shirley "Cha Cha" Muldowney.

The Glory Years was a time of opulence for Fonda's management. But it was also a time of good will and charity. When Pete Corey lost his leg, Gage and Feuz ran a benefit race on July 4, 1960, with the net gate proceeds going to their fallen star. But the most generous act of benevolence in Fonda history occurred August 18, 1959 when the drivers drove for free, the officials volunteered their services, and the promoters paid all of the overhead out of their own pockets. The event was "The George Welch Memorial." One hundred percent of the front and pit gate money went to benefit Welch's widow, Bertha.

George Welch had been a popular, young, and upcoming driver at Fonda, who had also raced at the Capital District tracks of Lebanon Valley, Empire Speedway in Menands, Route 66 Speedway, and White's Beach Speedway near Saratoga. In 1959, when he wasn't racing at Fonda, Welch moonlighted as Empire's Wednesday



George Welch wins a heat race at Fonda a month before his death. (Grady photo)

night flagger. While flagging on July 8, 1959, he was struck by a stock car driven by Lauren Meigs of Tannersville. He died July 10th.

The Fonda Welch benefit was intended to consist of five feature races: one for Whites Beach Speedway cars, one for Lebanon Valley cars, one for Fonda cars, one for Empire Speedway stock cars, and one for the Empire MARC midgets. When no Empire midgets or stockers showed up (although Dick Dixon, Gene Bergin, and Al Ristau were advertised), it became a triple-feature show. All three main events were 15 laps.

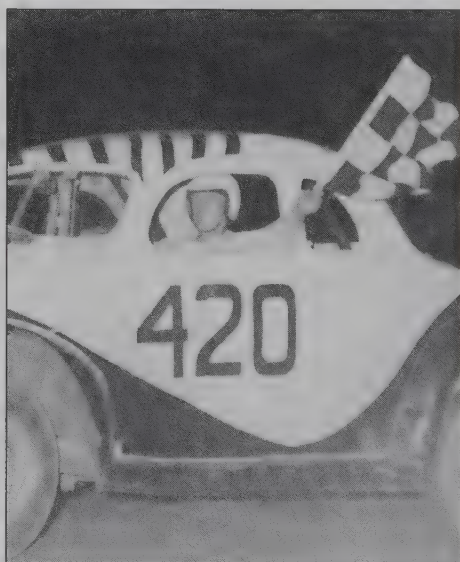
The Whites Beach 15-lapper was the first main, with 12 cars going to the post. A handful of teams from the Hollywood Bowl (a/k/a Route 66 Speedway) near Troy had shown up and those drivers were put in with guys from Whites Beach. Doc Blanchard's #49 held the lead until Earl Spellburg, a Route 66er, passed him on lap nine in his #1 and went on to become unquestionably the most obscure feature winner in Fonda Speedway history. Finishing behind Spellburg were Blanchard, Stan Burroughs, Herb Dunleavy, and "Rebel Ross" (real name: Dale Horton). Many of the Whites Beachers would become Fonda regulars later in their careers.

Chuck Dwyer won the first heat that night for the Whites Beach contingent. "Hollywood and Whites Beach were small tracks, like a quarter mile," remembers Dwyer. "And we didn't have quick changes. So to 'gear' the car for a half-miler like Fonda, we were all scrambling around to find the biggest (circumference) tires we could get a hold of." For the feature, Dwyer let Orlando Pappa drive his #420, and the car got mangled badly in a backstretch melee.

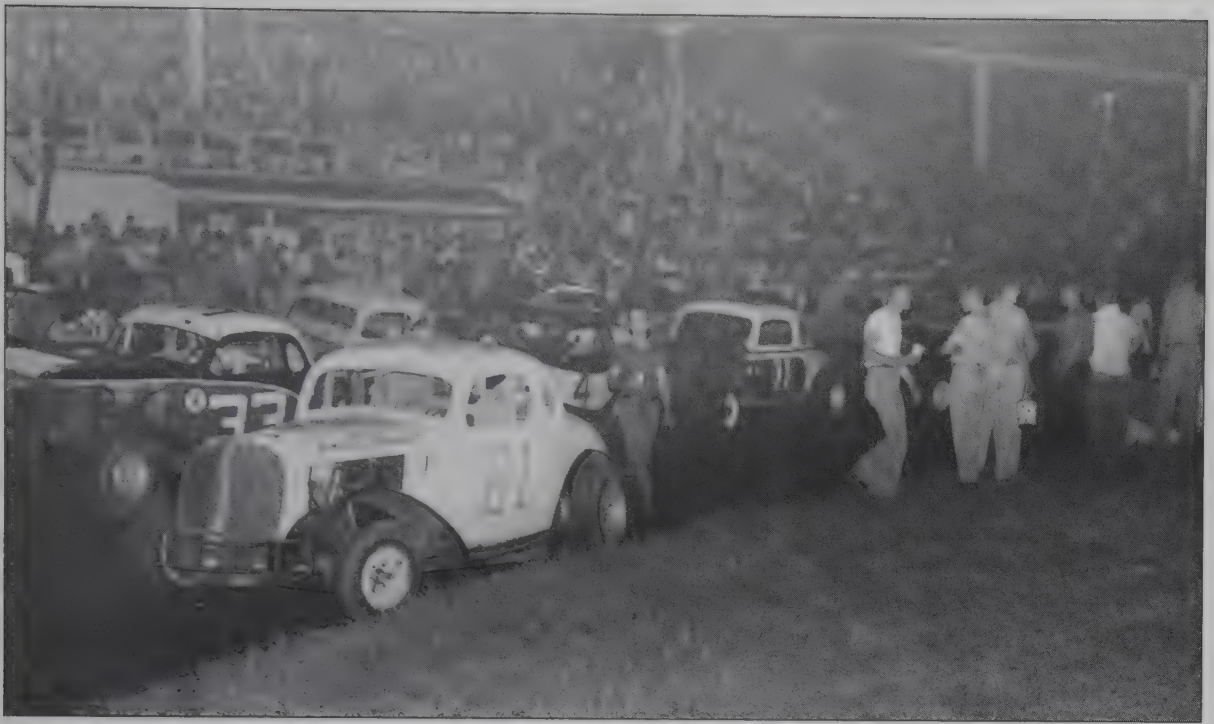
The Lebanon Valley feature was next on the card with nine starters. Howie Westevelt's #24 flew from eighth to first on lap three and won going away. Scootch Schoonmaker, George Baumgartner, Jim Morris, and Dunleavy rounded out the top five. The 15-lap fea-



The Whites Beach competitors on hand for George Welch Memorial Night at Fonda. Top row, left to right: Earl Madison, Doc Blanchard, Chuck Dwyer, Jack Rood, Herb Dunleavy, Louie Luft, Earl Spellburg, Ed Ryskowski, and Joe Wunderlich. Bottom row, left to right: Stan Burroughs, Dale Horton (a/k/a "Rebel Ross"), Ron Quackenbush, George Welch Jr., Bunny Discenzi, and Paul Dwyer. (Feuz Collection)



Pictured left to right: Rebel Ross (Biittig Collection), Chuck Dwyer (Dwyer Collection), and Howie Westervelt. (Feuz Collection)



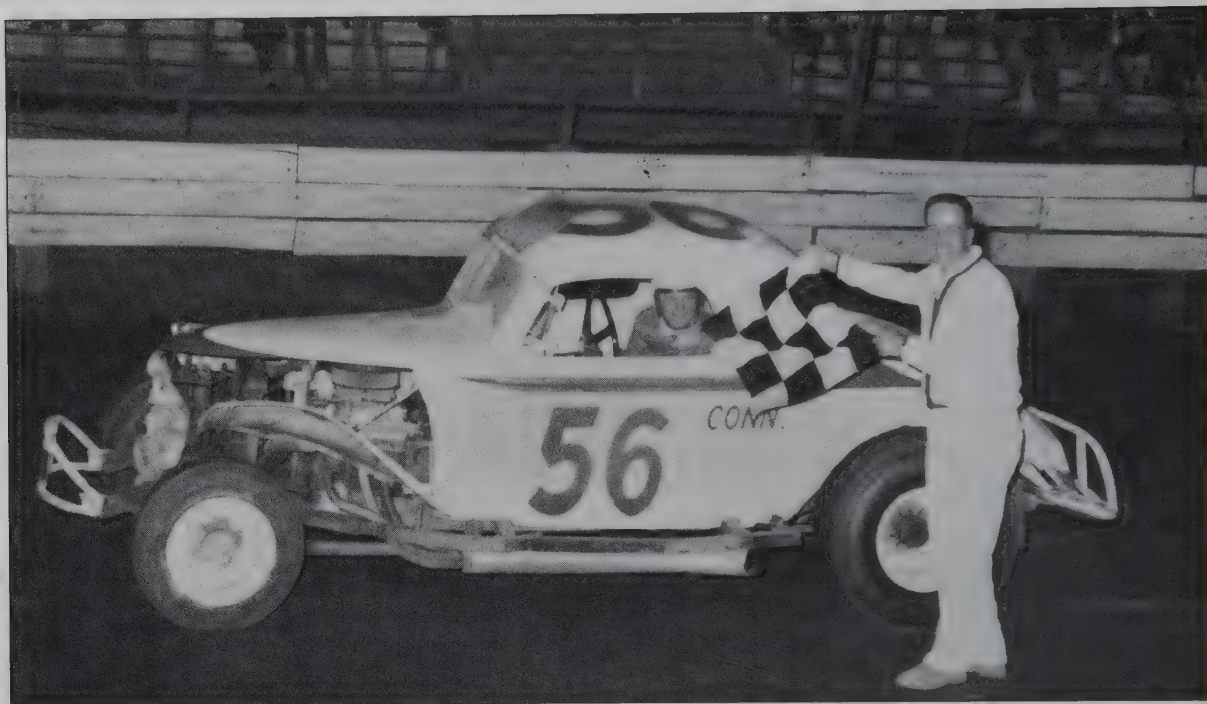
ture for Fonda drivers had 15 entrants, including 18-year old Andy Romano, making his first-ever start in father Joe Romano's #97. Pete Corey borrowed the Ray Vine/Jim Young-owned #75 for the night and won, with Ken Shoemaker, Jim Luke, Steve Danish, and Tom Kotary in tow.

The Glory Years produced numerous famous car owners and famous car color schemes that became almost as well known as the men who drove them. Cars would be sold from one team owner to the next, but the number and paint job would stay the same. A wonderful oddity of the era was fans cheering the mere arrival of their favorite cars. The grandstand would fill by late afternoon. When popular cars like #111 or #33 or #3 or #4 came into view while being trailered down Riverside Drive in Fultonville, or coming over the Mohawk River Bridge, fans of those teams would cheer approvingly. And this was two or three hours before warm-ups.

The racing procedure was far different in The Glory Years from what it is today. Just one class, three heats, a consi, and a feature. And the officials rarely used the yellow flag. When there was a wreck, the entire field would stop under red on the front stretch. Usually, the drivers would exit their cars and chat with each other or mingle with fans at the rail while the accident was cleared.

The Glory Years saw the emergence of Ken Shoemaker and the swansong of Howard "Jeep" Herbert. Both Herbert and Shoemaker had competed in the 1953 Saturday night opener. But since then, their careers had coursed divergent paths.

Steve Danish (#61), Bill Wimble (#S-33), Pepper Eastman (#181, outside), Lou Lazarro (#4), Ernie Gahan (#15 outside), Pete Corey (#11), and Lee Millington (#71 outside) await a 1963 restart. (Feuz Collection)



Jeep Herbert wins a heat race on September 17, 1966, driving the Hammond/Strong sportsman #56. The beautiful coupe would end the Schenectady wheelman's career a year later at Stafford.
(Feuz Collection)

Jeep first raced at Willett's Speedway in Perth near Johnstown in 1949 in a self-built coupe. Heretofore winless, Herbert finally found his stride when Fonda opened in 1953. Driving Bob Mott's #3, and then the Wolfe/Kitler/Caprara #37, and finally J.R. Earl's #991/#1, Jeep scored 22 Fonda feature wins in the decade of the '50s—only Pete Corey and Steve Danish won more. He was often voted Fonda's Most Popular Driver by the fans. But, the 1960s weren't nearly as kind to the Schenectady wheelman. He bounced from team to team, including Chris Drellos' #111A, Tony Vilano's #37, Pete Hollebrand's #53, Frank Trinkhaus' #62, Dick Welch's #77, and Vince Barbuto's #2. It was especially frustrating to watch him in the #62. The car appeared capable of winning every week, but broke with fiendish regularity. When unheralded Jack Farquhar replaced Jeep in the Barbuto #2 and looked better in the car than Jeoper had, rail-birds figured Herbert was over the hill. But the veteran would receive redemption from an unlikely source: an absolutely gorgeous coupe #56 out of Connecticut.

Owned by Lou Hammond and Burley Strong, Team 56 had been a regular on the Fonda/Stafford scene for a couple of years. Chet Hunt was Stafford's 1965 sportsman track champ in the #56, but he accomplished so little at Fonda that most observers figured Jeep was taking another step downward by accepting the seat. However, Herbert shocked everybody with a consistent string of top finishes in late 1966 and early 1967. Just when he looked like the odds-on favorite for the 1967 Fonda sportsman track championship, he



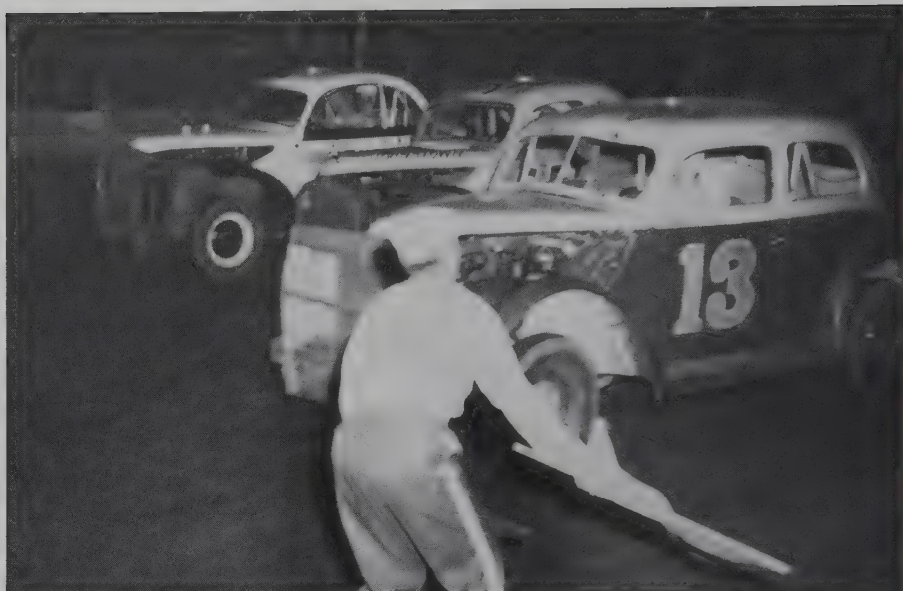
Kenny and Barbara
Shoemaker with Kenny's
1965 Fonda Sportsman
Championship trophy.
(Feuz Collection)

broke his ankle in a crash at Stafford and called it a career. In retirement, Jeep worked hard to mentor Jack Johnson. The two remain close today.

Shoemaker's learning curve was a long one. The Shoe, a taxi cab proprietor at the time, had scored one early Fonda victory, an October 1955 upset, pinch hitting behind the wheel of Red Knoblauch's #13 coupe, wrenched by Tony Achzet. But that win was kind of a fluke, what with many of the better drivers by-passing that Fonda show in favor of the National Open at Langhorne the same weekend. Most of the time, Shoemaker was a decided crasher and also-ran.

All that changed in 1958 when Shoemaker was hired to drive Caprara's potent #37. The pairing earned The Shoe five Fonda '58 features, a track championship, and much pit-side respect. From there, the burly hired gun moved to the Henry Caputo/(and then) Chris Drellos #111 for a five-year (1959-63) stint. That was followed by three years steering the Wright/Zauntner #24. The Glory Years of 1958-1966 saw Shoemaker visit Fonda's victory lane 36 times, second only to Wimble as the track's winningest driver during that era. Shoemaker would continue to win regularly at Fonda into the mid-1970s.

Chet Hames was Fonda's colorful starter through The Glory



"Chet says go," was Red Wildey's trademark starting call. On the left, Chet Hames poses for the camera before the action starts. On the right, Red Knoblauch (#13), Johnny Perry (#55, center), and Jerry Jerome (#777, outside), charge past Chet Hames' green. (both photos from the Feuz Collection)

Years. Hames, of Saratoga, was a daredevil who started the races while standing in the middle of the front straightaway. He'd bring the field to the front stretch under caution and kick his heels high in the air while throwing the green. Chet Hames and Middletown's legendary Tex Enright were the two most entertaining flaggers on the East Coast. Fans would look on in near disbelief as the race cars recurrently missed Chet by what always looked like a fraction of an inch. Hames' ballet would have been even more awe inspiring had fans known of his propensity to nip the bottle.

"I'd hear rumors that Chet would stop in the Broadalbin Hotel for a couple every week on his way to Fonda," says Feuz. "I confronted him once about it and he denied it. Then one night I saw him bring a six-pack of beer into the speedway and hand it to the infield concession stand guy to keep it on ice until intermission. I confronted him again and again he denied it. So I walked over to the concession stand, pulled out the beer, opened it and emptied it on the ground right at Chet's feet. I said, 'Chet, you're done working here. We can't have this.'"

Fonda's Glory Years was a simpler time for America, before the fallout of President Kennedy's assassination and the Vietnam War changed our country forever. And it was a simpler time for racing, too. You had only two major leagues back then, USAC champ cars and NASCAR Grand Nationals. So America's premier short tracks—like Ascot and Birmingham and Islip and Fonda—were third in the pecking order of national importance. There was little auto racing on TV. And none of the plethora of the sponsor-known series like the Busch this, the Craftsman that, or the Hooters whatever.

It makes one long for the time when genuinely brave men drove

stock cars in front of big crowds. When speed was measured by the skills of a racer, instead of the girth of his wallet. When what happened on the banks of the Mohawk every Saturday night got national attention.

It was a glorious era, indeed.



Jerry Townley (#47) and Pepper Eastman (#181) bring 'em down for a 1964 start. George Janoski (#40, inside) and Lou Lazzaro (outside) follow. (Grady photo)

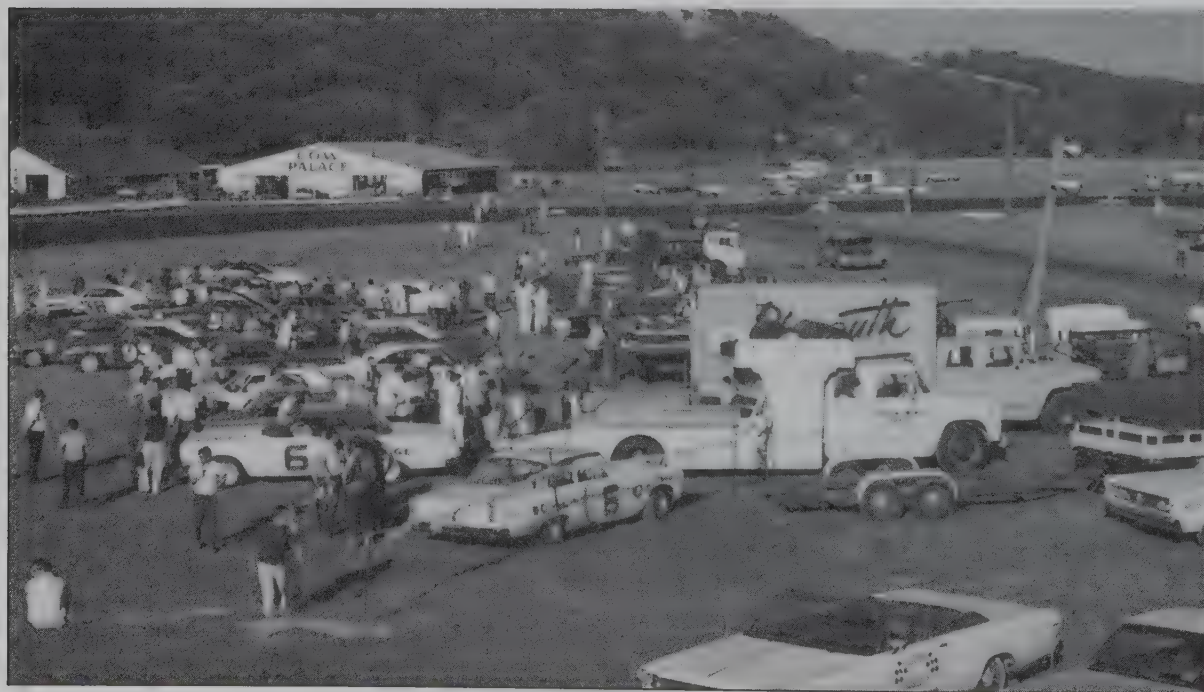


The boys from Fonda pose on the front stretch at Langhorne. Top row, left to right: Cliff Kotary, Bill Wimble, Dutch Hoag, Earl Maille, Pepper Eastman, Buck Holliday, and Chet Hames. Bottom row, left to right: Tom Kotary, Pete Corey, Jeep Herbert, George Baumgartner, Bob Fiske, and George Gallup. (Feuz Collection)



Fonda officials used the practice session preceding the 1955 race to stage publicity shots. Visible cars include #44 Bob Welborn, #42 Lee Petty, and #55 Junior Johnson. (Feuz Collection)

John Grady took this panoramic shot of the infield pits when the GN cars returned to Fonda in 1966. Note the Cotton Owens hauler in the foreground and the Petty rig behind.



Winston Cup Comes to Town 5

THE NASCAR Winston Cup series doesn't run on dirt anymore, and probably never will again. But the world's most competitive and most popular motorsports tour was born on dirt tracks. And on four magical nights—June 18, 1955, July 14, 1966, July 13, 1967, and July 11, 1968—Fonda Speedway hosted the circuit. On these four evenings, the little village of Fonda, New York was the most important race place on the entire planet.

The series wasn't called Winston Cup back then. NASCAR's premier class has undergone four name changes over the years. It was called the Strictly Stock Division in its first year, 1949, and became known as the Grand National division (a moniker that Bill France appropriated from a prestigious English horse race) in 1950. The R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company came aboard in 1972 and the circuit was then called Winston Cup Grand National. It was shortened to just Winston Cup in 1986 (the same year the "Grand National" denotation was switched over to the Busch series).

Here are the details of the four times in history when the greatest circuit in racing came to Fonda.

Saturday, June 18, 1955

Ed Otto's Monroe County Fairgrounds Speedway in Rochester, New York had been the Northeast's traditional "anchor track" for NASCAR Grand National races since 1950. But Otto had difficulty convincing neighboring promoters to team up with him on dates. They were hesitant to take a risk on the expensive show.

As a result, NASCAR's annual Rochester trip often resulted in dubious car counts and a cruel travel schedule. The most infamous example was in 1953, when NASCAR slated Grand National events

back-to-back in Rochester on July 3rd and Spartanburg, South Carolina on July 4th. The 1953 Rochester race drew only 18 cars. Point chasers Lee Petty and Tim Flock then drove all night to South Carolina. When they arrived at the Piedmont Fairgrounds in Spartansburg, they fell asleep on the track's infield grass. The result was disastrous. While they slept, they were run over by an automobile driven by a Champion Spark Plug representative. Petty suffered only minor injuries. But Flock sustained a serious head trauma, which sidelined him for five weeks.

In 1955, Otto urged the management at Fonda and Plattsburg to join him in a Friday/Saturday/Sunday GN swing. All three dirt half-milers would host 200-lappers paying a guaranteed purse of \$4,085, with \$1,000 going to the winner. Those were fairly steep numbers for the time. Fonda promoters also booked a NASCAR Grand National date for August 14, 1955 at their fledging sister speedway in Richfield Springs.

Arguably the biggest name in NASCAR Grand Nationals in 1955 didn't belong to a driver; it belonged to a car owner: Carl Kiekaefer. The Wisconsin boating magnate, owner of the Mercury Outboard Motor Company, entered racing in 1955 and he entered it in a big way, fielding a fleet of Chrysler 300 stock cars, hiring the best drivers available, and winning at an unprecedented rate.

Kiekaefer's cars won 22 of the 40 Winston Cup races they started in his rookie 1955 season. (Kiekaefer would win 30 of 50 in 1956 and then quit the sport forever.) So if the 1955 Fonda 200 holds any historical significance, it's that Kiekaefer's cars were beaten there.

Brothers Tim and Fonty Flock were Kiekaefer's primary drivers in 1955. They finished 1-2 at Rochester the night before Fonda. But a stocky 24-year-old ex-moonshine runner out of the Blue Ridge Mountains of North Carolina would best them at "The Track of Champions." His name was Robert "Junior" Johnson.

The 1955 season was Junior Johnson's first full year on the Winston Cup circuit, and he made an immediate impact. He had scored his inaugural win in early May 1955 and had pocketed two more victories by the time the tour reached Fonda. Johnson's red and black #55 was a 1955 Oldsmobile owned by Cadillac-Olds dealers Jim Lowe and Carl Bucham of North Wilkesboro, North Carolina—the same Lowe and Bucham who would go on to found the Lowe's Home Improvement chain. Lowe, Bucham, and Johnson all grew up in the same town—Ronda, North Carolina.

He and his "crew," brother Fred Johnson and friend Boise Hagler, flat-towed the race car down the thruway ("We used to just tow bar everywhere with our tools in the race car," says Johnson) and spent the next day at Maczek's Garage in Fultonville making repairs.

Come race time, they discovered the gas tank on Johnson's #55



was ruptured. Co-promoter Ed Feuz came to the rescue. "I told 'em they could borrow the gas tank from my passenger car (a 1954 Olds convertible), so long as I got it back," remembers Feuz.

He almost didn't get it back.

"The track was rough as hell that night," says Johnson. "Our big ole' cars were so heavy that they rutted out holes everywhere. It was real bad in the corners, but there was even ruts in the straightaways. At the finish, the gas tank was draggin' on the ground. The only thing holdin' it on was the gas line."

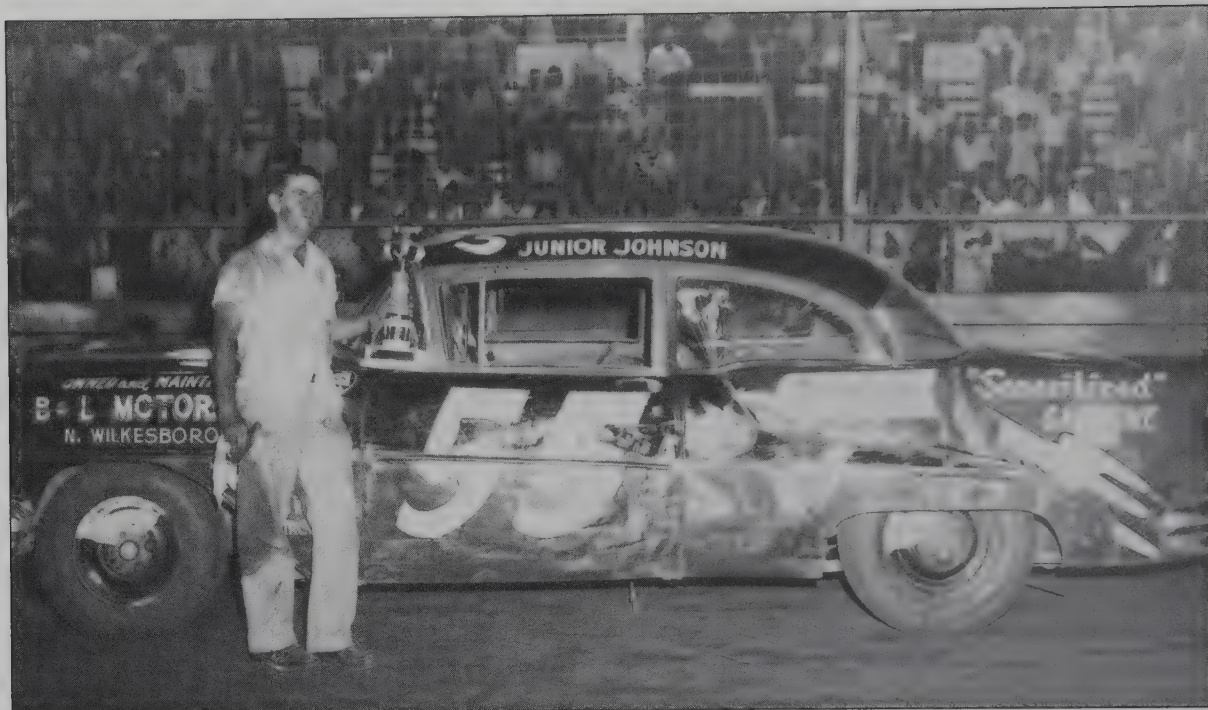
Pole sitter Tim Flock, in a Chrysler #300, which had been time trialed for him by brother Fonty, led the first 95 laps, before Johnson took over for good. Tim Flock finished second, one lap down. Lee Petty was third, nine laps down. "Daddy lost a lotta laps 'cause of a broken A-frame," recalls crewman Richard Petty after his first-ever Fonda visit. Richard was 17 at the time, one week out of graduating from high school, and two years from embarking on his own driving career. Buck Baker and Bob Welborn completed the top five, each 12 laps in arrears. Only nine cars were running at the finish. Fonty Flock blew the motor in his Chrysler #301 on lap 139 and was scored in 11th.

The rough track took an awesome toll. Only eight cars that ran Fonda were able to race at Plattsburg the following day. The Flocks had to scrape pick up rides. Johnson never made it at all.

"They (the officials) tore our car apart and I wasn't able to com-

John Valachovic, owner of Schenectady Marine and Boating Supply, presents the 1955 pole position award to Tim Flock. Ironically, Tim had qualified his #301 fourth quick, while brother Fonty was the fastest time trialer at 29.14 seconds in team car #300. At that time NASCAR rules allowed drivers to switch cars and Tim started on the pole in Fonty's #300.

(Mike Valachovic Collection)



(top) Junior Johnson endured horrible track conditions to win Fonda's 1955 NASCAR Grand National (now Winston Cup) race. (Feuz Collection)

(bottom) GN Northern Tour promoter Larry Mendelsohn (Gater News photo by Ed Appoldt)



pete the next day," laments Junior. "Kiekaefer always protested who-ever outrun him. He could do all that for \$100. We were found legal, but we couldn't get it back together in time for Plattsburgh."

Junior Johnson scored 50 Winston Cup victories as a driver and thereafter gained even greater glory as a car owner. His life was immortalized in the award-winning Tom Wolfe *Esquire* magazine essay and subsequent movie, both entitled "The Last American Hero." He retired as an owner in 1995 and hasn't been to a race track since. "I've moved on from that part of my life and I don't miss it a bit."

Fonda's first endeavor into the big-time had drawn a slim field of 19 cars, a break-even crowd, and negative reviews for what had been a lousy race. Gage and Feuz immediately canceled their scheduled August GN date at Richfield Springs, a track that by then was already on the ropes and that would close altogether by fall 1955.

Fonda would not have another Grand National for more than 10 years. Plattsburg wouldn't have another one ever. Monroe County stayed on the schedule through 1958.

Thursday, July 14, 1966

By 1966, NASCAR's desire to expand its Winston Cup (Grand National) series above the Mason-Dixon Line was far more enticing that it had been a decade earlier. The northern swing now had a fixed time frame—immediately after the July 4th race at Daytona—



and a host of prestigious venues like Oxford Plains, Islip, Watkins Glen, and Trenton. For Fonda to be included was an honor.

The popularity of NASCAR GN racing had also markedly increased. Major superspeedway events were now televised nationally on ABC's "Wide World of Sports." NASCAR was no longer the south's secret.

But Jim Gage Sr. took no chances on marketing Fonda's 1966 GN race. The 1955 event had little advance print publicity. This time Gage churned a massive amount of pre-race press releases from his Esperance law office, making the 1966 Fonda 200 the most hyped event in track history. As it turned out, the race—with a huge melee and a thrilling finish—actually exceeded the hype.

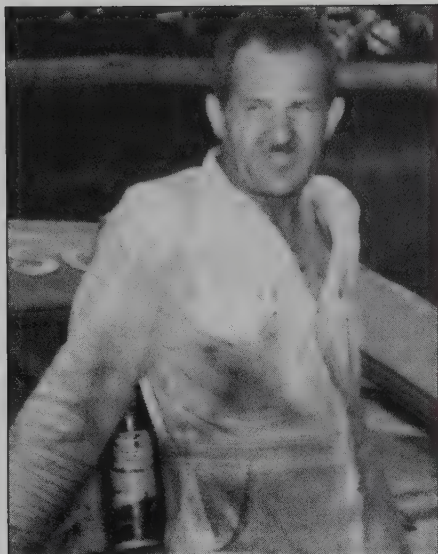
An excellent 32-car field and a jam-packed crowd (admission was \$4) overflowed the Fonda fairgrounds. The field boasted many household names, including Richard Petty, Bobby Allison, Buddy Baker, De Wayne "Tiny" Lund, defending series point champion Ned Jarrett, and Buck Baker. Plus, some Fonda regulars like Don Wayman, Ernie Gahan, and Rene Charland picked up rides. Heading the entry list was the current NASCAR point leader, David Pearson.

Pearson arrived at the track, which he had never seen before, early in the day. He and a crewman climbed to the top row of the grandstand seats to survey the oval. The circular nature of Fonda's layout immediately got his attention. "I do believe I can run wide open around here," Pearson remembers telling his buddy. "I just gotta keep her sideways almost all the way around."

It took Pearson awhile to get the hang of "The Track of

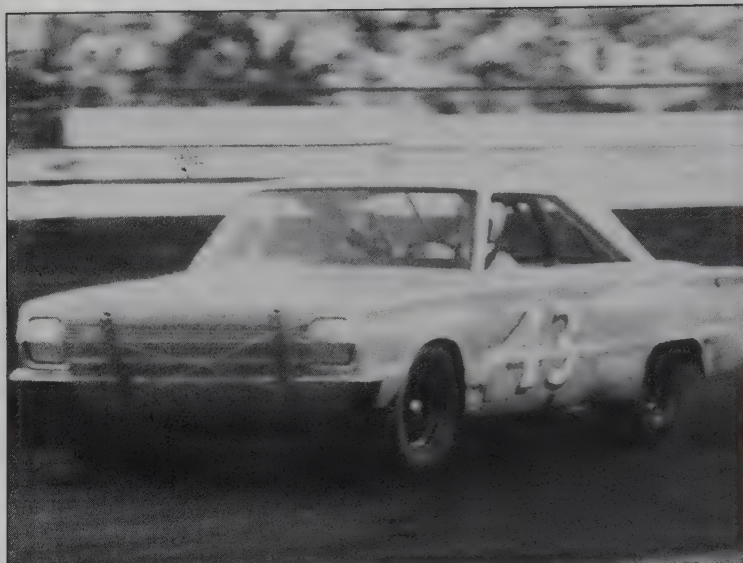
(left) Buck Baker was the only driver to run all four Fonda GN events. In 1966 he brought three cars to Fonda numbered #86, #87, and #88. Buck ran the best one (#87) and gave the backups to teammates Ray Hill and "Soapy" Castles. (Feuz Collection)

(right) Defending NASCAR GN champion Ned Jarrett borrowed Larry Hess' backup #44 and patched it to read #11 for the 1966 Fonda 200. Ironically, he and Hess crashed together on lap 21. Jarrett was credited with a 29th-place finish. (Feuz Collection)



(top left) NASCAR's first African-American driver Wendell Scott flipped his #34 Ford in time trials in 1966, but came back to finish 9th. He was 13th in '67 and 8th in '68.

(Feuz Collection)



(top right) Richard Petty is shown on the clock for the 1966 Fonda 200.

His fast time of 25.17 was four seconds faster than Fonty Flock's 1955 record.

(Feuz Collection)

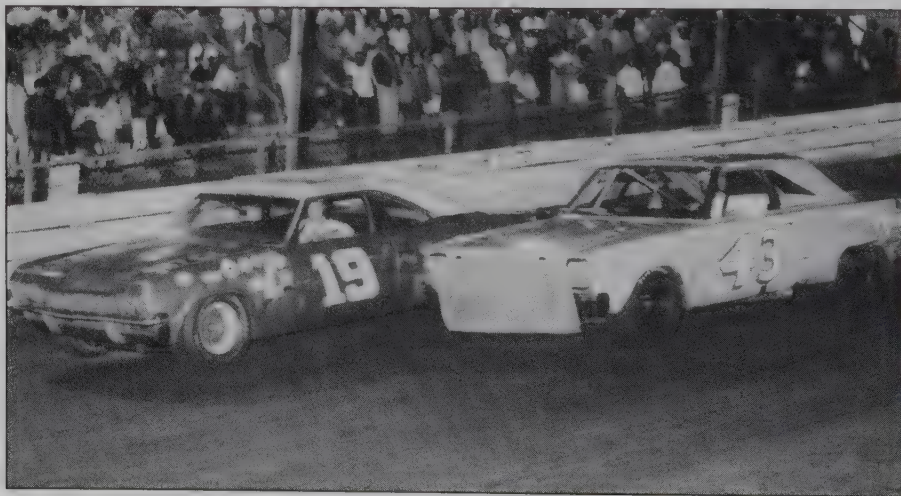
(bottom) The 1966 Fonda 200 front row. Richard Petty in the #43 Plymouth and J.T. Putney in the #19 Chevrolet pose before an overflowing grandstand.

(Feuz Collection)

Champions." He time trialed 12th in his factory-backed Dodge #6, wrenched by Cotton Owens. Richard Petty edged J.T. Putney for the pole. Wayman shocked pitsiders by timing his borrowed #15 third. Wendell Scott, NASCAR's only African-American driver, flipped his #34 in turn four on his second timed lap. The Ford sustained only minor wrinkles and his first lap was good enough to grid Scott eighth.

At the start of the 200-lapper, Putney muscled his big Chevy #19 around Petty's Plymouth #43 for the lead. Putney led the first 35 laps with The King's #43 in tow. Meanwhile, Pearson and Lund were making Herculean charges to the front from their respective 12th and 17th starting spots.

On lap 36, Putney got high in turn two and was forced to take the lower tow road. The tow road had been the track's backstraight from





1868 until 1952, when the track was revamped. Now it ran between the backstretch and the Mohawk River. But, escape road be damned: Putney never lifted. His blue and white Chevy emerged from the darkness, flat out in turn three—directly in the path of Lund’s orange #55. The T-bone and resulting pile-up looked like a restrictor plate wreck at Talladega.

Both Putney and Lund were giants, well over six foot, 250, with hands the size of steam shovels. They exited their destroyed mounts with fists flying. Frazier-Ali was patty-cake compared to this rumble.

“Lund hit him with his fist,” according to racing humorist Matt McLaughlin. “Putney went out like a light. He had to be revived at a local hospital. NASCAR only fined Tiny Lund \$100, deciding he had been “provoked” by Putney’s ill-considered move.”

Once order was restored and the destruction cleared, Petty and Pearson dominated things. The race’s only other leader would be “Tiger” Tom Pistone, mid-race for 22 laps when Petty and Pearson pitted.

The two factory MOPARS swapped the lead several times, but Pearson says it was a ploy. “My car was runnin’ and handlin’ really well,” remembers Pearson today from his Spartanburg, South Carolina home, “so I let him (Richard) pass me just to show him I could pass him back.”

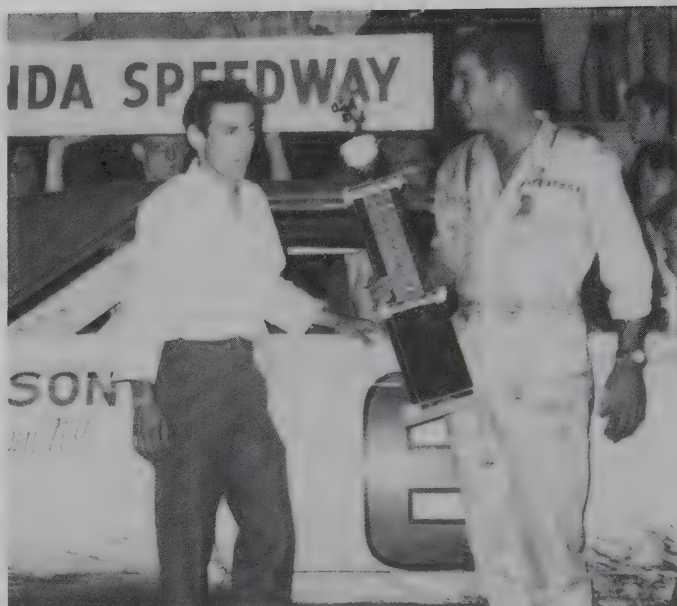
In the late going, Petty threw chance to the wind in a last-ditch effort to run with Pearson. With two to go, Petty tapped Pearson’s back bumper, and spun the electric blue #43 360 degrees in turn two. Pearson won. Petty recovered for second. Charland was an eye-popping third. Connecticut’s Roy E. Hallquist (not to be confused with URC sprinter Earl Halaquist) was fourth, and Buck Baker

The combatants in the 1966 backstretch fistfight were heavyweights in every sense of the word. On the left, Tiny Lund poses with his #55 Fairlane in 1967, and on the right, J.T. Putney smiles from the office of his #11 Chevelle in 1968.

(both photos courtesy of the Feuz Collection)



(top left) A classic moment. Richard Petty loops in turn two on lap 199, handing the 1966 Fonda 200 to David Pearson.
(Gater photo)



(top right) Pearson poses with his #6 and the trophy for winning the 1966 Fonda 200.
(Feuz Collection)

(bottom) Rene Charland absolutely shocked the NASCAR legions by driving his pick-up ride #03 Ford to a third-place finish in the 1966 Fonda 200.
(Feuz Collection)



rounded out the top five. The elder Baker was the only man to compete in all four Fonda Grand Nationals.

Pearson won over 100 Winston Cup races in his career, but amazingly still cherishes the trophy he won at Fonda that night. "It's a trophy with a clock in it," the "Silver Fox" smiles. "I remember seeing that clock trophy earlier that night at Fonda and thinkin', 'Boy that's pretty. I'd sure like to win that.' Well, I did."

Thursday, July 13, 1967

Richard Petty's devotion to winning at Fonda began almost one full year before the speedway's 1967 Fonda 200.

"The morning after the 1966 (Winston Cup) race, I came to the speedway bright and early to start preparing the track," says Ed Feuz. "It's about 8 o'clock in the morning and I drive in and there's a guy squatting on the infield grass inside of turn four all by himself. I drove over and it's Richard Petty.

"What are you doin' here?" I asked him. "Trying to figure out how to drive this turn," Petty told Feuz. "If I'm ever gonna win a race here, I'm sure gonna have to get through this part of the track better than I did last night."

Petty's 1967 season became one for the ages. He won a record 27 Winston Cup events that season, a mark that experts agree will never be broken. The 1967 Fonda 200 provided a relatively easy victory for Petty. He set fast time of 24.94 seconds, but his front row mate, Tiny Lund, was the early pacesetter. Petty passed Lund on lap 23 and opened a commanding advantage.

King Richard's pit stop on lap 60 dropped Petty to sixth in the running order and gave Bobby Allison the lead. Allison had landed a factory Ford ride for the 1967 NASCAR superspeedway races, but he still drove the faithful, family Chevelle in short track events.

Petty methodically worked his way back to contention. The blue #43 pinched off Allison's #2 behind a lapped car on lap 120 and led the rest of the way.

Allison survived a lap 137 tangle in turn one with a spinning J.T. Putney to finish second, the only other car on the lead lap. C.G. Spencer, John Sears, and James Hylton completed the top five. The

(left) Another overflow Fonda crowd greets NASCAR's best on the pace lap of the 1967 GN event.

(Feuz Collection)

(right) Lap 22 of the 1967 Fonda 200 finds Petty (#43) moving under Lund (#55) for the lead, as Bobby Allison (#2) waits his chance.

(Feuz Collection)



Richard Petty's 1967 season will forever be considered the greatest in Winston Cup history. He recorded 27 wins that year, including this one at "The Track of Champions."
(Feuz Collection)



Bobby Allison ran second to Petty at Fonda in 1967, driving brother Donnie's Chevelle.
(Feuz Collection)



very car that Petty used that night to win at Fonda is still in existence. It is enshrined in the Petty Museum at the family's race shops in Randleman, North Carolina.

Runner-up Bobby Allison had borrowed the car he had raced in 1966, now brother Donnie's regular GN ride, for his Fonda return. The 1966 North Tour had made Alabama's Allison a star, what with his first career win having occurred in Oxford Plains, Maine two nights before Fonda in 1966. It was that Maine portion of the tour that most amused Chris Economaki, publisher emeritus of *National Speed Sport News*. "The most interesting memory I have of those Fonda races is you'd have all these southerners complaining about the food," he laughs. "They'd come to Fonda from Maine all pissin' and moanin' about having to eat lobster."

The Petty Perspective

"Fonda was a very good track from the racers' standpoint. It was smooth and in good shape and you could race side-by-side all the way around there," recalls "The King," Richard Petty. Two of his record 200 Winston Cup wins occurred at "The Track of Champions."

"It was a typical dirt fairgrounds, but it did have some oddities. Like the river flowing along the backstretch. Like the graveyard in turn three. And they used to have like a '60-watt light bulb mounted on the fourth turn wall, as if to say "Don't hit this."

"Working on the race cars at Fonda was interesting. Back in 1955 when I went up there with Daddy, there were a couple of big ole' trees. We pitted under them for shade and hung lights off the branches. Then, later on in the 1960s, our garage was that big cow barn next to turn four.

"The people at Fonda were always real nice. Ya got good race fans up there. My Daddy took me with him up there in 1955, so I took my family with me when we went back in the 1960s because we like that area and those folks a lot.

"The big deal 'bout the 1966 race at Fonda was the fight between Tiny Lund and J.T. Putney. I remember going around under yellow while they cleaned up the wreck and seein' this big ruckus on the infield. But I didn't know what it was. After the race I asked what had happened and my crew said, "Tiny knocked J.T. out." They 'bout thought that Tiny had killed him.

"I won the 1967 Fonda race. I've still got that race car in our museum. We only had but two cars back then. A super-



Richard Petty (#43) chases Tiny Lund (#55) through the third turn in 1967. Note the tombstone in the background. (Feuz Collection)

speedway car and a short track car. When we'd run The Northern Tour, we'd only bring one car and run Islip and Fonda and Oxford Plains and the road course all with the same car.

"And 1968, that was one of my two duels at Fonda with David Pearson. He won in '66. I won in '68. Of all the people I ever raced against, David Pearson was the best for all types of tracks. Some guys were good on dirt, others were good on big tracks, and others good on road courses. David Pearson was good on 'em all. If you could beat him, you were probably going to win the race.

"Turn three was somethin' at Fonda. You could actually see the tombstones peekin' over the top of the wall as you ran through there. That old graveyard made Fonda a tough place to race. You'd go down the backstretch, make a hard left, go a ways, and then turn hard left again. You couldn't sweep the corner like everywhere else, 'cause the graveyard was in the way.

"Three generations of Pettys have raced at Fonda. Daddy in 1955, me in the '60s and Kyle twice in a modified. I remember when Kyle went up there to run, I told him what I remembered about the place and tried to give him tips, but I don't think my advice worked too well for him 'cause they'd taken out the graveyard by then."

Thursday, July 11, 1968

The top-five finish for the 1968 Fonda 200 was—Richard Petty, Buddy Baker, Bobby Allison, Bobby Isaac, and David Pearson, respectively. But looks can be deceiving. Not only was that quintet the top-five finishers, they were also the top-five time trialers, and pretty much the only five quality teams to enter the race.

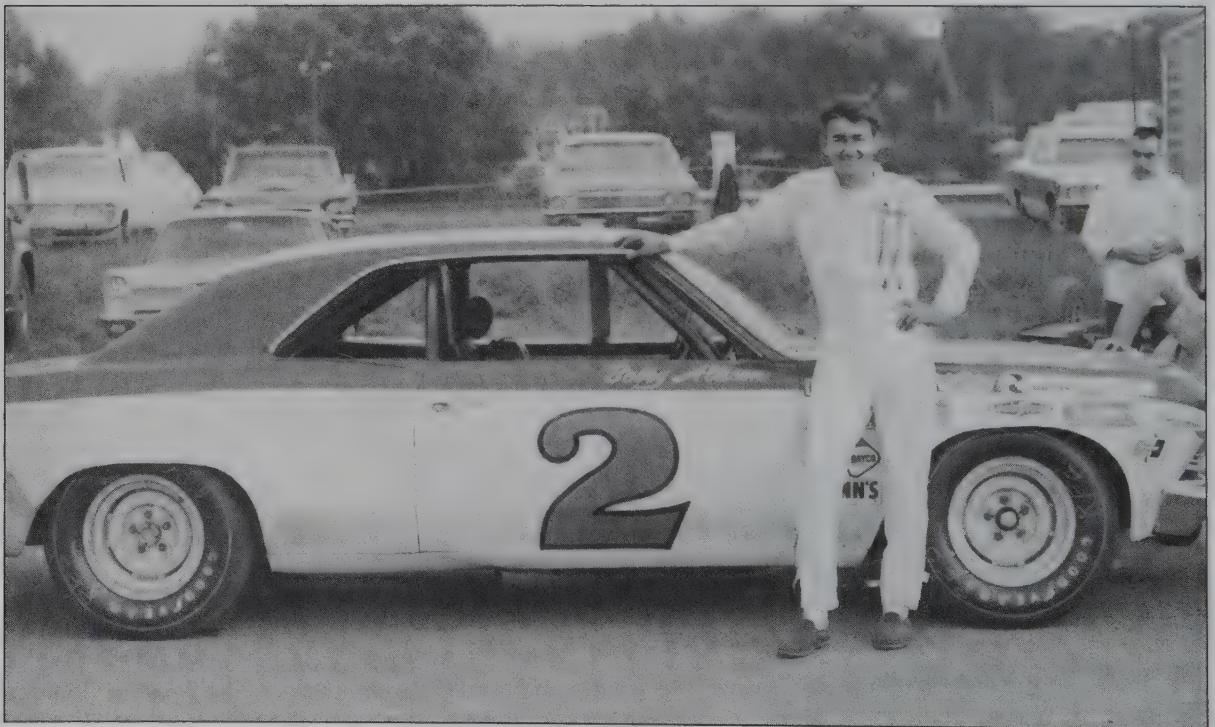
Alas, by 1968 the annual Winston Cup Grand National visit at Fonda had lost much luster.

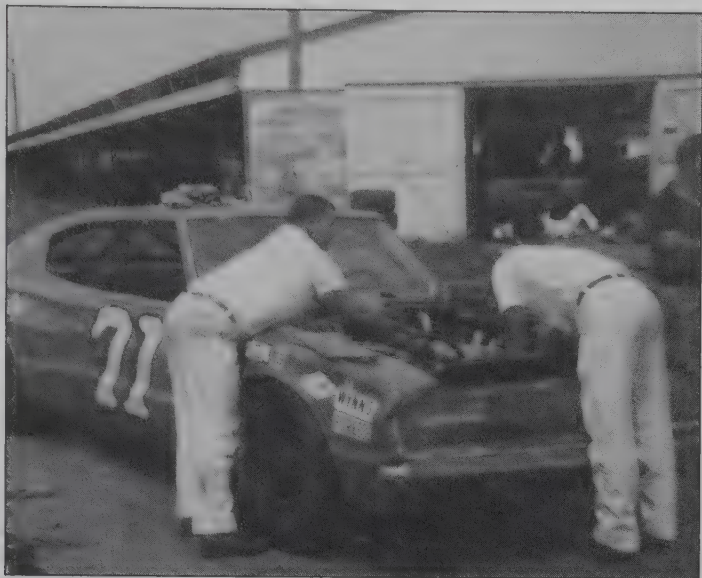
Dirt's days in Winston Cup racing were numbered by 1968. There were 49 events on the tour's 1968 schedule but only five dirt tracks had races. (Besides Fonda, the others were Richmond, Virginia; Greenville, South Carolina; Columbia, South Carolina; and Hillsborough, North Carolina). By the end of 1970, Winston Cup dirt races had been eliminated altogether.

And by now many top NASCAR teams were simply skipping the short track portion of the Northern Tour. Of the top-five finishers in the July 4, 1968 Firecracker 400 at Daytona, only one (Pearson) raced Fonda a week later. Several stars would run at Daytona and then Trenton (the only superspeedway on the northern swing), and bypass all the little races in between. Fonda's 1968 GN field of 25 entries was the smallest since the 1955 race.

For Ed Feuz, the diminishing quality of the Fonda 200 no longer justified the increasing cost to produce it. "As promoters, we just couldn't make money. It was too much of an effort," he says. "And we

By 1968, Bobby Allison had landed a factory Ford for superspeedway races. But for short track outings, like Fonda, he still fielded a trusty Chevelle. This gorgeous '68 model was a fan favorite.
(Feuz Collection)





never had bad weather for our Grand Nationals. By gawd, if it had rained, we coulda lost a fortune." Indeed, the event's purse had tripled almost overnight. The 1966 race paid \$1,000 to win out of a \$5,870 total purse. For 1967 and 1968 those figures trebled to \$3,300 and \$17,000 respectively.

The 1968 Fonda 200 was marked by a revival of the 1966 Petty-Pearson duel. Pearson had skipped the 1967 Fonda event, running a limited NASCAR schedule and just entering superspeedway races. In his 1968 Fonda return, he set fast time in his blue Holman-Moody Ford #17 at 24.44 seconds. Petty copped the outside pole at 24.56. "The Silver Fox" led the first eight laps and Petty took over the point until pitting on lap 55. Petty's stop—two tires, fuel, windshield cleaning, and a beverage for the driver—took just a tick under 18 seconds and drew a standing ovation from the packed grandstand.

Bobby Isaac, in his first appearance at Fonda since a 1959 sportsman show the night before Syracuse, then assumed the lead for 23 laps in his orange K&K Insurance-sponsored Dodge #71. When all the pit stops had cycled around, it was Petty and Pearson back on top. The King led laps 78 to 131 with Pearson in dogged pursuit. Pearson then grabbed the top spot on lap 132 and was still in front on lap 153, when he spun in turn three.

"Turn three at Fonda was tough for everybody because it wasn't symmetric," says Petty, who inherited the lead when Pearson spun, and then led to the finish. "They had that guardrail there for the graveyard. I remember once askin' why they got a fence there right in the groove and findin' out it was a cemetery back there. So I went over and had a look. Man, there were some real old gravestones back there, brother."

(left) David Pearson exits turn four in the Holman-Moody #17 Ford on his way to a 24.44-second pole clocking for the 1968 Fonda 200. This was the fastest lap ever turned at Fonda by a GN car. (Fusco Collection)

(right) Fonda's Cow Palace was the garage for the 1966-1968 Fonda GN shows. This shot shows Bobby Isaac's K&K Insurance crew preparing their '67 Dodge Charger for the 1968 Fonda 200. (Fusco Collection)

J.D. and Me



J.D. McDuffie (Fusco collection)

J.D. McDuffie is the only Winston Cup driver who has ever been to my house for lunch.

I was 13 years old.

When the Grand Nationals used to come to Fonda, I'd get to the track by 8 a.m. and spend the entire day in the Cow Palace, hanging with my heros. My parents had given me a Polaroid swinger camera and I'd ask the NASCAR drivers to pose for pictures until I ran out of film.

When I asked J.D. if I could take his picture, he asked me if there was any junkyards around where he could get parts. I

told him about Gigi Conover's in Johnstown and he asked me to ride with him and show him where it was.

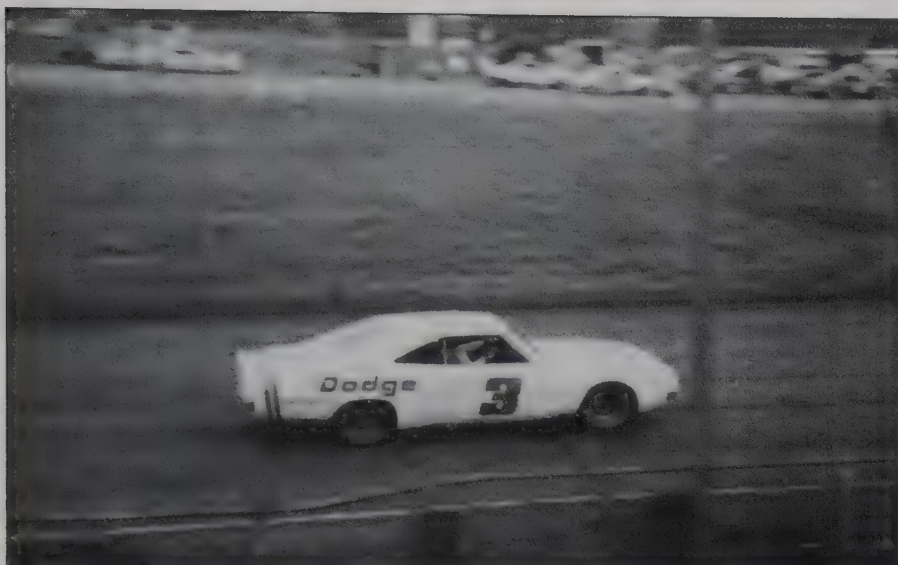
As we rode in J.D.'s hauler, we talked about his career. He wondered aloud how some boy in upstate New York could be so conversant about a winless racer from Sanford, North Carolina. I said that I knew all about him because the local paper had a story on him a couple of nights earlier. J.D. said his wife kept a scrapbook and wanted to know where he could get a copy of that newspaper for her. I told him we had a copy at home he could have.

So J.D. came to my house. Dad was at work. I introduced him to my mom. It was about noon, so she insisted on fixing us lunch. He politely, although hesitantly, accepted. Mom made us fried baloney sandwiches with mustard on seeded kaiser rolls. Soon it was obvious that J.D. had never heard of, or seen, a fried baloney sandwich. But he obligingly took a bite. Then he smiled. And he finished his sandwich and asked for seconds. J.D. carefully watched mom cook the second sandwich, like a novice racer studying the art of tuning a carburetor. I got him his newspaper, said 'bye' to Mom, and we rode back to Fonda.

As the years unfolded, I found uncanny the nexus between J.D. McDuffie and upstate New York. His best career finish occurred at Albany-Saratoga. He died at Watkins Glen. And he had lunch with a little kid in Johnstown.

And I always wondered how many more fried baloney sandwiches he'd eaten.

—Andy Fusco



Buddy Baker drove his own independent Dodge #00 to a 19th-place finish at Fonda in 1966 and was runner-up in 1968 driving Ray Fox's factory-backed Charger #3. Buddy missed the 1967 race.

(Fusco Collection)

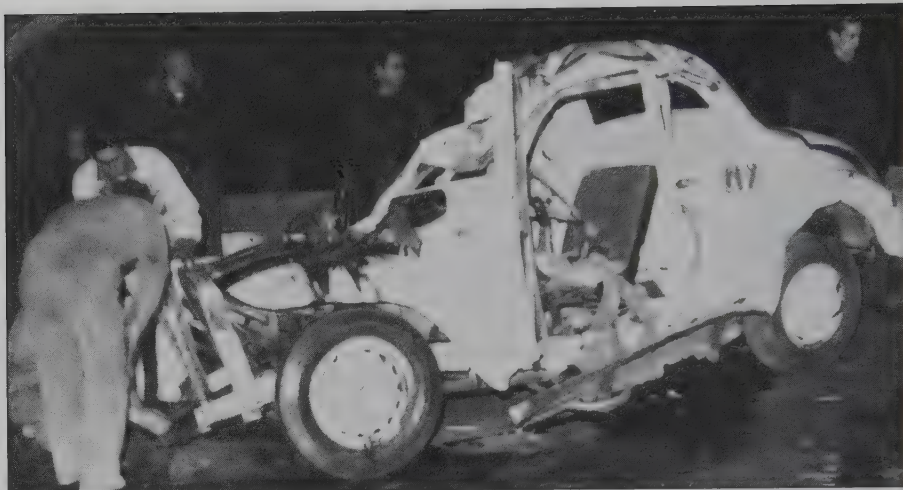
The last 10 laps of the 1968 Fonda 200 saw much position swapping. Pearson, having recovered from his spin, was in second with seven to go when he ran out of gas and dropped to fifth. Buddy Baker pushed his Ray Fox-prepared, factory-backed Dodge #3 under Bobby Allison's Chevelle for second on lap 197.

The 1968 Fonda 200 was destined to be the track's last Grand National event. For 1969, Feuz and Gage relinquished their date and it was taken by Thompson (Connecticut) Speedway. The NASCAR landscape was changing rapidly. Dirt tracks were eliminated from the GN schedule after the 1970 season and the Northern Tour was abolished altogether following the 1971 swing.

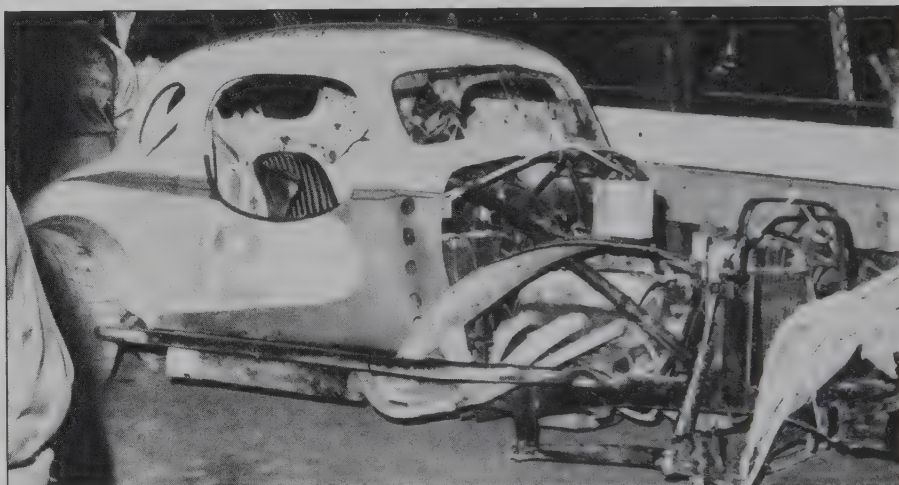
NASCAR's so-called "modern era" began in 1972, with Winston cigarettes underwriting the tour and with most short tracks crossed off the slate. NASCAR called it "streamlining." Chris Economaki calls it "sad."

"Racing's roots are the short tracks, the dirt tracks, places like Fonda Speedway," says the dean of American motorsports writers. "Certainly NASCAR racing has prospered on superspeedways, but it's sad that it occurred at the cost of short tracks."

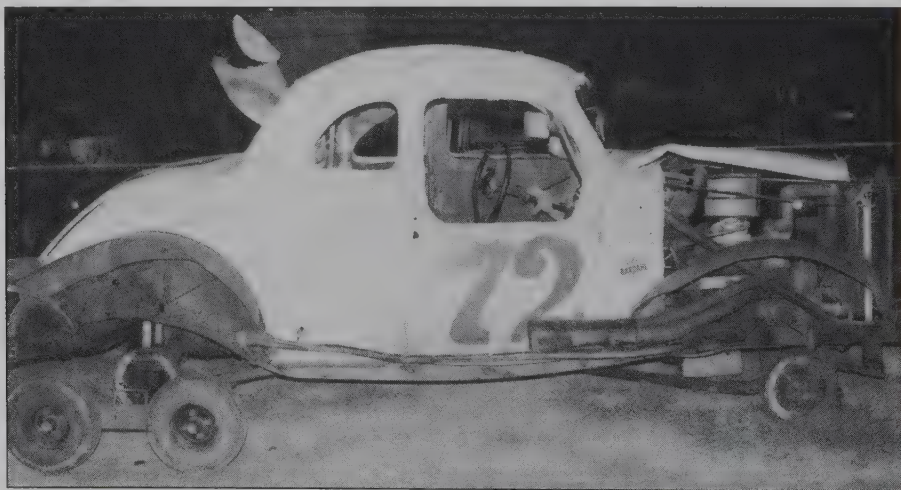
Driver fatality #1:
Otis Eaton #S-5, on
May 14, 1955.
(Boyd collection)



Driver fatality #2:
Lou Smith #62, on
May 15, 1965.
(Frank Simek Collection)



Driver fatality #3: Pepper
Eastman #72, on August
14, 1965. (Feuz Collection)



Six Crises 6

NOT ONLY WAS Richard Nixon our country's 37th president; he was a prolific writer. One of his best-selling works was entitled *Six Crises*, a book detailing a sextet of public controversies that Nixon endured prior to becoming president.

Fonda Speedway has endured its own share of crises over the years. Borrowing from Nixon's title, the following six essays detail some of those most critical events in the speedway's lineage.

The Worst Crashes Ever

It is not the intent of the authors to glorify accidents in this book. But wrecks are a part of racing and it would be ignorant to ignore them. So in assembling the book's material, certain sources nominated certain mishaps as the worst ever at "The Track of Champions." Based on the suggestions, they are ranked in this chapter, David Letterman style, counting down from number 10 to number one.

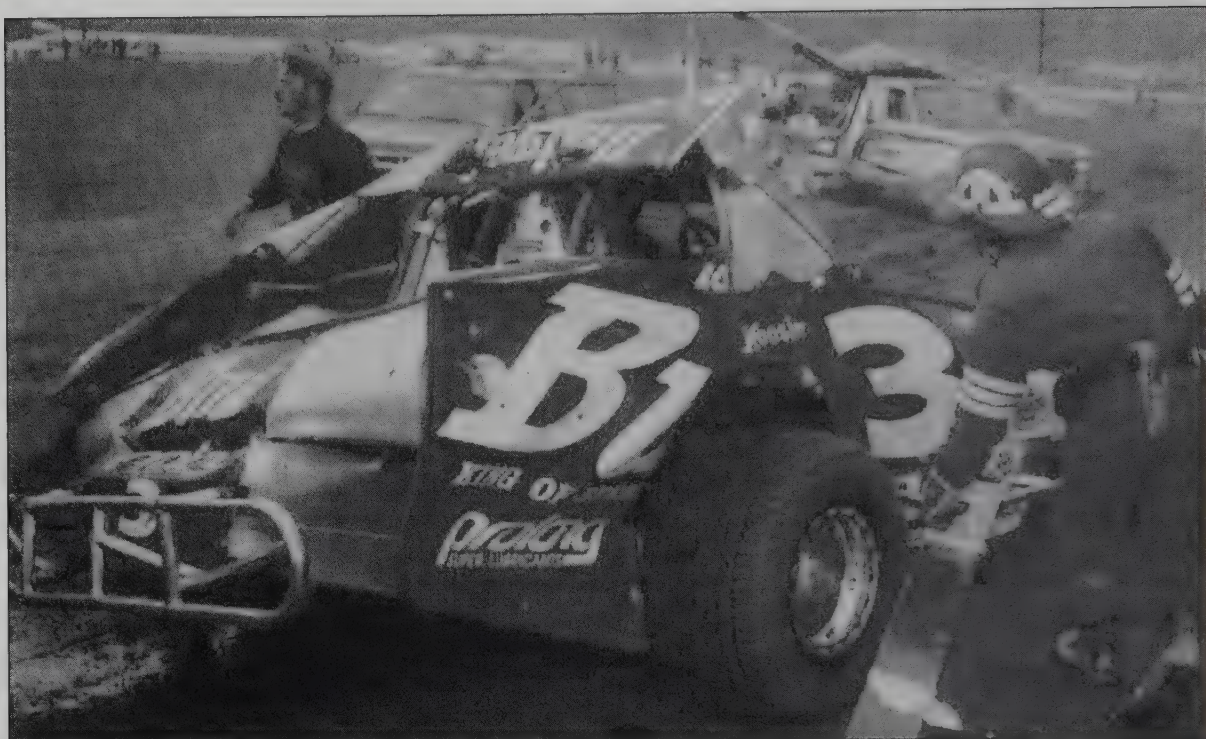
Two rules applied in compiling the list. First, no accident made the list that wasn't accompanied by a photograph. Second, wrecks that resulted in very serious or permanent injuries were not ranked. All of the drivers hospitalized in the "top 10" recovered. Fatal accidents are also not included here; however, due to their historical significance, Fonda's deaths are covered elsewhere in this chapter.

And with that, now to the countdown:

No. 10 October 17, 1999

BRETT HEARN: *Jet Lag*

While it may not have been the most fearful flip ever, Brett Hearn's flyer during the 1999 Fonda 200 was as politically charged as it gets.



The track crew gather pieces as they get ready to remove Brett Hearn's #3 from the backstretch.

(Mike Miller photo)

The combatants were Hearn and Danny Johnson, a couple of guys who have been going at it hammer and tong since their days of weekly warring at Middletown. Coming out of the second corner early in the 200, they got together. Hearn went airborne. The car was totaled. When he unbuckled and exited the cockpit, Hearn went ballistic, gesturing to Johnson under caution during the next two laps.

"What can I say? It was just Danny being Danny," recalls Hearn. "One moment he's into you, the next moment, you're upside down."

As for Danny, he downplays the incident with his usual wry humor. "They call Brett 'The Jet,' you know," smiles Johnson. "Didn't you want to see if he could fly?"

No. 9 August 24, 1963

KEN SHOEMAKER: *The Shoe Bar-B-Q*

Pit stops can be decidedly dangerous. That point was driven home at Fonda during the 1963 Fonda 200.

Pole sitter and race leader Ken Shoemaker had planned to stop just past halfway, take gas only, and go the distance. But when the #111 came in for service, the gas man tripped over the car's back bumper and spilled his load. "About a gallon of fuel splashed through the (rear) window and ran down my back," said Shoemaker. "The rest of the fuel trickled down the outside of the car. When it hit the exhaust header collector, it burst into flames. In seconds the whole car was on fire."



The Shoe has gone out the right window but his Chris Drellos #111 continues to burn.
(Boyd Collection)

Shoemaker had trouble unhooking his belts and didn't exit the inferno for what seemed like years. When he finally did extricate himself, he did a stop, drop, and roll, nearly getting run over by race traffic. As Kenny rolled, so did his #111. The car was actually moving in neutral when Shoe dove out, and it continued its slow flaming ghost drive eerily to the edge of the track, before stopping.

Shoemaker was hospitalized for a couple of days for burns to his back and arms. Two weeks later, he was back racing.

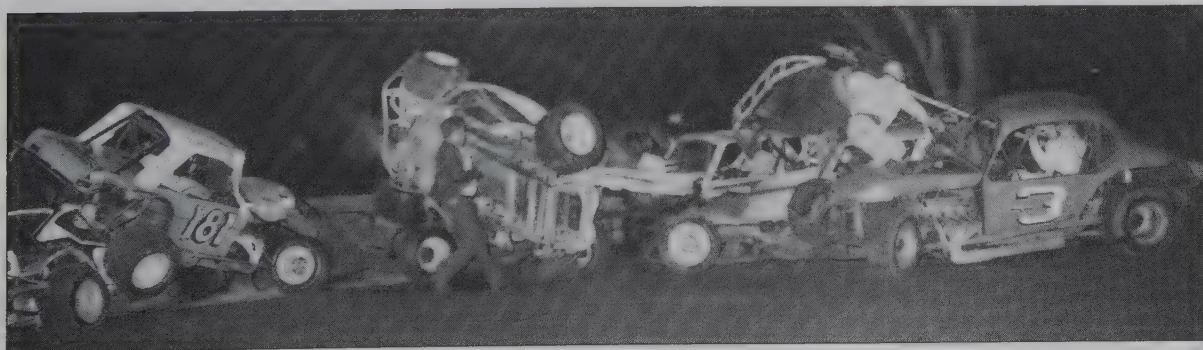
No. 8 May 10, 1975

A CAST OF MANY: *The \$50,000 Freight Train*

The only people who benefitted from 1975's high-speed, chain-reaction backstretch pile-up were speed shop proprietors. It may have been the most damaging melee ever at Fonda.

"1975 was a time of huge fields, huge motors, and aggressive drivers," remembers involuntary wreck participant Lew Boyd. "The

The Freight Train has stopped and the passengers prepare to disembark. Shown, or partially shown, from the left are Jack Johnson #12A, Lew Boyd #181, Ted Luft #04, Harry Peek #27, Dick Clark #16, C.D. Coville #61, and Bob Rees #3. (Boyd Collection)



first few laps of every feature were pretty hair-raising. Going down the backstretch, a couple of cars up-front got together and the bunched field reacted like a freight train pile-up. There was nowhere to go and the crashing seemed to last forever. The noise was thunderous.”

By the time the dust cleared, about a dozen were wadded up. Superstars Jack Johnson, Harry Peek, and Clarence Coville were sidelined. The cars of Peek, Boyd, and Ted Luft came to rest with their wheels still off the ground. It took nearly a half-hour to clean up the carnage.

“We figured it was Fonda’s first \$50,000 wreck,” observes Boyd. “It was a princely sum back then. I came to rest on top of Jack Johnson’s Vega. While waiting to be removed, I remember thinking, ‘Thank God for fuel cells.’”

No. 7 August 24, 1963

KEN MEAHL: *Houston, We have A Problem*

The summer of '63 was a pivotal year for space travel. America finally edged ahead of Russia in the race to the moon, thanks to the efforts of astronaut Leroy Gordon Cooper Jr.

Cooper flew higher and farther than any man ever before him. Then a few weeks later astronaut Ken Meahl challenged the record. Trouble was, Cooper had done his traveling in a space ship. Meahl’s flight occurred in a race car.

Kenny Meahl is helped from the wreckage of his #28 after breaking his own previous altitude record. (Feuz Collection)



It was August 24, 1963. Meahl's #28 got wide in turn four at Fonda, clipped the fence, and began a wild series of flips. Meahl actually got higher than the catch fencing. The real irony was that nobody could remember anybody getting that much altitude at Fonda since Ken Meahl himself had done the same thing in the same place while driving for Jerry Cook a few years earlier. As Yogi Berra would say, "Déjà vu all over again."

Nowadays, Kenny Meahl lives in the Buffalo-area suburb of Amherst, quietly in retirement. With both feet on the ground.

No. 6 September 8, 1956 and May 9, 1964

OLIVER PALMER: *Jolly Ollie's Double-header*

These are actually two separate incidents. But they are so strikingly similar that they are conjoined for the countdown.

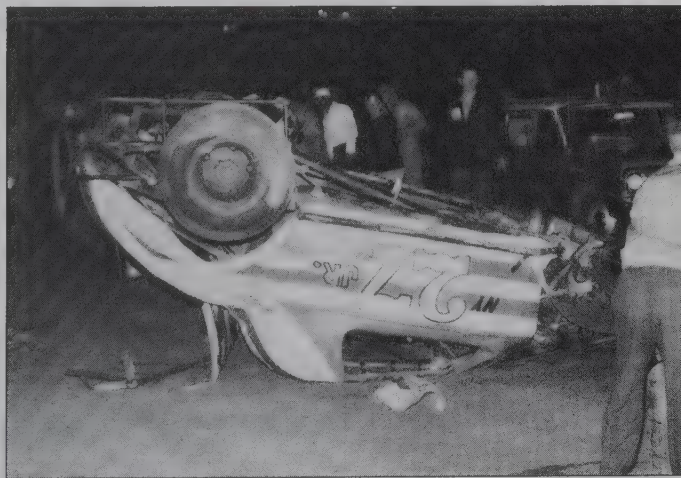
Oliver "Jolly Ollie" Palmer only flipped twice at Fonda in his career. Both occurred at the end of the front chute. Both cars came to rest on their tops. And both times, Palmer nearly got his head taken off due to equipment failure.

The first occurred in 1956 in his #J-O, initials that stood for co-car owners, Joe Batcher and Ollie Palmer. The seat broke in the roll. "I had to push with all my might with one arm against the steering wheel and with the other arm against the stick shift to keep my head from getting bashed in."

The next time, he wasn't as lucky. In 1964 he catapulted Bill Fowler's #27 Jr. over the back end of a competitor while trying to make an outside front chute pass. The candy-striped #27 Jr. shot high enough to seed clouds, and landed hard enough to collapse the cage. Palmer's back was injured and his helmet damaged; he's saved the helmet all these years as a reminder.

While hospitalized, Ollie says he got a visit from his boss and a visit from his wife. One told him to quit racing or lose his job. The

Oliver Palmer flipped the #J-O on the front chute in 1956 (left) and eight years later dumped the #27jr (right) in the same place. (Feuz Collection)



other told him to quit racing or lose his marriage. When put that way, the decision seemed rather easy.

The choice got a little tougher a bit later when the famed car owner Joe Leto came visiting to offer Palmer a first-class modified ride. But Jolly Ollie, who is now 77 and resides in Delmar, stayed true to his retirement pledge. May 9, 1964 was the final night of a racing career that had begun at the old State Line Speedway in the late 1940s.

No. 5 August 9, 1980

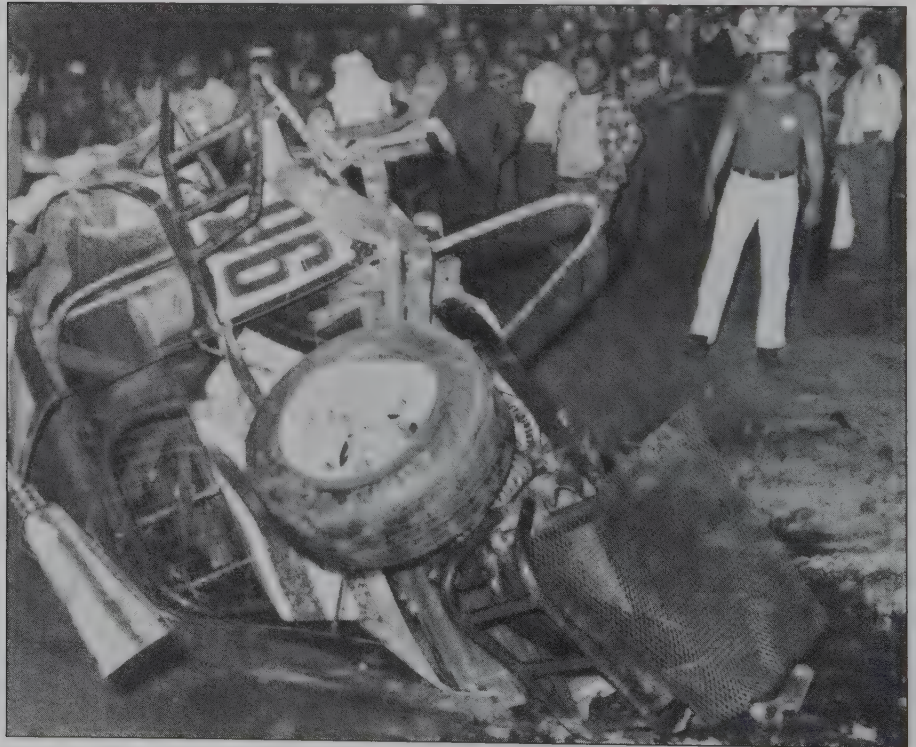
DALE WOLCOTT: *Gawker Convention*

Prior to the Fonda pits being moved from the infield to outside of turn three, there was one sure-fire way to gauge the severity of a wreck at Fonda: count the number of gawkers assembled on the edge of the track. Dale Wolcott's August 9, 1980 brain shaker probably set some kind of Fonda record for the number of rubber-neckers it attracted.

Following a trail blazed by Bill Wimble and Buck Holliday, Wolcott emigrated to Fonda from the St. Lawrence River Valley. He had been a winner in Fort Covington Speedway's late-model division and also won a Fonda late-model main in 1977—the same season he was Fonda's modified rookie of the year.

Wolcott was no stranger to front stretch flips at Fonda. In 1978 he had taken out the track's victory lane flagpole while rolling his mod.

Dale Wolcott rode out this bone-jarring crash in 1980. (Clancy Miller photo)



While he recuperated from that '78 crash, his wife Darlene tried to qualify the car at Fonda. She laughs today over how close family friend Jack Johnson teased her: "There are two places where women belong—the kitchen and bedroom. They don't belong in a race car."

Dale's 1980 crash was a violent end-over-end front-stretch flyer. "In the feature, Eddie Pieniazek got into me coming outta four and up I went," says Wolcott. He suffered a concussion, fractured ribs, and a broken collarbone. But he recovered and made a comeback in Fonda's sportsman class from 1988–91. Today the Rotterdam resident is a sales rep for a sand and gravel company.

While the number of onlookers who gathered to stare at Wolcott's 1980 wreckage was massive, one interested party was not in close proximity. "They (the emergency crew) wouldn't let me anywhere near there," says Darlene, "because they thought he was dead."

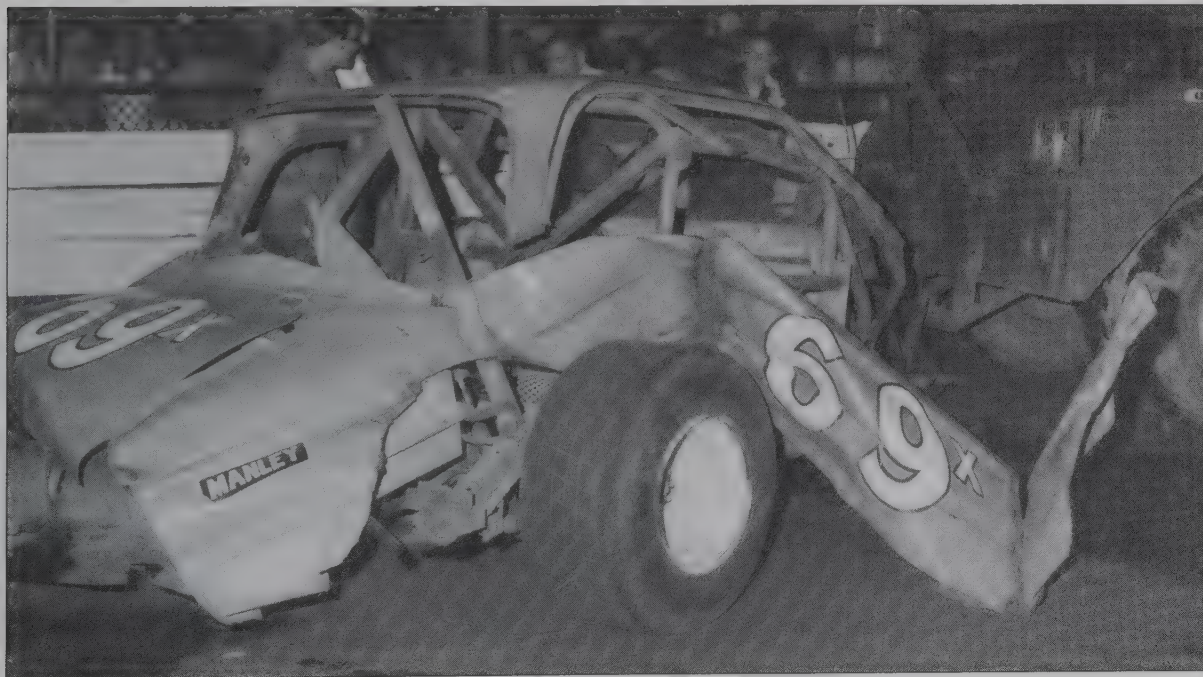
No. 4 July 18, 1970

BRUCE DOSTAL: *Lookin' Down at the Flagger*

After Pete Corey kicked off the late-model body revolution in modified racing, NASCAR sought to regulate and promote their "new-look" cars with a standardized set of rules and a purse bonus for racers who conformed to them.

Johnstown's Bruce Dostal was one of the first to build a car that totally complied with the letter of the new regs. He groused about it at the time, because NASCAR required late-model modifieds to have

Bruce Dostal was only able to save the cage of his #69X Falcon after this 1970 crash. (Gater News photo by Russ Bergh)



a full Grand National-style cage. Overkill, he thought. Little did he know that the cage would save his life.

It was early in the 1970 Mohawk Valley 100. Jim Hurtibise, driving Bill Fowler's #27 Jr., lost a wheel on the front stretch, and Dostal caught it. His pink #69 was launched skyward and flipped violently five times at the start/finish line. "I remember being in the air, looking over toward the flagstand, and having to look down to see the flagger," smiles Dostal, who is presently a parts supplier, car builder, and fuel distributor at Fonda. "I figured I was history."

Fortunately Bruce was uninjured. (He even borrowed Johnny Kollar's car to race at Utica-Rome the following night.) Alas, the same couldn't be said for his race car: The Falcon was complete junk. The only thing salvageable was that roll cage. Dostal cut it off and used it as the cage of his next car. Ironically, Dostal also built the modified that saved Dale Wolcott in wreck No. 5 in our list.

No. 3 May 16, 1964

CARL FINK: *Flying Coach*

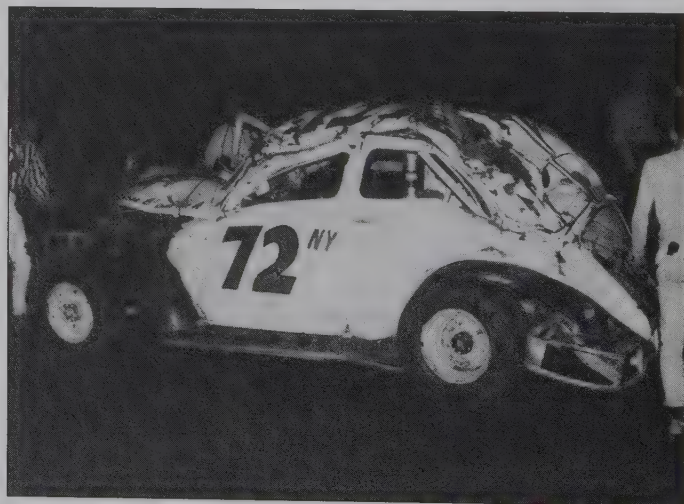
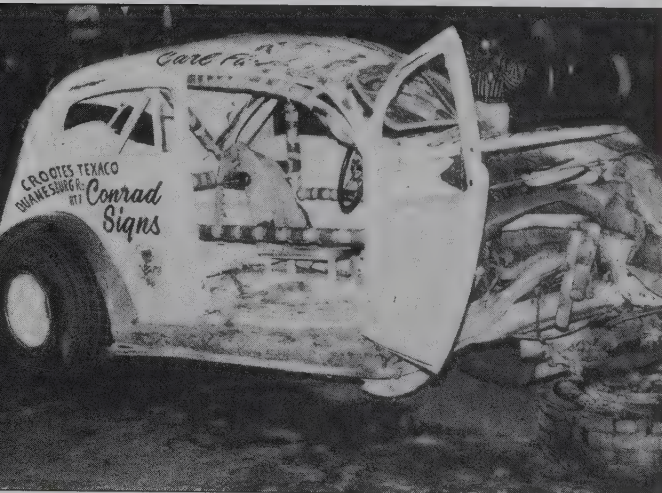
Carl Fink's 1964 jawdropper is the stuff of legend. Whenever Fonda race fans engage in a hot-stove debate over which wreck was the most spectacular in track history, Fink's entry is sure to get many votes.

It was during a heat race. Carl was in the lead pack. Exiting turn two, he climbed another guy's wheel and his #72 Ford coach took flight. It cartwheeled umpteen times like a rolling bathtub down the entire backstretch. Fink had set some kind of unenviable record, flying the entire distance from turn two to turn three.

"While I was in the air, a couple of guys drove under me—literally," says the 70-year old Albany resident. When I got outta the hos-

Carl Fink barrel-rolled his #72 Ford coach from the second turn to the third turn in this 1964 thriller:

(Both photos from the Blittig Collection)



pital, my cousin (car owner Bob Zimmerman) refused to let me see any pictures of the car.” The photos accompanying this story explain why. Fink’s whiplash injuries would heal and he would drive again... briefly. “I came back and ran Bob’s (Zimmerman) coupe #72. I couldn’t make that car handle and I gave up on it. So they got Pepper (Eastman) to drive it.”

Unfortunately, we all know how that deal ended.

No. 2 September 17, 1955

BOB FAKE AND STAN BELLINGER: *I Saw God That Night*

Fonda railbirds pretty much are in unanimous agreement: The fiery 1955 crash involving Bob Fake and Stan Bellinger was the scariest in track history.

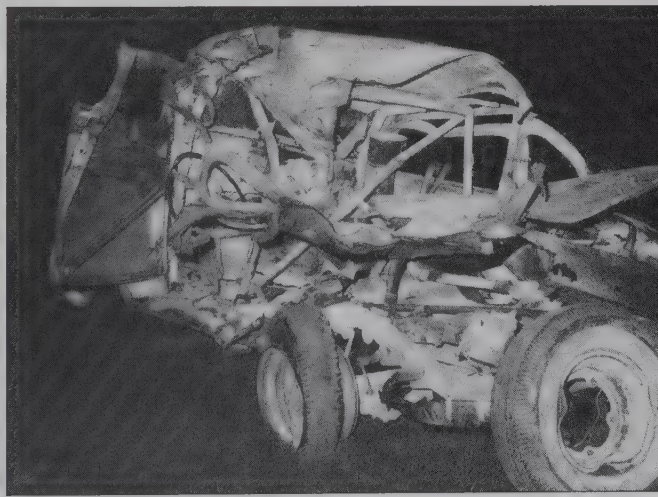
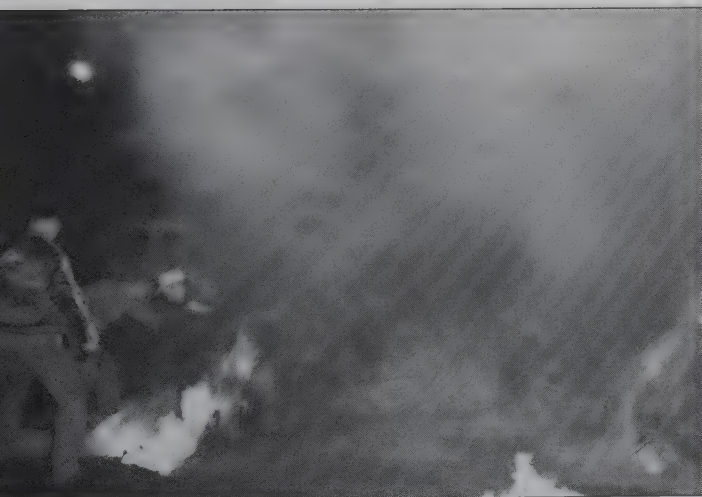
Fonda had not seen a serious fire until Dolgeville’s Fake and Johnstown’s Bellinger collided that night. As if the mangled wreckage of the two cars wasn’t enough, the huge blaze that ensued brought the grandstand to a dead silence.

Fortunately, both drivers survived. Fake was shaken up. Bellinger was burned. Their racing careers were over. NASCAR bestowed a hero’s honor, known as The John Naughton Award, on Bob Whitbeck for bravery displayed that night; he pulled Bellinger from the burning heap and extinguished his flaming clothing.

“You know, Stan Bellinger used to pray that I would quit racing,” says friend George Endem (a/k/a Jerry Jerome). “Stanley told me that he saw God at the foot of his bed the night of his fire. And he said God told him that I was gonna have a problem on the race track.”

Three years later—almost to the day—Bellinger’s prophecy came true.

Bob Fake and Stan Bellinger share honors for the scariest crash in Fonda history. On the left, Bob Whitbeck (bent over) pulls Bellinger from his car, and on the right is the charred remains of Fake’s car. (Feuz Collection)



No. 1 September 13, 1958

DON WAYMAN AND JERRY JEROME: *The Worst Ever*

There is near unanimous agreement by those who saw it that the most spectacular accident in Fonda Speedway history was the 1958 tangle between Don Wayman and George Endem (a/k/a "Jerry Jerome").

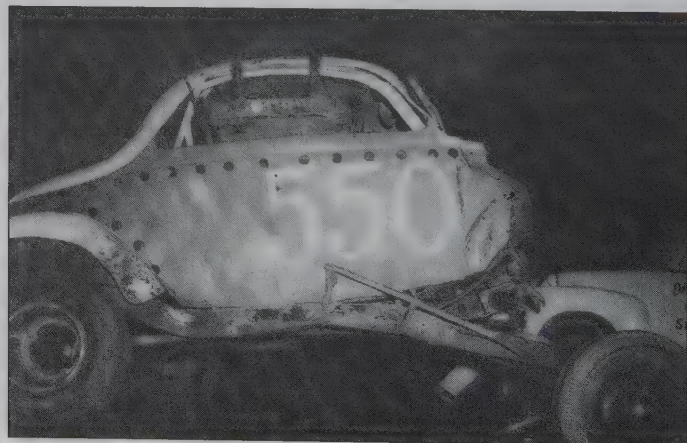
Curiously, this particular incident had its origins two years earlier. In those days, the Fonda guys did not take kindly to being beaten. One time Ken Shoemaker, nipped by a Keystone State newcomer in a heat race, indignantly asked the guy if his car would be ready for the feature. Told that it would be, the Shoe replied, "Good, 'cause it's going back to Pennsylvania in a box." The Fonda guys surely did not forget the night in 1956 that invader Don Stumpf, known for asphalt racing in New Jersey, popped in and blew them off on their own clay.

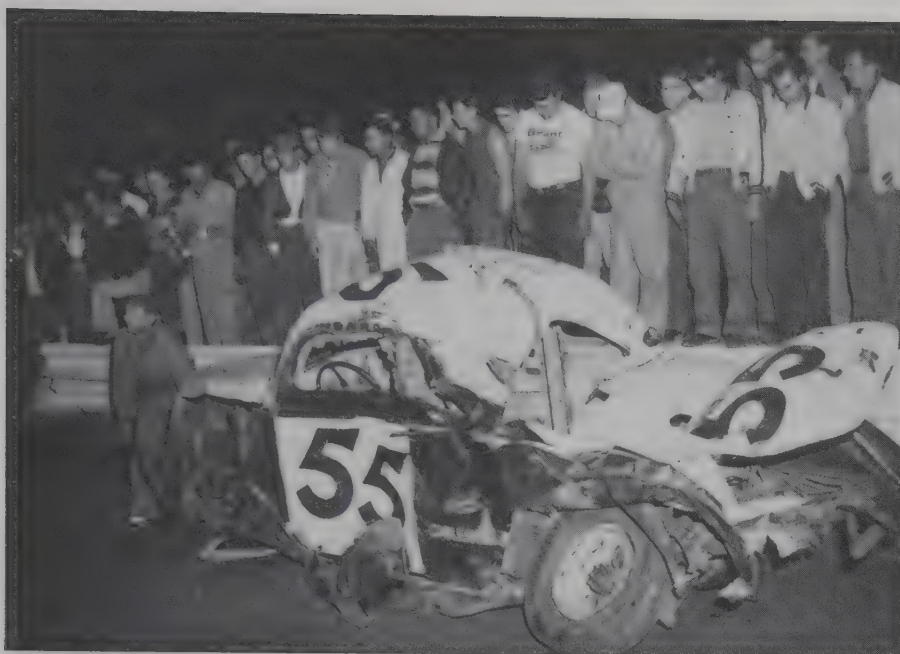
There was a hint of autumn in the air on September 13, 1958 when Stumpf again arrived in town for one of his infrequent visits. Strutting down pit road, he smiled at Ford coupe #550 and its flat-head engine. "Well, that's one car I don't have to worry about beating," he is said to have remarked. Problem is that Jerry Jerome overheard. He was driving the #550 and he was not impressed. He said to a friend, "If I don't race ever again, I'm gonna get that guy."

Jerome recalls starting in the back. "It was a good night and we were running fast. I was on a mission, and I was getting to the front. I only had to get by Donnie Wayman to get to Stumpy. I got under Wayman coming out of two and by him. But then in turn four he got under me and into me. That was it. End over end. Side over side. Both of us."

In Jim King's words, "When it was all over, the #550 was on its side near the judges' stand, its engine between the wood and steel fences in turn one. The gas tank was 50 feet down the track towards the fourth turn. The #55 landed upright, but was incredibly smashed

Most spectacular crash honors go to Don Wayman and Jerry Jerome for this 1958 thriller: Jerome's #550 (left) wound up on its side with everything gone from the firewall forward (right), and Wayman's #55 (next page) landed upright against the inside guardrail. (left, Feuz Collection; right, Gater News Archives)





(Feuz Collection)

up. Wayman was knocked unconscious and was hanging out of the window of his car. Fortunately, Donnie wasn't seriously hurt."

And all of this happened directly in front of a horrified grandstand. One such spectator was an eight-year-old Dave Lape. "I'll never forget that one. It was the worst ever. No doubt about it."

The 1965 Boycott

It's probably the greatest crisis in Fonda Speedway history.

Yet, it didn't even occur at Fonda.

The crisis was a driver boycott planned for Fonda on July 10, 1965. Due to some quick thinking and the generous sprinkling of deal money, Fonda management was able to deflect the drivers' action.

By way of background, NASCAR rules at the time prohibited drivers from competing in non-NASCAR-sanctioned events. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, Fonda drivers customarily skirted the rule by running outlaw events under assumed names.

The biggest outlaw lure for the NASCAR stars was the monthly Lebanon Valley Opens. Usually run the first Sunday night of each month, the Opens were 100-lap affairs paying a whopping (for the time) \$1,000 to win. Established in 1960, the Valley Opens drew outstanding fields from all over the Northeast. When Fonda drivers ventured to Lebanon early on, they often did so under fake names. But as the seasons ensued, the drivers became bolder. Bill Wimble won

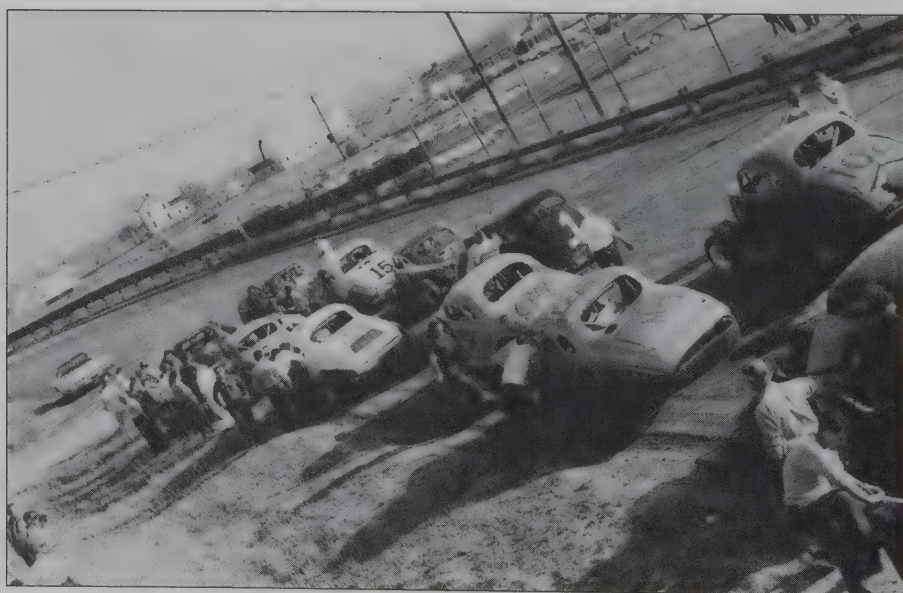
an Open in 1963 and in 1964 under his own name. Pete Corey also won one in 1964, without hiding his identity.

The situation neared its breaking point in early 1965. In the first Valley Open that year on May 2, 1965, Fonda drivers Lou Lazzaro, Ken Shoemaker, and Corey swept the top three spots. Intensifying the pending problem was a new speedway under construction in Malta, New York. Albany-Saratoga Speedway was scheduled to open July 16, 1965 and it was not going to be sanctioned by NASCAR. (Malta didn't go NASCAR until 1966.) Many top Fonda drivers towed every Friday night to NASCAR-sanctioned Stafford Springs, Connecticut. Would they continue to do so once Albany-Saratoga opened nearby? NASCAR felt it had to make a stand.

Immediately following the July 4, 1965 Valley Open, Daytona Beach telegraphed every offending team and imposed harsh fines. The racers' response was equally quick and equally harsh: They decided to boycott the NASCAR regular shows scheduled for Wednesday, July 7, at Victoria; Friday, July 9 at Stafford; and Saturday, July 10 at Fonda. By early Tuesday, July 6, 1965, Ed Feuz and Jim Gage Sr. caught wind of the plot. They knew that the race teams meant business and that it could have a devastating effect on the future of Fonda Speedway.

The drivers' plan was a good one. Victoria—where they would strike first—was the weakest link and the least able to defend itself. Opened in 1960, the half-mile dirt track west of Schenectady was a perennial spurned stepchild in Capital District racing. Victoria had tried Sunday and Friday racing without much success. Now faced with the debut of Albany-Saratoga, Victoria was running weekly on Wednesday nights in a desperate attempt to stay alive.

Victoria Speedway in Duanesburg was the first line of attack of a 1965 drivers' boycott aimed also at Fonda and Stafford. The Route 20 half-miler was a melting pot of racers from various circuits, but it never caught on with fans. This October 18, 1964 lineup includes Fonda drivers Lou Lazzaro #4, Kenny Shoemaker #24, Andy Romano #97, Jerry Townley #108, and Ray Sitterly #C-88; Lebanon Valley drivers Stretch VanSteenburg #1, Bill Gurney #64, and Bobby Leach #M-3; and invaders Bill Rafter #22, Dutch Hoag #18, and Sammy Reakes #15. In the track's seven-year history from 1960 through 1966, Lazzaro was the top driver with 34 victories, followed by Bill Wimble with 21, Shoemaker with 16, Pete Corey with 11, and Irv Taylor with five. (Bittig Collection)





The racers gathered early at Victoria on Wednesday evening, July 7, 1965. But instead of signing in, they left their rigs in the parking lot of The Swiss Inn Restaurant across the street from the speedway. Imagine the sight of teams like those of Wimble, Shoemaker, Corey, Townley, Taylor, Gahan, and a dozen others sitting in strike. Even unheralded drivers, like 17-year-old, second-year chauffeur Dave Lape, got caught up in the boycott.

"I remember sitting there at The Swiss Inn," says Lape. He hadn't even been penalized by NASCAR, but he was afraid to break the picket line for fear of being labeled a scab. "Finally (Lape's mentor) Bob Whitbeck came over to me and said, 'It's okay if you go in. This doesn't concern you.'" Indeed, a show consisting of back markers and youngsters like Lape was exactly what the boycotters wanted. They figured the paying public would tear down the place in protest if they saw a second-class show. Alas, the plan might have worked, had not Ed Feuz hatched a brilliant counterattack.

Feuz realized that if the strikers were successful at Victoria, Fonda would be at their mercy. On Tuesday, July 8, he called NASCAR competition director Pat Purcell and secured an immediate modified sanction for large engined cars at Fonda and Victoria. Since 1953, Fonda had been a "sportsman" track, with engines limited to small

"This doesn't concern you," Bob Whitbeck told 17-year-old Dave Lape, allowing the youngster to avoid the boycott. (Feuz Collection)



NASCAR's Bob Sall booked 10 Garden State modifieds into Victoria to help break the local sportsman boycott. (Bittig Collection)

Long-time Fonda official, and Andy Romano sponsor, Gigi Conover, was Ed Feuz's bag man in breaking a 1965 drivers' boycott. (Gater News photo by John Grady)



blocks and flatheads. Next, Feuz called Bob Sall, NASCAR's Northeastern Coordinator, and asked Sall to get 10 good modified teams from Flemington, New Jersey up to Victoria Wednesday night.

"Bob Sall told me that it could be done, but it would cost \$1,000—one hundred dollars in tow money per car. I agreed to do it," says Feuz, sensing that Victoria promoter Lou D'Amico didn't have the money to pull it off. So on the late afternoon of July 7, 1965, Ed Feuz stuffed \$1,000 into a sugar bag and headed to Victoria. He insists that it was the only time in his career that he paid appearance money to any racer. When Feuz arrived at the track, the scene was an ugly one. The drivers were confident that their boycott would break NASCAR. Many fans were milling around outside the gates, hesitant to spend their money on a show that promised to be a stinker.

Then it happened.

A parade of haulers from New Jersey came down Route 20. Led by the likes of Will Cagle, Bob Pickell, Gil Hearne, and Pee Wee Griffin—stars that fans had only ever read about—they towed past the strikers and into Victoria like they owned the place. The boycotters were stunned. And once the Jerseyites fired up those throaty big blocks, the fans just had to pay and go in to witness history.

But Feuz had one more trump card to play. Ernie Gahan was one of the boycotters. "I knew Ernie was hungry," says Feuz. "He lived on his race prize money. I knew he'd race if he could. So I gave Gigi Conover \$250 (the amount of Gahan's NASCAR fine) and I said, 'Gigi, give this to (chief steward) Ralph Oudekirk, but don't tell anybody where it came from.' Oudekirk sent a runner to tell Gahan that a fan had paid his fine for him. Ernie was the first guy to break ranks. He would finish third in the feature, behind Cagle and Pickell.

But once Cagle and his cohorts got inside the place, they smelled a rat. Sall had told them they were needed at Victoria because the promoter was getting small fields. "We had no idea that we had been brought in to break a strike until we got there," says Cagle. "So I told Sall, 'Look, those guys are racers and we're racers and unless you settle this thing, we ain't runnin' either.' So Sall ultimately ended up waiving the fines."

That winter NASCAR docked Gahan's point fund money by \$250. When Ernie called Daytona Beach to complain, he was told that the money had gone to Feuz as reimbursement. It was the first he'd learned that the fan who'd paid his fine that summer was actually Ed Feuz.

In any event, the boycott was shattered. The races were staged that Saturday at Fonda as if nothing unusual at all had occurred. Heck, most fans didn't even realize that from that point forward, modified motors were now legal at Fonda Speedway.

Four Fatalities

Otis Ray Eaton was on the verge of some wonderful things. The strapping, handsome 27-year old Navy veteran, engaged to be married, was a novice pilot and an aspiring stock car driver.

It all ended suddenly.

Eaton had not been overly successful in racing since getting his start at the old Willett's Speedway in Perth right after his discharge from the service. But the 1955 season offered real hope. The Ephratah, New York wheelman had never run competitive equipment. But all that was supposed to be different for 1955. Eaton had landed a ride with Johnstown's Harold Smith, a car owner who was tight with mechanical wizard Bob Whitbeck, and who would later win many features with Pete Corey as his driver. Smith's regular chauffeur, Johnny Perry, had always been competitive in Smith's car #S-55. Now, Perry was being slated in the seat of a new team that Whitbeck and Smith were putting together—a flaming #22. This created an opportunity for Eaton in Smith's other brand new 1955 entry, a Ford coupe #S-5 (a team car to the #S-55), which was going to make Otis Eaton a contender.

But, it never worked out that way.

During the first consi on opening night of the '55 season—May 14th—Eaton got high in turn two, hit the wall, and rolled. His #S-5 came to rest in the groove, on its side with the roof pointing toward oncoming traffic. A car driven by Walter Kretdler of Albion rammed Eaton's car full-bore, pushing the roof in on the helpless driver. Eaton was rushed to St. Mary's Hospital in Amsterdam with multiple



The late Otis Eaton.
(Courtesy of Jack Eaton)



When journeyman Johnny Perry was tabbed to be the first driver of Whitbeck's #22, Otis Eaton got the open ride in the Smith stable. (Bill Williams Collection)

skull fractures. He lay in a coma for 26 hours, while track officials tried to secure the services of the region's best brain surgeons. In the early morning hours of May 16, 1955, Otis Eaton succumbed.

Otis' brother Jack still mournfully recalls the fateful day of Otis' accident. He remembers visiting the team's race car shop that afternoon, as the crew rushed to get the new mount finished for opening night. Jack Eaton wishes they had never made it. He was an avid stock car fan prior to May 14, 1955. He hasn't been to the races since.

Eaton's death had a major impact at Fonda, as officials began to more closely inspect roof structure integrity. The increased scrutiny resulted in some stockers being outlawed, including the speedway's hottest car in 1955, Pete Corey's "Lil' Yellow 3."

On May 28, 1955, tragedy again struck. A wheel came off of the Jim Luke-driven, Bob Burns-owned #100. It bounced high in the night air and struck three observers who were watching the races from the shoulder of Route 30A, outside of turn two. Injured were Sally Cranker of Gloversville and Ann VanAvery of Fultonville. Dead was Joseph M. Salek, age 35, of a skull fracture. Salek was a Little Falls resident who was employed as a tolltaker at the Herkimer Thruway exit.

The press excoriated the speedway in the wake of Salek's demise. "Death became the main event for the second time in as many weeks when stock cars raced the Fonda Speedway Saturday night," wrote *The Gloversville-Johnstown Leader-Herald* newspaper. Salek's death was an immediate mystery to many. Luke's wheel had bounced so high and so far, that pitsiders assumed that it was destined to land harmlessly on the other side of Route 30A, in the

Watching the races from
Route 30A resulted in a
fatality in 1955. (Boyd
Collection)



schoolyard parking lot. Yet, it never got that far. The light of day the next morning solved the mystery. The utility cable above Route 30A's shoulder had a huge bend in it. It was obvious the wheel had struck the cable and had come straight down onto Salek.

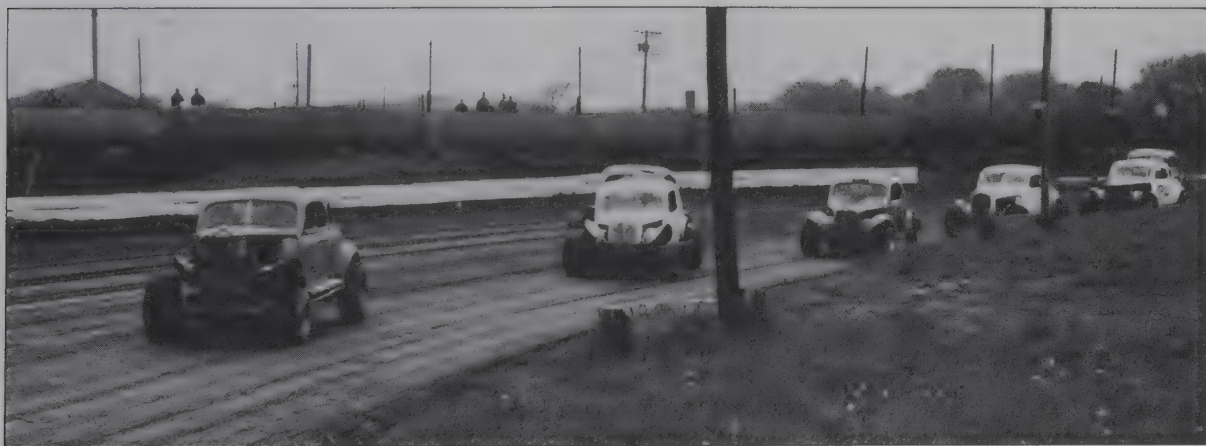
It would be 10 more years until death would strike at "The Track of Champions." Not that the Fonda fraternity was immune from tragedy in the interim, however. The highway deaths of champion Don Hendenberg and likeable Willie Chest, along with the flagging fatality of George Welch, had been crushing blows. But the 1965 racing deaths of a pair of highly popular chauffeurs, Lou Smith and Pepper Eastman, hit even closer to home. Smith might have become a superstar had he not been killed in an awful crash at Fonda on May 15, 1965. The 24-year-old Canastota wheelman had been virtually unbeatable in Utica-Rome's hobby late model division. When he moved up to sportsman/modifieds in 1964 in his #87 coupe, Smith won a feature at U-R and copped Fonda's Rookie of the Year award. For 1965, Frank Trinkhaus hired him to drive the famed #62. On that fateful May 15 night, Smith and eventual feature winner Ken Shoemaker in the Wright-Zauntner #24 were battling. Suddenly Smith's #62 climbed the fourth turn fence and began a sickening series of nose-to-tail flips down the front straightaway. It came to rest right at the start-finish line. As the emergency crew extracted the sophomore sensation—in full view of the packed grandstand—Smith's ungodly discoloration was clear evidence that he had suffered severe head injuries. A few days later, he was dead.

"Lou's death took a lot out of me," wrote Shoemaker in his autobiography, *They Called Me The Shoe*. "One of the things that made me feel even worse was that the same night the accident happened I got booed from the fans when I won the feature. A few even came down and claimed I'd been involved in the accident. Well, there was no way I was involved in any part of it. Lou slipped off the race track



This snapshot (above) of George Welch flagging at Menands was taken less than five minutes before he was fatally struck by a stock car. (Bert Welch Collection)

Below, Lou Smith (#87) leads Mel Austin (#99), Jeep Herbert (#77), Bobby Adams (#8), Steve Danish (#61), Ken Shoemaker (#24), and Bill Wimble (#S-33) through Fonda's second turn in this 1964 Russ Bergh photo. (Feuz Collection)



Woolie and Raymond

(Editor's Note: John Canfield, now a successful businessman in Virginia Beach, Virginia, grew up in Canajoharie, just three blocks down the street from where Willie Chest's #54B was garaged. In this sidebar, John contributes his fond recollections of Chest, one of the most endearing characters in Fonda Speedway history.)

"Willie Chest was the lovable loser. The guy who always started first and finished last. The sight of his #54B puttering around at the back of the pack and the sound of Red Wildey's weekly mantra "...and Willie Chest brings up the rear..." are memories that no Fonda fan from the '50s and early '60s will ever forget.

That he couldn't qualify, much less get a good finish, didn't bother him. Nothing bothered him. He was one of the world's most even-tempered guys. Willie Chest simply adored being part of the happening that was Fonda Speedway. He ran his

Ken Shoemaker once offered to tweak Willie Chest's #54 to make it fast. "No thanks," said Willie. "I'm goin' just as fast as I want to." (Feuz Collection)



whole operation on a shoestring, never won jack; but he and his brother Ray were genuine heroes to our bunch of neighborhood kids.

Willie was partners on his race car with his brother. By day, Willie worked on the New York Central Railroad and Ray was a TV repairman. Ray had a small ranch-style home with one of those driveways that goes downhill to a garage underneath. Ray ran both his TV repair business and housed the #54B in that garage. The place was like "The Little Shop of Horrors"—all kinds of rusted axles and assorted car junk living side-by-side with gutted TVs, piles of old tubes, and God only knows what else.

Ray always called Willie something that sounded like "Woolie," and Willie always called his brother "Raymond." They were both slow-talkin' guys and I can still envision when they'd argue about something: "Well, geez Raymond" ... "Well, geez Woolie," Ray chomping on a cigar and Willie dangling a Camel.

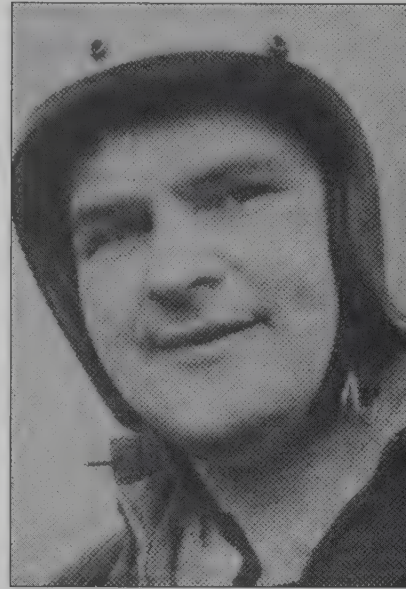
The Chests were true shade-tree mechanics of the first water. Usually they worked on their stock car out on Ray's driveway, frequently tinkering with it well after dark to the neighbors' dismay. But it was great for us kids, because they'd cheerfully let us hang around and even sometimes "hold something" while Woolie or Raymond tightened it down.

I remember like it was yesterday, hearing that Willie had died in a highway crash. And some jerk joked that "I never knew that Willie Chest could drive fast enough to get killed in a car." People like that just didn't get it. Willie Chest was never a winner, but he sure was a champion."

—John Canfield



Workers remove Lou Smith from his wrecked racer. He died a few days later.
(Simek Collection)



Lou Smith. (Area Auto Racing
News photo)

by himself. I don't see how anybody could say I had anything to do with it. The accusation hurt me very deeply."

Fonda's fourth—and hopefully final—fatality occurred on the second lap of the consi on August 14, 1965. The victim was Walter "Pepper" Eastman. Although Pepper never won a Fonda main event, he had been a front runner since the late 1950s, and had won a 1958 feature and the 1957 track championship at Rochester's Monroe County Fairgrounds. That track championship was a macabre tale. Hendenberg was actually Monroe County's highpoint man when he was killed, so officials declared Eastman as the track champ, rather



Pepper Eastman. (Bittig
Collection)

The interior of Pepper Eastman's #72 shows that his body probably had a hard impact with the steering wheel and column. (Feuz Collection)



than have a posthumous title holder, according to race historian Brian Spaid.

Pepper was a fan favorite. Driving Bob Zimmerman's #72 on the tragic night, Eastman contacted the third-turn graveyard fence and rolled. The accident appeared relatively innocent. But, the Madison, New York driver was dead by the time the track crew reached the wreckage. Over the years, folks have theorized that Pepper's fire extinguisher came loose in the roll and struck him in the head. But, interior photos of the wreckage, published here for the first time ever, suggest that his body had a hard impact with the steering wheel.

Promoter Feuz attended Pepper's funeral and came away with an eerie story. "My wife Ramona and I went to the wake and I felt odd about it because I didn't know how the family would accept me being there. But I was accepted very graciously and Pepper's father walked me over to the casket and we stood there looking at Pepper.

"Pepper's father told me, 'I'm a fireman and I was burned badly in a plastics fire earlier this year. Pepper came to the hospital to take me home. On the way home, I said to Pepper, 'Ya' know, we're both in a dangerous business. Maybe we oughta stop off at the undertakers on the way home and pick out a casket together and whoever needs it first uses it.' That's the casket right there.'"

"The cold chills and goose pimples ran up and down my spine," laments Feuz. "It was the middle of summer and I felt like I was freezing to death."

The Demise of the NASCAR Sanction

As such things usually go, Fonda's difficult decision to leave NASCAR was no snap judgment. It was the product of a four-year evolution, starting in 1968.

"By 1968, the racing at Fonda was dropping off," understates Ed Feuz. The problem had begun with NASCAR's 1967-68 off-season proclamation eliminating the Sportsman class, replacing it with a division called Late Model Sportsman (known today as Busch Grand National). The NASCAR Sportsman Division, which had served Fonda so well since 1953, was now history. Henceforth, NASCAR essentially declared all coupes, coaches and the like as Modifieds, regardless of engine size. The move ended up costing Fonda nearly 25% of its field; and another class, hobby late models, had to be brought in just to fill the show.

By way of background, small block sportsmen and big block modifieds had peacefully co-existed, racing against each other at Fonda since mid-1965. What the sportsman sacrificed in cubes, NASCAR made up in perks, like separate points and point funds, and handicapped starts, with modifieds in the rear.

With those incentives removed, many small blockers simply abandoned NASCAR and Fonda in favor of non-NASCAR Lebanon Valley, which still had a 339 c.i.d. limit rule. Corey, Jerry Townley, and Townley's owner Pop Wilcox were already there. So Bill Wimble, and his owner Dave McCredy, and Jack Farquhar, and his owner Vince Barbuto moved in, too. Wimble, Townley, and Farquhar would finish first, second, and fourth, respectively, in Valley points in '68. Car owners Godfrey Wenzel and Art Furness also joined in the migration. Wenzel took his #03 and #03x team sedans, which Maynard Forrette and Irv Taylor had steered at Fonda in 1967, to the Valley in '68 for driver Bobby Tauscher. Furness took his #40, long a Fonda front runner with George Janoski, to Lebanon in '68 for up-and-coming Ed Delmolino.

In the wake, Fonda was left with short fields and small crowds. Oh, 1968 did produce some noteworthy events. Long-suffering Don Wayman, Ed Pieniazek, and Ray Sitterly finally visited victory lane. Legendary asphalt star, Don MacTavish, put together a dirt car with owner Len Bosley and won. And Shoemaker bummed a ride in Andy Romano's stock sportsman back-up car and beat the modifieds. But compared to the previous "Glory Years," 1968 was a very bad season at "The Track of Champions."

To end the malaise, Feuz convinced his customarily tight-fisted partner, Jim Gage Sr., to agree to a huge purse increase for 1969. Calling it "That Grand Feeling," Fonda paid its feature victor \$1,000 every Saturday night, the biggest weekly stock car winning prize money in America at the time. Alas, the noble gesture was an abysmal

The Late Models: 1963, 1968–1984

In 1968, a Late Model division was added to the show at Fonda. For the first time the normal Saturday night show was broader than three heats, a consi, and a feature for the Sportsman/Modified cars.

The Late Models, which also went by the monikers Hobby Division and Overhead Lates, had been a staple at Utica Rome for years. The class was once tried at Fonda on September 7, 1963 with Tommy Wilson Sr. winning over Speed Williamson and Don Redmond. Fonda fans didn't like 'em in 1963 and didn't like 'em any better in '68. Fonda's faithful was almost snobby in its disdain. The Late Model feature was last on the card. Immediately after the mod main, fans would rush to the exits for an early trip home. Too bad. The racing was good and the top cars were sophisticated. Norm Moyer, the class' first kingpin, was especially impressive. NASCAR rules defined a "Late Model" as 1948 and up. In '48 Chevy manufactured its last coupe, a production holdover from pre-World War II. Moyer found one and built a car that looked and ran just like a modified.

The Late Models finally gained acceptance in 1970. Fonda went to weekly twin-25s for mods that year and the LMs ran their feature between the two mod mains. Fans were forced to watch them, and guess what? They liked what they saw.

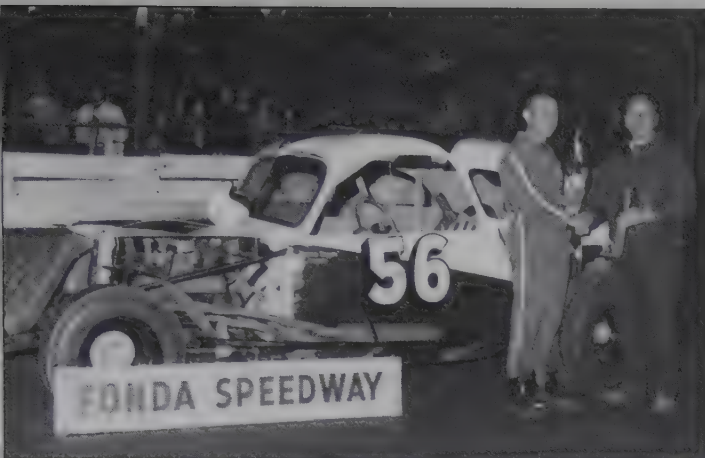
The Lates served Fonda well, producing a number of drivers who would go on to win in the modifieds. Harry Peek parlayed his 23 Late Model victories into a great modified career. All-time winning late model shoe Dick Schoonover pulled off a

mod shocker early in the 1986 season. Randy Glenski won 16 late model features before becoming a modified front-runner with three Fonda wins. Jack Cottrell was also a double-digit late model winner with 11 victories before going modified. The still-active Cottrell has a trio of modified triumphs as of the publication of this book.

Curiously, several very promising Late Model chauffeurs were to move up a class and win just once. Jay Bleser won 19 times in the Lates before etching his name in the modified record books for posterity by winning from the pole in 1981. Jack Cottrell's buddy Jack Halloran won three Fonda LM mains and then got the break of his career when rains came one lap past halfway with his modified #5 Pinto in front during a 1976 mind-blower. Ex-late model star Ralph Holmes with two Fonda support features got the gift of a lifetime when he snatched a 1972 modified 100 lapper after Jack Johnson was disqualified.

By the early '80s the division began to lose steam because of economics run amok. The top guys in the class were now fielding Camaros that would be more at home in an NDRA show with \$10,000 to win. Alas, Fonda was paying a couple of hundred bucks.

In 1982 the Lates were merged with the new small block sportsman/modifieds class, then called 320s, and were discontinued altogether in 1984. Those teams that wished to compete in a Late Model-type automobile were filtered into the new Street Stock division, today called Pro Stocks.



Norm Moyer. (Feuz Collection)



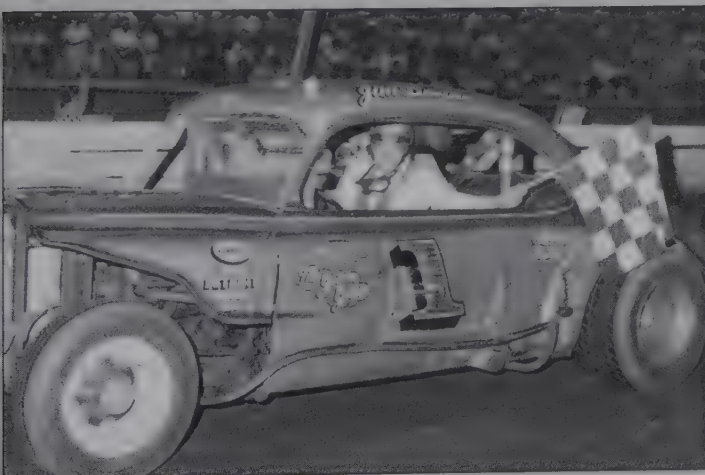
Dick Schoonover. (Komphoto by Bob Manieri)



A 1970 field goes green. (Feuz Collection)



Harry Peek's first Fonda ride. (Gater News photo)



Jim "Smokey" Devine. (Grady photo)



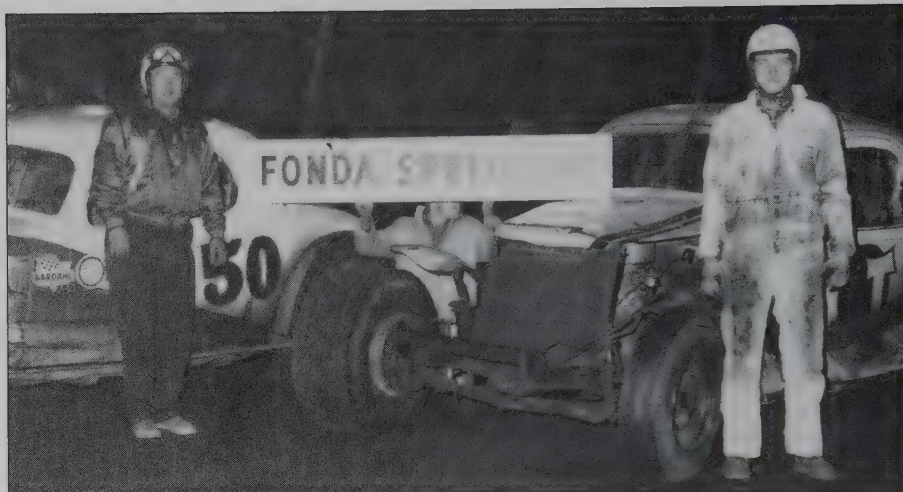
Joel Canfield. (John Canfield Collection)



Don Wayman (above, left) wins on April 20, 1968. (Feuz Collection)

Asphalt influence was a problem at Fonda in the late '60s (above, right).

Even Don MacTavish's infamous "Circle J" made a single Fonda appearance on May 6, 1967. Photographer Russ Bergh used the rare occasion to pose NASCAR's reigning 1966 champions Ernie Gahan (modified) on the left and MacTavish (sportsman) on the right. (Boyd Collection)



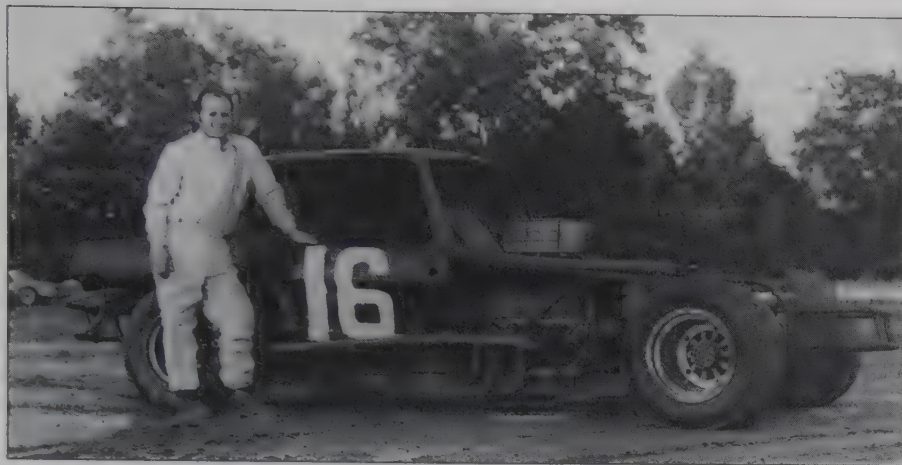
failure. Instead of drawing outside cars and new blood, the affair became a weekly Lou Lazzaro benefit. "That Grand Feeling" brought no new talent, largely because most big-name outsiders either didn't have NASCAR-legal modifieds, or didn't want to pay for NASCAR licenses. Crowds, weary of Lazzaro's dominance, stayed away.

Mindful that Fonda was one of the few 1948 NASCAR charter speedways still operating, Feuz's final novel attempt to save NASCAR at Fonda came in 1970: he split 1969's 50-lap \$1,000-to-win format into weekly twin-25s, each paying \$500 to win. What fans remained liked the two-for-one bargain, but most drivers absolutely hated the concept. Lazzaro even left for awhile to run Plattsburgh, correctly figuring that the twin-25 format was a direct slap against him.

Lacking answers and enthusiasm, Feuz quit Fonda after the 1970 season. Gage Sr., plagued by driver discontent and rough track conditions, tried once to get Feuz to return in 1971. When that failed, Gage Sr. promoted a pair of life-long Fonda employees, his son Jim Jr. and Ron Compani, to take the track's reins.

Young Gage and Compani quickly made a pivotal decision: 1972 would be Fonda's final season with NASCAR. It was a move that would never have been possible were Feuz still involved. The rationale was two-fold: Since 1968, big shows at Fonda had drawn few competitive outsiders. The fields were stale and dwindling. And by 1971, tubular chassis and homemade frames were the rage of the dirt track world. NASCAR rules were still requiring Detroit production frames. As a result, probably 75% of the dirt track modified cars in the Northeast were illegal at Fonda. Dave Buanno became an instant beneficiary of the chassis rules liberalization. He was the first Fonda regular with a tubular frame—a Tobias—which carried him to three victories before health reasons prematurely ended his promising career.

Going outlaw was a bold step, but it proved a blessing. In 1973, "The Track of Champions" returned to much of its former glory. And



Dave Buanno was an immediate beneficiary of the tube chassis revolution at Fonda. He's shown here with Joey Lawrence's #16. (*Gater News photo*)

young Gage and Compagni had positioned themselves as major players in a new decade of speed.

The 1978 Strike and a Change at the Helm

Big A Auto Night on August 26, 1978 should have been like any other Saturday at Fonda. But it wasn't. It became a disaster that changed the course of the track's history.

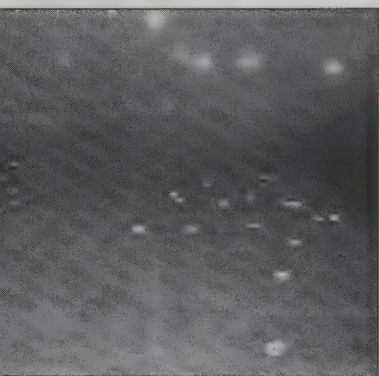
The Big A Auto Parts chain reportedly paid Fonda \$1,000 to sponsor the event, a twin-25 special for the modifieds. However, a mid-week track press release allegedly said that the \$1,000 would be added to the night's purse. Whether in error or otherwise, by Saturday night, the announcement had become inoperative. Management had decided to keep the \$1,000 as track income instead of giving it to the drivers.

One only knows how word starts and how it spreads, but by the time that night's second 25-lapper was slated to go off, every modified racer in Fonda's pit knew that he wasn't going to get to share in the \$1,000 that had been supposedly promised earlier that week. And the drivers were lathered up. When that second feature was called to the grid, only five cars answered the call. The balance of the field was loading up.

Fonda's first-ever strike was in force.

Leading drivers, including Lou Lazzaro and Jack Johnson, marched to the track's first turn office to voice displeasure. Jim Gage Jr. met them outside on the shoulder of State Route 30A. This was beyond eyeshot of the grandstand, so fans initially only perceived the delay as an elongated intermission.

But Gage Jr. held his ground: The press announcement was an honest mistake, the money was his, and that was final. He ordered the feature to roll off, even if it meant that the star drivers would sit out. Two more cars bit on Gage's gambit, but when only seven cars appeared on the track for the main event, fans knew something was amiss.



Fans threw beer cans on the track during the 1978 drivers' strike, just as they had done in the '60s.

(Feuz Collection)

Fonda fans have always been a free-spirited bunch. Never ones to repress emotion, the fans foot-stomped the old covered grandstand so hard that observers feared it might collapse. Beer can throwing, that unique Fonda passtime, which thankfully had seemed to die out in the late 1960s, was reborn this night as never before. The circle of negotiators now outside the office in turn one grew larger. Even the Montgomery County Sheriff's deputies chimed in: They were here to direct traffic, not quell a riot, they reminded.

One of the most influential strikers was C.D. Coville. "Super C.D." had won the first 25-lapper easily, but he was firm on sitting out the nightcap. And Coville was in a very weighty position; his car was sponsored by the same company that was sponsoring the race, Big A Auto Parts. "That's how I learned about the whole thing," remembers C.D. "My sponsor came over complaining that the promoter was gonna put the \$1,000 in his pocket. He assumed that it was gonna be added to the purse for the drivers." As the pitside unrest grew and the decision to strike was being formulated, Coville received permission from his sponsor to join the job action. It was hugely symbolic. If it was okay for the night's first feature winner to boycott the Big A race in the Big A car, it was okay for most everyone else.

Finally, Gage Jr. caved. A deal was struck and a full-field feature was conducted. But by then, the damage was done—in more ways than one. A sponsor had been humiliated, the fair board was embarrassed, and the Gage family's credibility was compromised. The only winner that night was C.D. Coville. He won the second 25-lap feature, too.

Oddly absent from the strike scene negotiations was one Ron Compani. But he had his reasons. The once-loyal Compani had been secretly plotting a coup to take control of Fonda. Distancing himself from

August 28, 1978, might have been the most exhausting night in C.D. Coville's career. He won three times that evening—twice with his race car and once politically. Coville is shown here in victory lane with car owner Jerry Barnowski. (Gater News photo)



the strike disaster gave him more needed ammunition in his clandestine hope to wrest the speedway from Jim Gage Jr. and Jim Gage Sr. Compani, now deceased—as are Gage Jr. and Gage Sr.—disclosed his plan in a 1978 interview, the substance of which has never been revealed until now.

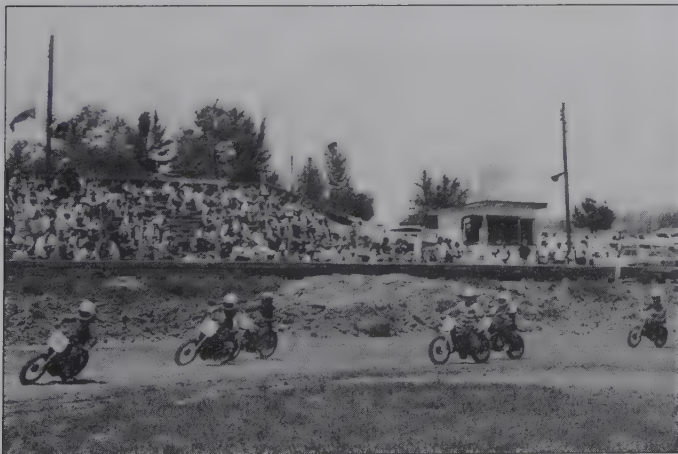
Ron Compani had worked at Fonda Speedway in one capacity or another since 1952. “He was 10 years old,” remembers Ed Feuz. “His family lived across the railroad tracks behind turn four. He’d keep coming over and I was afraid he’d get hurt, so I’d throw him out. Fifteen minutes later he was back again. I’d throw him out again, and 10 minutes later there he was again. Finally, I put him to work so I could keep an eye on him.” Compani always viewed himself as a faithful employee. He hoped to someday acquire some or all of Feuz’s shares in Thruway Speedways Inc. Alas, to own a piece of Fonda Speedway was his dream.

But that dream began to shatter in 1977. First, he sensed that the Gages were beginning to estrange themselves from him for what he felt were personal reasons. Then, he heard rumors that the Gages were building a new racetrack in Sloansville, south of Fonda, and that he wasn’t in their plans. He said that he confronted Jim Jr. about the rumor and that Jim Jr. denied the story, saying that he and his father were only developing a park in Sloansville.

Indeed, it was a park: Chariot Park Speedway, a quarter-mile oval and adjacent motorcross track. Although Chariot Park was built for motorcycles and hobby stocks, and never was intended to host modifieds, Compani felt betrayed. Then when the Gages moved some bleachers from Fonda to Chariot Park without telling Compani, he was incensed. He said that he felt his days with the Gages were numbered, so he mounted a campaign to usurp their Fonda Speedway lease when it came up in the 1979–80 off-season.

Compani assembled his brother Ralph and their friend Seymour Hayes as a management team. They formed Fonda-Fultonville Speedway, Inc. and made a successful bid to the Montgomery

Chariot Park in Sloansville ran karts, cycles, and hobby stocks as Fonda’s sister speedway. When the Gages excluded Ron Compani from the Chariot Park project, he launched a successful campaign to take Fonda from them. (Gater News photos)



C.D. by Tom Boggie

(Editor's Note: Tom Boggie is one of the most influential race-writers to ever emerge from the Fonda area. We asked him to contribute his thoughts on the great Clarence Donald Coville.)

All throughout sports history, rivalries have been the foundation on which legends have been built. Muhammad Ali had Joe Frazier, the Boston Celtics of Larry Bird had the Los Angeles Lakers of Magic Johnson, and Jack Johnson had C.D. Coville.

The soft-spoken Coville, whose deadpan manner of speech hid a razor-sharp wit, was a Hall of Fame driver in his own right. Throughout his modified racing career at Fonda Speedway, he drove for some of the most prominent owners on the dirt circuit, beginning with Jerry Barnowski and the Perth Lumber Wagon, and progressing through Cliff Barcomb, Mark Hauser, Hank Spetla, Wayne Ryan and Bob Siemski. With 39 career victories at Fonda, he sits eighth on the all-time win list. But for all his individual accomplishments, his rivalry with Jumpin' Jack, and the fact that he twice denied Johnson from attaining one of the most revered records at the Track of Champions, is what puts Coville in the same category as Paul Bunyan. On two separate occasions, Johnson pulled into the pits at Fonda Speedway with an opportunity to break Steve Danish's track record for consecutive victories (seven). Both times, it was Coville who wound up in victory lane, leaving Johnson to be satisfied with holding a share of the record.

The first occurrence came on August 8, 1981. Johnson had won seven in a row, and promoter Ron Compani offered a \$500 bounty to any driver who could break the streak. Coville's frustration was already

building, because he had already finished second to Jumpin' Jack on four occasions, and in Coville's eyes, finishing second just meant you were the first loser. "I was thinking about painting the front of my car orange, so some of the deadbeats would pull over when they saw it, like they did for Jack," said Coville. Coville arrived late at the speedway on the night of August 8, and had to qualify through the consi. But it didn't matter. On lap nine of the feature, Johnson tangled with Andy Romano and Jack Cottrell in the fourth turn, and his night—and his bid for the record—came to an early end. Coville charged from the rear of the field to get the victory, but he never got the bonus, because one of Compani's stipulations was that Johnson had to be running at the end of the race.

Four years later, in 1985, Johnson put together another seven-race winning streak. This time, Coville wasn't even around to watch it. Early in the season, after a disagreement with track officials, Hauser and Coville took their racing operation to Lebanon Valley Speedway, leaving Jumpin' Jack very little competition. But once the streak hit seven, Coville figured it was time to come back.

And on the night of June 11, in the 100-lap Spring Championship race, Coville brought another Johnson streak to an end. Again, Coville had to qualify through the consi, and again, Jumpin' Jack ran into problems early. This time, he had to bring his modified to a halt when the pin came out of the steering wheel early in the race. Jumpin' Jack ducked into the pits, got the wheel back in place, and went to the rear of the field. It only took Coville 29 laps to get the lead, but Johnson kept carving through traf-

fic, and when a caution came out on lap 75, he was right on Coville's rear bumper. But on the restart, Johnson's right rear tire went flat, and another streak was over.

Ironically, Coville points to a third streak that he broke that he thinks is even more important. In 1978, the year that Coville finally broke into victory lane in the Perth Lumber Wagon, Lou Lazzaro had picked up 11 wins by early August. One more win, and he would tie Danish's record of 12 wins in a season. "They started running double features, doing anything they could to get Lou the record," said Coville. "One night in the pits, a couple members of his fan club came up to me and asked me to let him win at least one more. But I think I won something like the last three."

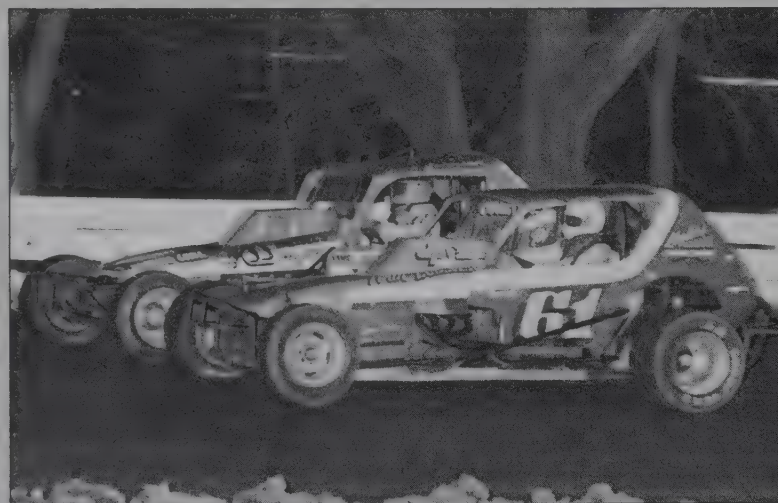
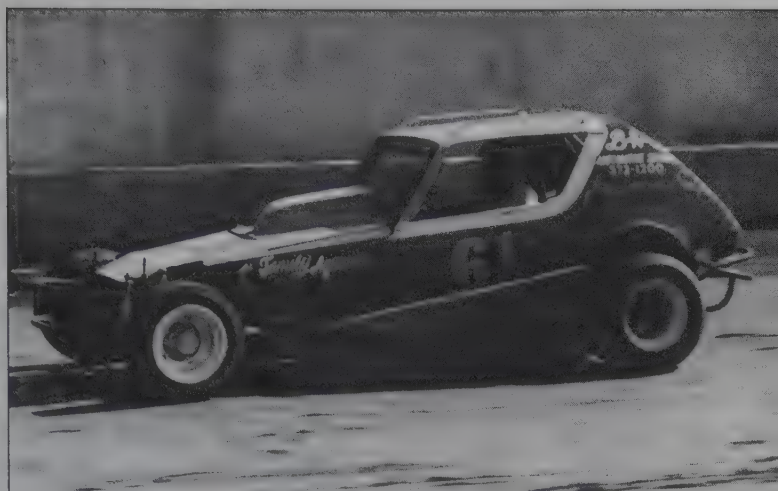
Coville's last victory at Fonda came on May 7, 1988. The second-place car was driven by Jack Johnson. Although Coville loved to race against Johnson, he downplays the rivalry. "I was just doing my job," he said. "I was getting paid to win races. It didn't matter who I beat. If I didn't win, I wasn't doing my job."

—Tom Boggie

(top) C.D. was going nowhere in his early days at Fonda, so in 1974 he emigrated to the modified mecca—Reading, Pennsylvania—to learn his craft. When he came back, Coville was the real deal. (Gater News photo by Bob Perran)

(middle) Coville and Johnson run side-by-side at Fonda in 1980. (Clancy Miller photo)

(bottom) The final Fonda win of Super C.D.'s career came on May 7, 1988, in Nick Ryan's #28. (DIRT photo by Tom Sorvel)





Ralph Comperi (Miller photo)

County Fair Board. Fonda joined Drivers' Independent Race Tracks (DIRT) and remains a DIRT member today. Ron Comperi and Seymour Hayes would eventually leave Fonda-Fultonville Speedway Inc. However, that corporation, under the direction of Ralph Comperi, would operate Fonda Speedway from 1980 until 1997, when current promoter Ric Lucia took over.

Ironically, Chariot Park would fold after just two seasons.

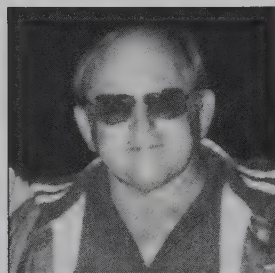
USNA



Ron Comperi (Miller photo)

In 2000, a new sanctioning body rocked the modified racing world. United Speedways of America (USNA), a Syracuse-based corporation, announced that it was going to organize a series of big-money races for DIRT-type modifieds.

Whereas DIRT had always scheduled its summer specials on Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday nights—so as not to interfere with weekly Friday/Saturday/Sunday tracks, USNA slated its events for Saturdays. While most observers viewed the USNA plan as a shot across the bow of DIRT president Glenn Donnelly, Ric Lucia keenly realized that his track—Fonda—was ground zero for a USNA assault.



Seymour Hayes (Miller photo)

Of all of the tracks in DIRT, Lucia sensed that his had the most to lose if USNA succeeded. He realized that money racers like Jack Johnson, Jeff Trombley, Ronnie Johnson, and Dave Camara would likely defect—along with their fans—to the fledgling Saturday night roadshow. Heck, even up-and-coming Seth Gano bolted Fonda for USNA. Moreover, at least two USNA specials would occur in Fonda's backyard—at Albany-Saratoga and Devil's Bowl—dead against a regular Fonda show.

Lucia made a courageous move to pre-empt the USNA fallout. In March 2000, he went to a Village of Fonda board meeting and announced to the world: USNA was coming and Fonda was in trouble—together with every restaurant, bar, and gas station in the area that benefitted from race fans who spend money. Lucia's announcement made headlines throughout the region. And for the first time, fans and racers realized that USNA wasn't just some grudge match against DIRT Headquarters; USNA could change forever the face of Saturday night racing as they knew it. The message was clear: Support Fonda or lose it.

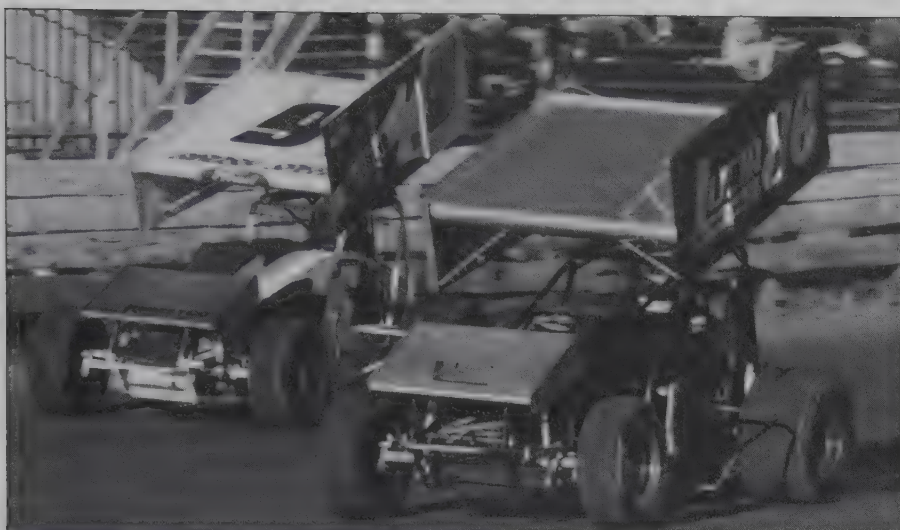
Then Lucia went to local teams to plead his case. Friend Andy Romano was especially helpful. Not only would his sons Mike and A.J. stay at Fonda no matter what, but Andy would field a third car for promising youngster Ron Holmes. By year's end, Holmes had become a big winner, a crowd favorite, and a trailmarker for Fonda's future success.

In August 2000, USNA suspended operations. The crisis had been averted.

Ric Lucia is rightfully proud of the way he handled the USNA threat. "One of the things that makes me different than other promot-

Ric Lucia withstood USNA. (Fusco Collection)

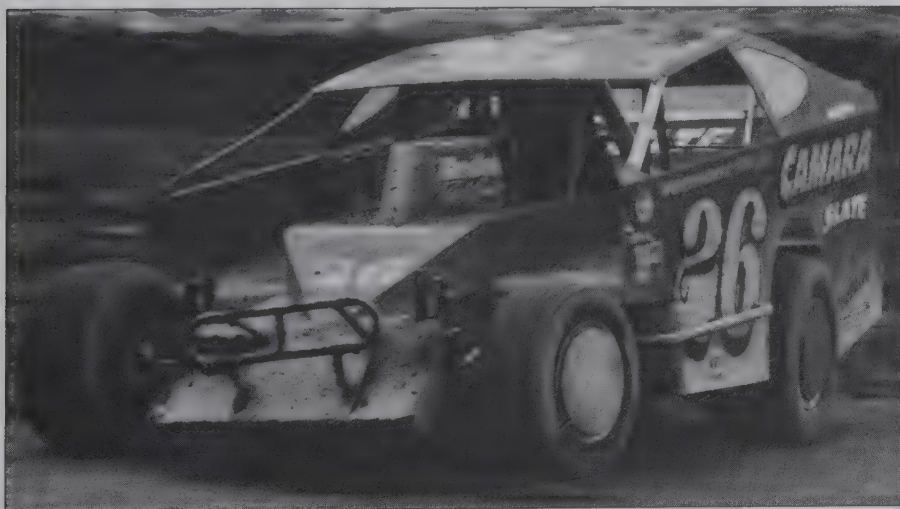




Ric Lucia races his sprint car #86 through the fourth turn at Fonda in 1996. (Lucia Collection)

ers is that I am a former driver,” he says. “So I was able to analyze USNA from a driver’s viewpoint. I knew that it would be attractive to professional race drivers like Jack Johnson. And I also knew that if it got off the ground it would be detrimental to Fonda. I figured that we’d have to tough the year out, but I didn’t want to burn any bridges either.”

Lucia says that star drivers Johnson, Trombley, and Camara were all gentlemen enough to call him and tell him of their decision to go USNA. “My feelings were hurt, but I didn’t want to get bitter. When USNA failed—and I truly believed that it would because it didn’t make sense financially—I knew that it would be in Fonda’s best interest to have those drivers back,” says Lucia. Ric’s vision became reality. Camara won Fonda’s 2001 opener. Jack came back and scored a Fonda feature for the 28th year in his illustrious career. And Trombley copped Fonda’s 2001 track championship.



Dave Camara was Fonda Speedway’s two-time defending track champion when he abdicated the crown to defect to the USNA. (Lucia Collection)



A river definitely runs by it. (Clarke Blair photo courtesy Montgomery County Archives Dept.)

Promoter Ric Lucia, with snowball in hand, stands in the third turn as the starting field passes by for the 2001 opener. (Grady photo)



The Lighter Side 7

FOR ALL OF THE RACERS and most of the fans, what goes on at Fonda Speedway is serious stuff. Not only is stock car racing dangerous, success in the sport—at any level—requires hard work, much time, and focused attention.

But racing is also entertainment. Sometimes it makes us cry, and sometimes it makes us laugh. This chapter is a collection of essays on some of the lighter moments in Fonda Speedway's history.

A River Runs By It

The Mohawk River is an omnipresence at Fonda Speedway. Flowing adjacent to the track's backstretch, the river poses a perpetual hazard. Like Homer's *Sirens*, the Mohawk's waters beckon the wayward. Almost everyone at Fonda has an amusing river story. Many racers have tasted the canal's contents. All have lived to tell about it.

One of the funniest river stories is told by Chris Economaki of *The National Speed Sport News*. It involves Sam Nunis who drove "big cars" at Fonda in the 1930s and later became a racing promoter. Nunis used to employ Economaki. In 1959, Nunis promoted a Saturday afternoon champ car event at Syracuse. Roger Ward won it, Economaki was the announcer.

After the Syracuse race, Nunis, Economaki, and Ward rode together east on their way to another show at Lime Rock, Connecticut the following day. As they came down the Thruway, they saw the lights at Fonda Speedway and decided to stop in and watch the races. They were treated like royalty and were escorted to the judges' tower for interviews over the public address system.

When he was interviewed, Nunis told the crowd that he had raced at Fonda in the olden days and had, in fact, once crashed

through the backstretch fence, plunged into the river, and submerged. A fan dove into the Mohawk, Nunis said, pulled him from the crash, and saved his life. He had never learned the identity of his rescuer, but had hoped to meet him someday to thank him personally. After the interview, as the famed guests were leaving the speedway, an elderly fellow approached Nunis and introduced himself as the gentleman who had pulled him from the wet wreckage decades earlier. They embraced tightly and Nunis thanked the codger profusely for saving his life.

Once they were in their car, Economaki said to Nunis, "I've been working for you for 10 years and I thought I'd heard every story there was about you. How come you never told me that you nearly drowned at this place?"

"Because it never happened," Nunis deadpanned. "I just made the whole thing up."

The 1979 track champion and winner of 17 Fonda features in the '80s, Ray Dalmata, openly admits the river was the biggest fear at the speedway. Even today he recalls, "I always worried about it and I always respected the second turn. Getting in the water upside down was not the way I had in mind of going out." Undoubtedly contributing to Ray's unease was the fact that the first car he had driven once ended up in the Mohawk with its driver Todd King very lucky to escape.

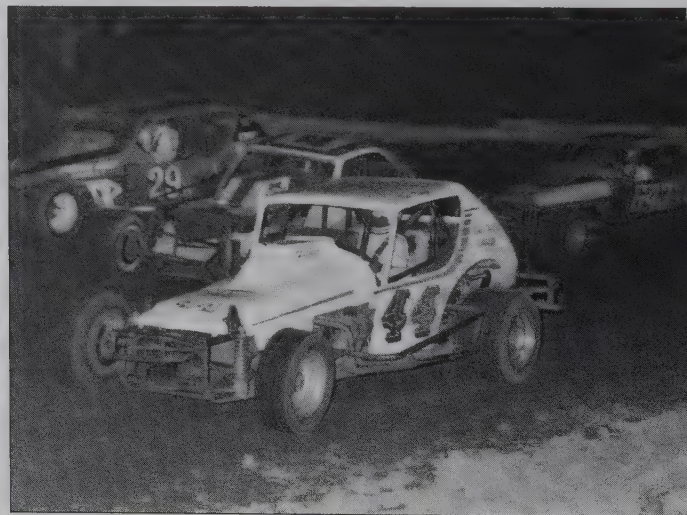
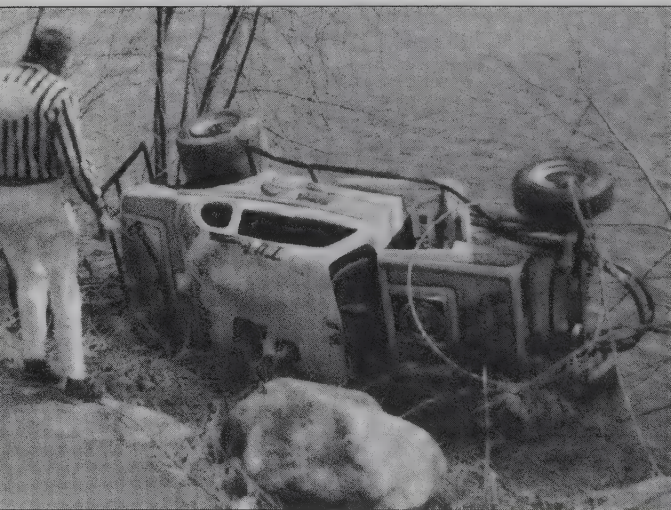
One night, powersliding off the second turn, Dalmata's #643 lurched, as Harry Peek spiraled over the front end and appeared to be flipping into the watery depths. Dalmata freaked. He immediately spun his car sideways against the fence, unhooked his belts, and began climbing out in a rush to assist his friend Peek. Suddenly Ray heard the unwelcome roar of an approaching big block. He knew instantly that he had reacted too quickly, as not everyone who

Todd King (below, left) lays his #52 on the bank of the Mohawk in 1972.

Track official Gigi Conover surveys the scene from dry ground.

(Jim King Collection)

(Below, right) Jim Senzio (#44) and Ray Dalmata (#643), two of the participants in Dalmata's river story, battle Art Kiser (#29k) and Nick Ronca (#7) in this 1979 shot. (Clancy Miller photo)



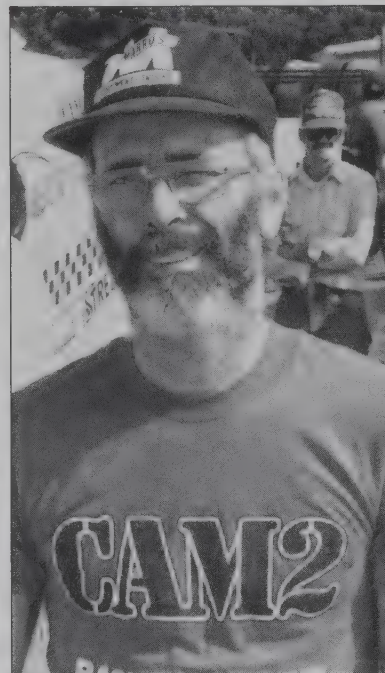
was following had seen what had happened. He slid back into the cockpit, grabbed the roll bars, and held on for dear life. Along came an unsuspecting Jim Senzio, T-boning the #643 mightily and breaking Dalmata's arm. Ray chuckles these days about the rest of the story. "The next think I knew, Harry was peeking in my window, asking me if I was okay! I'll never forget that."

Like so many before him, Ray was carted off to St. Mary's Hospital in Amsterdam for a full arm cast, installed by a dutifully disapproving doctor. The cast was short-lived, however. Ray's hacksaw was at work three days later, amputating just enough of the cast so that he was able to race—if somewhat timidly—the next week. "We got seventh or eighth," he claims. "It was amazing. No one touched me. They raced me clean for five or six weeks. Then, when I took the cast off completely, it was bang, bang again. I felt like going to the next drivers' meeting wearing a new cast and saying 'Hey, lookie here!'"

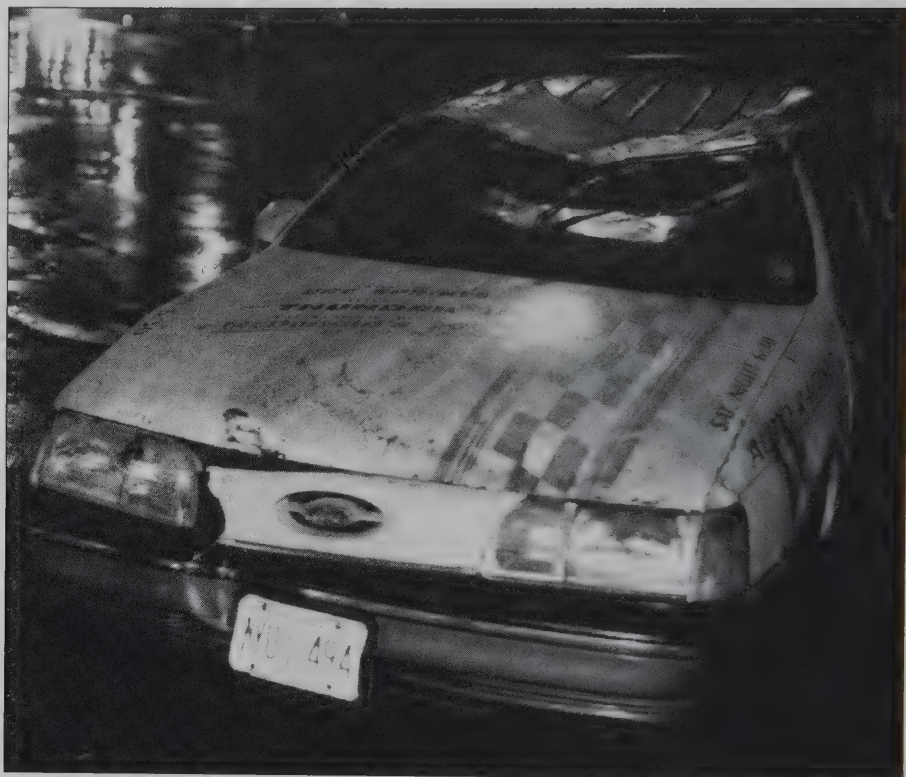
"The Paddle Award," was the humorous brainchild of Ralph Compagni during his tenure as Fonda promoter. Ralph would bestow a wooden canoe paddle on drivers who were unlucky enough to crash into the river. One such recipient was Bob McCreadie, who found the drink during the 1994 Fonda 200. Upon receiving the "award," McCreadie smiled for the cameras, but privately he considered the paddle an affront.

A month later, promoter Compagni was a passenger in the Fonda pace car, when driver Jay Drinkwater (the track's flagger) put the

(Below, left) "Barefoot"
Bob McCreadie won a
Paddle Award with this
dump in the Mohawk
during the 1994 Fonda
200. (Tony Mormile photo)
(Below, right) "Barefoot"
(Gater News photo by Dave
Hollander)



Fonda pace cars can't swim. This shot was taken in Alexandria Bay on November 18, 1994. (Watertown Times photo by Karen Garber-Pominville)



pace car into the St. Lawrence River during an auto accident off James Street in Alexandria Bay, not far from McCreadie's Watertown home. McCreadie gleefully used the embarrassing occasion to return serve, giving Compani his paddle back.

The Dead Heats

Most speedways will go an eternity without ever having a tie for first place in the main event of its headline division. But, Fonda Speedway has had the distinction of two such modified dead heats. The irony, however, is that neither one was really a tie. Moreover, both stories are pretty amusing.

Each of the supposed dead heats occurred during the 1970 season, when Fonda's format was weekly twin 25-lap features for the modifieds, paying \$500 apiece to win. The first occurred June 6, 1970. In the closing laps, Don Wayman, driving in Russ Betz's #59 coupe, had a comfortable lead over Pete Corey in Jerry Rose's #93. But then Wayman developed motor trouble, slowed dramatically, and allowed Corey to close. On the final lap, the two cars flashed under the checkers side-by-side. Who was the winner?

Good question. Scorers Joan Betts, Anita Farina, and Eleanor Vine couldn't agree. Two had the #59 scored first and one had #93 on top. While they discussed whether the majority ruled, flagger Ray

Christman radioed the tower with a pivotal question: "Hey, where exactly is the finish line at this place?" The scorers looked down at the track and began to smile. And then they laughed out loud because it was impossible to answer Christman's query.

Allow us to explain. Early on at Fonda, the officials worked out of an old horse judging tower on the infield, and Chet Hames flagged from a small wooden platform on the inside of the front stretch. The infield tower, Hames' perch, and a striped board nailed to the front wall were all aligned. It was quite apparent precisely where Fonda's finish line was.

But late-1960s improvements to the Fonda facility changed that. The flagstand was moved to the outside of the track, in an elevated, steel enclosure. And the infield tower was razed, and replaced by an officials' skybox atop the wooden grandstand.

However, now the flagstand and the scorers room in the skybox were no longer aligned, separated by about 30 linear feet. So was the finish line the flagstand, the scorers' room, or someplace in between? It was a fundamental question in the Wayman/Corey "tie," because the two cars were traveling at such disparate speeds at the end of the race. Wayman was arguably in front at the flagstand; Corey was probably leading when they whizzed by the scorers.

Not being able to determine the finish line—much less the winner—Betts shrugged her shoulders and declared it a tie. Ed Feuz decided to pay both Wayman and Corey \$500 each. That unilateral move irked his partner Gage, who thought the two should split first and second place money. Jim Gage Sr., hesitant to ever gratuitously give away money, was upset with Feuz's generosity, but was comforted by the fact that this situation was a one-in-a-million shot that would never occur again.

Except, that it did occur again, a mere two months later.

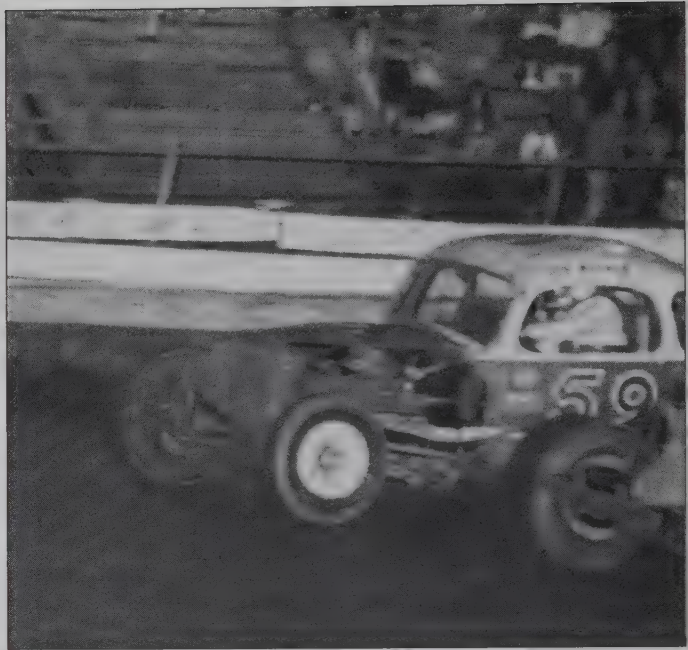
On August 8, 1970, Dave Lape in his Camaro-bodied #22 and Wayman, again in Betz's coupe, finished under a blanket. Despite Wayman's insistence that he had won, the scorers decided to call it another dead heat.

Gage was quick to react. This time the two winners would split the first- and second-place money, he demanded. The decision didn't sit well with the drivers, especially Wayman, who realized he was being ripped off because he had been paid the full \$500 back in June's dead heat. Fuez settled the row with a compromise. The event would be declared a tie, but the disputed difference in prize money would go to a winner-take-all, five-lap match race the following week between Wayman and Lape.

Meanwhile, track photographer Russ Bergh was busy in his dark room. In the closing laps of the Wayman/Lape nailbiter, Bergh had positioned himself to take a photo-finish shot just in case it was needed. On Sunday morning after the race, Bergh drove the short



Anita Farina (center) and Joan Betts (right) were among the officials trying to decide who won the Don Wayman/Pete Corey blanket finish. When Mike Valachovic (left) announced it was a tie, most everybody was happy. (Feuz Collection)



The late Russell S. Bergh (left), Fonda's track photographer from 1953 to 1973, shot this 1970 Wayman/Lape "tie." Line up a straight edge connecting the bottom of Wayman's front tires and you'll see that he beat Lape by a foot and a half.

(Feuz Collection)

distance from his Middleburg studio to Feuz's Esperance house and handed over the evidence. The photo showed that Wayman—not Lape—had won the race. Feuz told Bergh it was too late. The decision of a dead heat and match race had already been announced. He asked Bergh to destroy the negative and keep quiet about the photo. Feuz filed away the only print and has kept it hidden from public view for over 30 years, until the publication of this book.

Behind the scenes, Lape and Wayman were both annoyed because they considered the run-off degrading. During the ensuing week they cooked up their own counter-ruse. They secretly agreed to split the winner-take-all money, and to flip a coin to decide who would actually "win" the match race. Lape won the coin toss and Wayman agreed to lose on purpose.

The following Saturday night Lape and Wayman lined up for the match race. At the drop of the green, Lape shot into the lead and Wayman obediently fell in behind him. But on lap three, Lape developed trouble. The engine hood popped loose on his Camaro and covered his windshield. Lape slowed down, unable to see. Yet, Wayman continued in line, right behind him. The pair had slowed to about 30 miles an hour and Wayman—honoring his promise—still refused to pass for the lead. By now, the grandstand was roaring in laughter at the obvious farce.

Eventually, Lape came to a near dead stop and Wayman reluctantly went by to "victory." The two legends laughed hysterically when they reached the pits. "That race is kinda the story of my life," Lape still giggles today. "The fix was in, I couldn't lose, and somehow, somehow, I still lost."

The Cemetery That Never Was a Cemetery

Of all the quirks that comprise Fonda Speedway, there is none stranger than the old cemetery turn.

From 1868 when the Fonda half-mile was laid out, until the cemetery's removal in 1980, an ominous set of gravestones sat next to narrow turn three. The graveyard had always been believed to be the final resting place of the family for which the village is named; an official New York State historic marker even said so. Imagine the surprise when folks learned that there weren't any bodies under those gravestones.

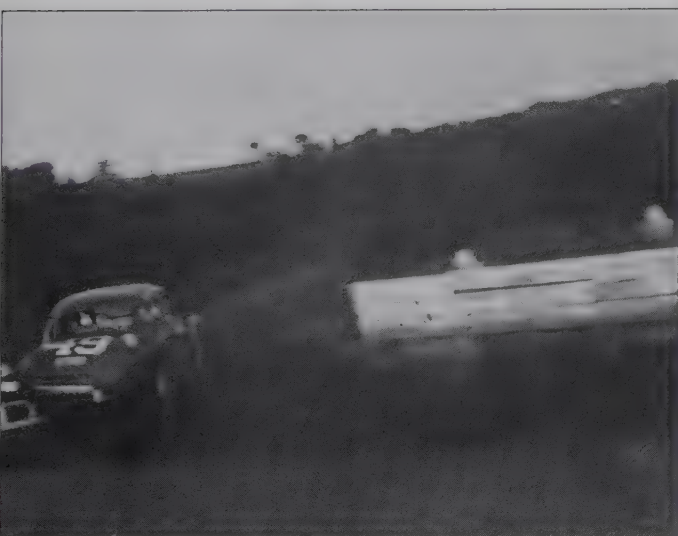
Here's the story.

The original Iroquois Indian name for Fonda was Caughnawaga, which means "above the rapids." In 1750 a prominent Dutch merchant named Douw Fonda settled in Caughnawaga. His homestead lay on land that is presently Fonda Speedway. Renowned Hollywood actors Henry, Peter, and Jane Fonda are direct descendants of Douw Fonda.

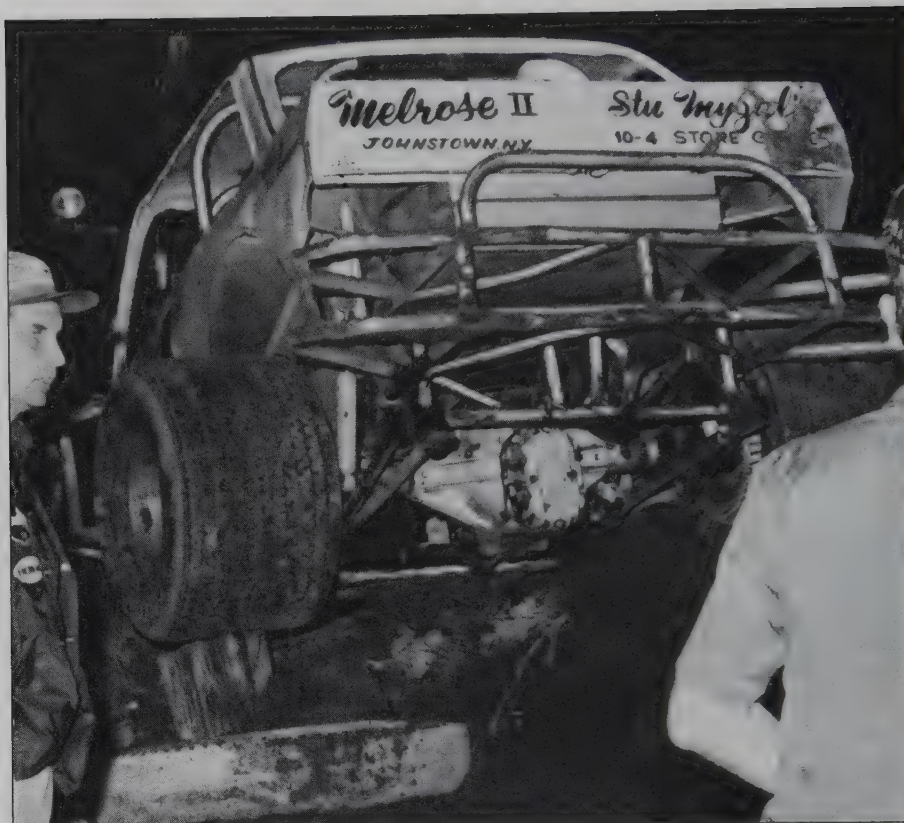
When Douw Fonda was scalped by Indians in 1815, residents renamed their hamlet after him because he had become a respected businessman and had donated land for erection of the local church. Eventually, Fonda's family was buried on their homestead's lands. All of their gravestones dated to the late 1700s and early 1800s.

When Ed Feuz converted the old fairgrounds track into a weekly speedway, the third-turn cemetery and its eight old gravestones posed a dilemma. Feuz decided to protect the graveyard with a guardrail of thick wooden planks. Not unlike the walls at Darlington, the wooden planks at Fonda were precariously close to the groove in the cemetery turn. Taking that turn at full speed, inches from the wall, is what separated the winners from the losers. For those racers

(Below, left) George Baumgartner (#49) does Fonda's version of whistlin' through the graveyard in this 1958 shot. (Feuz Collection)
(Below, right) Peppy Pepicelli (#23) is cemetery bound in this 1970 photo as Rich Zagata (#014) and Roger Griffith (#18) zip by. Note the roof wing on Peppy's car has been freshly removed by order of the track officials. (Gater News photo by Tony Farina)



Track officials literally had to step over gravestones to extract Ted Luft's #04 modified from the cemetery on August 12, 1978. (Gater News photo)



who got too close, the wooden barrier was decidedly unforgiving. Fonda's "graveyard turn" grew in lore throughout America.

Ron Compani became Fonda's promoter in 1980. His first priority was to remove the graveyard wall, for the safety of the drivers. This would require removing the cemetery behind it. Graveyard removal is governed by New York State Cemetery Law. It requires a court order, which Compani's attorney obtained, and excavation of the old burial ground was slated for September 22, 1980. The headstones were removed and backhoes carefully began their sensitive work. As they dug, they found dirt, dirt, and more dirt.

Not a single bone or casket was found. Nothing but dirt and rock. After a couple of days of meticulous digging and sifting, officials concluded that there were no remains whatsoever beneath the gravestones. The cemetery that had impaired Fonda's fast lane for decades wasn't really a cemetery at all. Worried about offending villagers' sensibilities, Compani fibbed to the local newspaper about finding remains. "That was Ronnie's way of whitewashing themselves," laughs famed racing photographer and historian John Grady. "They found nothing. They didn't even come up with a button."

So what happened to the bodies?

Fonda moves cemetery turn

Original settlers 'disturbed'

By JENNY WADSWORTH
Fultonville Reporter
Tel. 853-3082

FONDA — Some of the original settlers of the village of Fonda were moved from their resting place in the former Caughnawaga Cemetery next to the Fonda-Fultonville Speedway and buried in the village cemetery on Cemetery Street recently.

The village board of trustees, at its last meeting, passed a resolution donating land in the village cemetery so the ancestors could join other settlers who were moved from the speedway site in 1863.

When the fairgrounds were built in 1863, many families moved the bodies of their ancestors to the village cemetery.

However, several graves were left because the families did not have funds to move the graves and many of the families had moved away.

The graves, some more than 100 years old, were protected from the whizzing cars of the speedway by a wooden barricade. To race car drivers, the third turn on the track had been known as "cemetery turn."



SPEEDWAY EXCAVATION — A crew of workers was on hand last week to remove the bodies of some original settlers of the village of Fonda from the Caugh-

nawaga Cemetery, located on the Fonda Fairgrounds, and place them in the village cemetery. In the picture are, from left, Fonda

village historian Millard Crane and Fonda-Fultonville Speedway manager Ronald Compani. (Clark Blair photo)

Your guess is as good as any. But village historian Millard Crane privately theorized that the real cemetery was never in turn three in the first place. His take: The real graveyard was likely somewhere behind turn four, where the railroad is now located. And when the railroad track was first laid in 1836, workers probably moved the gravestones to what is now the turn-three area, but didn't bother to move the remains.

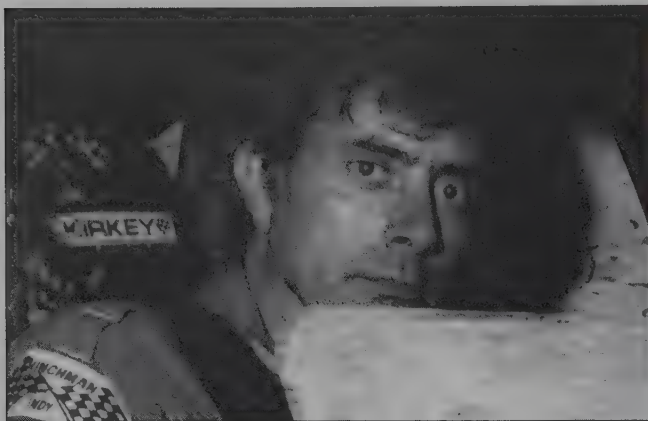
Whatever the explanation, the eight old burial stones uprooted in 1980 from turn three were encased in a vault by local mortician Allen Jackson and interred in the village cemetery on the northerly hillside overlooking Fonda Speedway. Atop the vault is a large granite burial marker, which was donated by the speedway.

Once the gravestones were removed, so was the old wooden guardrail. And for the 1981 season, turn three was widened to its present dimension.

This is how the *Amsterdam Recorder* newspaper reported the cemetery's removal in its September 24, 1980 edition.

About the Author: Lew Boyd

by Andy Fusco



Lew Boyd in the office. (Lucia Collection)

"Lew Boyd ain't hard to figure out.

Picture a guy with Hollywood good looks, a guy with a degree from America's most prestigious university, a guy with a Ward Cleaver-like perfect family—and then picture that guy as someone who would (almost) chuck it all for just one single Fonda feature win. That's Lew Boyd.

A native of Amsterdam, New York, Boyd became hooked on Fonda Speedway in his youth. He eventually settled in the Boston area and the four-hour hike to Fonda proved but a minor inconvenience. Boyd has made the weekly pilgrimage so many times that his street car has more miles than a Peterbilt.

Boyd's racing career began at age 17 back in 1962 at the old Westboro Speedway. Soon he was a charter member of the infamous Jewish Lightning Racing Team, along with Dick Berggren and Bruce Cohen. Bergie has gone on to become a world-famous broadcaster, and Cohen is now a multi-millionaire fashion magnate. Meanwhile, Boyd parlayed his Harvard education into a management

consulting company that is shut down tight on the weekends.

From Westboro, Boyd's driving prowess whistled its way through Hudson, Lebanon Valley, Lakeville, and speedways far and wide before arriving on the banks of the Mohawk.

Lew's first appearance at Fonda as a race driver occurred on May 19, 1973—except that he showed up that night with Berggren's #180 coach instead of his own #181. When the late Les Deuel, a DIRT Hall of Fame columnist, asked why Boyd was running Berggren's car, the ever irreverent Cohen jokingly explained, "Because Dick is off with Lew's wife for the weekend, so we figured borrowing his race car was a fair swap."

His best official Fonda finish was a third in the 1974 Spring Thing 100. After the dusty event, Boyd was taken to Johnstown Hospital to have dirt removed from his eyes, leading some to observe that he would probably be a better driver with his eyes closed.

Despite being pitched a shutout by "The Track of Champions," Lew has enjoyed an otherwise successful racing career. He's won 33 lifetime features—and counting. After 40 seasons, he still runs occasionally at Canaan, New Hampshire, fielding two Lape Champ cars for himself and a TEO Pro Car for teammates Danny Douville and Blake Shepard. All three mods are blue and yellow 181s in tribute to his boyhood idol, Pepper Eastman—who also never won at Fonda. Lew presently races under the pseudonym "Finch Fenton" for reasons that defy rational explanation.

Suffice it to say, Freud would love this case."

About the Other Author: Andy Fusco

by Lew Boyd

"It really started getting under my skin. You see, when I first came to race at Fonda, I was having a real hard time. And there was this reporter dude named Andy Fusco who kept needling me about why I wasn't faster.

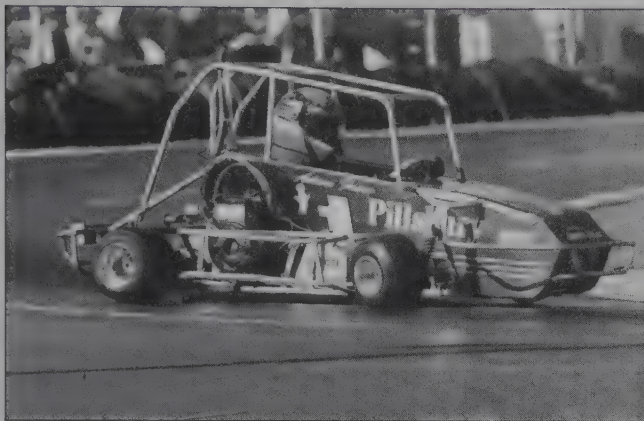
One night Dick Bennett offered me the ride in Bernie's Liquor Store #71. Over comes that Fusco and asks, "So who's gonna see how fast that car of yours can really go now?"

"You," I replied, figuring I could finally lay one on him. 1973 was a wild time at Fonda—big fields, big motors, big crashes. I thought it would scare the wee-wee out of him. So, off he went in my modified—and didn't he just look great, almost qualifying the first time out. That really ticked me off.

Over time, I have come to understand Andy much better. Here is a guy with a zest for life—someone who is good at just about anything he does. After Hobart College and Albany Law School, it was off to Auburn where he started a law practice, highly successful since 1985. For 10 years he was also a judge in Auburn, and for years he has been very active in DIRT as General Counsel.

Fusco's "free" time is as crowded as his workday. Very much the family man, he is busily off skiing or golfing with Andrea and the kids, Jennifer and Adam. And, when that's done, he might be seen capturing a little personal time, studying the movement of freight trains or banging out a Beatles tune on his harmonica.

All this unending activity has failed to cut him off from racing, his passion since his childhood in Johnstown, just up the street from Fonda. He has been a monthly



Adam Fusco at speed in September 2001. (Carl Rice photo)

columnist for *Stock Car Racing Magazine* and now *Speedway Illustrated* for decades, and he has been "promoter on wheels," staging races at speedways hither and yon with his LAPCO partner, Dave Lape.

Andy does it all so well that I have given up on getting back at him for what he did to me at Fonda. Instead, I'm betting on someone else to outdo him—his 13-year-old son Adam.

The kid can do anything—great grades, golf, baseball, football, basketball—you name it. And he has become so hot a microd/quarter midget driver that this winter he has a ride in the indoor races at Niagara Falls. As I write this, I've just learned that Adam broke his arm skiing. Still very much in pain, he persuaded the doctor to put on the minimum-size cast to allow him flexibility of movement so he can race next Saturday. After all, he is running second in points.

Is this kid gonna be a Fonda hot shot or what?"

Pseudonyms

It all started at Victoria.

We're talking about fake names, counterfeit identities that Fonda drivers assumed whenever they ran outlaw shows, in order to avoid the wrath of NASCAR.

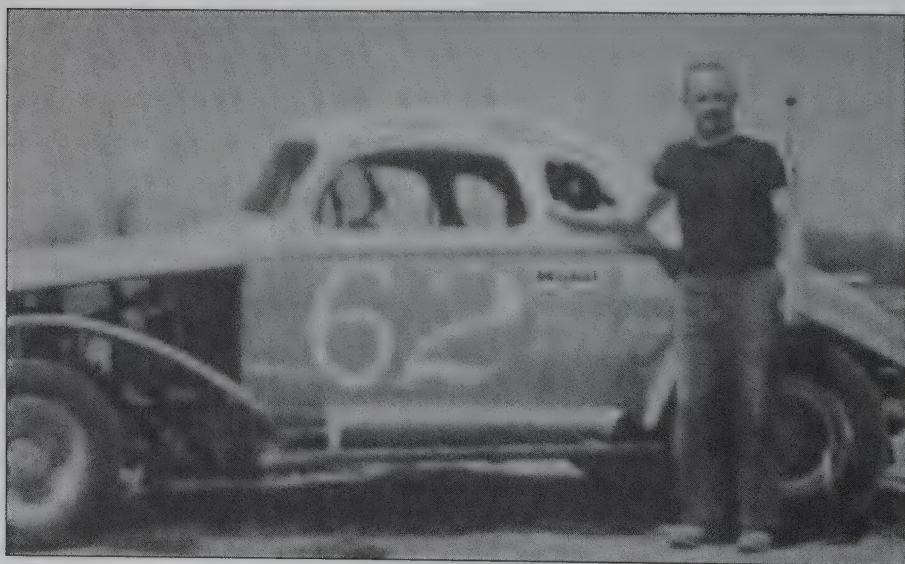
Back in the 1950s and '60s, NASCAR rules prohibited its members from competing in non-sanctioned races. Breaches were harshly punished with fines and/or loss of points. NASCAR pretty much exiled its very first superstar, Red Byron, over violations of the rule. Lee Petty was effectively stripped of the 1950 Winston Cup (then called Grand National) Championship because he ran a non-NASCAR race.

The Victoria Speedway on Route 20 in Duanesberg opened in 1960 and didn't receive a NASCAR sanction from Bob Sall until the following season. Thus, the many Fonda drivers who competed there in '60 did so under pseudonyms, in order to prevent detection by Daytona Beach. And when Lebanon Valley began its rich monthly opens in 1961, Fonda drivers flocked there for the big purses. But you would have never had known it by looking at the odd names on the entry list.

Many of the names were thinly veiled. Lou Lazzaro used Pete Bianco, his crew chief. Howie Westervelt was Cliff Wright, his car owner. Jeep Herbert sometimes was John D'Amico, a crewman. Jerry Townley was Jay Tee, a rap-like use of his initials. Some drivers enhanced the ruse with a phony hometown as well. Bill Wimble was supposedly Bud Smith of Glens Falls. Don Wayman was George Wayne of Gloversville. And Paul Marshall was Dick Lasky of Albany.

Humor motivated some selections. Burly Kenny Shoemaker had a pair of descriptive pseudonyms: Duke Bryant and Yogi Bear.

Jerry (Jay Tee) Townley poses with the Pop Wilcox #62 at a 1965 Lebanon Valley Open. Note the painted-over name on the roof and the different style of the painted "6" in the car number. Jerry and Pop used enamel paint so they could wash it off with a gas rag after the race. (Rick Parry Collection)



Jokester Jeep Herbert was the king of pun-motivated monikers, using Pete Moss, Flex Hose, and Bob Alou. The latter was a brilliant send-up of Ricky Ricardo's Cuban theme song on the No. 1-rated TV show in its day, "I Love Lucy." The late Lee Millington picked Jim Jones, innocent at the time, eerie in retrospect.

To further escape discovery some drivers even disguised their cars. When running outlaw for Frank Trinkhaus, Herbert would whitewash the #62 and "renumber" it "X." Townley and Pop Wilcox changed their #32 to #62. Cliff Parker's car owner Wally Pettengill had two different bodies for the same car, coach #114 for Fonda and a coupe for Lebanon.

Alas, some drivers declined to join in the highjinx. "I talked it over with my wife," recalls Irv Taylor. "It's my name and I oughta be proud enough to use it, we decided. Of course, it also ended up being my name on the (fine) check to NASCAR, because I got penalized a bunch of times," he laughs.

Ironically, the fake name trick usually worked and many Fonda drivers other than Taylor were spared penalties. Today, of course, with the media attention that modified racing receives, such a fraud would be impossible. And could you see trying to explain your phony identity to your corporate sponsor?

The Track Record

If there's one mark that's made to be broken, it's Fonda's one-lap track record. As certain as sunrise, race cars get faster and faster year after year.

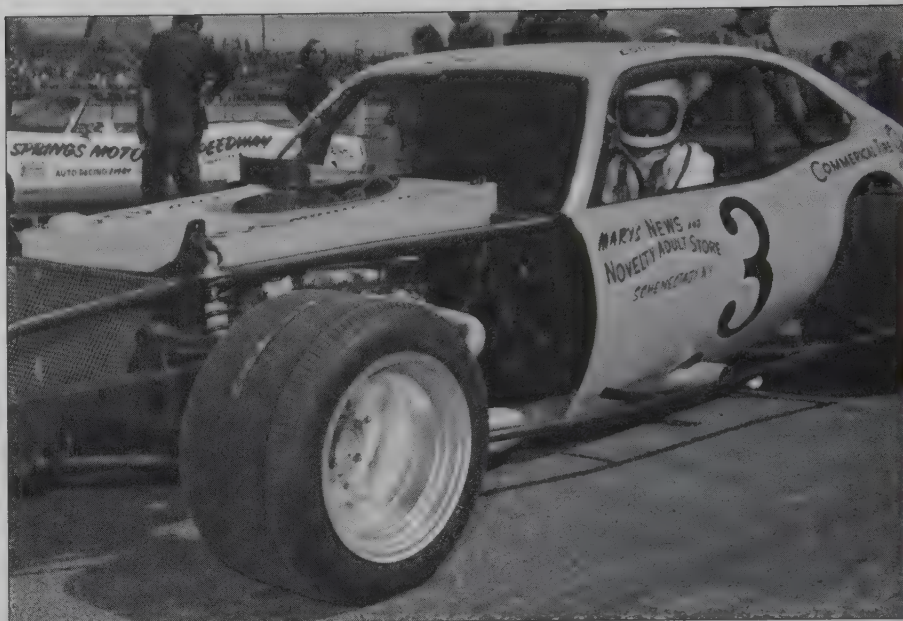
It is difficult to comprehend that Tim McCreadie's current Fonda record of 19.800 seconds (set July 18, 2001) is eight seconds quicker than Fonda Speedway's first "official" mark of 27.8 seconds (set by Pete Corey August 21, 1954). And surely McCreadie's mark will be eclipsed as well.



Tim McCreadie holds the current Fonda track record with a 19.800-second qualifying run for the 2001 Fonda Syracuse qualifier. McCreadie steered this John Finch-owned #56 to break the previous track record held by Pat Ward, the man McCreadie replaced in Finch's logging cockpit. (Clancy Miller photo)

Eddie Pieniazek drove this Jim Marx #3 Pinto to the 23.082-second lap that finally broke Shoemaker's alleged 23.11 run. (Grady photo)

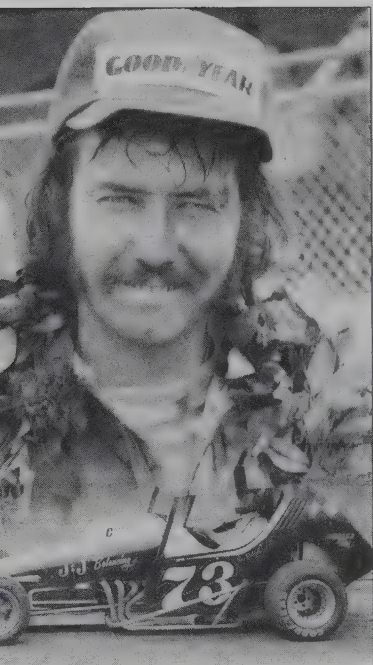
Gary Balough was the first driver to crack Fonda's 23-second barrier with a 22.994 clocking during a qualifying heat for the July 4, 1974 100-lapper. He drove this Grant King-built Gremlin #73 to the record, but he also qualified a coach that night. The race was stopped by rain after seven laps and Balough returned five days later to capture the win in the King car. He also won Fonda's Columbus Day 100 lapper later in the year. (DIRT Motorsports photo)

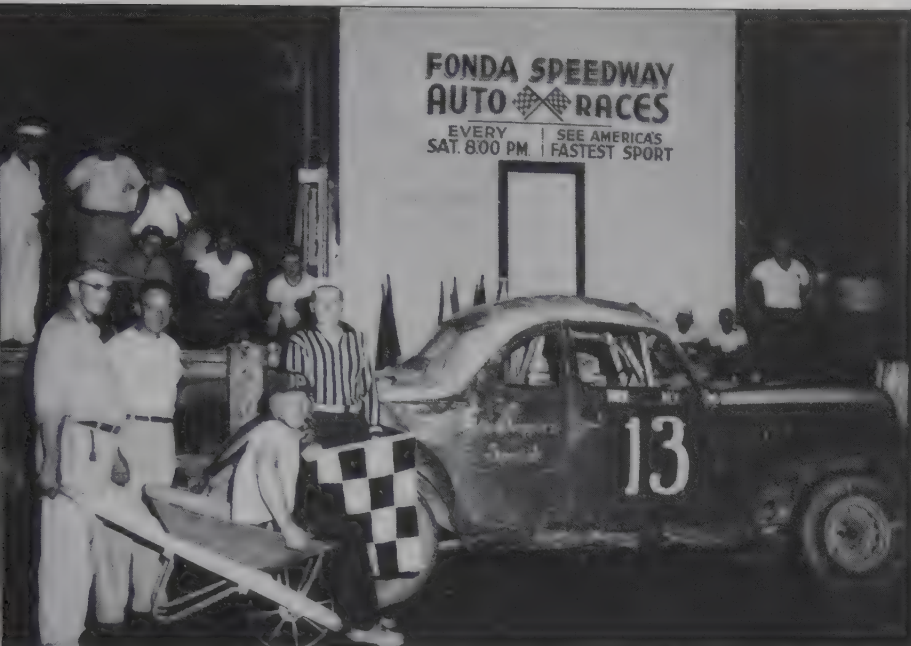


For many years, Fonda's track record was a source of debate. During the late-1960s, publicists and announcers repeatedly accorded the honor to Ken Shoemaker with a reputed 1965 clocking of 23.11. Trouble was, nobody could confirm the exact date he did it or in which car it was done. Moreover, the alleged 23.11 was about one second faster than cars were going at Fonda in 1965. Nonetheless, the more often the 23.11 number was repeated, the more entrenched it became. Such is always the case with urban legends.

The late Ron Compani, track manager in the '60s and promoter in the '70s always considered the 23.11 a sham. He believed that it was the result of an honest mistake, a bastardization of a real record—24.11—which Shoe had set in 1963. He even tried to tout an August 31, 1968 23.31-second clocking by Lou Lazzaro as the "official" record. But that didn't fly, 23.31 being "slower" than the accepted 23.11. It wasn't until Ed Pieniazek turned in a 23.082 on June 22, 1974 that Ken Shoemaker's phantom mark was finally put to rest.

Shoe did set some authentic Fonda records. He was the first guy to break both the 25-second and the 24-second barriers. He accomplished the former with a 24.73 on May 26, 1962 and the latter on August 15, 1964. Other barrier breakers included Pete Corey who was the first to dip below 27 seconds in 1955; Tom Kotary, who got under 26 in 1961; Gary Balough, who was the first to break 23 seconds in 1974; Dave Lape who erased the 22-second standard in 1977; Jack Johnson, who smashed 21 in 1984; and Pat Ward, who lowered the bar below 20 seconds in 2000.





But there are two Fonda track records that will never be broken. One is Red Knoblauch's mark for being pushed around Fonda in a wheelbarrow, set in 1955 with his friends Dave Talmadge and Pete Slovik, who bet Knoblauch a ride if he ever won a race. Knoblauch cashed in the wager by winning a heat race on July 16, 1955. And the other unbreakable standard is "Daytona Dave" Ball's record for running around Fonda naked. With his shortcomings on public display, Ballie streaked into the record books in 1974. We've always wanted to ask his wife Kathy whether Dave passed post-race inspection.

Rene Charland: A Champ and a Scamp

(Editor's Note: Massachusetts native Rene Charland is a pillar in Fonda Speedway history. But he came to "The Track of Champions" by a circuitous route. After conquering the obscure dirt bullrings of his home state, Vermont, and New Hampshire early in his career, Charland took his act on the road as a member of the famed "Eastern Bandits." The Bandits were a confederation of New Englanders like Red Foote, Ed Flemke, and Pete Hamilton who traveled up and down the East Coast as a group, racing as many nights a week as humanly possible, descending upon any track that was open, and appropriating the lion's share of the purse money from the locals. As a Bandit, Rene raced nearly 100 times a season. This prolific grind made him an annual lock for the NASCAR

(Above, left) Dave Talmadge (left) and long-time Fonda official Pete Slovik (second from left) bet their buddy Red Knoblauch (seated) a wheelbarrow ride if he ever won a race. Knoblauch won a heat race in his #13 on July 16, 1955 and Talmadge and Slovik are shown keeping their promise. That's starter Chet Hames in the striped shirt.

(Above, right) "Daytona Dave" Ball completes a record naked lap at Fonda in 1974. (Lape Collection)



The Champ and his ever-present cigar. (Feuz Collection)

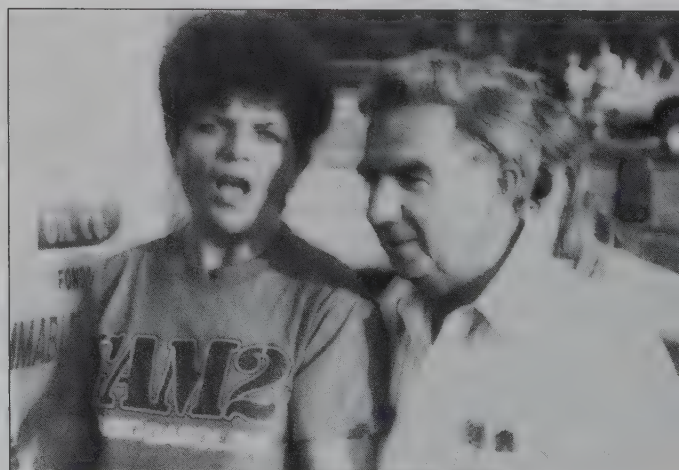
(Below, left) When it came to practical jokes—like barrel stuffing—Rene was usually the perpetrator. But sometimes he was the foil. (Gater News photo by Ron DeYulio) (Below, right) Goose season is open. No butt is squeeze-proof as long as Rene is within arm's length. (Miller photo)

National Sportsman Point Championship four years running 1962–65, and earned him the lifelong nickname “The Champ.” Point chasing occasionally brought Rene to Fonda. His first win there in 1964 at age 36 was as a quasi-invader. But he fell in love with the place, became a regular, and eventually moved permanently to the Fonda area. Rene’s 18 trips to Fonda’s victory lane place him 15th on the track’s all-time feature win list. And after retirement as a driver, car owner Charland fielded competitive rides for Nick and Don Ronca. But Rene Charland was more than a successful racer; he was the court jester, a prankster extraordinaire. We asked our friend Bruce Cohen, a Charland confidante who inducted “The Champ” into the New England Auto Racing (NEAR) Hall of Fame, to contribute the following piece chronicling Fonda’s Clown Prince.)

“Rene Charland, in addition to his awesome driving prowess, was the consummate practical joker. Neither friend nor foe was shown any mercy. For years, women were prohibited from the pits at Fonda; once they were admitted, it was Charland “Goose Season” from April through October. At any given moment, you could expect Rene to swipe Fonda’s pace car for a couple of hot laps, or to ignite a firecracker behind an unsuspecting victim, or to deftly throw a rubber snake at an official with reptile-phobia.

And sometimes the snake wasn’t rubber. Once Rene put a garter snake in a shoe box. As the cars lined up to race, Rene walked up the staging grid, one car at a time, stopping with his box at each of drivers he was about to run against. “Do you like snakes?” he asked each driver, opening the box and showing off his pet in order to shake the strapped-in competition. Finally, he reached Pete Corey.

“Do you like snakes, Pete?” taunted Rene.



Modifieds had rear-view mirrors back then, and Corey had been watching Rene's ploy all along. Suddenly, Pete reached into the box, grabbed the snake, popped off its head between his thumb and forefinger, and threw the dead animal on the ground.

"Yeah, Rene. I just love snakes," Corey answered.

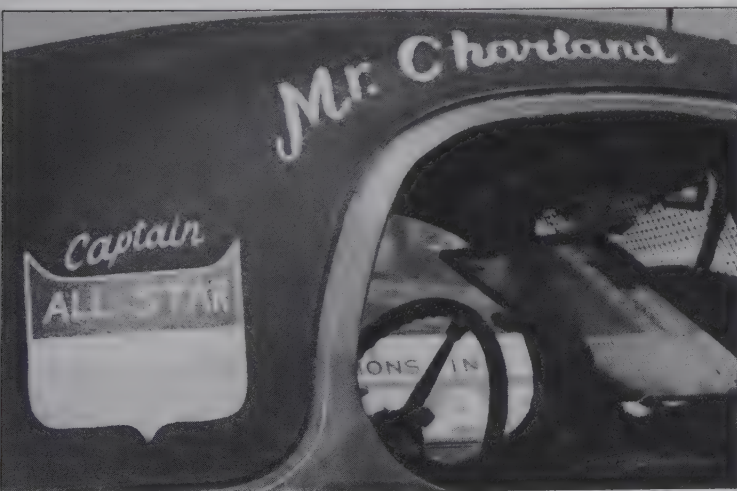
Rene's most famous Fonda car was the Fred Rosner-built, Dick Czepiel-owned, and John Lopardo-wrenched #888. It had a black vinyl roof, considered fashionable in the late '60s. But Rene had an ulterior motive. He was the master of jumping restarts in turn three. The mound on the infield there, obscured all but his car's entirely dark top. The black roof blended into the night sky, making his recurrent restart cheating difficult to detect. Rene's defense: "Hey, I was running against superstars like Corey, The Shoe, Louie, and Billy Wimble. I had to do something."

After three straight wins by the #888 in 1967, Fonda chief steward Ralph Outekirk caught onto Charland's chicanery, and ordered Charland to paint the numbers 888 on the roof. Outekirk's excuse: it was for scoring purposes. The following week, Rene made it four straight—his roof still entirely black. Outekirk charged into Rene's pit space yelling, "Dammit Rene, I told you to paint numbers on that roof." With a twinkle in his eye and a chew on his ever-present cigar, Charland retorted, "I did what you told me to Ralph. Look over here." Sure enough, Rene had hired a sign painter to paint "888" in black gloss enamel on the black vinyl roof. Now Outekirk was really steaming. "But Ralph, you never told me what color to use," Rene offered.

The following week the car had white roof numbers. And Rene won again, passing Bill Wimble on the last lap, a hundred yards from the finish. Rene's take: "Bill Wimble just committed Hari Kari, and Ralph Outekirk is about to join him."

(Below, left) Captain Charland (Gater News photo by Bob Hunter)

(Below, right) "Hey kid, wanna buy a program?" the Champ asks Jim Gage Jr. in this 1975 shot. (Gater News Collection)



Maynard Forrette: The Cyclone

Word is that Rene Charland first dubbed Maynard Forrette "The Cyclone" way back when the two Frenchmen were still racing in New England. The Champ's label was right on. Forrette was not only gusty on the track, but edgy, energetic—almost bionic—on terra firma as well.

In the mid-'60s the Cyclone began to blow West, initially at the 100-lap opens at Lebanon on Sunday nights and then to Fonda. A first Fonda win on June 3, 1967 and then the season's Sportsman Championship aboard the storied Reardon Garage #03 coach surely played a role in Forrette's decision to actually move to Fonda. So, too, did the instant attraction he felt for a comely young trophy girl named Marilyn "Queen" Buanno, sister to David and future manager of the Buanno Transportation Co.

The '70s started with a bang when in 1971 the Cyclone swept away two features, eight heats, and the Fonda track championship in the Rourke Brothers' potent but basic and unadorned #99 Chevy coupe. After some disappointing years with master owner Russ Betz and then in his own rather motley #006, the Cyclone and the Queen decided to get with the times and update in a big way. Significant Others by this time, the two saved up and purchased a Grant King Gremlin in 1978. Numbered #78M, it was the first of a series of "Queen's Machines" that has lasted 25 years and still goes strong.

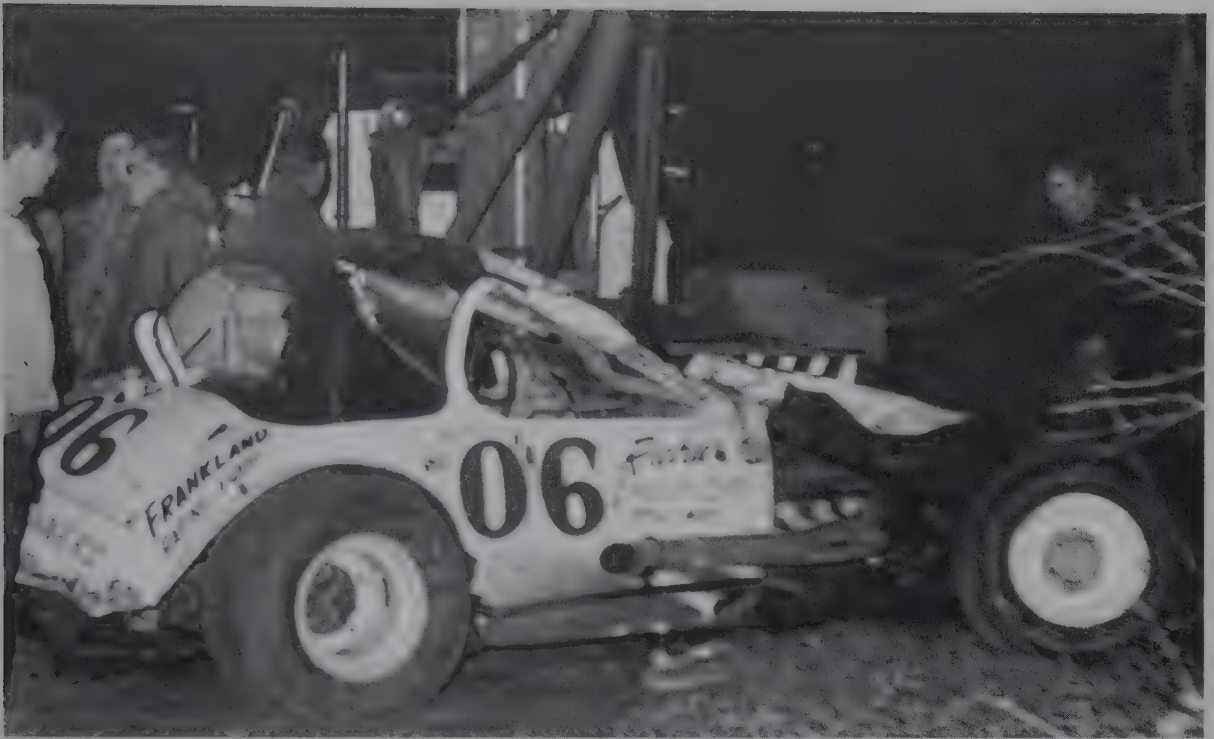
A non-stop workaholic who seldom sleeps more than five hours a day, the Cyclone has accumulated nine features at Fonda. The last came in July of 1980 at

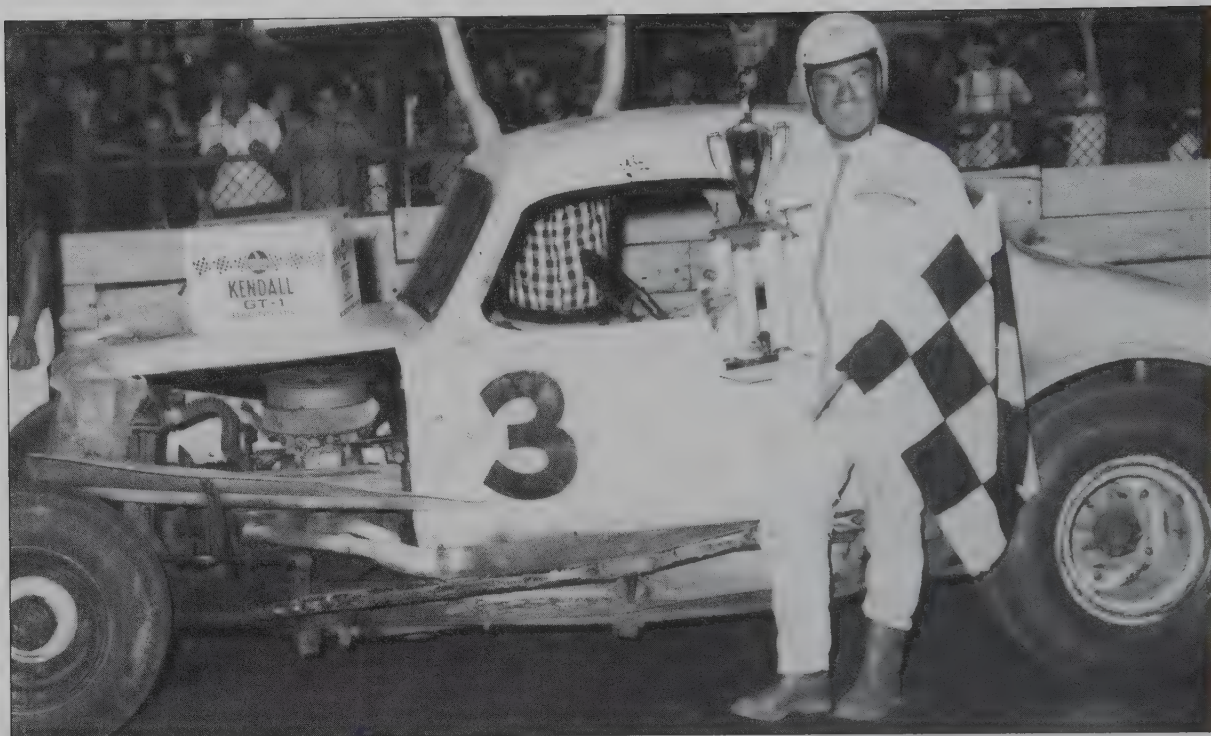
which time the team left due to continuing disagreements with Fonda management. They have run Canandaigua, Canada, and Lebanon Valley. Incredibly, at 65 years of age Forrette is still up front both at the Valley and at Syracuse.

Thinking back on it all, Marilyn Buanno becomes reflective. "It has been an amazing time. He works 12 hours a day, does all his own motor stuff, does the driving, and is always ready to travel. I just don't know where he gets the energy. You know, when we first got that Grant King car we numbered it #78M for the year. The M stood for three things: Maynard, Marilyn, and Miserable. 'Maynard' because sometimes he is sensational behind the wheel; 'Marilyn' because sometimes I have made the right decision about what to do with the car; and 'Miserable'—well, you know racing. Yeah, we've had some of each M, but overall it has been a real gas."

Maynard Forrette was known for hanging with Rene Charland—his mentor and antagonist—in the early days. One of Rene's #888s became Maynard's #06, and Maynard preceded Rene in the Rourke #99. Forrette destroyed both cars in flips, the #06 in 1970 (top right) and the #99 in 1972 (bottom right). Ironically, the cage collapsed in both mishaps, but Forrette escaped serious injury.

(both photos courtesy of Gater News)





Rene Charland puts George Pendergast's #3 in victory lane at Fonda on July 30, 1966. (Feuz Collection)

Rene has the last laugh on Seymour the Clown. (Gater News Collection)



One night after Fonda warm-ups, Charland's good buddy Maynard Forrette pulled his #006 into the pit area with a skipping motor. Maynard and his crew got out their timing light and other needed tools to try to sort out their problem. Maynard was on the left front side of the car, revving up the engine with the carburetor linkage.

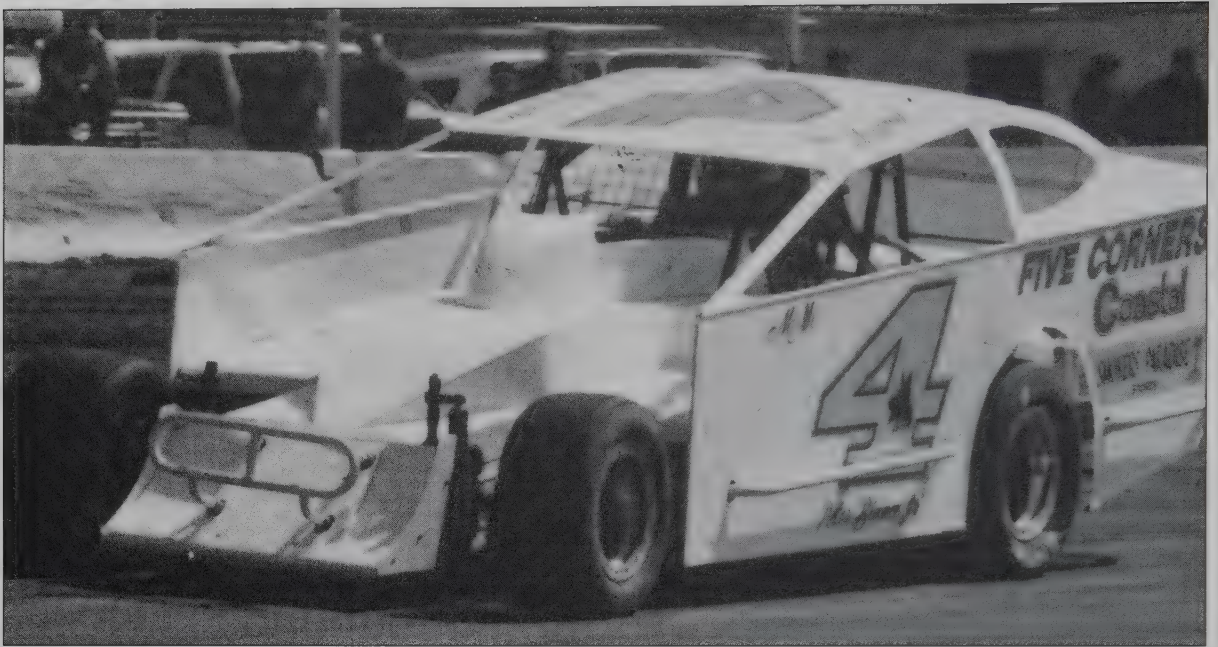
Unknown to him, Rene Charland was hiding with a small hammer near the right rear tire. As Forrette's motor would rev up, Charland would hammer out a steady beat on the nerf bar. As the motor speed dropped, Rene would stop hammering. This scenario went on for a good five minutes, attracting a large crowd of curious onlookers. Maynard finally looked up from his labors to see 30-odd people laughing hysterically—he knew he had been had. Forrette charged around to the back of the car, screaming "Rene, you miserable S.O.B., I'll kill you!" Charland took off like a rocket. To add insult to injury, that evening, Rene won the modified feature event in the Roerig Brothers #99, a ride that Forrette had just vacated.

But an incident that really sticks in my mind was at Anthony's Tavern, on Route 5 in Fonda, a popular watering hole for post-race libations. On a warm summer's evening, Anthony's would be packed with drivers, owners, pit crews, and fans re-running the just-completed races. On one memorable night, I was seated at a long table directly across from Rene Charland. To say the least, Charland was in top form, insulting everyone within sight. Two

seats away from me sat a lady of rather large proportions. Rene got started on her, and didn't stop—his insults were frequent and relentless. After a few moments, the woman got up and headed towards the bar. Upon her return, with a large pitcher of beer, she stood behind Rene and tapped him on the shoulder. She said, "Rene, you're not a champ, you're a chump!" And then she dumped the contents of the pitcher on him. For perhaps the only time in his career, a surprised, chagrined, and soaked Rene Charland was speechless."—*Bruce Cohen*.

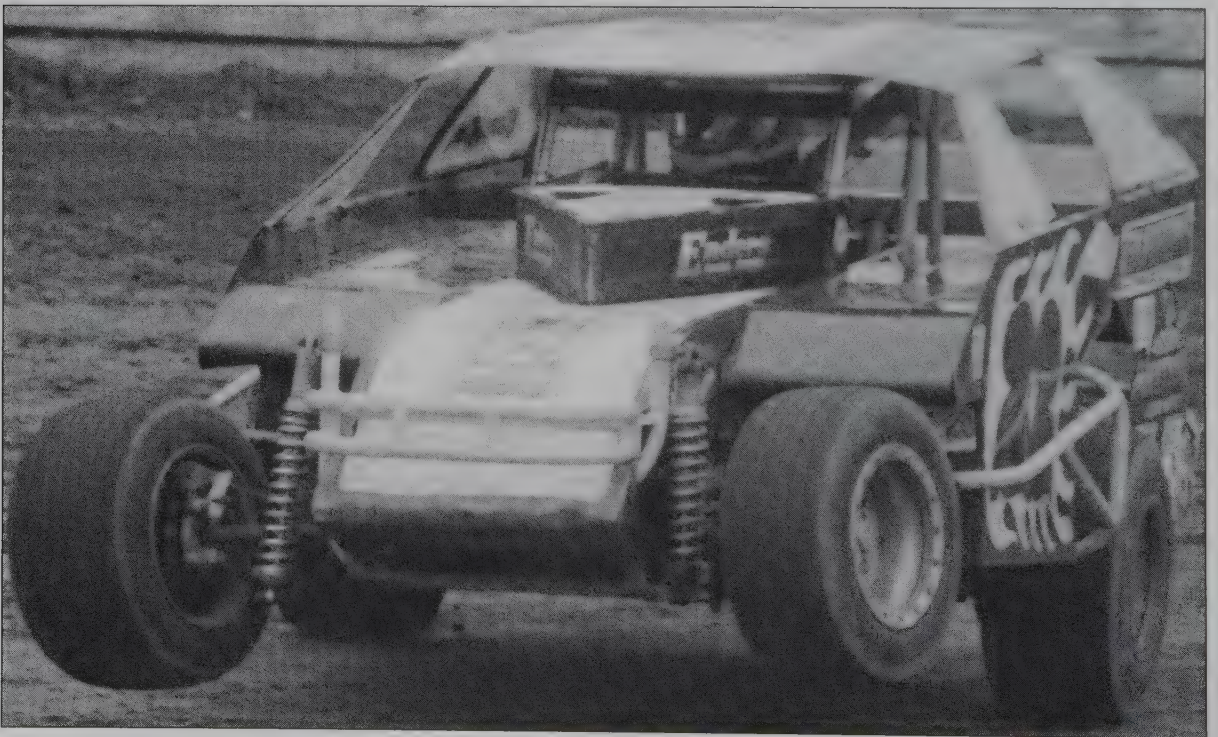
Charland in victory lane with the Roerig's #99 in 1974. Or is it Groucho? (Gater News Collection)





The door panel of Lou Lazzaro's last car, shown above in April, 2000, was a rolling museum, carrying mention of daughter Melissa ("Mi Mi"); his life-long sidekick (Peter "Junior" Bianco), and a silhouette of his deceased German shephard ("Blackie") within the number. (Dan Lazzaro Collection)

Hammer down and flying: Dave Lape throttles Fred Burrow's #22 through turns one and two at the "The Track of Champions." (Lape Collection)



Lifetimes of Dedication:

The Lazzaro/Lape Years

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LOU LAZZARO AND DAVE LAPE witnessed it all. Fonda's Glory Years, its hard times, resurgence—and every point in between. Their visages stand out in that small circle of personalities who link Fonda's past to its present.

Lazzaro hailed from Utica, while Lape is from Canajoharie, nearby communities right along the canal and the Thruway to the west of the track. Both balding and heavy set, they even looked a little alike; and over all the years they were tight friends. There, however, is where the likeness stops. The fact is, a generation lay in the scant 12-year difference in their ages. Born in 1935, Lazzaro embodied for his entire life the imposed simplicity of the post-Depression years and the sobering concerns of this country as it faced World War II. Lape, however, born in 1947, grew up in a period of such unbridled optimism and growth that he looked to the future with far greater hope and expectation.

Louie

Pete Lazzaro Sr. had a tough go of it raising his family of six kids in East Utica in the '30s and '40s. The task was all the harder in that the construction worker had a crippled right hand from World War I. Lucky for him, his son Lou was not only athletic, but strong as a bull. One day while the two of them worked together on a major dig, the trench collapsed and Pete Sr. was buried. The bulky Lou used all his grit and got his Dad out just in time.

Louie was a terrific baseball player in his youth. "He was a very patient long-ball hitter," recalls lifelong sidekick Pete "Junior" Bianco. "He could hit a home run nearly every time." Already losing his hair in his teens, Lazzaro's baseball buddies called him Monk be-

cause of his rotund frame and balding pate. The nickname stuck for perpetuity.

Lazzaro might well have become a ball player, except that he became bitten by the motorhead bug. His father drove a hot Olds 88, so Louie got himself a low-rider Merc. Dad hung out at Vinnie Maugeri's Esso station on Bleecker Street. So Monk did likewise. In the early '50s, a quartet of Utica stock cars (each sharing the common numeral four: #4, #41, #44, and #46) called Maugeri's home. Lazzaro followed the boys to Bennett's Field Speedway one day. Cliff Kotary was god and Lou Lazzaro was hooked. "Louie was so shy. He started coming around the garage, then the pits, but he never said much," recalls Junior. "Then one day in 1952 at the old Columbia Speedway (on Route 28 south of Utica) a guy driving Stanley Zajack's #109 flipped and got shook up. Louie said, 'Let me drive that thing. He went out and won the heat.'"

Lou and Junior then appropriated Maugeri's #46, a low-buck six-cylinder '38 Plymouth, for the limited class at tracks like Brewerton, Sharon Springs, Brookfield, and Columbia. Lazzaro was hardly a quick study, winning but one limited feature in those formative seasons: a 1955 triumph at Brewerton. The lure of Fonda soon beckoned. On May 30, 1957, Louie and Junior borrowed the Maugeri-sponsored #4, usually piloted by Johnny Velleto, and headed east on the Thruway to "The Track of Champions." It was a Saturday night pilgrimage that would be re-enacted nearly a thousand times over the ensuing 43 years. While the results in Velleto's coupe were marginal, Lazzaro eventually showed enough promise to land a ride in the Dick Bennett-wrenched, Bernie's Liquor Store-sponsored #71. One time in '58, Lazzaro managed to roll the #71 twice in the same evening, both times on Fonda's homestretch. The second one was pretty intense and wiped out Chet Hames' flagstand in the process. For 1959, Mike Michaels handed Louie the keys to the potent #10-10. Twice in July he put Michaels' powder blue and white coupe into Fonda's top five. The signs were clear: Lou Lazzaro was emerging.

This is the earliest known racing shot of Lou Lazzaro. That's him in the white tee-shirt sitting on the roof of his #46 waiting in the sign-in line at Brookfield in 1954. Maugeri team cars #41 and #4 are just ahead. (Peter Lazzaro Collection)





Louie and Junior crewed Johnny Velletto's #4 before borrowing it for Lazzaro's Fonda driving debut on May 30, 1957. Shown left to right, Lazzaro holding John Velletto Jr., Johnny Velletto, Peter "Junior" Bianco, and Jan Manazzi. (Lazzaro Collection)

This car is the 1960 creation that first brought stardom to Lou Lazzaro. Louie's Gilbert Street house in Utica appears in the background. Loaded up for the trip to Fonda is a scene that would be repeated nearly a thousand times. (Dan Lazzaro Collection)



For Fonda's Opening Day in 1960, Louie and his cronies had a brand new racer, numbered 4 in the Maugeri tradition. Like all of the Team Maugeri cars, it was painted maroon and white (the colors of Utica's Proctor High School sports teams) and it had wide striping that looked like a backwards Nike swoosh. The color combo, stripe design, and number would stick with Lazzaro for life. The big guy

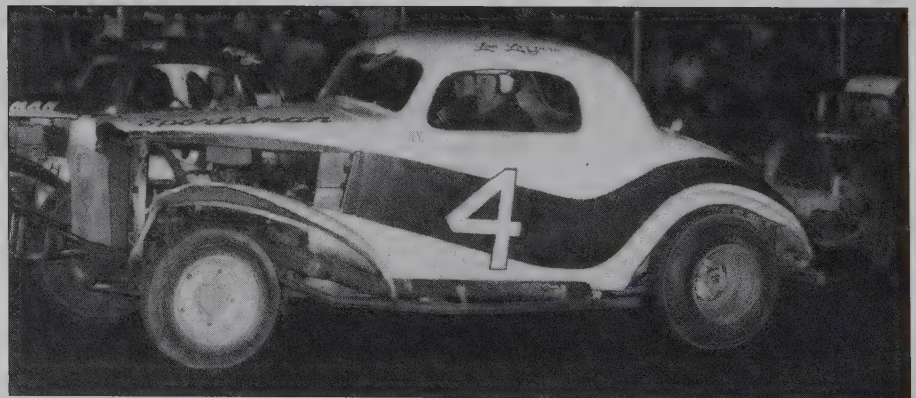
was fifth that first night and managed eight more top fives over the season, ending up a surprising fourth in Fonda points. That same year Lazzaro was able to snag his first sportsman/modified win at Victoria—an “outlaw” track. Because the team was forced to pay homage to the NASCAR restriction against running unsanctioned events, Victoria records show that the race was won by a “Pete Bianco,” driving a primer colored #1. Victoria would go NASCAR in 1961 and Louie would become its all-time most successful driver, using his own name and number from thence forward.

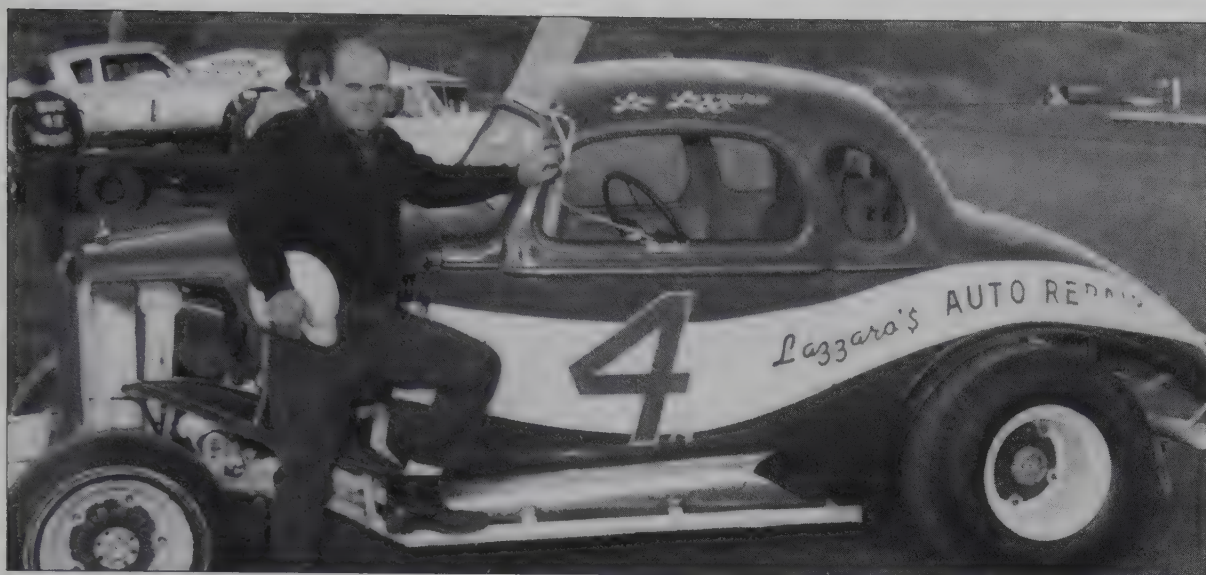
In the very early '60s, racing was becoming increasingly technical and somewhat pricey. Louie was working for Chicago Pneumatic, but he had a growing family to think about. He wanted to be a professional stock car driver. But he had to be careful—if the team was to compete with the big dogs, it would have to win regularly, or else he'd go broke and take his family down with him. The first victory at Fonda did not take long, coming the second week of 1961. Monk promptly quit his job and became—permanently—a full-time race car driver.

In today's money-conscious environment, it is hard to imagine that a family man would try to get by with essentially a weekend race car and no other source of income. The fact is that Louie just plain needed nothing more. He had simple wants and desires. Junior recalls him this way: “Louie was not a classy guy, really. He was perfectly comfortable driving around in an old junker. He didn't want to do much of anything. He was a good worker on the car once he got going, but he had to be push-started. He was the driver. That was his life. So he was happy living the way he did. He wanted no more.” To make the whole situation even more challenging, with very few exceptions along the years, Lazzaro never had a consistent, meaningful sponsorship or rides in other cars.

As it turned out, the triumphs did come regularly for a good while. His first double-digit win season was 1961, with three Fonda mains and seven more at Victoria. 1962 was even better: 10 Victoria

Late in his career, Lazzaro surprised fans by fielding white cars with maroon trim. But it was more of a throwback than a switch, as witnessed by this rare 1963 shot at Utica-Rome, where he was track champ. (Peter Lazzaro Collection)





features, four at Fonda, and one at Utica-Rome. He had been Victoria's point champ in '62 and Utica-Rome's in '63, but 1964 would produce the real plum: the Fonda track championship (along with a second Victoria crown). The Fonda title was no mean feat, as the veterans of The Glory Years like Danish, Wimble, Shoemaker, and Corey were still red hot. And relative newcomers like Jean Guy Chartrand and Jerry Townley were showing their colors. The 1965 season was another good one for the Monk, with him tying Kenny Shoemaker atop "The Track of Champions" win list that year.

Racing success is seldom linear, however, and the next few years were not nearly as satisfying for the Monk. And even when he did win, the increasing costs of racing were making it difficult to break even. The winds of change were blowing across the Fonda Fairgrounds. Some of the old guard retired, while others were leaving Fonda for perceived greener pastures at Lebanon Valley. New wavers like Rene Charland and Jerry Cook were bringing to Fonda race cars with the expensive advancements of asphalt racing. That meant everyone needed bigger motors and better equipment in a down time. Lazzaro and his comrades built a new coupe with a fuel-injected big block for '68 in order to keep up (injection was legal at Fonda from mid-1965 through 1969). Louie was Fonda's top driver in '68, but barely broke even in the process. He took out a loan from Beneficial Finance to get his family through the winter. Even for someone with his Spartan tastes, the going was getting tough. The Monk was seriously considering quitting.

Then came 1969.

That year Fonda amazed the racing world by unveiling its "Grand Feeling" purse increase, a doubling of the feature winner's prize

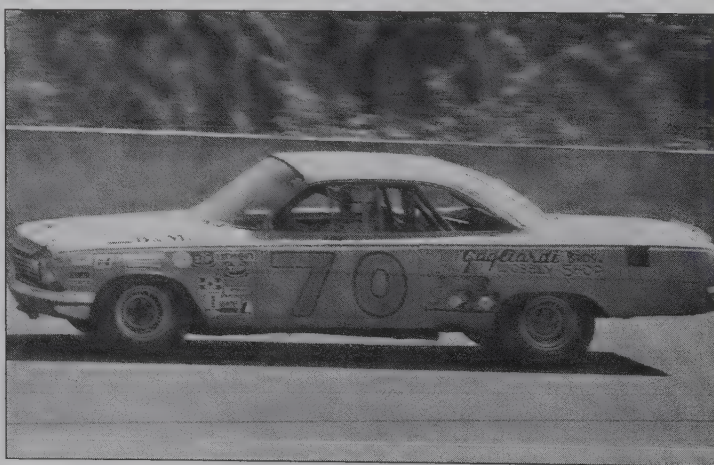
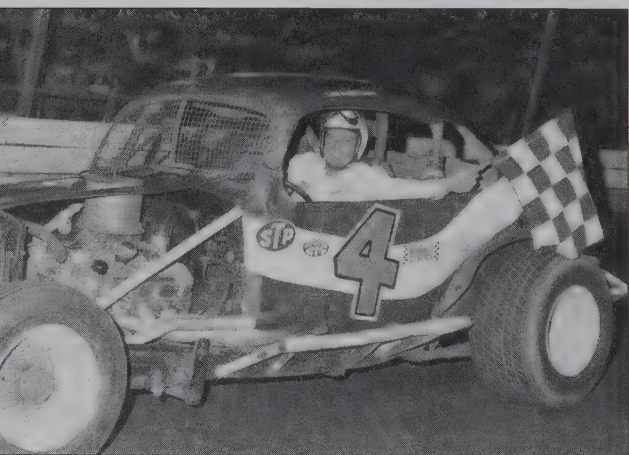
During the three seasons that Fonda ran modifieds and sportsmen together, Lou Lazzaro was the only driver to win races with each motor formula in a single year. In 1966, driving this '36 Chevy, Louie won one sportsman feature and two modified features. (Grady photo)

money from \$500 to \$1,000 weekly. It was the biggest weekly stock car payoff in America. "No way you can quit now, Louie," Junior implored. He and crewman Bob Glensky even dipped into their own pockets to outfit Lazzaro's car with new components.

The result? Well, let the record speak. Fonda ran 16 shows in 1969 and Lazzaro won 11, usually in a romp. That .688 single-season win percentage will probably never be beaten. Louie was equally dominant on Fridays and Sundays. At Utica-Rome he was seven for 13. At Albany-Saratoga he scored seven wins. The only other guy to win more than one feature there in 1969 was Richie Evans, with two. Moreover, Lazzaro was undefeated in the limited schedule offered at Monroe County. Alas, 1969 was Lazzaro's career year: He won the Fonda 200, the New Yorker 400 at Utica-Rome, the Fonda and Albany-Saratoga track championships, and nearly \$70,000 in prize money. He even finished for the first time in the top 10 of NASCAR's National Modified Points, without even trying. His 1969 numbers springboarded Louie into a ride at Daytona for the 1970 Speedweeks, where he finished an impressive ninth in the Permatex 300. Louie wasn't one to usually tow South for championship point events—with one hilarious exception which occurred in '69.

Lazzaro and company made a fall road trip to Virginia for the Martinsville 500. By now, Monk was getting a well-earned reputation for having some nasty appearing race cars. Early in his career, he had fielded some real head-turners, but later on he seemed to become convinced that the worse they looked, the better they ran. "I'm no fender and body man," he said in a 1971 interview. "I'm a driver." So he showed up at Martinsville with his gruesome coupe towed behind an equally awful Caddy street car. The pit gate attendant, who didn't know Lou Lazzaro from a hill of beans, took one look at Louie's contraption and refused him entry, saying, "Sorry mister, this race ain't for hobby junkers." Lazzaro was unsuccessfully pleading his case and on the verge of being sent packing when NASCAR's Pete

(Below, left) The Monk's bashed-up #4 winning at Fonda. This became such a recurrent sight in 1969 and 1970 that Fonda fans responded with lusty boos. (Feuz Collection)
(Below, right) Lou Lazzaro steered Gil Cramer's #70 to a very impressive ninth-place finish in the Daytona Permatex 300 on February 21, 1970. The '61 Pontiac had quite a history. It began life as Jack Smith's #47 Grand National, then was bought by Dave McCredy for Bill Wimble. Several drivers with Fonda ties drove it under Cramer's ownership. (Gator News photo by Bob Zellers)



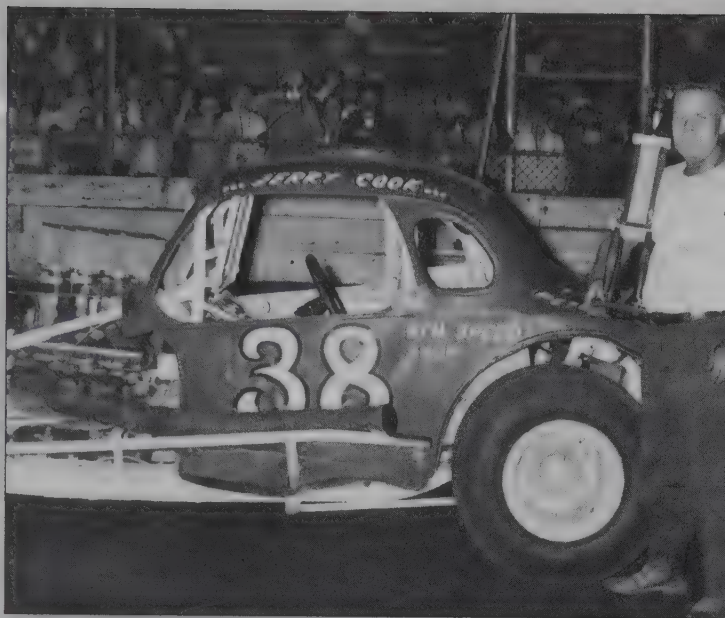
Cookie Monster

When NASCAR celebrated its Golden Anniversary five years ago, it commemorated the milestone by naming the top 50 NASCAR drivers of all time. Only four modified drivers made the grade: Richie Evans, Red Byron, Ray Hendrick, and Fonda's 1968 track champion Jerry Cook. Here's his story in his own words:

"I built my first modified when I was 13 years old, back in 1958. Cam Gagliardi was my driver and we raced Ransomville. In 1959 I built a car for Ken Meahl. It was number 38 and that became my number for the rest of my career. Kenny and I raced everywhere, including Fonda. I remember my first impression of Fonda: This is a tough place. It's where you go if you want to race against the best. In 1962 Kenny totaled two of my cars, one in a fiery crash at Richmond, and another in a fiery crash at Syracuse. That's when I decided if I gotta fix 'em, I might as well drive 'em. So, in 1963, at age 18, I started racing. I won my first main event that year at Utica-Rome.

"My best year at Fonda was 1966 when I won four features. I had a wild-looking car with a high-mounted Falcon body. It used to be a sharp-looking, three-window coupe, but Albany-Saratoga and Utica-Rome started to offer a late-model body bonus, so I took off the coupe and stuck on the Falcon. Money is money and it qualified for the bonuses."

"I had a little short block in the car. At Fonda, I was runnin' against all those big honkers. Plus, I was buyin' used tires off Bill Wimble's car and then going out and beatin' him with them. Dave McCredy would just shake his head and paw his foot into the ground. I felt a sense of accom-

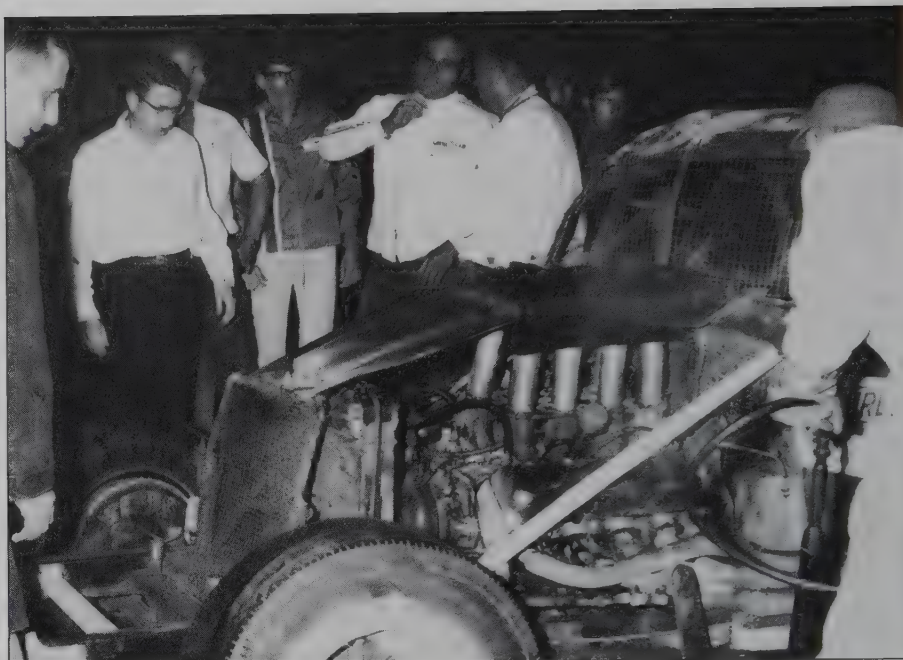


Cookie's final Fonda win on August 2, 1969. (Feuz Collection)

plishment to beat the best at Fonda, especially the way I did it. I figured out a unique way to run the track. I ran it like asphalt, on the bottom, keeping the car straight. When racing the corners I could look to the right, and there'd be somebody like Pete Corey, flat sideways with the nose of his car pointing toward the door of mine. When the track came in hard, I'd win. But when it was muddy I was petrified. I wouldn't even qualify."

Although Jerry Cook was winless in his final two seasons at Fonda—1971 and 1972—he continued the speedway's tradition as "The Track of Champions" by taking NASCAR's national modified point championship both years. Before calling it a career at the end of 1982, Cookie copped six NASCAR national point titles. He has served as a high-ranking NASCAR official since his retirement from racing. Presently, at age 58, he resides in Mooresville, North Carolina and serves as NASCAR's Competition Administrator, in charge of determining all rules and writing the rule-books for every NASCAR division.

This is a moment of backhanded significance in the history of Lou Lazzaro. He always fielded fairly nice-looking equipment until this 1968 flip at Utica-Rome. The body sustained heavy damage in the wreck and Louie didn't bother to fix it for five years. As a result, he became infamous for the nasty appearance of his stockers. (*Gater News* photo by Donald Steates)



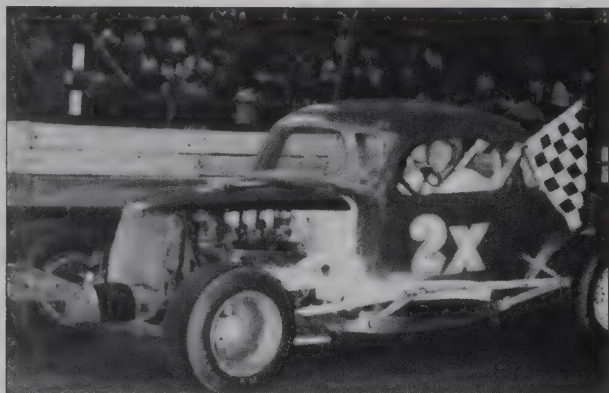
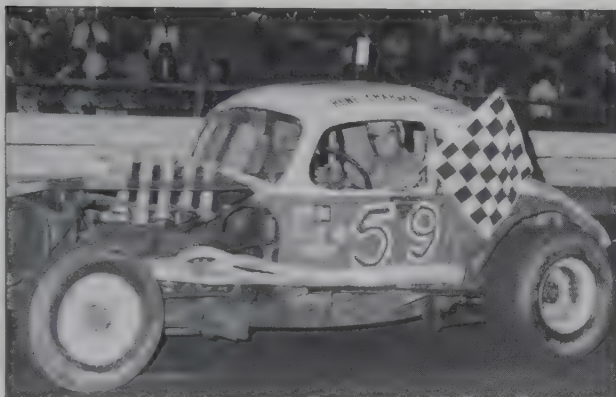
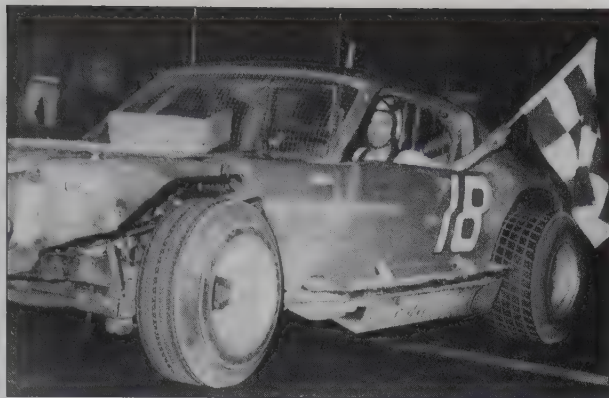
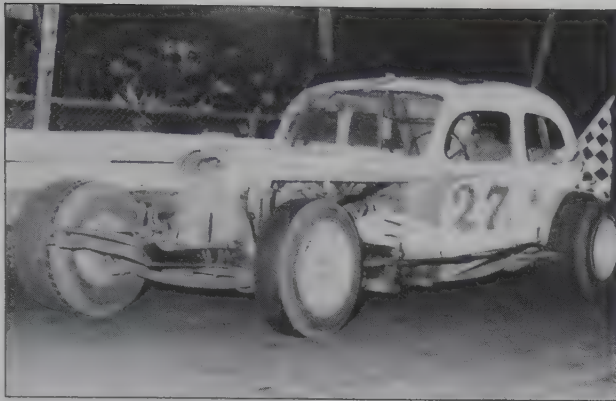
Keller came to the rescue. "Let 'em in," Keller told the gate man. "He's one of the most famous drivers in America."

Seldom during that glorious Fonda summer of '69 did Lazzaro miss a step. The weatherman beat him on May 17 and handed Dave Lape his first career win. On July 19, Louie guessed wrong on tires for the Mohawk Valley 100 and driver Jerry Pennock and owner Bill Fowler of the #27jr coach were the primary beneficiaries, earning their first-ever Fonda win. Utica's Bobby Adams had a Mustang mod that was nearly as fast as Lazzaro's, but it always broke. Jerry Cook won his final Fonda feature on August 2 by getting out front early and opening enough of a lead to keep Lazzaro from hunting him down. But the most memorable race of 1969—if not of all time at Fonda—occurred July 28th. Lazzaro had won eight of the track's first nine mains and certainly would have been nine for nine, but for the rain giving Lapey that one. In week 10, the Monk had the lead again but Shoemaker in Bob Judkins' #2x was right there. "I tried to get around Louie, but I couldn't get underneath him and I couldn't get around him. I figured I was going to settle for second," wrote the late Shoemaker in his memoir.

"Then, on the last lap, there was a lapped car in the middle of the straightaway. I went down to the inside, pinned Louie behind the lapped car, and beat him to the start/finish line by about a half-car length. It was the first time anybody had beaten him there in a long time. The crowd gave us a 10-minute ovation, standing up and clapping, which I understand is the longest in track history. I cherish all the newspaper clippings about that night that people had sent me. I

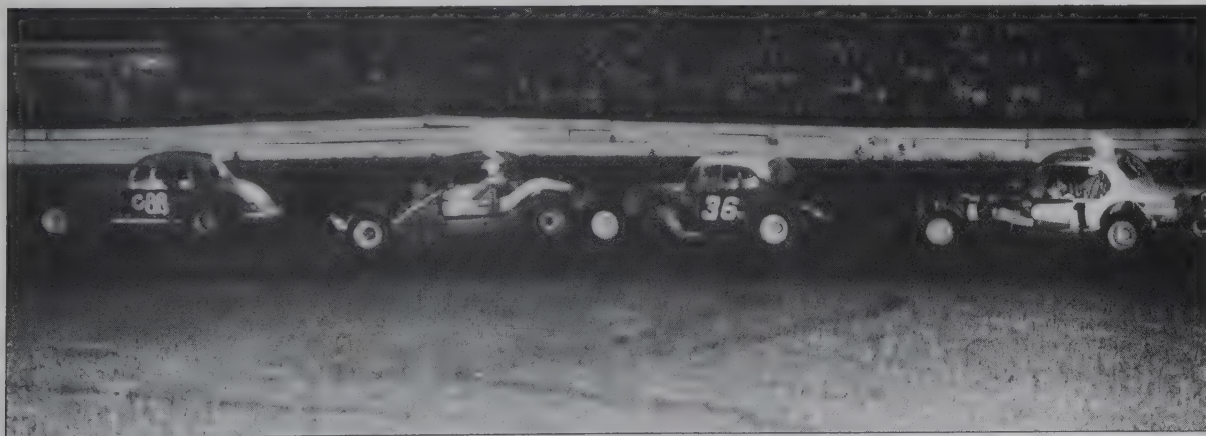
Peter Keller (*Gater News* photo by Bob Hunter)





Jerry Pennock (#27jr), Bobby Adams (#18), Rene Charland (#59), and Kenny Shoemaker (#2X) had fast mounts in 1969, but seldom proved equal to Lou Lazzaro. (Top left and right: Gater News, bottom left: Feuz Collection, bottom right: Grady photo)

From 1968 through 1971, if Lazzaro didn't crash or break, he'd likely win. In this shot from May 1, 1971, Louie was denied when Dave Buanno (#36) took him out. Also shown are Ray Sitterly (#C-88) and Irv Taylor (#1). (Gater News photo by Carl Rice)

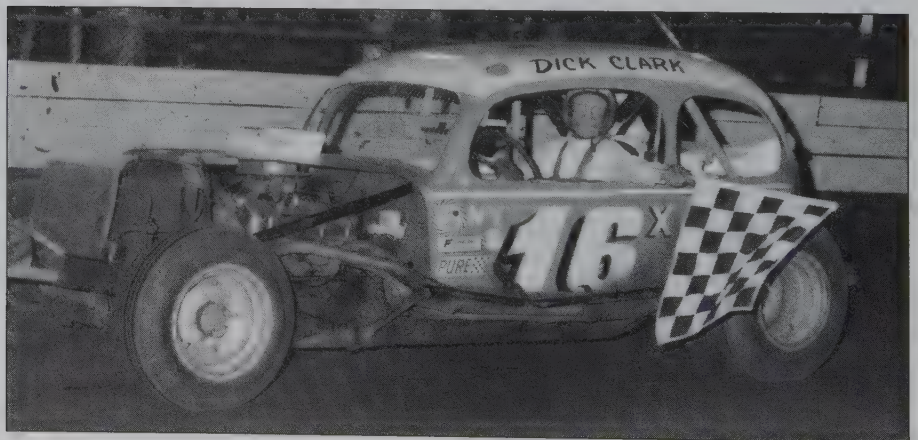


can remember hearing their applause like it was yesterday.” Indeed, the Fonda faithful, sick of seeing #4 win every week, had turned decidedly anti-Lazzaro. Though Louie was hot, Fonda was not. The karma of the times was bad, and, when things get tough, there is no easier scapegoat than a winner. So Louie began getting booed. Aggressively. Now the shy and socially awkward Utican had to deal with showers of cat-calls every time he went to victory lane. Even his family was exposed to relentless, often savage, verbal assault.

It was rough stuff. Just a year earlier, on July 17, 1968, it was Lazzaro getting a standing ovation when he lapped the best field ever assembled at Fonda in the All-Star League 100. Now, the same fans who had stood in respect of that remarkable feat, were hooting in anger. Isn't it interesting in this sport how disliked a driver can become by reaching the pinnacle of his craft? And make no mistake about it, the League was a pinnacle. Formed in 1967 and folded in 1975, the All-Star League was a mid-week tour of both dirt and asphalt tracks, and involved three-man teams from participating speedways. Fonda was a league member in 1967-68 and 1971-72. Driven by “The Track of Champions’” reputation, Fonda drivers always shined in League competition. Lou Lazzaro was the individual All-Star point champ in 1968 and 1971. Fonda was the League's team titleholder in both 1967 and 1968. Bill Wimble, Ernie Gahan, and Pete Corey comprised Fonda's 1967 All-Star squad. The 1968 championship team consisted of Louie, Ron Narducci, and Dick Clark.

Fonda fans' anti-Louie sentiment continued through 1970 and 1971, seasons in which he again dominated the track's win list. Things changed, however, in 1972. Hungry young lions like Jack Johnson and Harry Peek were coming of age, and Buzzie Reutimann would make his only trip to victory lane at Fonda in the July 4, 1972 All-Star 100. This was a reversal of Fonda's 1971 All-Star event, when Louie had bested Buzzie. But more importantly, it was an era of im-

Dick Clark was a member of Fonda's 1968 All-Star League championship team. (Feuz Collection)



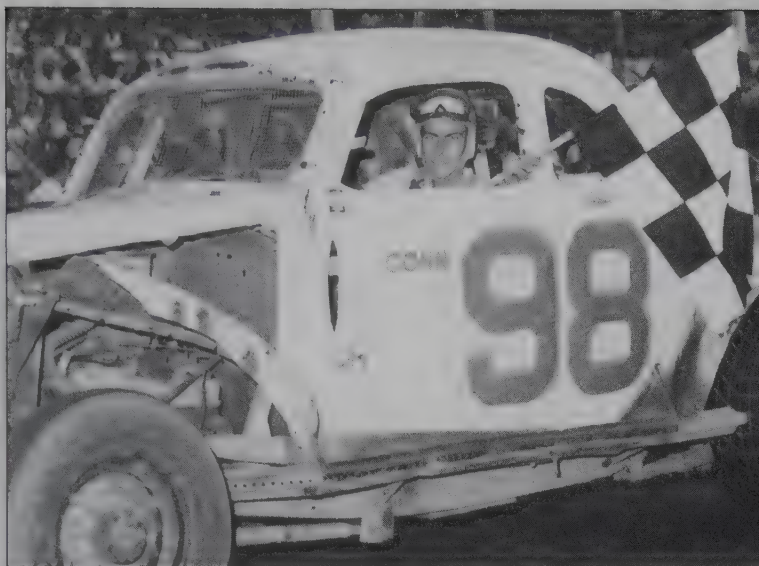
Ron Narducci: Top Wop

Connecticut's finest export to Fonda was Ron Narducci. The lanky good-looking guy, known as "Top Wop" by New England fans, was an obsessional local racer. He was clearly underfunded, but somehow at the end of the modified main he would be right up front with his pea-shooter 327 or 350 Sportsman.

Although a winner on the tar of New London, Norwood, etc., the East Haddam resident always preferred the dirt. He had learned the sport at Waterloo and Weedsport while stationed in the service in western New York. When he was discharged, his favorite place was Stafford on Friday nights. There he befriended Wayman, Corey, The Shoe, and Wimble—and they urged him back out West. "Going out there to Fonda was a big outing for us," Ron admits. "We had only a home-made trailer, one engine and two rounds of wheels." They went to some of the big-paying shows first and began to sneak up on Fonda. They cracked the top 10 with a ninth in the initial Fonda 200 in 1964.

Narducci says, "I loved Fonda. It was an elbows-up place. It was like Nazareth National. There were so many different turns, that you had to pick the part of the track you were going to set up for. The rest of the way around you just had to drive. When those All-Star guys would come into Fonda with their injected honkers, I would tell them, 'Never mind. This race will be over before you get comfortable with that fourth turn wall staring you in the face when you are coming through three!'"

It would turn out that Narducci became one of the five new winners in the unusual



Ron Narducci snags a heat win on July 16, 1966. (Feuz Collection)

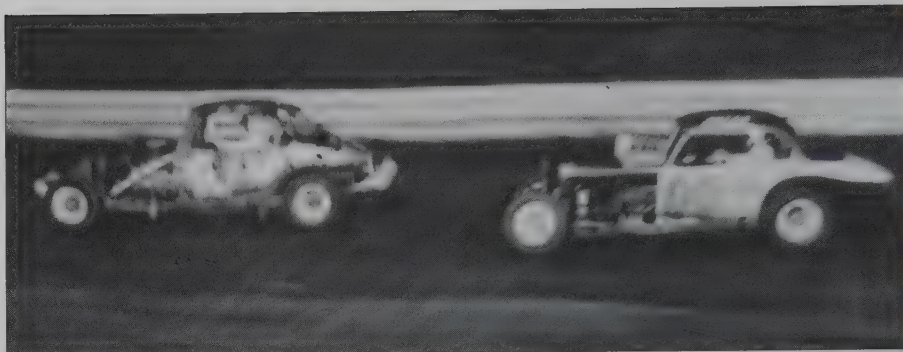
season of 1968, the others being Don Wayman, Eddie Pieniezak, Ray Sitterly, and Don MacTavish. He did it in style, outgunning Jerry Cook, Andy Romano, Sitterly, and Dick Clark. He won a trio of the 1970 25s and finished third in track points. He began to fade from racing in the mid-'70s after two seasons on the Rolling Wheels/Weedsport circuit.

Although Narducci was to build considerable acclaim with his strong performances in the All-Star League, there was never any pretense about him. His driving abilities, his low-buck approach, and his incredibly hard work explain his popularity. Many New Englanders remember a specific incident that sums him up. At Stafford the feature was interrupted by a serious wreck and the cars were stopped on the front stretch in front of the stands. When at last the ambulance returned, the cars were waved back into formation. All took off, save the white #98. Starter Red Labelle walked over and said "Ron, are you going to join us tonight, or what?"

Labelle had to talk loudly into that cockpit. Having worked all night preparing his car for the show, Top Wop was sound asleep.

Lazzaro successfully defended Fonda's honor by beating Buzzie Reutimann in the track's 1971 All-Star 100.

However, in the 1972 event, shown here, Buzzie (#00) hunted down the Monk and finally passed him for the win. (Gater News photo by Dick Tanner)



pending rule liberation that would allow more advanced chassis designs to compete at Fonda. In 1973 Dave Buanno unveiled a Tobias tube job and won with it on a regular Saturday night show. The flood gates were bursting and Louie was awash. It was one of the most dynamic times in the history of Fonda. But the Monk was not dynamic. He stuck to his seedy and decrepit-looking coupe, almost as a statement. In 1972 he scored only twice at Fonda; in 1973 and 1974 just once. The '74 win, on June 15, was over Eddie Pieniazek in Jimmy Marx's asphalt-influenced Pinto, Buanno in the Tobias car, and punky Bob Rees in a tubular unit of his own construction. By now the unpopular wins of the past were forgotten, and Louie's surprising victory in his aging relic was approvingly applauded.

Quite possibly the reason the Monk chose not to get with the program was that he was still stealing a win now and then on the road at places throughout the Northeast. But the high point was certainly his astounding win in the 1974 All-Star 300 at Islip, the tiny 1/5th-mile asphalt track on Long Island promoted by flamboyant motorsports entrepreneur, Larry Mendelsohn. In Junior's words "We towed down there with that old Caddy, right over the bridges of New York City. We'd run Fonda the night before and didn't even wash it. Things were a mess. We had two spare tires—one in the trunk and one roped to the front bumper of the race car. We changed the gears and the steering arm. That was it. Somehow Louie got up front in the 300, but then Eddie Flemke and Charlie Jarzombek got by him. Then Louie kinda sucked it in and went upstairs and around the both of them. Man, that old shit box going around that classy equipment! I was watching from the infield. All I had was a crescent wrench and a 9/16th. Afterwards, Flemke comes over and looks at the car. "I must be seeing things," he says. "God bless you, Louie."

The gypsies headed back up the New York Thruway \$5,000 richer. But they were no faster on the clay at Fonda. In fact, it became a threadbare time for the Monk. Increasingly reclusive after a couple of failed marriages, he just hung out at home with Blackie, his omnipresent German shepherd. He would run the three-track circuit, hoping not to crash or blow, and counting on collecting the mini-

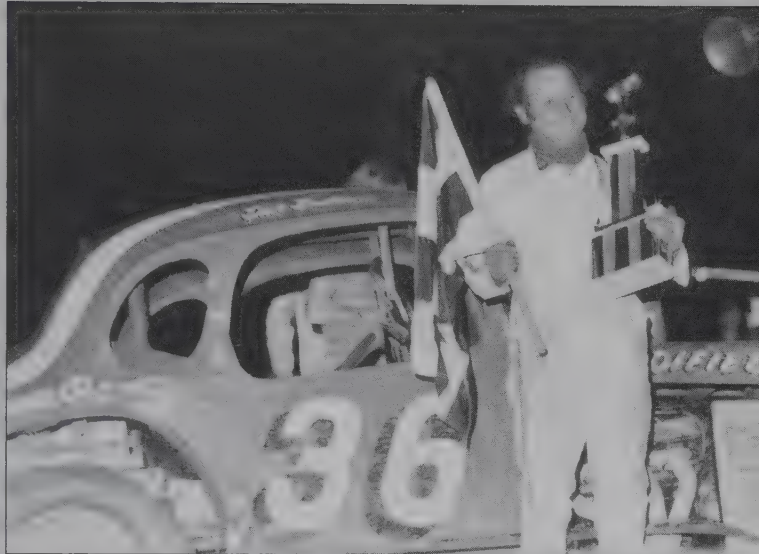
Buanno on Buanno: David's Story

"I used to go with my Dad and his brothers. I was 10 when Fonda opened. I couldn't believe the excitement. The cars sliding. I always wanted to do that. It was big deal and I knew those guys were really good. A lot of people went to the races back then and everybody liked it.

"When I came back from Okinawa in 1965, I wanted to race. My father was against it. My family was friends with the Companis. Ronnie was always trying to talk me out of driving, but I got a car from Harry Peek for \$2500 ready to go. Harry was honest about the car but I bought it anyway. Teddy Luft and I towed it down to Fonda. I was excited about things 'cause I didn't know what to expect. To be with those guys when they went full bore, what an experience! When they went by, the dirt and the stones stung my face. All we had was a bandana. I couldn't see anything.

"I got a little better and I picked up a Bruce Dostal car. One night Jack Johnson got between me and a lapped car by the starter's box and we got into the boards. My car was demolished and he was out of commission, too. We never talked about it. Then, at a Syracuse display I saw Tobias' tube chassis. It seemed like the way to go to me—very inexpensive. It was \$450. I thought I was going to have to run an out-law track, but then Fonda let them in at the last minute. I liked the car, but it wasn't easy. One day the Shoe brought his crew up and changed everything on the car around. That's the night I won with it.

"A little while later I was at Fonda without the car and I saw Joey Lawrence with the #16 Whistlin' Wilson drove. I knew

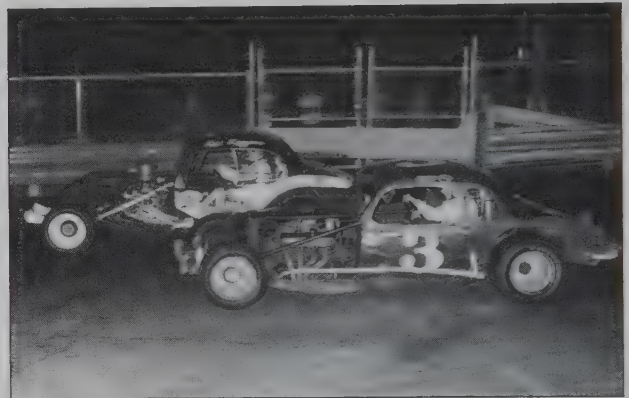
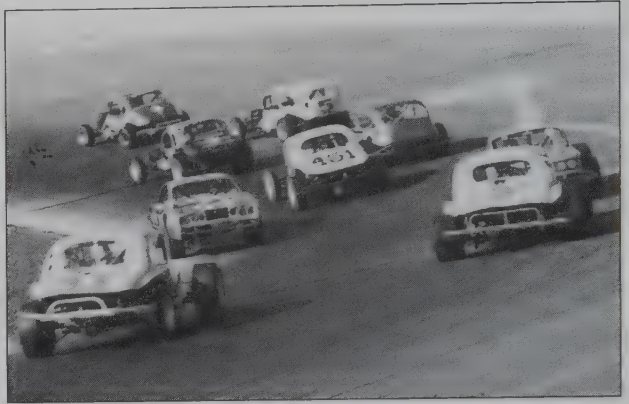
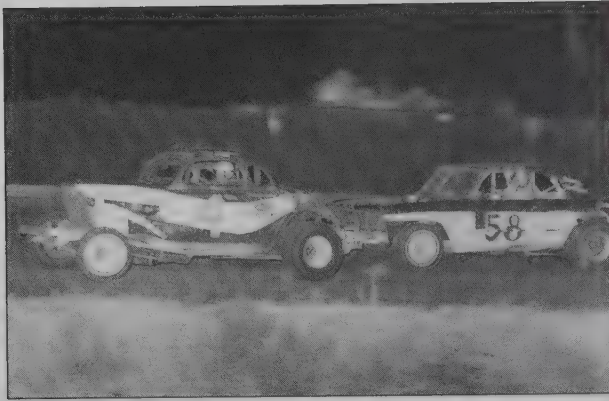


Dave's first win at Fonda aboard "Toby's Tubes." (Biittig Collection)

Lawrence was a funny guy 'cause I had seen him at Middletown walking around with a welded-up leash and collar—no dog. I went to say hello and it turned out that his driver—Denny Soltis, I believe—did not show up. We ran good that night until we broke. After that we ran some at Fonda and Rolling Wheels. We won a couple of races.

"By 1975 my stuff was getting old. One night I blew the motor and Roland Johnson, a real nice guy, came up to me and said, "David, you need a lot of new equipment." I thought about that quite a bit. I wasn't ready to leave racing, but I just didn't have the money. The costs were just going up and up.

"When I left, I stayed away for a long time. I had to. I started doing other things like flying helicopters instead."



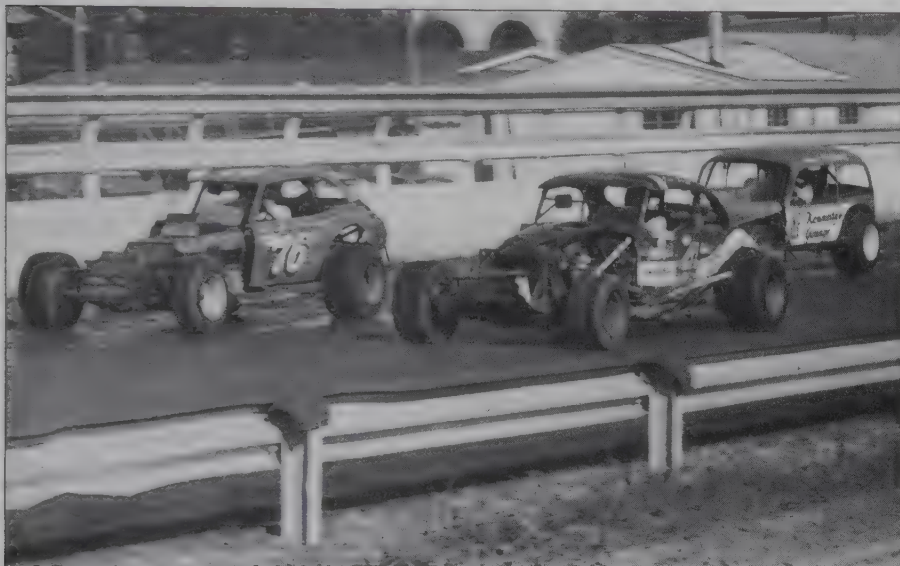
Lou Lazzaro became renowned for his uncanny ability to win on the road, whether on dirt or asphalt. Top left: he beats Merv Treichler to win the Monroe County Fair Championship in 1965. (*Gater News* photo by Bob Hunter) Top right: he leads Ted Renshaw (#5), Dutch Hoag (#7), Rodger Treichler (#74), John Colbort (#451), Al Clark (#48), Lee Osborne (#18), Chuck Boos (#9), and Bobby Merz (#33) to win a 1968 biggie at Fulton. (*Gater News* photo by Norm Patrick) Bottom left: he's mobbed by well-wishers after copping the 1971 Southern Tier 100 at Five Mile Point. (*Gater News* photo by Bob Hunter) Bottom right: he drives around Fred DeSarro on the last lap to win the 1972 All-Star 100 at Riverside Park Speedway in Agawam, Massachusetts. (*Gater* photo by John P. Avery)

mum \$300 or so he could pull in by taking the green flags. It was not a pretty sight. The coupe looked like a bag of walnuts held together with baling wire and, at 41 years old, its driver—bald and bulky—looked prematurely old. “He was a stubborn old Italian,” comments his daughter, Melissa. “He didn’t listen to anybody but himself. If he didn’t do it his way, he did it no way. He was very old-fashioned.” So old-fashioned that the rail birds were beginning to think that he was all done.

The Phoenix-like pattern of the late '60s would be repeated, however, when Louie managed to score a new Walt Schwinning tube chassis in 1976. Debuting it mid-season, he swept 14 Northeastern features in the second half of the year, including six of the last eight shows at Fonda. He again propelled himself to the top of the annual win heap above Jack Johnson, Jimmy Winks, one-time winner Jack

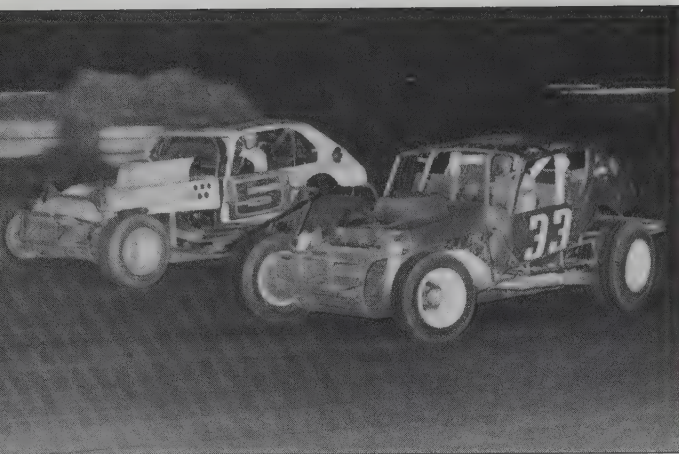
Halloran, and season champion, Harry Peek. The Monk provided serious late-season driving lessons to Fonda newcomers, including Ken Hanson, Tom Rullison, Wally Warburton, Dexter Dorr, Big John Richmond, Gibby Fountain, and Harry Chase.

The 1977 and 1978 seasons were much the same. Dave Lape would be hot, too—so hot, in fact, that the duo won every '77 Fonda feature except one by Jumpin' Jack Johnson and one by Jimmy Horton. In '78, they shut out everyone except the fast-rising C.D. Coville and veteran Jack "The Judge" Farquhar. Louie, thought to be over the hill just a season or two before, was now at the peak of his driving prowess. Sheila



(Left) The mid-70s were threadbare times for The Monk, as evidenced by this incredible photo from 1973's Super DIRT Week at Syracuse. That's Louie, in a car that appears to be held together by baling wire, going wheel-to-wheel with the pristine mounts of Gerald Chamberlain (#76) and Mert Hulbert (#8). (Gater News photo)
(Below) Louie and his ever-loyal "Blackie" pose with the Schwinning-chassied mod that again made Lazzaro a star. (Danny Lazzaro collection)





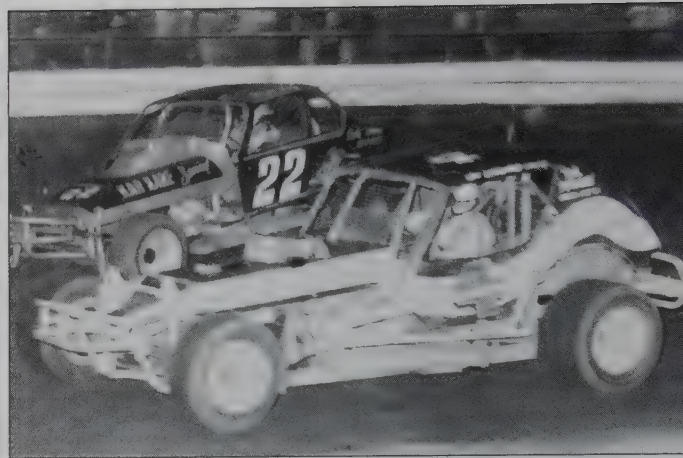
(Left) Jack Halloran (#5) races popular '70s contender Al Castrucci (#33) at Fonda in 1978.

Two years earlier Halloran became the luckiest feature winner in Fonda history by leading Lazzaro and Jack Johnson on lap 18 of a 35-lap feature, when it started to rain. That was a 1/2-lap past halfway, so the race was considered complete. Had it rained 10 seconds earlier they would have completed the race the following week and surely either Louie or Jack would have won. (*Gater*

News photo by Ron DeYulio)

(Right) In 1977 and 1978

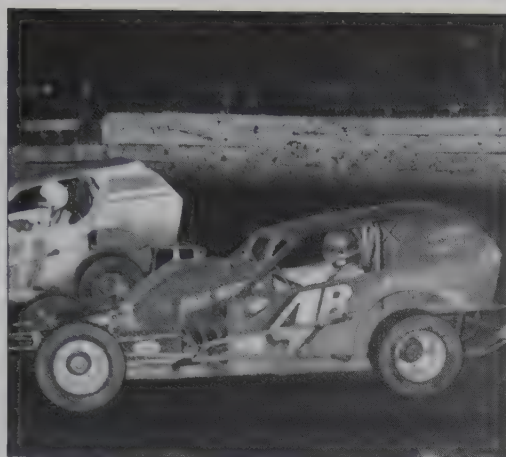
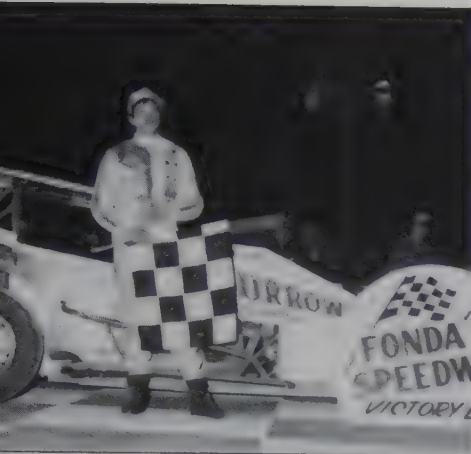
"The Louie and David Show" dominated "The Track of Champions." Lazzaro (#4) and Lape (#22) accounted for 32 of the 42 features run those two seasons. In this 1978 shot, Monk held the upper hand, earning his fourth (and final) Fonda track championship. (*Gater* News photo by Dave Lukowski)



Palmer, Louie's partner in those years, observed, "It was no effort for him to drive. He didn't have to work that hard, he was so good. He never had to hit anyone and he'd never get riled up. C.D. and others would drive up to him on restarts to try to psyche him out. He'd just look over at them like they were nuts." Adds Junior Bianco, "He was so great, but he never knew it. He had such a sheltered life. His family didn't know it either. Nobody. Certainly not the people in Utica."

But the racers in the Utica area certainly knew it. Lou Lazzaro's influence there was huge. Just ask Ben Novak, Randy Glenski, or Tommy Wilson. And were he still alive you could even ask Richie Evans of nearby Rome. The resurrection of Lazzaro inspired Novak, Glenski, and Wilson to take up the sport and all would visit Fonda's victory lane in 1983. Louie's nephew Novak shocked the world by running away and hiding to win the Fonda feature the third week of '83. The sophomore sensation then backed it up with a twin-25 triumph on August 13th of that year, just to prove the first one was no fluke. Those were the only Fonda victories in a career that was quite short, until Novak came out of retirement in 2001 to run Sportsman at Utica-Rome with Louie's 1984 chassis. While at Fonda, Ben drove a red and white #4B in tribute to his Uncle Lou. Wilson enjoyed a 1983 year that reminded old-timers of Bob Fiske's 1955 season. He got Fred Burrow's #B13 hooked early and copped the only three Fonda features of his career during a magical four-week spring streak. Glenski, a hot dog in Fonda's old late-model class, won at Fonda twice during a three-week period in July, in only his second year in the mods. Glenski came back to "The Track of Champions" in 1993 to score a third Fonda modified triumph.

The Evans tale is one of the greatest in Lazzaro lore. Richie was at Rolling Wheels during a rare, for Evans, dirt track foray. A wreck, halfway through the main, collected Evans and the race was red-flagged. Realizing his friend Louie had not one decent tire on his car, Richie ran over and offered the four tires off his own wrecked racer.



Junior changed them in a flash and Louie restarted at the back. Upstairs he went, calmly and deliberately powering by Will Cagle for the win on the last lap. Much like the Ed Flemke incident at Islip, Evans walked away, shaking his head in disbelief.

By now, Glenn Donnelly's DIRT organization had become the new ruling body in modified racing. Lazzaro was one of DIRT's superstars, winning the Northeast 200 at Weedsport in 1977. But, one of Louie's favorite DIRT Tour wins—again accomplished by a smooth, but relentless high-side charge—came at the 1978 Eastern States 200 at Middletown. Louie's son Peter proudly recalls, "It was something how Dad started 36th and passed Kevin Collins on the outside at the very end, weaving because of low fuel. He finally ran out on the cool-down lap and had to be pushed to victory lane." But that career high point was followed by a gradual downturn. Still just a race driver in the summer and an occasional hunter in the fall, the Monk struggled to keep up with accelerating technology and expense. For a time he was hired by R.C. Putman and drove for a percentage. The arrangement, like a couple of others before it, was short-lived. Lazzaro was able to snatch his 100th Fonda win on August 2, 1980, but in 1981 he went winless for the first time in 20 years at the speedway.

In 1984 the deterioration furthered as the 49-year-old Italian, who had so loved to cook, developed serious digestive system problems and nearly died in surgery. Not even those close to him could quite believe that he would ever race again, let alone in the Lebanon Valley 200 that same year. Amazingly, he soldiered through the entire grind fresh out of rehab, and ran fifth in a 100-lapper at Fonda the next week. Unfortunately, Lazzaro never regained robust health after '84. Various maladies would plague him for the next decade and a half, and his illnesses would decimate him financially. Helped as much as possible by a group of supporters such as Butch Washburn, Bob Novak, Vinnie Maugeri, Mike McKeon, George

Tommy Wilson (left), Ben Novak (#4B center; racing with Paul Parker's #61), and Randy Glenski (right) all hailing from the Utica area, were Lou Lazzaro devotees, and all won Fonda features in 1983. (Top left and center: Clancy Miller; right: Gater News)

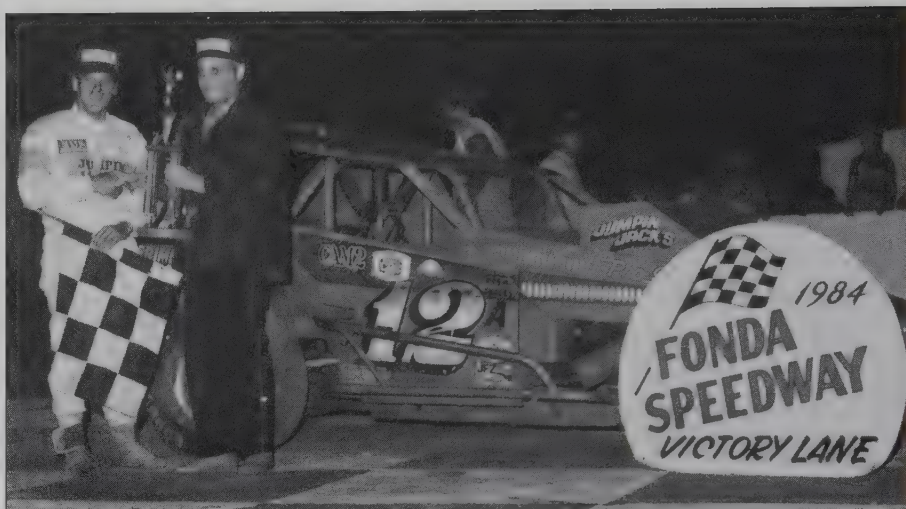
Richie Evans jokes about being Monk's tire sponsor (Gater News photo)



Louie was felled by a serious digestive disorder in 1984 and nearly succumbed. On May 15, while Louie was still in the hospital, Fonda held a fundraiser called "Get Well Lou Lazzaro Night."

A week later, out of the hospital but looking gaunt, Lazzaro made it back to Fonda to greet feature winner Jack Johnson in victory circle.

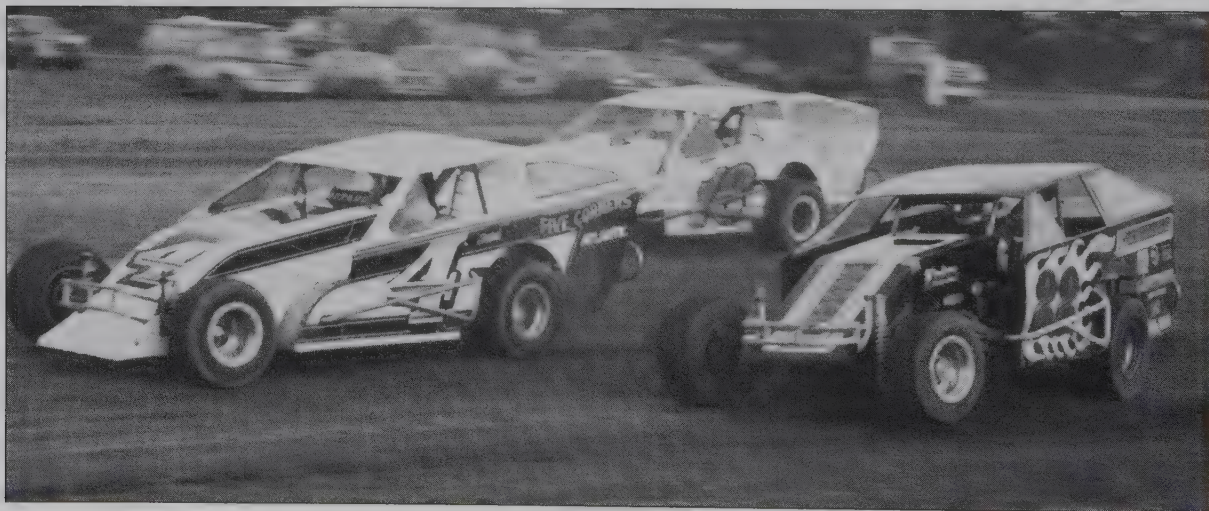
(Clancy Miller photo)



Biancosino, Bob Lovella, Danny Morrone, and the ever-loyal Junior Bianco, the impoverished Louie would struggle on against the increasingly well-funded and yuppy-like new competitors. During the early 1990s, Lazzaro was still good enough for about one surprise Fonda win per season. Each of those upsets was greeted by an old-time Fonda frenzy from fans certain that they had just witnessed The Great One's final triumph. But the next year it would happen all over again. And then again, and so on. Hey, perhaps this fella wasn't aging; maybe he was ageless.

The second half of the '90s decade, however, showed signs of his mortality. There were nights when the guy looked horrible out there, too slow to even qualify. So the track made a special accommodation: Lou Lazzaro was made a lifetime guaranteed starter at Fonda. By now he was living just to race. He'd essentially hang around home all week anticipating Saturday night at "The Track of Champions."

Lazzaro (#4), Bobby Varin (#18), and Dave Lape (#22) have at it in 1989.
(Mike Miller photo)





Winters were especially difficult; you could call his fall-to-spring existence hibernation, except that Louie seldom slept. He'd become an incurable insomniac, languishing night after night in front of his television. Lazzaro went winless from 1995 through 1998. Perennial fan Danny Morrone had seen enough. He sprang for a TEO car, and the old man responded. He was nosed out by Ronnie Johnson in a late-1998 duel, which announcer Jim King dubbed as Fonda's best race of the decade. And then in early 1999, Louie whupped up on young studs Jeff Trombley and Dave Camara to commandeer the 113th feature of his Fonda career. King had taken to referring to Lazzaro as "The Living Legend." Never had truer words been spoken.

One Saturday night a few years before (July 30, 1994), award-winning writer Bones Bourcier had gone to Fonda to check out the legendary Monk. Jack Johnson immediately set Bonesy straight. The top driver in Fonda history proclaimed, "As far as I am concerned, Lou Lazzaro is Fonda Speedway." Louie would strut his stuff later in the evening by scoring his 112th (second to last) feature win. Sitting in his lawn chair greeting fans after the show, Lazzaro mused to Bones, "I like to kid around and say that I am not at retirement age yet. Maybe I'll hang around until I am 65." That is precisely what he did. On April 29, 2000, Junior and 65-year old Lou Lazzaro, towed east from Utica towards Fonda, as they had done nearly a thousand Saturdays before. This time, however, Louie wouldn't be returning home.

Melissa, The Monk's daughter by Sheila Palmer, was a soul mate to her Dad. The 20-year-old Melissa was on the crew the night her father drove to the very end in one of the most poignant stories in Fonda history:

Lou Lazzaro makes a final visit to victory lane on May 15, 1999. Left to right, Jim King, Lou Lazzaro, and Melissa Lazzaro. (Jim King Collection)



Louie struggled at times in his later years. (Clancy Miller photo)

"When they got to the track, Junior said Dad had complained that he was real tired. Then Dad asked me to get in the race car to warm it up. It was strange. Always before I had to ask to do that. In the heat, he did something unusual that caught my eye. Bobby Varin went under him, and Dad jerked the wheel like he was spooked. I never saw him do anything like that before.

"Before the feature, he kept falling asleep in the lineup. He came in after only 15 laps of racing. He was totally disoriented. He looked at me, blinking like he couldn't see right. He said the car wouldn't steer, but we all sensed that it wasn't the car that wasn't working right. Dad had these deep circles under his eyes and his words began to slur. He just stayed in the car and, when his friend Lapey won the feature, I asked him if he was gonna go over and congratulate him. When he said no, I knew he was really in trouble.

"We got the ambulance and he collapsed into unconsciousness as they loaded him in. When the ambulance doors closed, the dogs started going crazy, barking their brains out. He was air-lifted to Albany Medical Center and along the way he kept moving his feet like he was working pedals, driving his race car. But, by the time we got to the hospital, he was all but gone. He had a massive blood clot that had caused a devastating stroke. He never regained consciousness. They unhooked his life support on Monday morning. I was there and I kept begging him to take one more breath. It never came.

"ESPN did a story on him when he died. Dave Lape gave the eulogy in church. And Ric Lucia was wonderful through the whole thing. He had a big memorial race for Dad (a 29-lapper won by Davenport's Seth Gano). We had saved the ashes and we spread them all around the track. We spread Blackie's ashes at the same time."

Seth Gano won the Lou Lazzaro Memorial. "It was supposed to be a 29-lap race, with all of us pulling off so Louie could symbolically lead the final lap. But I got so caught up in it, I forgot, and when they showed the checkers on lap 29, I kept right on racing, and darn if (runner-up) Timmy Clemons didn't come racing right with me," laughs Gano. (Clancy Miller photo)



David

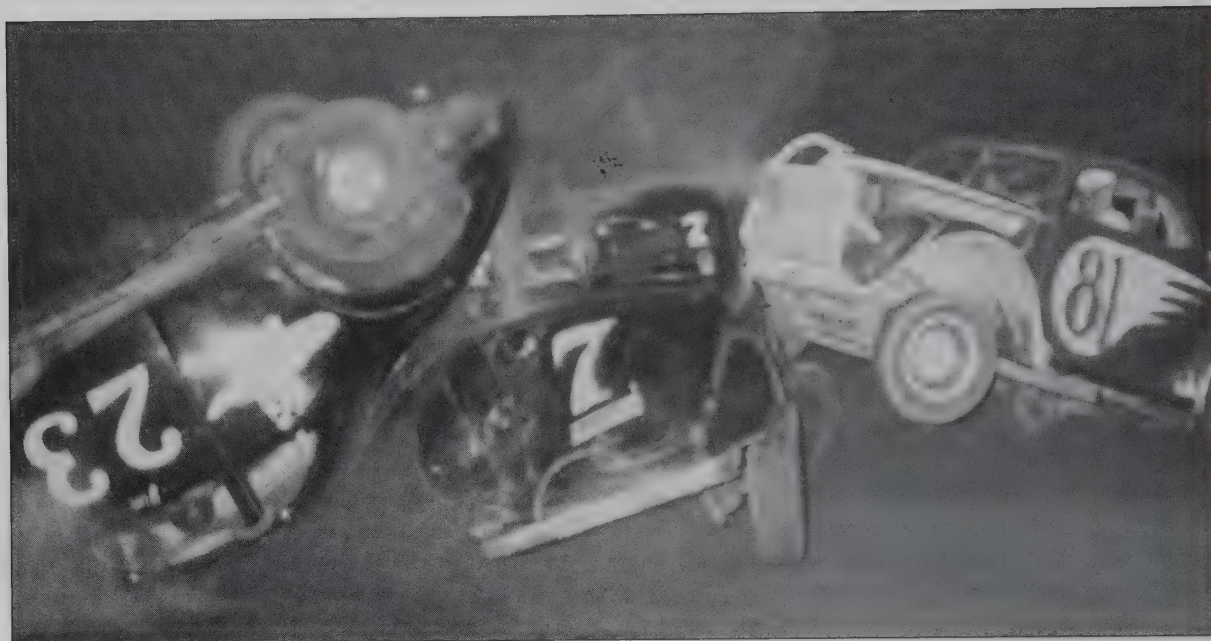
Thirty miles east of Louie's Utica, the Canajoharie area was a bustling little place in the early '50s when Dave Lape was growing up. The Beechnut factory was humming right there in town, companies were hiring, and there was a general feeling of well-being. The country had won the war, and the future looked good. A bright kid like Dave Lape could pick up on this optimism as he cruised around Canajoharie on his bicycle. The son of the guy with the local coal and oil business, Lape was outgoing, popular, and daring. He was seeking a way to define himself, intent on getting his piece of the action.

The auto racing epicenter of Canajoharie belonged to Bob Whitbeck and it housed some of the most famous stock cars of the times. The gaudily painted chariots fascinated the local kids, as did the heroes who drove them. "I used to hang out there all the time," says Lape. "All the top drivers used to come by and sit around with Whitbeck. They would drink whiskey and tell stories. It was pretty wild."

Lape absorbed it all; moreover, his father and grandfather were committed race fans. There is ample photographic record of David's early trips to the races, whether as a youthful go-kart or stock car aficionado. Lape got involved with go karts in 1959. He won everything in sight and continued to dominate the karts until he became old enough to race stock cars.

The karts brought an important message about horsing around with fast cars. One day in 1960 he and Whitbeck's daughter, Linda, were whipping around Whitbeck's parking lot in their karts when David lost control. He slammed into Pete Corey, sitting there in a chair, recovering from his Fonda amputation crash. "It was awful. I think I hurt his leg a lot," admits Lape. And there were the lessons learned about the less-savory folks who hang around the sport. During the winter months in the early '60s, several promoters, including Chuck Mahoney, ran professional kart races at Utica's Municipal Auditorium. It made a deep impression on a young David the night one promoter took off without paying the purse.

As soon as Lape got his learner's permit in 1963, he went out and bought a stock car—Johnny Gruner's old #81—for \$50. "I towed it over to Lee Millington's place in Palatine Bridge," laughs Lape. "Boy, he was thrilled to see me bring that piece of junk there. It didn't run, needed a lot of work, and I didn't know how to do anything. It sat around for a long while, in the way, until one day Lee finally got rid of it. I didn't have the courage to ask him what he'd done with it." The experience taught Dave that if he wanted to race, he'd better figure out how to turn wrenches. His relationship with journeyman Millington gave him the opportunity to learn mechanics. In exchange for his labor, David was allowed to drive Millington's #S-22



Dave Lape's first race car was Johnny Gruner's #81. Lape bought the Ford coupe for \$50 but never finished it. Gruner, himself, is an interesting story: Both the highlight and lowlight of his Fonda career occurred the same evening, September 12, 1959. First, he won his only Fonda feature, a 15-lap flatheads-only special.

Later, when he tried to qualify for the regular show, he crashed hard on lap one of the consi and sustained career-ending injuries. Gruner was a bit prone to wrecks. In this June 14, 1958, shot, Gruner (#81), Lee Millington (#7), and Larry Larabee (subbing for Jim Connelly in #23) practice precision driving.

in slow warm-ups at Fonda while the cars packed in Ed Feuz's heavy surface. "One night, they threw the green unexpectedly," he smiles. "I remember hearing them coming, watching them go by, and thinking, Holy smokes, this is great." David set out to work overtime at his father's coal yard to earn enough money for a real race car. In the fall of 1964 at age 16, with a few extra beans from Dad, Lape found a '37 Chevy coupe #000 in Connecticut. For a \$1,050 price tag, he got the car, the engine, spare parts, wheels and tires, a trailer, and delivery to Canajoharie. Renumbering the car #22 in deference to his idols Bob Whitbeck and Pete Corey, Dave Lape headed out to his first race at Victoria. And then it was Fonda Speedway, here we come.

Many teenage fans and crew members were to follow the young-man-about-town down to Fonda. They were '60s kids. They listened to rock and roll, they were out to have a good time, and they wanted to see one of their own knock off the old guard. Fonda, of course, had to knock Lape around a bit before anything like that was about to happen. It was an ambitious thing for a teenager to enter the NASCAR fray with no real experience, and the few races Lape entered in late 1964 were lessons in humility. His first full season, 1965, was far more promising. Lape's first Fonda flirtation with success came during a 25 lapper on August 28, 1965. Lape hustled his coupe to the front and was leading at the conclusion of lap 12 when it began raining—one lap short of halfway. If the weather had held off for 20 more seconds, he'd have been a winner in his first year of racing. As it was, Lape got the unique experience of knowing what it was like to lead a Fonda feature for two weeks, because the race

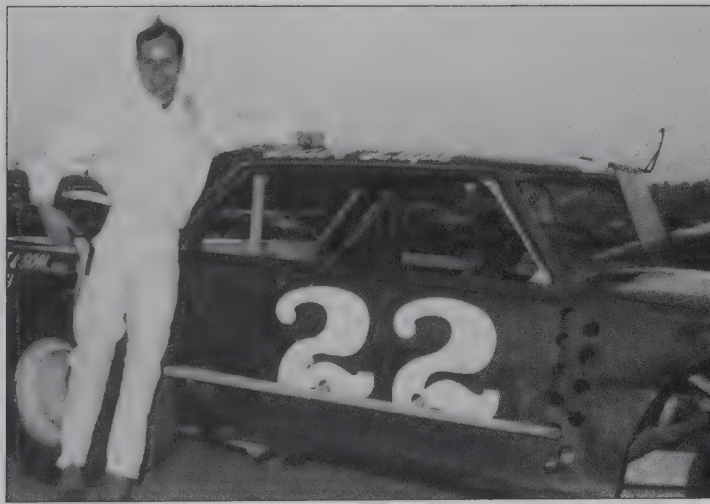
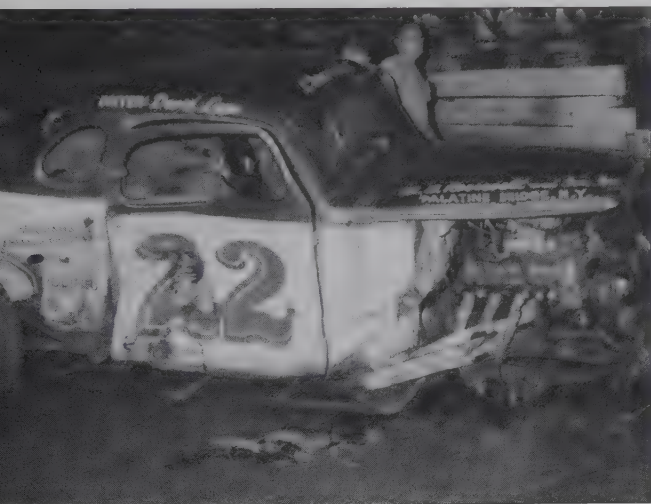
couldn't be completed until after the Montgomery County Fair. Also, the experience taught him the rules about rainouts, which would come in handy in 1969.

His rookie season was a carefree time. "Team Lape," a bunch of happy-go-lucky teenagers, made its only Stafford, Connecticut dirt appearance on July 9, 1965. He qualified for the main event, which turned out to be a barnburner won by Don Wayman in a Fred Rosner-built #00 sedan over Ernie Gahan in a Sonny Koszella #15 coupe. Not wanting to squander their prize money on an amenity like a motel room, Lape and crew slept in a Massachusetts cornfield on the way home from Stafford and raced Fonda the next night.

These experiences were enough to get David thinking he could possibly make a living from racing. "Towards the end of high school, I started racing Malta, Fonda, and Utica. I wasn't too fast, but even if I didn't qualify I'd get tow money and I was coming home with \$70 to \$100 a night. So I had a lot of money for those days." Dave was a young, popular, cool racer with bucks in his pocket, and lots of parties. Times were good. Maybe a tad too good. On three separate occasions Lape entered Hudson Valley Community College in the fall. Today he speaks of that time with uncharacteristic reflection. "Each time my grades were good and everything was fine. 'Til racing season. Come spring, I was out the door."

In 1966, Lape outfitted his coupe with a big block, and promptly wadded up the car on Fonda's frontstretch. He and his Dad sought out the best they could buy as a replacement. They hired master craftsman Fred Rosner of Agawam Speed Equipment to come out and build a car. Rosner produced a beautiful Chevy II late-model-style modified. David had hustled around and had arranged what would become a long-term sponsorship association with Jake and Warren Roosevelt of Roosevelt Chevrolet, in Palatine Bridge.

The first car that David raced was a coupe #22 that he bought used in Connecticut in late 1964. When he wadded it up in early 1966 (left), Fred Rosner built its replacement (right) in two weeks. (Left: Blittig Collection; right: J&H Photos)



A historic moment: Rain drops dotted Russ Bergh's lens and glazed Fonda's surface, while Ron Compani (center), Dave Lape (fourth from left), and Lou Lazzaro (right) debated whether to finish the rain-interrupted 50-lapper. The decision favored Lape and he was awarded his first career feature win—officially listed at 39 laps—on May 17, 1969. (Feuz Collection)

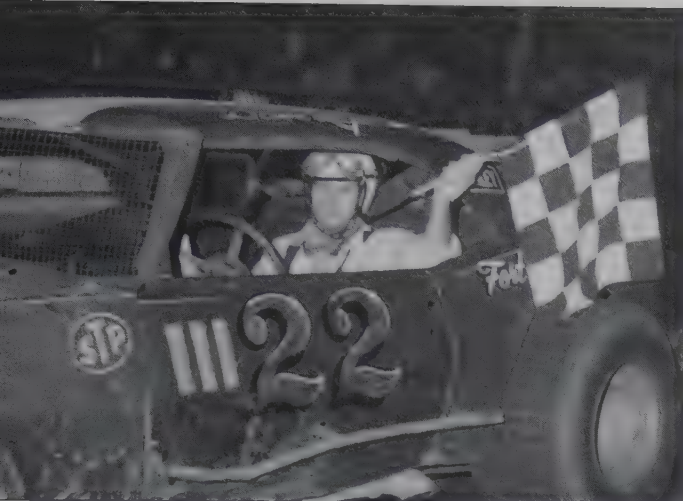


Rosner's rod would carry David to his first feature win in 1969. He was barely leading a 50-lapper at Fonda, and had just been reeled in by a very stout Lou Lazzaro. The Monk was about to pass for the lead on lap 40, when it started raining and the caution flew. Parking their cars on the front stretch, the drivers futilely waited out the weatherman. Finally Lazzaro looked to track manager Ron Compani, and offered, "We're gonna finish out this race next week, right?" Lape, who at the time was about as outspoken as a mute, shot back, "Hey, wait a minute, 39 laps is past halfway. I should be declared the winner." Today David remembers the incident fondly. "Louie was so shocked to see me speak up for myself, that he said, 'The kid's right,' and walked away. We had tremendous respect for each other from that night on."

Lape's second "victory" was no less controversial than his first. It was a suspicious 1970 dead heat that has been clouded in mystery for the last 30 years, before finally being solved in this book. (See Chapter 7). Lapey finally started winning stock car races without an assist from the officials in 1971 and he's been winning them every since.

His most serious injuries from a racing accident occurred *after* the 1969 stock car season. On the first day of winter, Lape was racing snowmobiles in Richfield Springs. He hit some hay bales, flew off the sled, and was run over repeatedly by the oncoming pack. He lay broken in the snow with a fractured back, ribs, and jaw, and gashes around his lower face that would require 52 stitches. His mouth was wired shut for over two months.

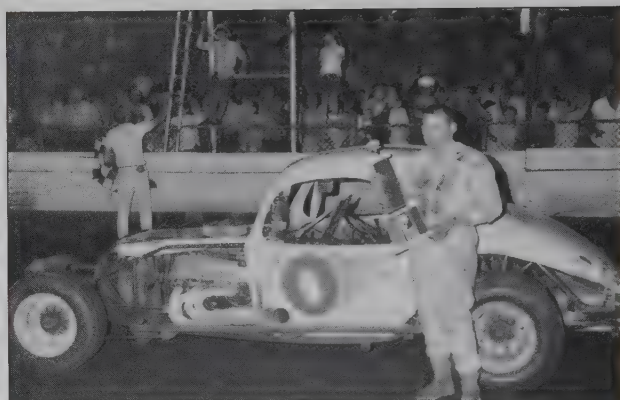
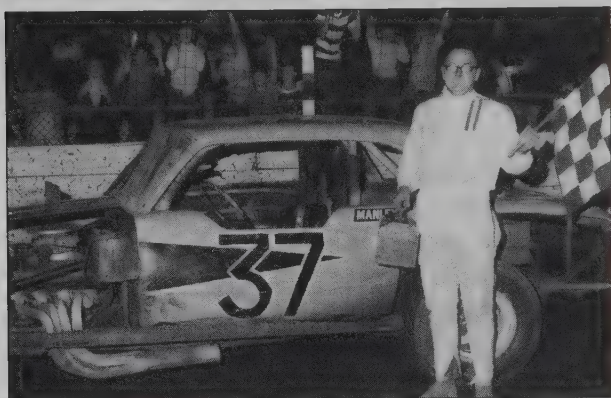
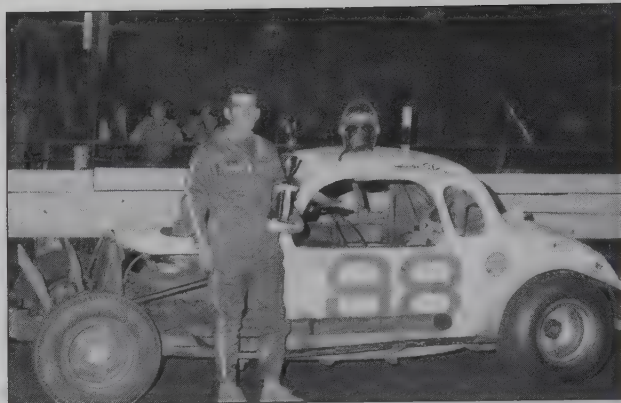
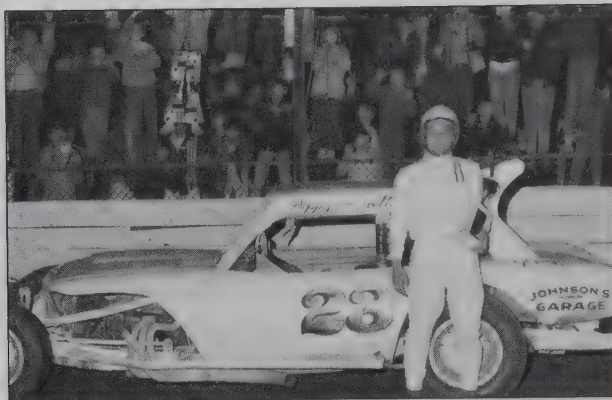
As he began to get mobile again, David turned his full attention to building race cars for himself. Showing early the precise and thoughtful construction techniques that would later become his trademark, he built a full Camaro-bodied modified. "It was beauti-



ful,” he remembers. “NASCAR was pushing the late-model look and we were after the bonuses they offered. After a few wrecks, though, we began trimming off body parts here and there. Eventually NASCAR and the bonuses were gone. We found a Caddy coupe body for it. It had to be real wide to fit that cage. But we ran that car for seven years. It was always strong ‘til I backed it into the wall at Syracuse. It was never right after that.”

The 1970 season was, without question, the most unusual in Fonda history, with twin 25-lap mod features being the weekly fare. Rene Charland would cop his only Fonda track title, winning but two of the 33 mains. Ron Narducci of East Haddam, Connecticut, would deliver a three-pack of wins, the last victories of his Fonda career. Jerry Pennock proved his 100-lap win the year before was no fluke, steering the familiar yellow and black #37 to four wins. The time-honored entry was now Falcon-bodied and now owned by Tony Vilano, an animated character from Schenectady. Jim Hurtubise, the Indianapolis star from North Tonawanda, continued his occasional drop-ins to Fonda in order to qualify for Langhorne. He did win one in 1970 in Gil Bruss’s #0. Hurtubise, an immensely popular and committed racer, had been badly burned in a 1964 Milwaukee champ car fire, and he had his surgeons mold his disabled hands in a permanent shape that was only good for two things: holding a steering wheel and holding the neck of a beer bottle. Victory also came to Ed Pieniazek, The Shoe, Lazzaro, promising neophyte Harry Peek, and Pep Pepicelli in a winged Falcon. As soon as Peppy won one, officials made him cut off the wing. There was another winner that year and he was in a car that Lape helped build. It was Lee Millington in Frank Trinkhaus’ #62. The #62’s bittersweet 1970 season was one of the most dramatic in Fonda history.

The first car that Dave Lape built started life as a Camaro in 1970 (left) and ended up being shrouded with a Cadillac coupe body (right). (Left: Lape Collection; right: Fusco Collection)



Fonda's unusual 1970 format of twin-25 features produced a noteworthy list of winners, including Peppy Pepicelli (#23), Ron Narducci (#98), Jerry Pennock (#37), and Indianapolis veteran Jim Hurtubise (#0).
(Hurtubise photo courtesy of Bill Williams, all others from the Feuz Collection)

In his relentless pursuit of technical advantage, Frank Trinkaus had asked Fred Rosner to build a car for Millington to drive. For reasons of the intertwined friendships, Millington and Lape drove to Fly Creek each day to assist Rosner in the project. Predictably, the result was a low-slung, state-of-the-art design. It proved to be way fast. Debuting the yellow and blue coupe at mid-season, the formerly winless Millington stomped Pete Corey in a thrilling 100-lapper. A huge party followed first at the track and then at the Crystal Bar in Amsterdam. Millington and Trinkaus were showered with beer, and Frank, everyone's favorite, had both his chair and his glasses playfully coated with STP during the raucous celebration. As if to comment on their enjoyment, the #62 team won again in a 25-lapper the next Saturday.

But good fortune was fleeting for the dedicated speed shop owner and his soft-spoken driver from Palatine Bridge. In an eerily strange evening three weeks later, Millington tangled with rough and tough Floridian invader, Bruce "Pee Wee" Griffin, during the



Lee Millington brought Frank Trinkhaus' brand-new Fred Rosner-built #62 to Fonda for the July 18, 1970, Mohawk Valley 100. He won the pole and the race. But his fortunes would vastly diminish within weeks. (Feuz Collection)

Fonda 200. Griffin's red #72 coupe, a hot item on the mid-Atlantic circuit, rolled over to a stop in turn three while Millington roared on. Few could even see Griffin's car. Just down the street the famed Maze's Hotel was ablaze, and the entirety of the Mohawk Valley was filled with acrid smoke. Officials, their view impaired by the smoke, failed to turn on the caution. Millington made a full tour around the oval, again lost control in turn three, and rammed Griffin's disabled racer at full tilt. "Griffin was climbing out of the car, legs first, when it happened, and at the end his legs were pinned underneath. It was a miracle he wasn't killed," says Dave Lape. And it's a darn good thing that at least Lape could see what was going on. He stopped his racer and ended up breaking the magneto on Millington's car to shut down the screaming motor that was spewing scalding water on the entrapped Griffin. Pee Wee's burns were horribly painful. His colorful career behind the wheel was over.

Incredibly, just two weeks later Lape would witness the Millington/Trinkhaus #62 in another and even more devastating spill. "I was standing on Frank's truck at the State Fair race in Syracuse. There was a caution and Lee went over someone's wheel in turn three. He got high in the air. Back then all those fans would stand right next to the fences. Over the fence and down on them he came. Two people were killed and several injured. Everyone felt sick." Frank Trinkhaus' car-owning days were over after 18 consecutive years as a weekly Fonda supporter.

By 1971 Lape was an acknowledged factor at Fonda, taking three of the 16 races that year. Also, the 1971 season became a pivotal one in determining Lape's future. Not only had he become one of the hot shoes on dirt at Fonda, but in the 1970-71 winter off-season he had constructed a purpose-built asphalt coupe for Albany-Saratoga and Utica-Rome, where he was now a winner too. And as the season un-

raveled, Lape was unexpectedly, albeit solidly, in the top 10 for NASCAR's National Modified Championship. So, following the path blazed previously by Fonda luminaries Bill Wimble, Dick Nephew, Rene Charland, and Ernie Gahan, Lape decided during the second half of 1971 to chase NASCAR points all over the East. Not that he could catch point-chasers like Jerry Cook, Fred DeSarro, Bugs Stevens, and Bernie Miller for the title; those guys had been committed to the hunt since March. But, David had an honest shot at ending up in the top five because of his mastery of both dirt and blacktop.

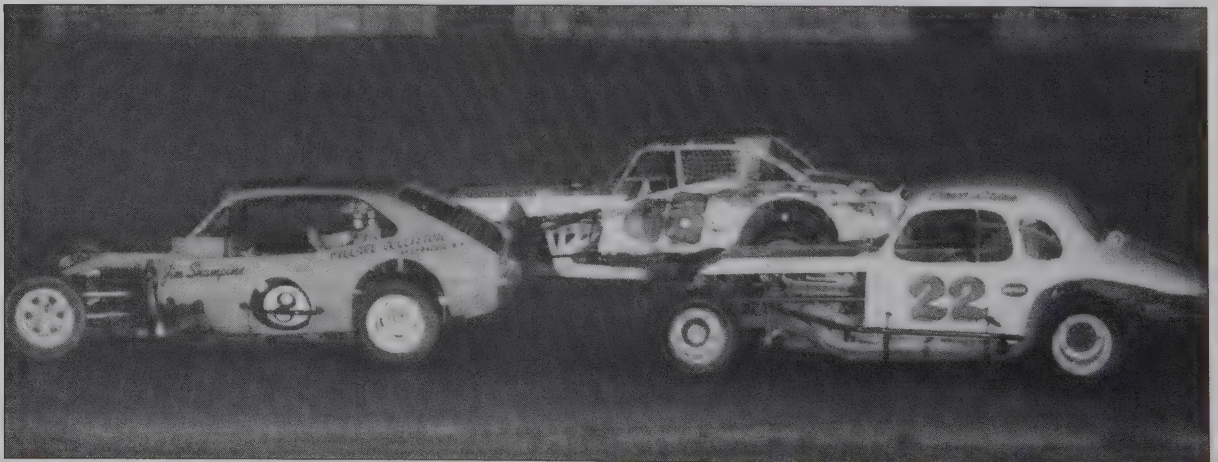
Running for national points was long and arduous, taking Lape below the Mason-Dixon line and to other points far from his Canajoharie roots. He attained his goal by finishing fifth in the national standings, but he came to hate the process because he despised being far from home.

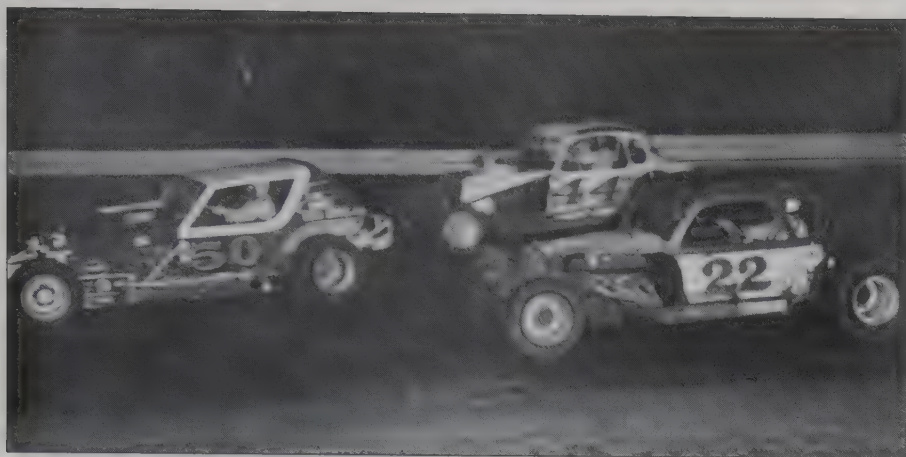
It was a defining moment. "Once I started winning races, I had thought about the notion of taking a shot at the big time, like Pete Hamilton and Don MacTavish," says David. "Even then it was like it is now—you had to go down South to do it. Well, if I learned anything in 1971, it was that I didn't want to be away from home. Right then and there, I decided to spend the rest of my life in Canajoharie."

In 1972 Fonda's pits would be returned to the infield from the outside of turn three and four where they had been planted in 1968. Long-time official Walt Smith remembers the fans grumbling noisily about missing the action of the crews and cars parked along the drag strip. The fired-up Frenchman Maynard Forrette was a top runner at that time, pressing the pedal of the Dick and Larry Roerig's #99. "The Cyclone" had been Fonda's track champ in '71 and added three more wins in '72.

Lape's Camaro body was pretty much fried by 1973. The new but "retro" Caddy coupe body only seemed to make the car go faster. David scooped six mains during the hotly contested season. This ac-

David's blacktop coupe, below, with superstars Jim Shampine (#8) and Mike Loesher (#88) at Fulton, vaulted him to national point prominence in 1971 and taught him, as Judy Garland once told *The Wizard*, that, "There's no place like home." Later, Lape converted this car for dirt, and won a Fonda feature with it on August 16, 1975. (Gater News photo)





Lape in his retro Caddy #22, Tommy Corellis in Joe Leto's #50, and Harry Peek in Dexter Dorr's #44 engage in one of Fonda's best races ever: the October 9, 1973, Columbus 100.

(Gater News photo by Russ Mills)

complishment is especially noteworthy because the infield was brimming with cars now that NASCAR was gone. The retro Caddy's winning days were numbered, however, because Fonda (and sportsman/modified racing in general) was at the dawn of the biggest change in technology in 50 years.

Under NASCAR rules, Fonda racers had to use a stock, U.S.-manufactured car chassis, meaning teams had to hunt through salvage yards for relatively unrusted and untwisted frames of the proper dimensions. With that rule gone, custom-built frames, based on square tubing rails and built up with integral round tubing roll cages, became the rage. A world-class racer and innovative designer, Dick Tobias, began manufacturing such units in his Lebanon, Pennsylvania shop. Soon "Toby's Tubes" were seen under the sheet metal at most dirt tracks in the Northeast. Tobias' design was quickly copied by individual teams who made up one of their own. Other fabrication shops, such as Kniesal, L&R, Alberti, Weld, King, Show Car, A&B, Bushbacher, and Schwinning, would follow Toby's lead and offer bare, but fully welded chassis for sale. Maynard Troyer would revolutionize the market in 1981, a market today dominated by Troyer, TEO, Bicknell, and Olsen. In today's modern era of four shops building nearly 99% of the cars on the East Coast, there's not many privateers who have won with one of their own constructions. A notable exception is Bob Savoie, of Broadalbin. Savoie's first visit to Fonda's victory lane occurred in his #5 Olsen in 1994. Then he built his own #5 the following year and won Fonda again.

"I built my own jig and even my own pipe bender," grins the decidedly old-school Savoie. "And then guys ended up asking me to build them cars. I built six and between Fonda, Devil's Bowl, Bear Ridge, and Canaan, every one of them was a winner. Today, the 48-year-old Savoie operates a successful auto repair and sales garage and is still a Fonda regular, driving the infamous "Ghetto" car, Danny Kollar's #28.

Bob Savoie (Biittig Collection)

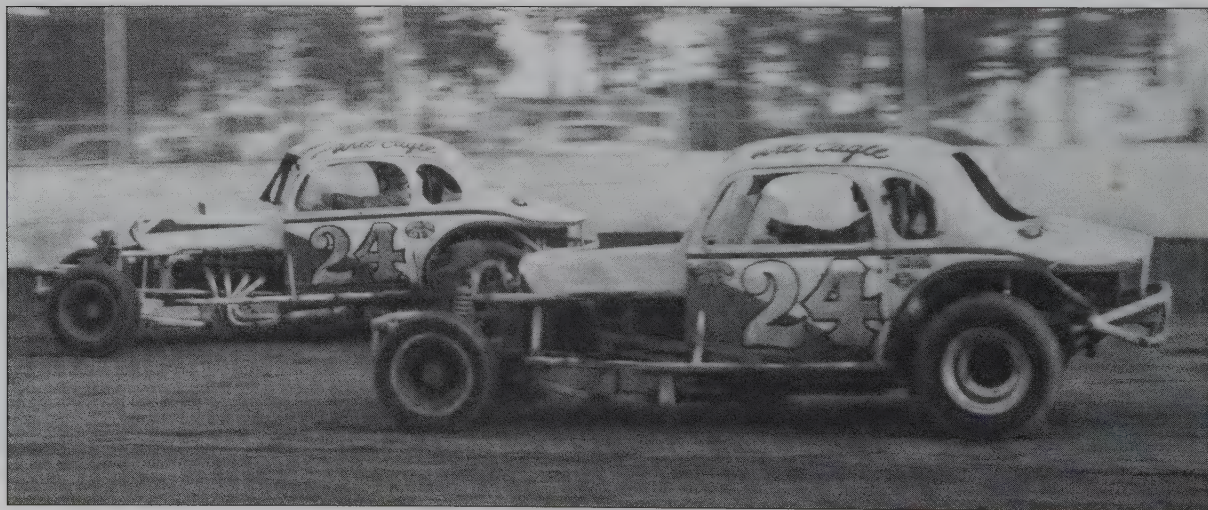


The advent of the tubular chassis also provided modified stock car racing with a visual makeover, very much in the direction of the sleek, but uniform appearance of today's fields. The tube chassis were very narrow and accommodated huge motor set backs, such that Gremlin-style bodies with big side window openings and abbreviated back sections became the norm over the next few seasons. And as guys started building things the same way, a whole new market for bolt-on speed parts opened up. After-market racing steering systems, radiators, and suspension parts all became available over the counter during the course of the '70s. So did throaty racing engines, often over 500 cubic inches, until DIRT limited them to 467 c.i.d. in 1975. Increasingly, they became produced by specialized machine shops equipped with dynos. In a way it became much easier to assemble a race car because so much of it could be purchased. But was it ever becoming more expensive!

Ken Shoemaker had quite the year in 1973 with unusual cars. That season his friend, nationally known dirt track guru Will Cagle, gave Fonda a try. "I don't remember much about the two races I won at Fonda, except that they were both 100 lappers," says Tampa's Will Cagle. "But I sure as hell remember like it was yesterday the two races at Fonda that Kenny Shoemaker beat me in my own car." The '73 season was the only year Cagle ever ran Fonda as a regular, ending up fifth in track points.

"What is a very funny story is how Kenny ever got that ride as my teammate in the first place," giggles Cagle. "I had built an experimental car, with different shocks, steering, and springs, and I was going to have (another Florida driver who shall go nameless) test drive it at Fonda. The Saturday morning of the first time he was gonna drive the car (June 2, 1973), I get a call to come down to the Albany police station. I get there, and they got (my driver) in jail for givin' counterfeit money to a hooker the night before—and they weren't gonna let him

The Shoe and his short-term boss Will Cagle produced incredible theatre in 1973. (*Gator News photo*)



out. So I went home and called Kenny to see if he could drive for me that night. Then he goes out and drives right around me on the last lap. Next week, he does the same thing and I said, 'That's enough of this. Kenny, you're done. That car's too good for you.'

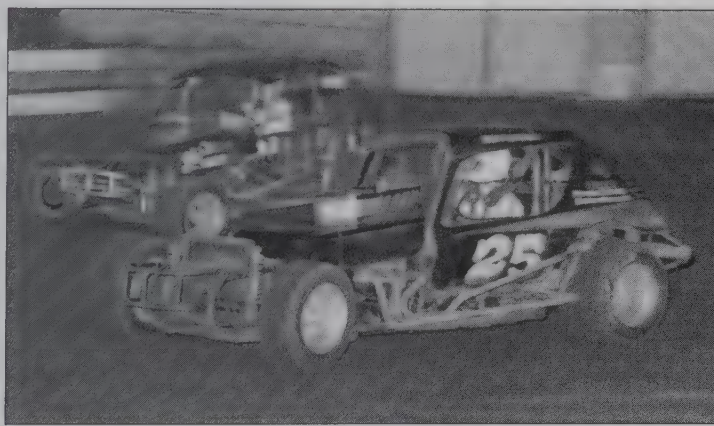
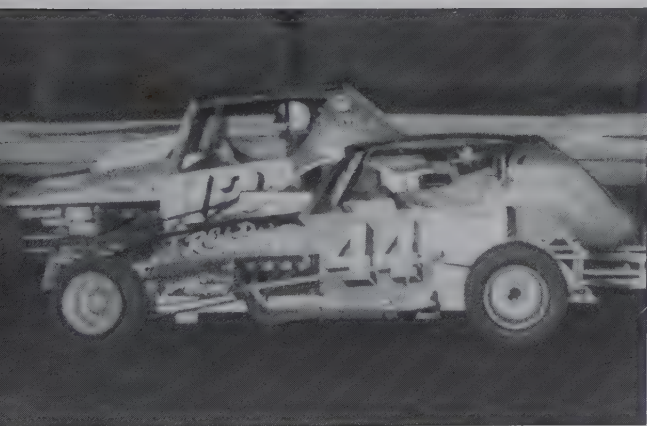
"Joe Leto ended up pulling some strings and got (the other driver) off scott-free for givin' that prostitute counterfeit money," says "Wiley" Will. "But by then I wasn't about to let anybody but me drive that test car." The Shoe finished out 1973 doing his thing in Leto's #50.

Lape's retro Caddy did have the powder to deliver him one feature win in 1974. But for David—as was the case for his friend Lou Lazzaro—these years were real downers. His youthful band of followers began to focus more on the post-race partying than what came earlier. They were known to lay the reins on particularly loose at the Meadowbrook, a rock and roll bar in Auriesville. To make some needed money, David experimented with a residential painting business. Soon his marriage failed and he broke his leg in a highway crash to boot. 1976 was the nadir. He went winless for the entire year and was ready to quit. Quite on a whim, on August 21, 1976, David accepted a ride in the blue and white #15a that Ron Miller had been driving, and promptly flew the normally non-performing Gremlin to an inspiring third place. The podium finish was all the more spectacular when the motor blew going across the line.

Thoroughly impressed, Don "Burger" Knapfel and Ted Conklin asked Lape to drive for them the next year. With his act coming back together at home, Lape went for the moon. The team picked up the first of a brand-new generation of Tobias cars, these built with all the latest stuff, including torsion bars, front and rear. Supposed to be twice as good as the #22, it was numbered 44B. And in 1977 it most surely was. Lape was on a year-long tear. The #44B swept 10 features at Fonda and Lape stretched the horizons of Conklin and Knapfel to Rolling Wheels and Weedsport, copping the 1977 Mr. DIRT point title. The #44B was so fast that Lape lapped its designer, Dick Tobias, one night at The Wheels. Burned out by travel, Conklin and Knapfel

Below left: Dave Lape in the legendary #44B and Jack Johnson in Bob Deming's #12A dual tooth and nail at Fonda in 1977. Lape won the coveted Mr. DIRT point crown that year. (Jack Johnson Collection)

Below right: The immortal Jan Opperman powerslides Ted "Burger" Knapfel's #44B around Skip Fountain's #25. Opp would later flip. (Gater News photo)

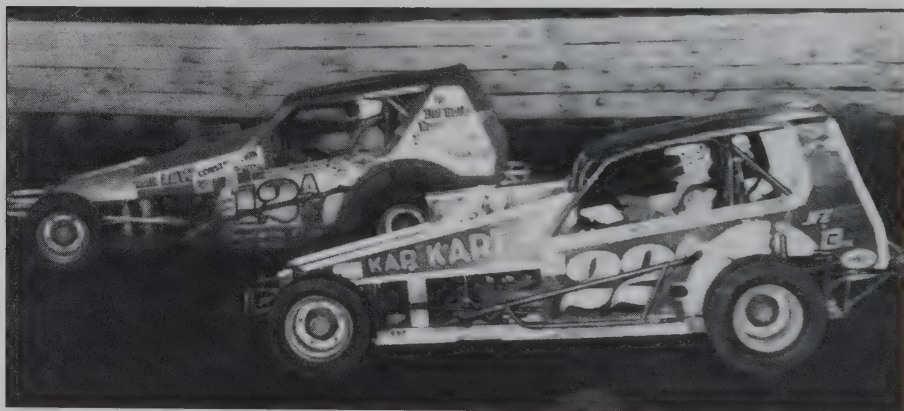


thereafter returned to running Fonda only, with drivers such as Harry Peek; but the car would never recapture its 1977 glory. Even charismatic Indy and sprint car hero Jan Opperman would drive it on one occasion at Fonda. He flipped.

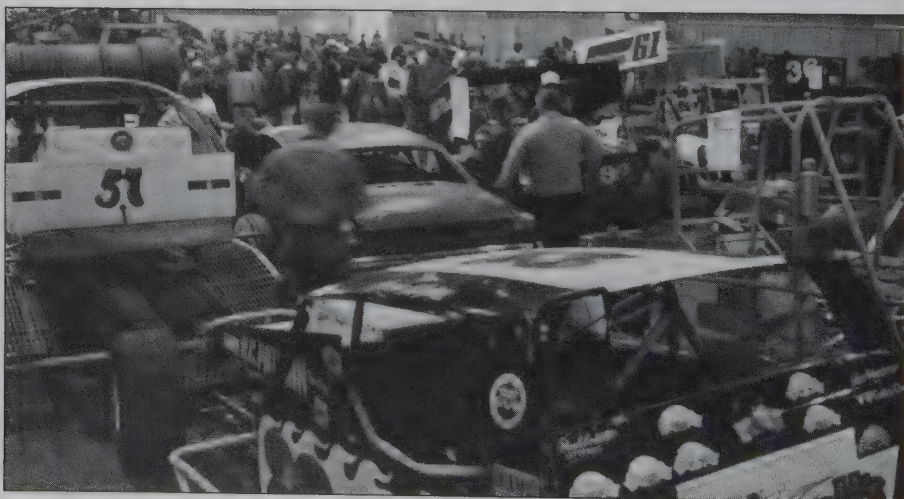
Meanwhile, Lape parlayed his success into a deal with Bob and Karol Grimm of Fort Plain. The Kar Kare Special, also Tobias-chassed, accumulated nine Fonda wins between 1978 and 1981. When the chemistry between Lape and the Grimms went away, the hard-working Grimms continued with Randy Glenski, and Lapey sought other pastures.

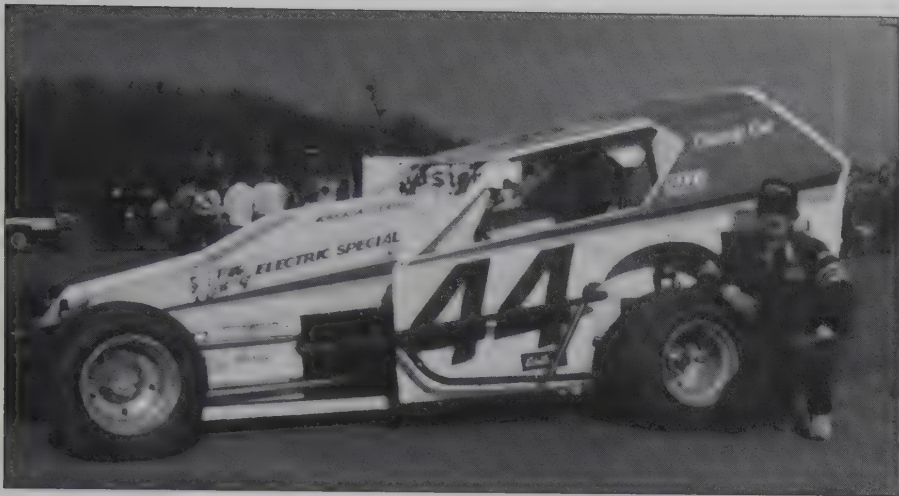
In the early 1980s there was a proliferation of Maynard Troyer's "Mud Buss" tubular chassis design. It rekindled Lape's interest in building cars. Hearing that R.C. "Dick" Putman had split with Louie, David went to Gloversville in early '82 to pitch the trucking company owner. He went many times. Eventually the persistence ground down the skeptical sponsor who grumbled that "David could sell refrigerators to Eskimos." The duo would click for the 1983 Fonda track title and multiple wins at not only Fonda, but Malta and Weedsport, too. Lape had drawn out a design with chalk on the con-

When the Grimms and Lape split, mod rookie Randy Glenski, shown here battling Jack Johnson on June 26, 1982, got the car and colors. Lape then switched to the Pete Corey-inspired flame motif, which he still carries today. (Clancy Miller photo)



It was Corky Stockham who nicknamed Lape's R.C. Putman #22 "The Troyer Destroyer." And it was Stockham who eventually auctioned the car at his annual Syracuse show. (Gater News photo)



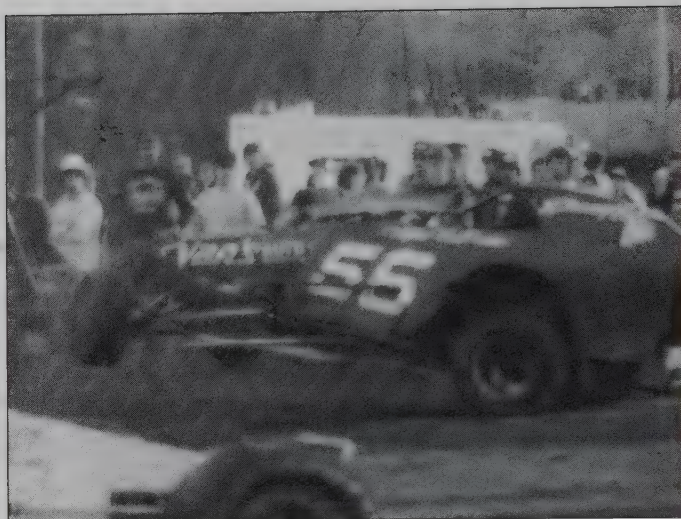


crete floor of Bruce Dostal's shop and then flipped on the welder. The car was racy looking from the start. Taking one peek, Corky Stockham of the National Parts Peddler labeled the black, white, and red flaming #22 "The Troyer Destroyer."

Lethally fast, the car won so many features that Lape began to see a market for a chassis of his own making. Forming Champ Car Fabrications, Lape partnered first with Howard Conkey and then later with Jim Senzio. The chassis company would prove quite successful, despite a dubious start. One of the first Champ Car customers was Oneonta's Mike VanDusen. His Lape chassis had made him such a contender in 1983, that he bought another one in late '84, and almost got decapitated in it. VanDusen had time-trialed fifth for the 1984 Fonda 200. "On lap 24, I was running sixth, lapping John Kollar, when he swerved to avoid a car that was exiting the pits," remembers VanDusen, who presently splits his time between New York and Florida, supporting his son's burgeoning sprint car career. "I climbed his right rear and took off. I hit a telephone pole in turn one that holds a p.a. speaker, or I would have gone right into the bleachers." VanDusen's modified flipped numerous times and the cage folded. Fortunately, VanDusen was not seriously injured. But seeing his creation turned convertible had a profound effect on Lape. VanDusen was more than a customer; he was a friend. David immediately major overhauled his roll-cage design. VanDusen's car would be Lape's first and last cage failure. From that day onward, Champ Cars would be renowned as safe, reliable, and rugged.

Champ Cars also made Dave Lape a perennial force on the DIRT Tour, where he won some of the circuit's biggest races, like the 1984 Eastern States 200 at Middletown, and the Rolling Wheels 200 in 1985 and 1989. Soon Champ Cars became the chassis of choice back home at "The Track of Champions." At one point there were 23 in the pits at Fonda. They dominated the sportsman ranks.

Dave Lape's partners in Champ Car Fabrications were first Howard Conkey (right) and then Jim Senzio (left) (Right; DIRT Motorsports Collection; left: Gater News photo)

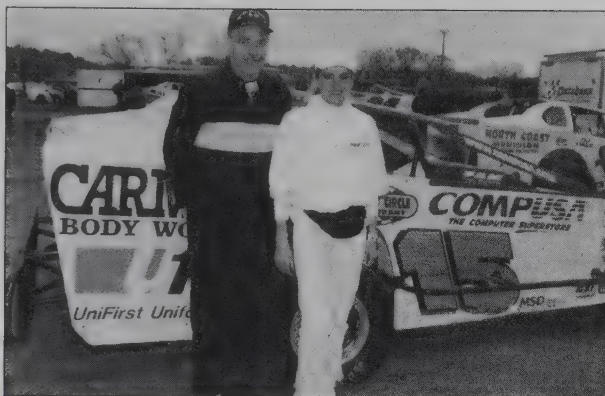
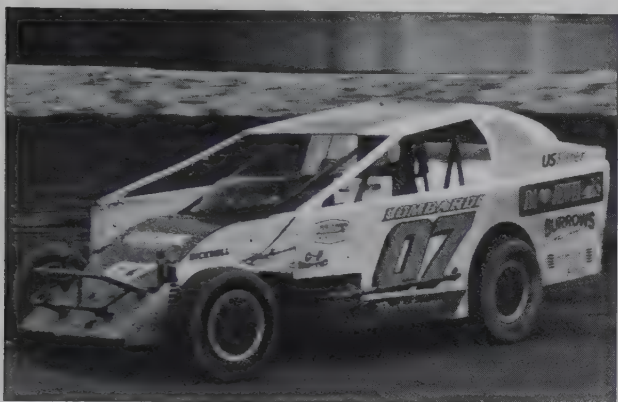
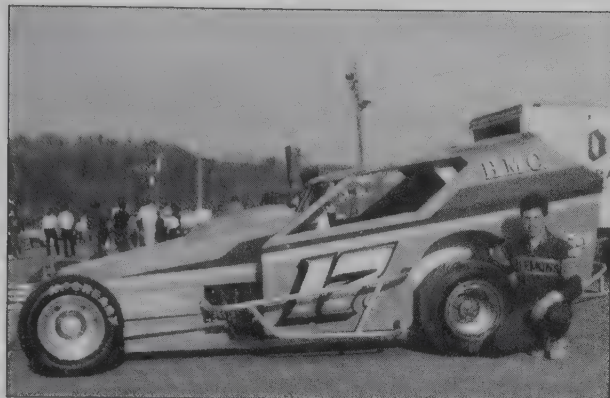
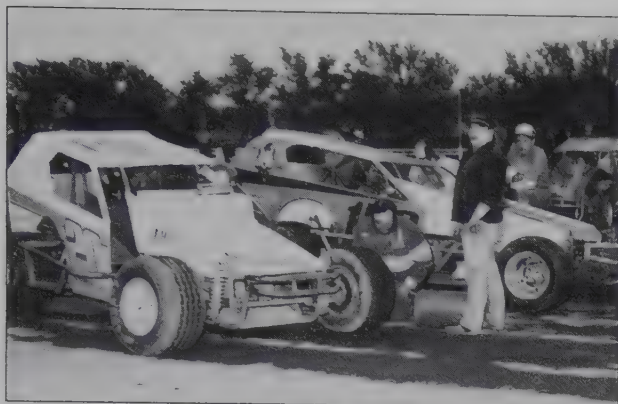


Mike VanDusen's nearly catastrophic flyer in the 1984 Fonda 200 was a major wake-up call for Champ Car Fabrications. Dave Lape completely re-designed his roll cages following this terrifying moment. (Both photos courtesy of the Mike VanDusen Collection)

One of the company's finest hours came July 5, 1997 at the hand of David's brother-in-law, Billy Gray, then a Champ Car employee. Known as the "Wild Child" for his hammer-down style, Gray shocked the Fairgrounds by taking both the modified and the 358 mains aboard his Champ Car in each. Another great Champ Car moment occurred July 4, 1986, when Fonda ran its first-ever quad-20 modified program. Champ Cars won three out of the four features. First, it was Kenny Hanson, to the pleasant surprise of all. Then, it was Lou Lazzaro—back from his 1984 near-death experience. Lapey had taken Louie under the Champ Car wing and Monk answered with yet another successful comeback. The third 20 went to David himself. Mike Romano prevented a Lape-chassis sweep in the nightcap, but Champ Car's Timmy Clemons gave it a solid try, ending up fourth for the first good finish of his career. The Champ Car business would continue 15 years and Lape cars would win from New Hampshire to Florida. The company finally closed when the Lapes moved to their new home, sans a race shop. David would go TEO, a successful move good for five Fonda features from 1999 through 2001, following what had been a pair of winless seasons for Lape.

And while David may have moved on from the chassis parts and repair business, he can look proudly over the list of customers he's helped and/or inspired into Fonda's modified victory circle. Included are Kenny Hanson; Lape proteges Tim Clemons and Alton Palmer, who conquered the Fonda mods in 1997 and 2001, respectively, and who promise to be future contenders at Fonda in years well after this book is published; Seth Gano, who has a pair of Fonda mod wins on his resume; and Randy Snyder with three.

In 1987, Lape moved from the Putman camp, and was tabbed to succeed Tommy Wilson as Fred Burrow's pilot. The Burrows/Lape pair-



Clockwise from upper left: Ken Hanson, a surprise Fonda winner, borrows air from Gary Putman of Lape's crew, while '80s contender Jim McMillan looks on. Tim Clemons in 1987. Randy Snyder with Kim Hart, Fonda's new announcer: Alton Palmer in 2000. (Clancy Miller photo; Gater News photo; Clancy Miller photo; Clancy Miller photo)

ing, now in its 17th season, is the longest owner/driver marriage in Fonda history. Their success continued right through the '90s, winning the Fonda Championship in 1991 and 1992, and snapping up features whenever conditions were right. His racing in a stable mode, Lape was able to reach out to another entrepreneurial pursuit, this one in concert with Andy Fusco. Under the name LAPCO, they promoted dirt track specials. From 1988 through 2000, LAPCO promoted two dozen shows at Can-Am Speedway, Five Mile Point Speedway, Woodhull Raceway, Canandaigua Speedway, and Brockville Speedway.

Given all he has been through, it is ironic that Lape's most serious injury in four decades at Fonda would come in August of 1998 in an incident that did not even involve a crash or another car. Powersliding into Fonda's turn one, the #22 ripped into a deep rut and rocked about so violently that Lape ruptured a disc in his back and was done for the year. He faced a painful recovery over the winter.

As clever throughout his life as he was as a kid, Dave Lape eventually managed to integrate his passion for racing with a solid fam-

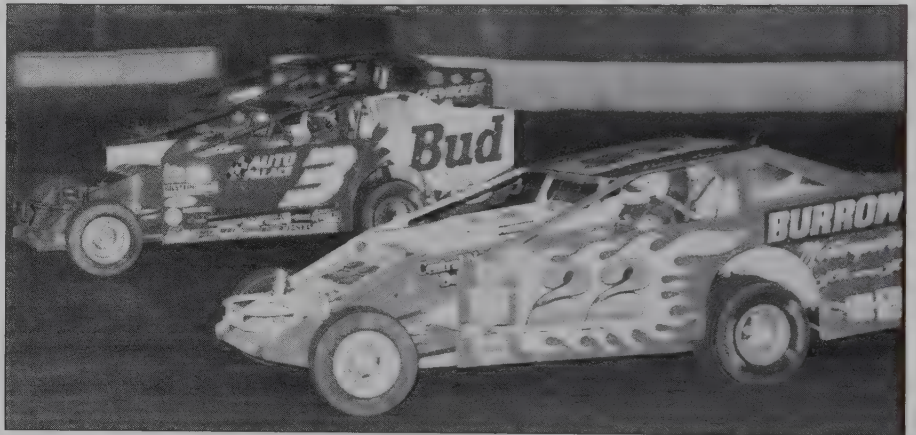
ily life and a spectacular and fully-appointed new home. He is a centered man, with wife Jackie and their daughter Jessica, who herself has become well-known for her Fonda victory lane roof dances.

David scored but one Fonda victory in 2001, making it the 30th calendar year he's won at "The Track of Champions." That ties him with Louie for the record. But, like the Monk in later years, there are nights now when Lape struggles mightily and it ain't pretty to watch. But it doesn't seem to bother David—he has nothing to prove. And it doesn't bother the fans—they know what they like. The Kid from Canajoharie, who had groupies following him to Fonda back in 1964, was resoundingly voted Fonda's Most Popular Driver in 2001.

Right: Dave Lape's final Champ Car triumph came on June 22, 1996.

This shot, taken five nights later, shows him running wheel-to-wheel with Brett Hearn (#3) and Doug Hoffman (#1, outside) in the nationally televised "Thunder on the Mohawk" blockbuster. (Alex and Helen Bruce photo)

Below: Little Jessica Lape's victory lane roof dances the last three years have brought tears to Dad's eyes, exultation from Mom Jackie (left), and cheers from Fonda's grandstand. (Lape Collection)



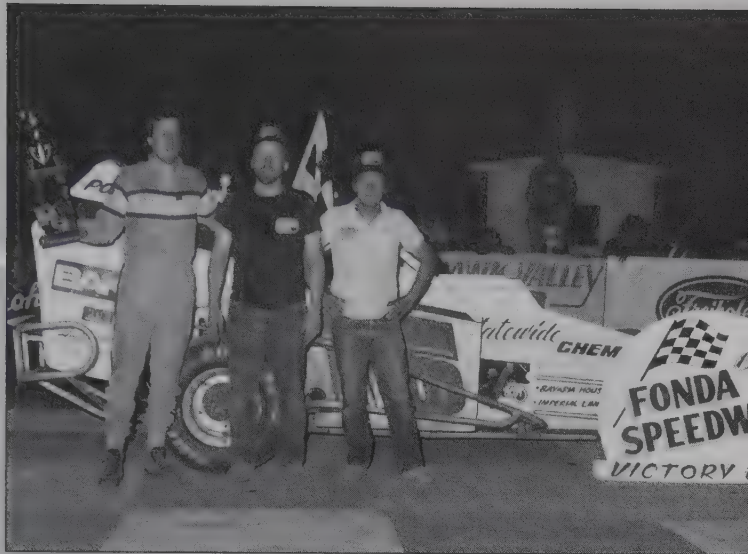
Randy Snyder: The Academic Path

There do seem to be many different pathways to victory lane at Fonda, and Fultonville's Randy Snyder most certainly blazed one of his own.

When the 42-year-old became interested in racing in the '60s, he didn't seem that different from others growing up in the area. His dad, George, owned the Gulf station in Fultonville where Jack Blackwood and Jack Brookman helped Ernie Gahan with his #50. George Snyder would go on to open Fultonville Truck Stop, and he would also sponsor Fort Johnson's Earl Canavan on NASCAR's Grand National circuit.

Things began to take a twist for Randy when he announced at the dinner table one night that he wanted to be a driver. His parents responded that before they would allow any such activity he would have to promise to finish school. Agreeing to this, Randy concentrated on his studies and graduated from Rochester Institute of Technology with a degree in mechanical engineering in 1982.

That obligation out of the way, Snyder bought an aging Tobias car from Mike Arminio, and schooled in the 320 division starting in 1983. By 1987 he was ready for the Mod Squad, and he put together a deal with Jim Niznik and Roger Peterson, Larry Livingston's former crew. Powered by a Baker Chevy motor with Buick heads, the team won their maiden year. They would be victorious again in 1989 and 1990. In the '90s he competed intermittently at Fonda, spending several seasons on the



From left, Randy Snyder, Roger Peterson, and Jim Niznik celebrate their first modified win. (Clancy Miller photo)

NASCAR BUSCH North tour and establishing a new business of his own.

Snyder's approach to stock car racing is clearly impacted by his education. In his words, "I believe I am the only degreed mechanical engineer at Fonda right now. It has given me an engineering sensitivity that has helped me figure things out and see them from a different point of view, and I have come to have more respect for my equipment and what it is supposed to do."

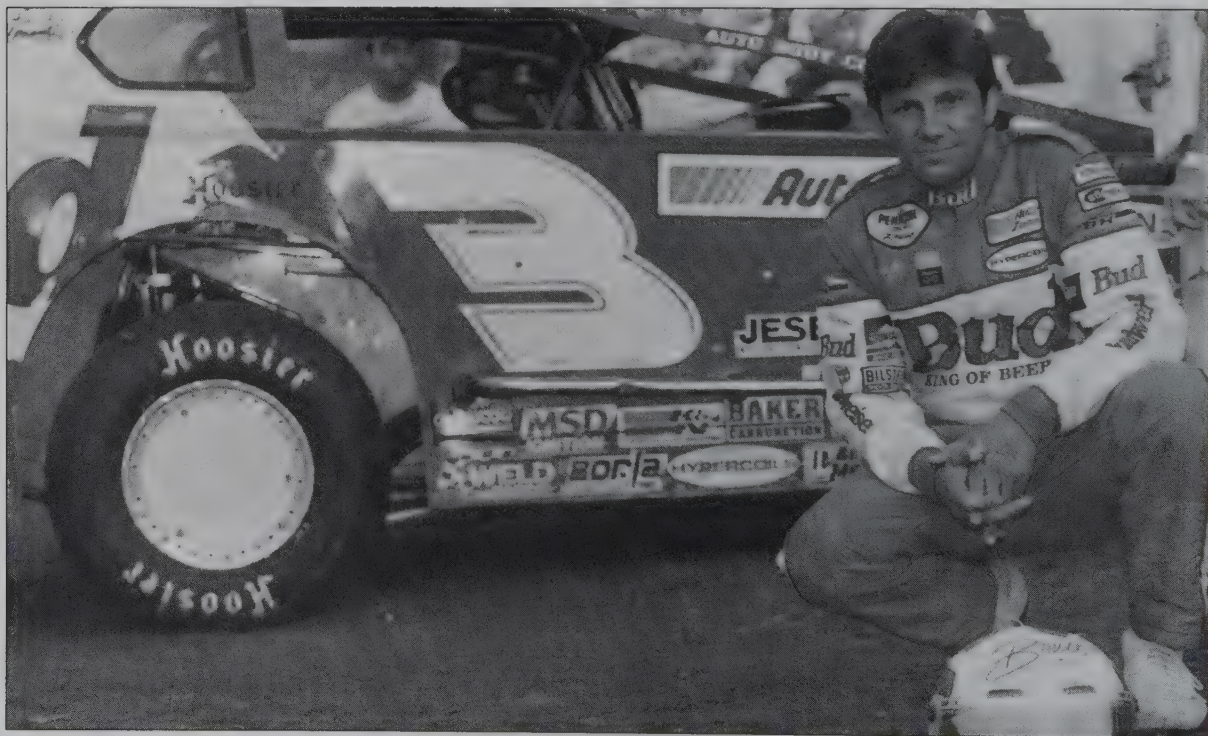
Snyder's engineering virtuosity has only been reinforced by his own business activities. He runs a growing, high-end, fully computerized machining business, producing all manner of things, from sophisticated machines for the food industry to offset spindles for NASCAR chassis builders.

Snyder does plan to return to Fonda in 2002 with more regularity. It will be a balancing act for him, however. His lady, Kim Hart, hostess of the popular radio talk show "Racing with Hart," is also launching a promising career as an announcer at major NASCAR events and has signed on to become "The Voice of Fonda" in 2002.



An invader showin' the home boys the way around. It became an all-too-common sight in Fonda's second 25 years. In this 1978 shot, Kenny Brightbill (#19) leads Andy Romano (#97), Spike Reed (#4), Bob Sitterly (#11), and Lew Boyd (#71). (Gater News photo by Dave Lukowski)

No Fonda invader has ever done it any better than Brett Hearn. (Bob Yerko photo)



The New Invaders 9

MY, HOW TIMES HAVE CHANGED.

In the 1950s, '60s, and early '70s, "The Track of Champions" prided itself on the fact that big-name invaders could seldom win on Fonda turf. But for more than two decades now, the tables have turned. Nowadays, big-money, long-distance specials at Fonda are customarily dominated by outsiders.

So why the turnaround? The explanations are many.

"It's tough to think of the touring DIRT professionals as strangers at Fonda anymore," offers DIRT's Director of Media Services Tom Skibinski. "Guys like Hearn, McCreadie, Danny, and Alan have been racing there three or four times a year for the last 20 years. There's not much about the place that they don't know."

Legendary Bill Wimble offers another theory. "When they removed the cemetery and guardrail in turn three, Fonda became a somewhat easier track for outsiders to run. Back when the graveyard was in turn three, we Saturday night regulars had a real edge because that end of the track was so unusual and difficult to drive. Now some of the home court advantage is gone."

Brett Hearn's take on the situation is as follows: "A lot of the Fonda regulars don't run enough long-distance races to learn the setup. You can't put your Saturday night 30-lap-setup in the car for a 100-lapper or 200-lapper. The car will just go away on you. I learned that the hard way at my home track. What works on Saturday night at Middletown is worthless on Eastern States Weekend."

And the ever plain-spoken and honest Dave Lape has a more basic explanation why the touring pros dominate whenever they come to Fonda. "Those guys are just flat better than we are. Those guys race five nights a week against the best in the business. Fonda

guys pretty much run one night a week against each other. Those guys have the best equipment and the newest technology. Plus, they have so much experience, that there isn't a situation that comes up that they can't adapt to."

Well, whatever the reason or reasons, the new invaders usually steal the headlines when they attack at Fonda. Here's a look at some of the biggest names in modified racing who have had a significant impact at Fonda in the last 25 years, along with their views on "The Track of Champions."

Brett Hearn

The statistics don't lie. Brett Hearn is unquestionably the most successful invader in Fonda Speedway history. His 16 big-block wins place him 17th on Fonda's all-time win list. His seven small block wins place him first on the track's 358 win list. Of those 23 feature wins, an unprecedented 19 have been in extra-distance races.

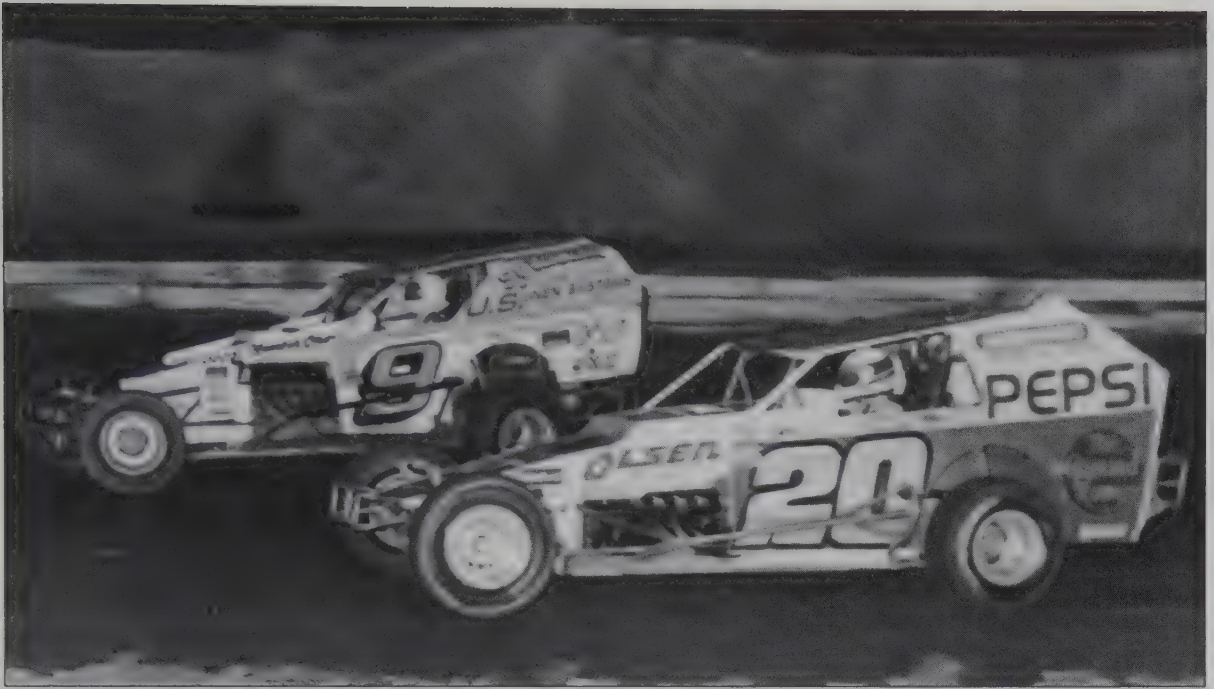
Not bad for a guy who only visits Fonda two or three times a year.

The 43-year-old Sussex, New Jersey superstar has fond recollections of "The Track of Champions." "Fonda was the first track ever where I came to realize that my presence was a valuable asset to the show," Hearn says of his initial sojourns to Fonda in the early 1980s. "Ron Compani was the promoter back then. He'd pick up our hotel rooms, he'd buy us steak dinners. Nobody had ever treated me that way. And it was eye opening that just by racing there I could help put people in the seats."

Hearn reacted favorably to the red carpet treatment, winning seven big-money specials at Fonda from 1984 through 1987. He then endured a drought, winning only one Fonda big-block feature from 1988 through 1994. "I had a good combination at Fonda in the mid-1980s," he reflects, "and then things dried up. I lost the handle and struggled to find a setup."

His 1995 introduction of the TEO Pro Car chassis ended the dry spell. Devised by his brother Bobby Hearn, the TEO design has been especially well-suited to Fonda. "The surface at Fonda changes dramatically. Sometimes it's dry. Sometimes there's a great top. Sometimes the inside takes rubber. Sometimes it's smooth and slick all the way across the track. Whatever condition develops, I've got good notes on what setup works. The TEO chassis seems to respond to whatever condition Fonda throws at us."

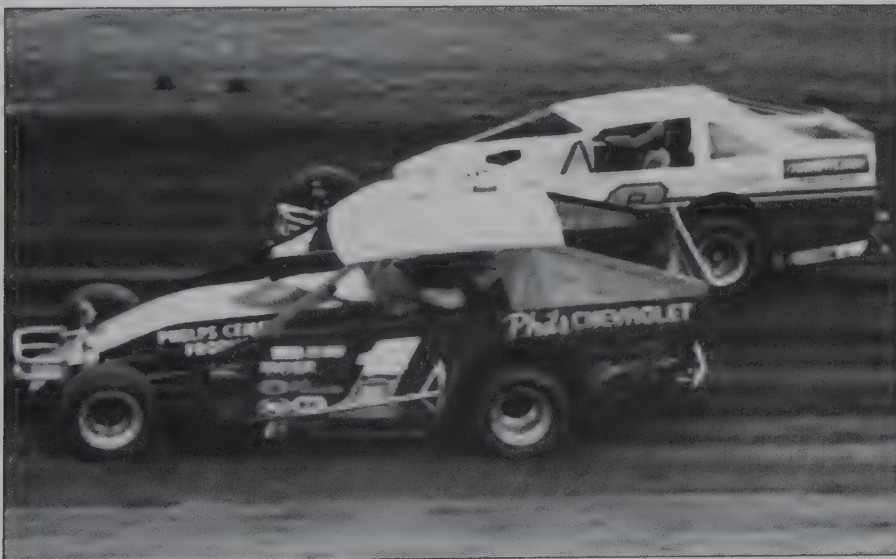
Hearn's Fonda 200 performances in the late 1990s were especially compelling. He won three straight Fonda 200s from 1995 through 1998 (there was no Fonda 200 in 1997). But of all of the 200s,



1996 is most memorable for the man they call "The Corporate Jet." "I'll never forget that race. I spent the entire day running around the top of the track. I was the only car up there. I drove around everybody and had the lane all to myself. I ran 200 laps and never got behind another car all day."

Brett Hearn is a living legend. And he will probably end up in Fonda's Hall of Fame, the only invader to ever be so honored.

A pair of masters. Brett Hearn (#20) and Bob McCreadie (#9) full-tilt at Fonda in 1986. (Gater News photo by Ron DeYulio)



Hearn steers the Freightliner #6 around Kenny Brightbill in Billy Taylor's #1 at Fonda in 1989. (Dave Miller photo)

Bob McCreadie

"I love Fonda. I absolutely love the place." So says Bob McCreadie, the gray-bearded modified veteran who is unquestionably the most popular driver in DIRT history.

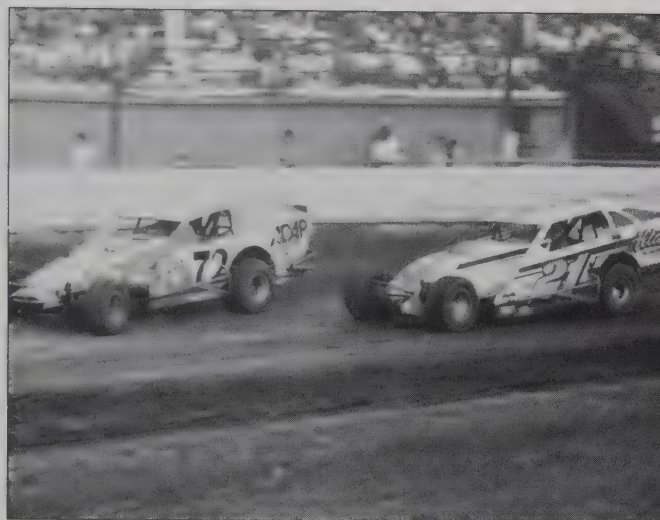
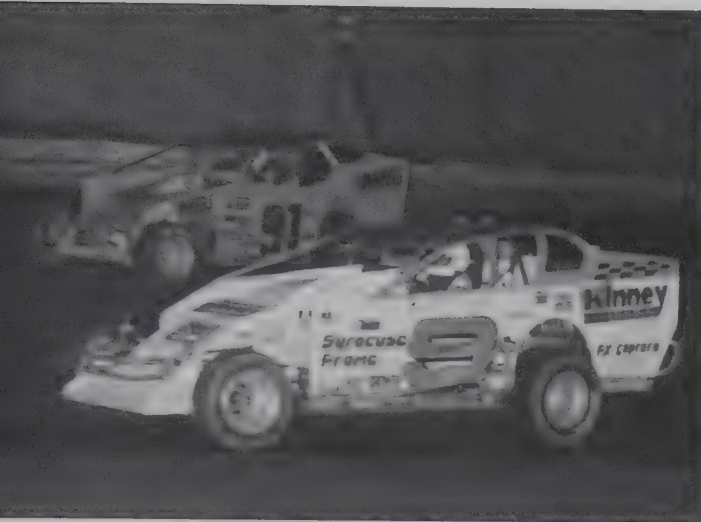
"Any true driver loves Fonda because it is a driver's track," he explains. "You don't need a lot of expensive horsepower to win there. You need a good-handling car and a good driver." McCreadie's love affair with "The Track of Champions" takes him back to his roots at the old Watertown Fairgrounds half-miler, which hosted Saturday night stockers from the late 1950s into the early 1970s. It was at Watertown that McCreadie got his start, as a spectator and as a racer.

"Fonda's covered grandstand is a beautiful piece of history. Watertown had a covered grandstand. I remember going to the races at Watertown when I was about 10 years old. And we'd climb all the way to the top row of seats, closest to the roof. You could just run

The old Watertown Fairgrounds hold Bob McCreadie's roots, and reminds him of Fonda.

Here, Gary Reddick drives his #V-3 to a Watertown win. (Gater photo by Bob Hunter)





around up there and be a kid. It was way cool. Because the Fonda track is right in town, like Watertown was, kids can walk to the races. It's a good deal for the kids and for the parents, because they know where their kids are for the night and they know that they're safe," says McCreadie.

But the greatest similarity between Fonda and Watertown? "The fans," he quickly responds. "Good people, honest people, hard-working people. The Watertown area is a lot like the Fonda area. The fans are blue-collar folks from working-class families. To them, going to the races is a big deal. And they really know the sport."

McCreadie's four Fonda wins have all occurred in high-paying, long-distance events. His best Fonda memory: consecutive triumphs in the Fonda 200 in 1992 and 1993. Only he, Richard Petty, Doug Hoffman, and Brett Hearn have been able to win back-to-back Fonda 200s.

"We won those 200s at Fonda with good pit strategy," McCreadie remembers. "Everybody went in early at about lap 30 to get track position. But we stayed out to around the half-way mark so we'd have newer tires for the finish. Fresh rubber won both of those races for me."

Solid pit strategy also earned Ransomville, New York's Charlie Rudolph his two Fonda wins, in the 1983 and the 1985 Fonda 200s. Ironically, Rudolph became a Fonda regular in 1989 when his sponsor, ADAP, sought exposure in the Albany area. After '89, Rudolph quit dirt racing. He raced blacktop through 1994 and then retired from the sport altogether.

As the 51-year old Bob McCreadie's marvelous career winds down, the man they call "Barefoot" is passing the family mantle on to son Tim McCreadie. And with the handing of the torch, goes sage

(left) Bob McCreadie (#9) digs the bottom while Billy Decker (#91) seeks the cushion at Fonda in 1993. (right) Charlie Rudolph (#72R) races Jeff Trombley (#21J) in 1989. Rudolph won the 1983 and 1985 Fonda 200s as an invader, and then ended his career as a winless Fonda regular in 1989. He went asphalt racing in 1990 and retired altogether after the 1994 season.

(left: Ken Dippel photo; right: Clancy Miller photo)

advice from the man still fast enough to have finished second in the 2001 Fonda 200. "The first time Timmy ran Fonda, he hated it because he couldn't get hooked up," says Dad. "I told him, 'You're gonna come to love Fonda because Fonda's not about money. It's all about the chassis and the driver.'"

"Now he loves the place, just like I do."

Pat Ward

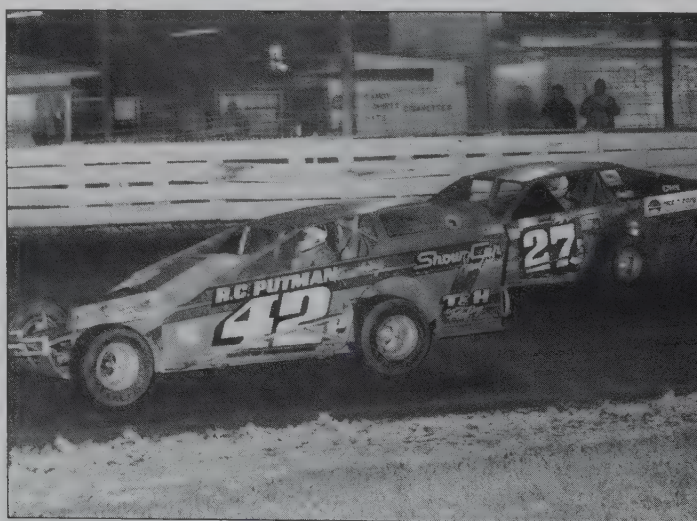
Pat Ward will be the first to admit it: Fonda Speedway is the place that made him a successful race driver.

The 45-year-old King Ferry, New York native began his career in DIRT modifieds in 1975, running the Canandaigua and Weedsport Speedways. To see him compete today, it is difficult to imagine, much less remember, just how bad a racer Pat Ward was in his early years.

After 11 terrible seasons in Central New York, Ward decided to give Fonda a try in 1986. "I had an old Show Car Chassis and not much horsepower. I figured we might be competitive at Fonda because it had the reputation of being more of a handling and momentum track than a motor track," recalls Pat. "So I called up the Companis, they were Fonda's promoters back then, and they really welcomed me. Here I was, some nobody, and they treated me like gold."

Ward did well enough in 1986 to finish ninth in track points. The 1987 season was his breakthrough year. Ward's two Fonda feature wins that summer were the first victories of his career. From 1987 until he left Fonda in early 1997, Ward won at least one feature at "The Track of Champions" every year. Eight times he fin-

(left) Rains made for a makeshift "victory lane" when Pat Ward (#42P) won at Fonda on July 16, 1988. (right) Pat Ward (#42P) leads Danny Johnson (#27J) in 1989. Ward became Dick Putman's driver when Dave Lape moved to the Fred Burrows team. (Clancy Miller photos)



ished in the top five in track points, including a seven-point second to Jack Johnson in 1994 and a four-point second to Jack in 1995. He has ascended to 13th on Fonda's all-time feature win list, with 19 big-block mod feature wins.

Equally important, Ward's Fonda success springboarded him to become competitive anywhere he went. He became a consistent winner Sundays at Weedsport and a consistent front runner on the Super DIRT Series trail. Conquering Fonda transformed Pat Ward from perennial back marker to respected front runner. "Fonda gave me confidence. Running with Jack, C.D., Ray, and David—those guys were the best and to beat them at Fonda made me believe in myself."

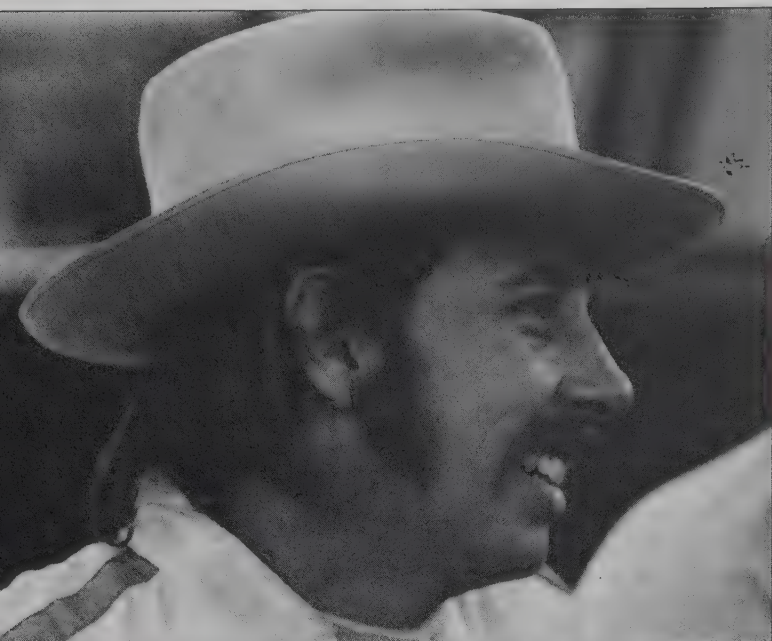
Pat now spends Saturday nights back at Canandaigua, which is close to his home and close to his sponsor's headquarters. He still returns to Fonda for Super DIRT Series races and when his schedule permits. His win in one of the track's early April specials in 2000 proved that Ward hadn't forgotten the fast lane at Fonda.

Ward's mentor was the late Howard Conkey, founder of Show Car Engineering and co-founder of Dave Lape's Champ Car Fabrications. Conkey died of melanoma in 1993. "Howard helped me a lot. He was smart, he knew how to set up a car, and he was my best friend. I still think about him every day. And boy, his chassis design could sure get around Fonda Speedway."

Jimmy Horton and Billy Pauch

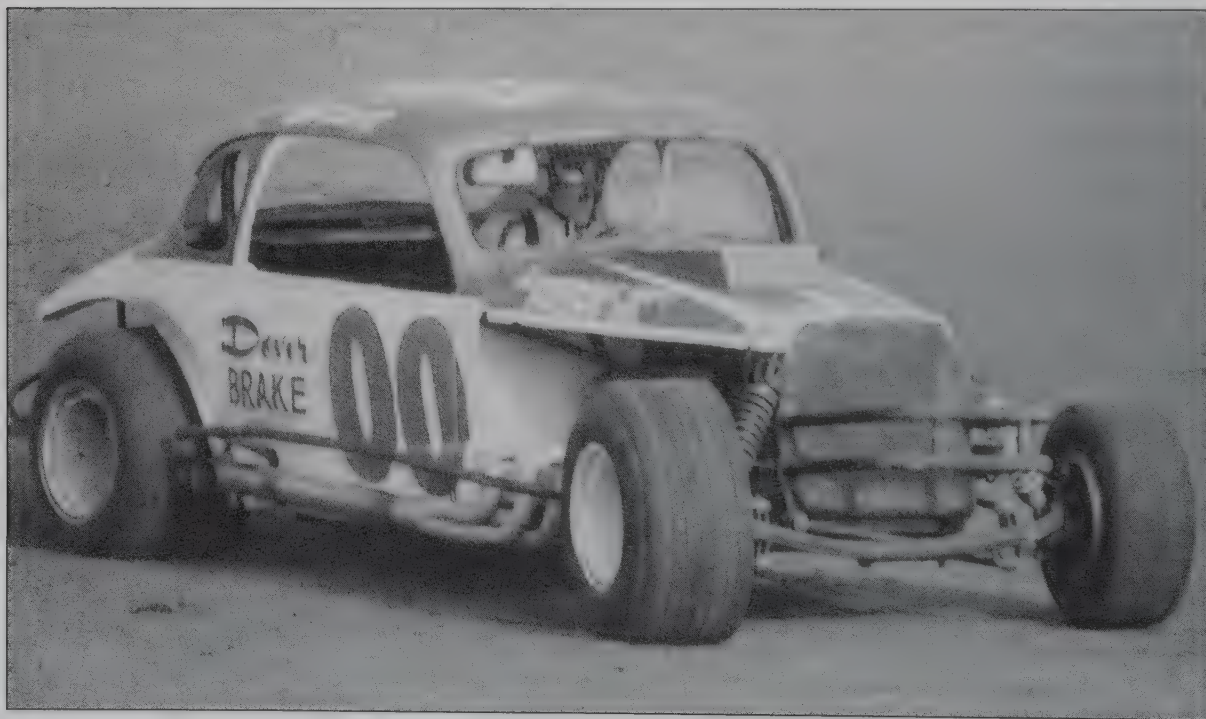
Until the 1970s, Fonda's asymmetric shape recurrently thwarted outsiders. Indeed, other oddball ovals are a rarity. The Waterloo Fairgrounds in Western New York comes to mind. Maybe that is why Waterloo's master, Cliff Kotary, had no problem adapting to Fonda. And then there's the Flemington Fairgrounds in New Jersey. The Flemington oval was truly unique, almost a square with rounded corners.

A fast lap at Fonda requires a driver to overcome some natural tendencies, like lifting into three and mashing the gas into four. In a wonderful example of geographic irony, it was a quartet of Florida invaders who proved that a weird-shaped track in New Jersey might provide the stuff needed to go fast in Fonda, New York. The four Floridians were Buzzie Reutimann, Will Cagle, Gary Balough, and Wayne Reutimann, who between them won six major events at Fonda from 1972 through 1975. No real surprise there: Florida racers (who got to run year-round) were the cream of the modified crop in the 1970s, plus the recent dropping of its NASCAR sanction and restrictive chassis rules had opened Fonda up to outsiders and their



Wayne Reutimann (left) and Jimmy Horton (right) were young bucks when they first conquered Fonda in the early '70s. Both remain active racers today. (Bob Perran photos)

Buzzie Reutimann power slides the Dover Brake #00 in 1973. (Bob Perran photo)



state-of-the-art tubular chassis. But the Reutimanns, Balough, and Cagle had more than just good equipment. Each had turned a lot of laps at Flemington. Being able to set up a car for Flemington and to drive well at Flemington provided a good baseline for Fonda.

Enter Jimmy Horton and Billy Pauch.

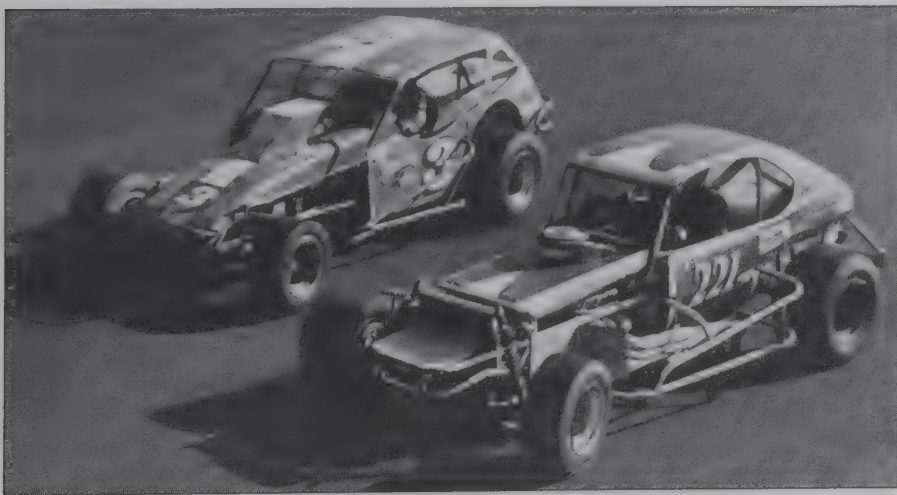
Horton had grown up in Somerville, New Jersey, 10 minutes from Flemington, where his father raced modifieds. The younger Horton was a regular Flemington attendee. But when his own driving career began in 1973, Jimmy was forced to race away from home at Middletown, New York, and Nazareth, Pennsylvania because New Jersey law required race drivers to be over age 18. He was only 16. By the time Horton became a Flemington regular in 1977, he already had four years of experience and one Middletown track championship under his belt.

Driving George Smith's Statewide Highway Safety Weld-chassied #3, Horton became a top runner at Flemington and began journeying to other tracks. On Tuesday, May 17, 1977, he towed to Fonda for the first time ever. He still remembers his first impression.

"Wow, this place is just like Flemington."

Horton went out and copped the 100-lap Fonda feature that night. At age 20, he'd become the youngest Fonda winner ever. His Flemington experience had assisted him well. "You drive Fonda the same way you drove Flemington. The long sweep between one and two at Fonda is just like Flemington. The longer sweep between three and four at Fonda is a little different than Flemington, but you hold the car and pitch the car the same way."

Horton would win six open-competition modified shows at Fonda, plus a 1981 URC sprint car race, before leaving the mods in 1985. He'd spend most of the next nine seasons down South, rac-



Jimmy Horton's teammate Billy Osmun (#3) and Jim Winks (#221) battle in turn two at Fonda in 1975. Winks towed down from Syracuse to win at Fonda four times between 1974 and 1976. (*Gater News* photo)

ing NASCAR Winston Cup, Busch Grand Nationals, and ARCA Late Models. Horton's résumé boasts eight superspeedway victories. Returning to the dirt track wars in late 1994, Horton promptly took the '94 Fonda 200. Solo wins in 1995 and 1996 brought his overall Fonda feature win total to 10, including that URC sprint victory.

It was Horton's success at Fonda that paved the way for other Flemington standouts, like Billy Pauch. His 123 Flemington wins are a record never to be broken, since Flemington closed in 2000.

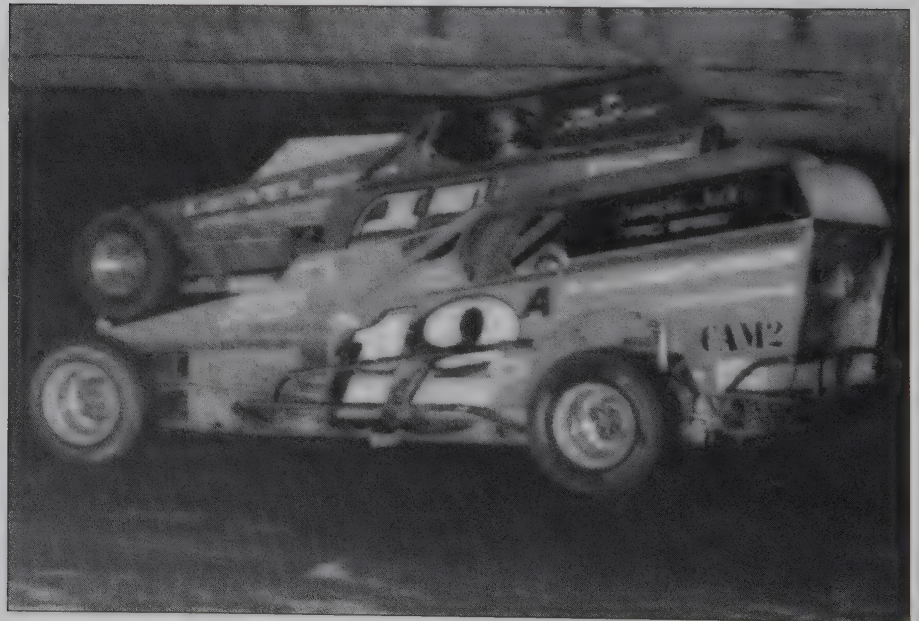
Pauch had noticed that not only did Flemington cars run well at Fonda, but that Fonda guys—like Jack Johnson, Dave Lape and Lou Lazzaro—ran well at Flemington. When he ventured to Fonda for the first time, he found out why: "You'd run the same setup at Fonda that you did at Flemington, even the same gears."

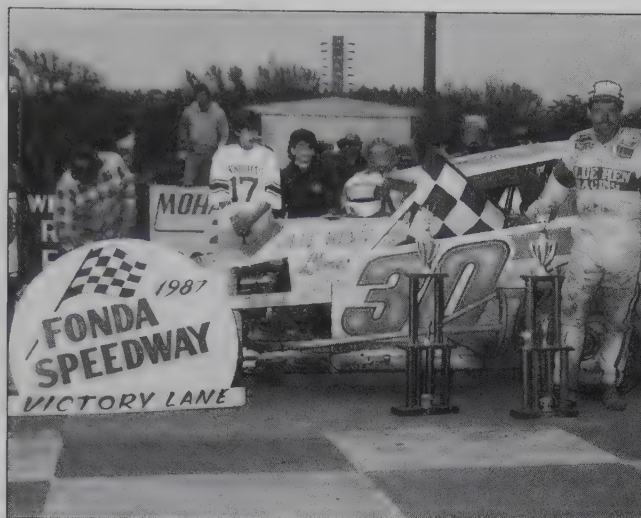
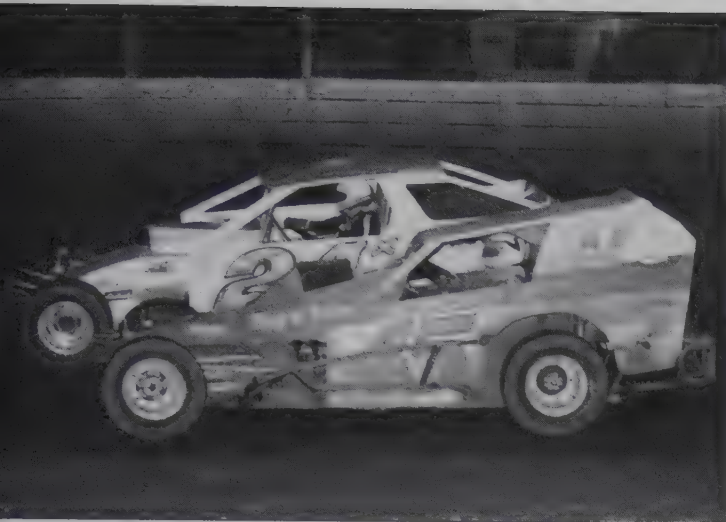
The 45-year-old Frenchtown, New Jersey driver has two Fonda triumphs: a 50-lapper in September 1985 and a 100-lapper in August 1985. That latter win was on "Harry Gant Night." Not only did the popular Winston Cup veteran drive a modified that evening, but he joined Pauch in victory lane for the celebration.

He says that driving Flemington was just slightly different than Fonda. "Fonda's tricky out of turn four, when the track debanks and can suck you into the wall. Plus, you don't want to get too high in turn two, or you'll go swimming."

Doubtless, Flemington know-how was also responsible for the Fonda wins earned by Kenny Brightbill and Kevin Collins, according to Billy "The Kid."

Billy Pauch (#47) drives around Jack Johnson (#12A) on his way to winning "Harry Gant Night" at Fonda in 1985. Pauch carded five top-five Fonda finishes in specials at the track that year. (Clancy Miller photo)





In recent years, the popular Pauch has significantly cut his travels, concentrating on tracks closer to home. Staying in the Garden State has served him well. He has over a hundred feature wins at East Windsor and at Flemington, and has averaged more than a dozen victories a season in each of the three years that the New Egypt Speedway has been re-opened. At that pace, he's liable to end up with more than a hundred wins at three different tracks, an unprecedented record anywhere.

Ken Tremont

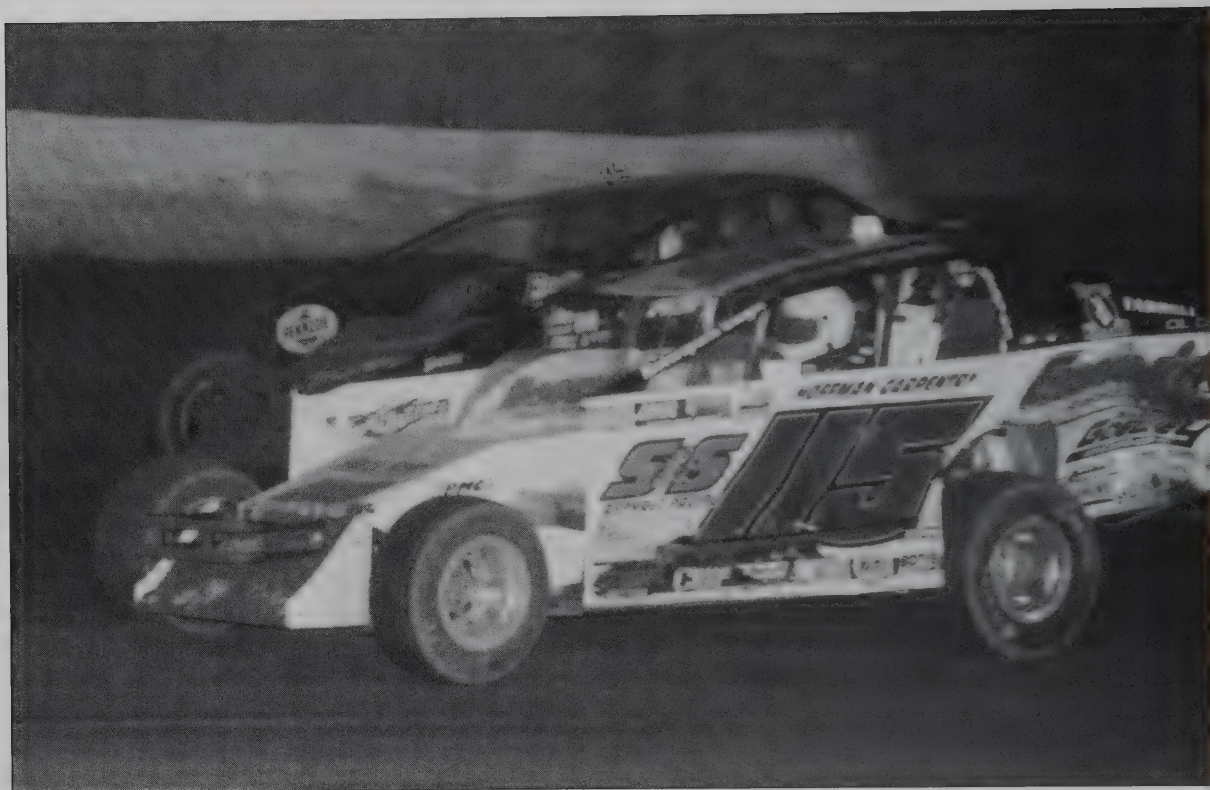
When he won the 2000 Fonda 200, Kenny Tremont became one of only a select few Lebanon Valley drivers to ever win a Fonda modified feature. Tremont, age 40, of West Sand Lake, is the latest in a long line of Valley superstars who have tried to conquer "The Track of Champions." Most have returned east empty handed.

"To win at Fonda was especially satisfying," says Tremont of his 2000 Fonda 200 big-block victory. "You can't be a race fan in the Albany area and be unaware of the rivalry between Fonda and The Valley. Which track is better? Which one has the better drivers? Things like that—people have argued about it for years." Tremont, best known as Lebanon Valley's all-time top-scoring driver, also has two Fonda 358 triumphs to his credit. "If you're a Lebanon Valley driver, you are also aware that very few of us have won at Fonda."

Tremont is right.

Other than himself, the list of Lebanon Valley drivers who have conquered Fonda is decidedly short. More notable is the list of Valley drivers who have fallen short. Howie Westervelt, who still holds the

(left) Flemington vet Kevin Collins (#24X) conquered Fonda twice, while local Bob Emsminger Jr. (#45), son of popular Fonda official Bob Emsminger, Sr., scored one win: a 1988 twin-20. (right) Kenny Brightbill in victory lane after winning the 1987 Fonda 200 in the Delaware-based Eugene Mills #30. (Clancy Miller photos)



Kenny Tremont (#115), winner of the 2000 Fonda 200, slides under Jim Horton in the Bob Faust #M-1 in this 1999 turn one shot. (DIRT Motorsports Collection)

Lebanon record for most wins in a season, was cursed at Fonda. He won a special 15-lap main for Valley cars only as part of Fonda's 1959 George Welch Memorial. Then he became a Fonda regular. Steering the famed Wright/Zauntner entry, Westervelt spent three-and-a-half winless years at Fonda in the early 1960s, and then lost his ride to Shoemaker.

The most storied Valley assault on Fonda was by well-heeled and outrageously flamboyant car owners Austin Dickerman and Joe Leto in the mid-1970s. They were party animals who spared no expense in fielding top equipment. Dickerman's driver, Butch Jelley in a Ford Pinto station wagon #357, amazingly finished second five times at Fonda in 1975 without a victory. Leto's hired gun, Tommy Corellis in #50, couldn't conquer Fonda either, so infuriating the boss that he ended up fielding a team car #50 for Kenny Shoemaker to drive and win with at "The Track of Champions." Jelley and Corellis begot other Lebanon Valley standouts. Mert Hulbert, Ernie Marshall, Stanley Wetmore, and Dick Hansen all descended on Fonda in the mid-1970s. All finished second. None won.

Other than Tremont, the only other drivers who have ever been regulars at The Valley and then won at Fonda were Don Wayman,

The Leto-Dickerman Show

One of the biggest changes in the fabric of the pit area at Fonda over the years relates to car owners. In the '50s and '60s, successful drivers carried huge reputations, but so too did winning car owners (and their cars). Back then, Michaels' #10-10, Whitbeck's #22, Sharky's #44, Wilcox's #32, and Drellos' #111 and #111a were followed almost as closely as their appointed chauffeurs. During the '70s, '80s, and '90s, however, the increasingly formidable costs of racing began to drive owners away. Drivers had to begin to seek out third-party sponsors to support their habit.

Right in the middle of the '70s, however, two flamboyant car owners burst on the scene at Fonda and Lebanon Valley. Almost as throwbacks to an earlier time, Albany's Joe Leto and Brandon, Vermont's Austin Dickerman fielded first-rate equipment and hired excellent drivers. At Lebanon, Leto teamed successfully with the notorious Tommy Corellis, while Dickerman relied mainly on the services of smoothie "Fast Eddie" Delmolino. At Fonda, Leto was immediately victorious with the aging Kenny Shoemaker, while Dickerman's hot shoe, Butch Jelley, hammered at the door throughout 1975 with five second-place finishes, earning him second in seasonal points.

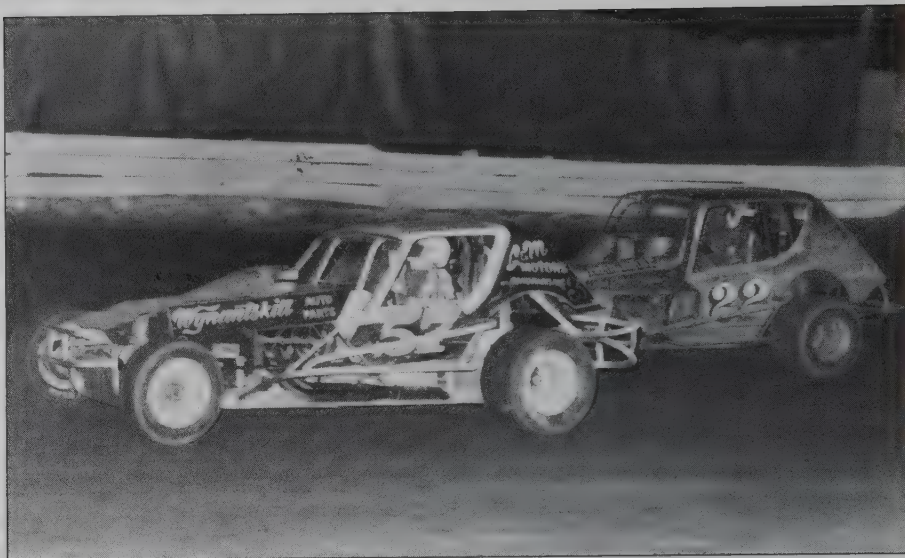
However, there are those who would contend that the hard-partying Leto and Dickerman were themselves worth the price of admission. For example, there was the night at Fonda in 1975 that Leto in his Cadillac and Dickerman in his Lincoln ventured out onto a wet track



Joe Leto (left) and Austin Dickerman (right) telling tall tales.
(Gater Racing Photo News)

surface between events and began racing—aggressively. Before management could reel them in, the inevitable happened. It was into the boards with the two high-dollar road cars. Fortunately neither of the pranksters was hurt, but observers claim that it sure wasn't just the track that was lubricated that night.

Tommy Corellis is shown here in Carlton Hughes' #57 leading Dave Lape in Bob and Carol Grimm's #22 in 1980. Corellis was a recurrent Fonda contender, but never a feature winner. (Clancy Miller photo)

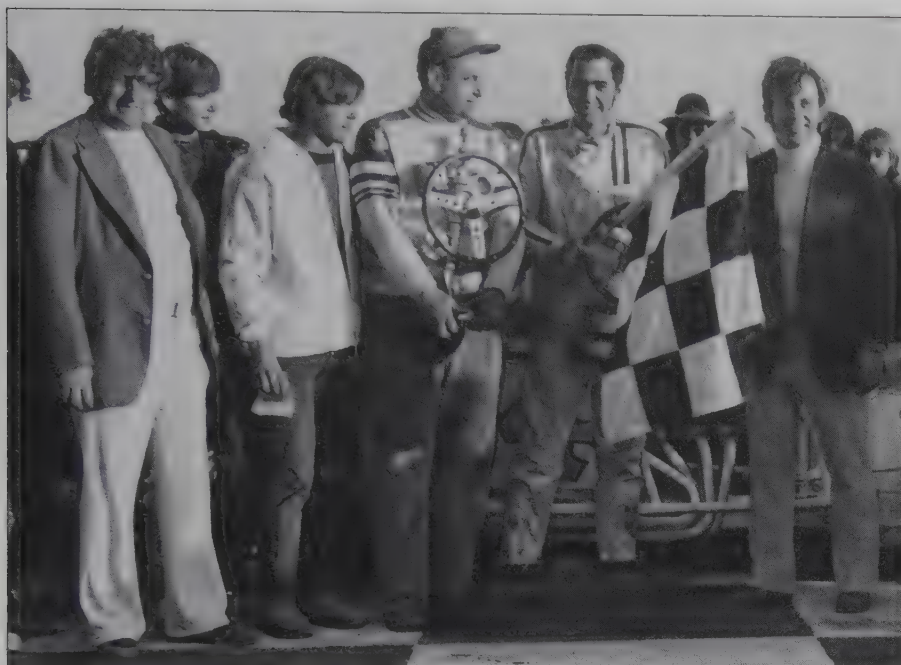


Dave Pelczar, Jack Farquhar, George Proctor, Frank Hoard Sr. and Bobby Albert. Wayman was the first. Lebanon ran on Friday nights from 1954 through 1957, which allowed drivers to support both tracks. The Cobleskill chauffeur was one of the very few who ran both The Valley and Fonda weekly. In the '50s he was a big Valley winner and he added another Lebanon Saturday night regular show pick-up ride victory to his résumé in 1966, before finally conquering Fonda (after 15 years of trying) in 1968 with Trinkhaus' #62. Wayman would get four more Fonda wins: a pair of 1970 dead heats in Russ Betz's #59 coupe; a 1973 triumph in Betz's #59 coach; and a 1974 win in Jay Broderick's #3 sedan, the last coach-bodied victory in Fonda history.

Connecticut's Dave Pelczar was next. He endured awful track conditions in Henry Bahre's #24 (an ex-Gerald Chamberlain #76) to win the 1974 Spring Thing 100. It was the first afternoon stock car racing in Fonda history. The track was a dusty minefield, making survival difficult and passing impossible. Co-author Lew Boyd finished third that day and had to be immediately hospitalized to cleanse his eyes.

Jack Farquhar began and ended his career at Fonda. But in between, the former Ephratah Town Justice was a top runner at Lebanon Valley. His only Fonda victory came near the end of his career, in 1978 in the Ribley & Harpinger #24s. The Judge's throng of fans, known as the Ephratah Bunch, always wore purple, the color of Jack's first #685.

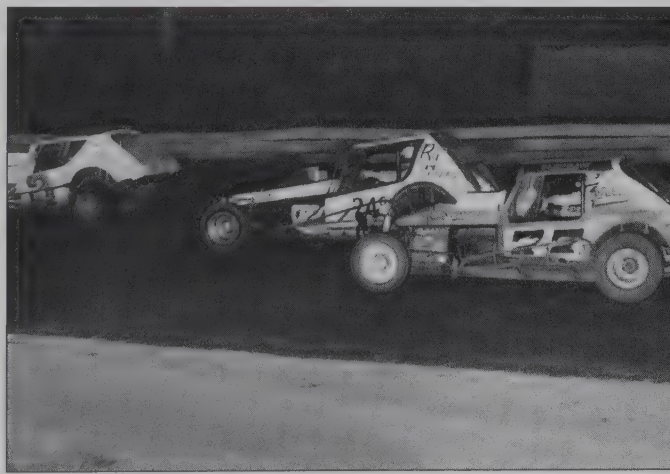
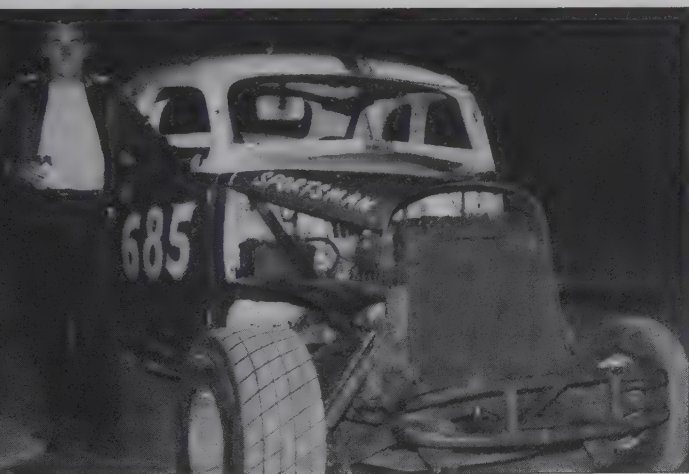
George Proctor is the most obscure of The Valley crossovers to win at Fonda. He copped a pair of 1964 Valley Saturday night shows.

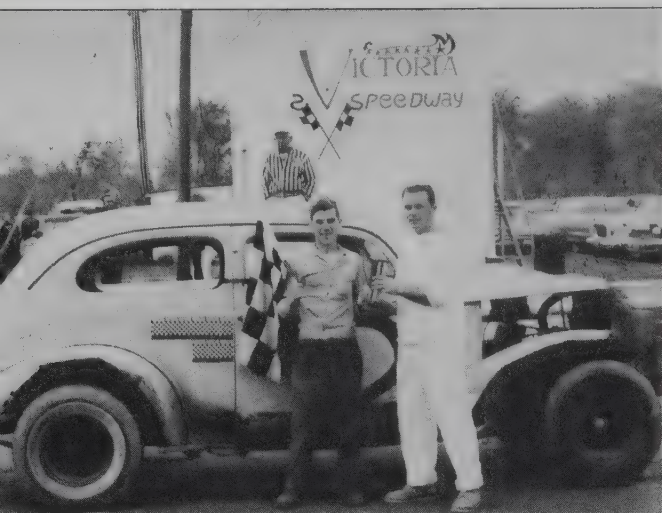


Dave Pelczar (second from right) shocked everybody by driving Henry Bahre's #24D to victory in Fonda's 1974 "Spring Thing." Co-promoter Ron Compagni is on the left and his partner Jim Gage Jr. is on the right. That's Bahre, holding the trophy, flanked by his son and his driver. (Gater News photo)

Proctor also ran Victoria's B-class limited division, which he dominated. Ultimately, the Crescent veteran made Fonda his home in the later '60s. After years of being a Fonda backmarker, Proctor pulled off the biggest upset in "Track of Champions" history in winning the 1979 season finale. One by one, front runners Jack Johnson, C.D. Coville, Dave Lape and Lou Lazzaro all suffered troubles that night and Proctor's light yellow #52 Gremlin inherited the lead with a couple of laps to go. The ecstasy in victory lane that evening wouldn't soon be forgotten.

(Bottom left) Jack Farquhar began his career at Fonda in 1964 driving his own #685. (Bottom right) Farquhar returned to Fonda to end his career driving the Ribley & Harbinger #245. He's shown here snaking around Jim Johnson (#77) and under Steve Luse (#3) to win his only Fonda feature on July 1, 1978. (left: Biittig Collection; right: Gater News photo by Ron DeYulio)





(left) George Proctor began his career as a hot dog at Lebanon Valley and in Victoria's limited class. (right) He then moved on to Fonda, struggled mightily, and ultimately shocked the racing world on August 25, 1979 by winning Fonda when favorites Ray Dalmata (#643) and Dave Lape (#22) broke near the end. (left: Feuz Collection; right: Gater News photo by Ron DeYulio)

Frank Hoard Sr. was next. The long-time Valley veteran had come to Fonda because of the track's reputation of a place where small blocks have an honest chance to win. Indeed, Fonda's long momentum curves and short straights sometimes even give high rpm small blocks an edge. On Memorial Day weekend in 1994, Hoard got out front early and hung on.

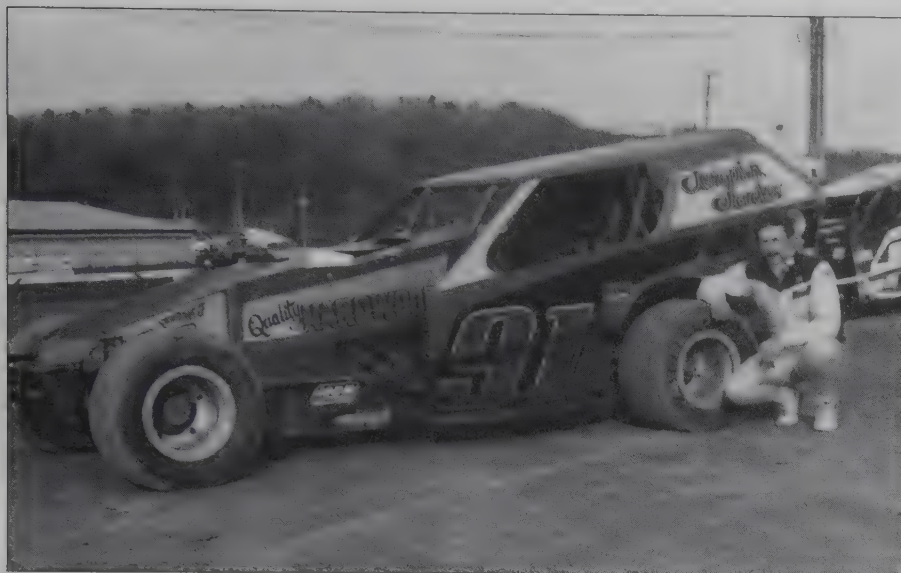
Bobby Albert is the latest former Lebanon Valley man to mine gold at Fonda. Lured to "The Track of Champions" by chief steward Marty Beberwick, Albert had taken his career to the next level. He's won Fonda features in #333 three times, one each of the last three seasons.

Billy Decker

Billy Decker, age 37, has become one of racing's biggest names. Three times now he's climbed to the apex of the modified racing world by winning Super DIRT Week at Syracuse. How many fans remember that his modified career started at Fonda Speedway?

The year was 1984. Fresh out of high school and coming off a couple of successful years in the six-cylinder late-model class at Penn Can and Five Mile Point, the "Franklin Flyer" headed north to run 320 modifieds at Fonda. "The 320 class at Fonda was some of the most fun I've ever had racing," remembers Decker. "We were allowed to run drag rubber and we'd run three-wide and never let off the whole way around. It was something."

Jack Johnson was Billy's mentor in those days. Johnson was friends with Billy's father, and also with his soon-to-be father-in-law. During a 1983 hunting trip to the Decker family's vast property



Billy Decker, shown here with his #91 at Fonda in 1987, began his modified career at the "Track of Champions" but has had a tough time of it when returning in recent years. (Gater News photo)

in Otsego County, Jack convinced father Floyd Decker to get Billy a 320. "I still remember my first 320 race, opening night at Fonda in 1984," he smiles. "I finished third, a lap down to winner Mitch Gibbs."

The following 320 season at Fonda was one for the ages. Mike Romano dominated as no one ever has at "The Track of Champions." After the first 13 weeks of that 1985 season, Romano had 11 feature wins and two DNFs. That's right, for 13 consecutive 320 main events, nobody had beaten Mike Romano. The 14th week saw Romano finally lose on the track, when he finished second to Billy Decker.

In 1986, Decker did double duty at Fonda, running cars in both the big-block modified class and the small-block 320 class. Despite not copping any features, Decker scored numerous top finishes in both classes and ended up in the top 10 in points in both divisions at season's end.

Decker won his first big-block feature at Fonda in 1987. But that triumph was a lone bright spot in an otherwise awful season. For 1988, he moved his Saturday night home to Lebanon Valley. "I wasn't mad at Fonda or anything. We just needed a change of pace," says Decker of the switch. "We had run some specials at The Valley, went good there, and liked it."

"Horses for courses," as they say in thoroughbred racing. At The Valley, Decker blossomed into a superstar. Billy returned to Fonda as an invader for a September 1988 100-lapper and won. Decker ultimately left The Valley, too, switching to Canandaigua in 1998. "We run at Brewerton on Fridays and Weedsport on Sundays," Decker says in explaining his move to "The Land of

Legends.” “By running Canandaigua on Saturdays, we can stay in Central New York all weekend. It’s really cut down on our travel time and travel costs.”

Decker still returns to Fonda twice annually for the Super DIRT Series race in July and the Fonda 200 in October. He’s had several good finishes, but no victory in those DIRT specials. And he finds frustrating the 13-year hiatus from visiting Fonda’s checkerboard square.

“I still know how to drive Fonda,” says Decker. “It is a very different and difficult race track because turns three and four are so long. At Fonda, you go into turn three wide open, whereas at most tracks you’re backing off entering turn three. At most tracks, you’re standing on the gas entering turn four, but at Fonda you’re rolling out of the throttle into turn four. What’s troubled us at Fonda in recent years is that we struggle on the setup.”

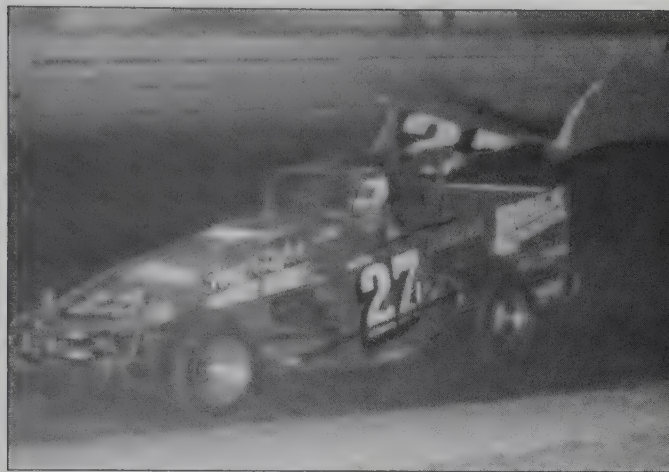
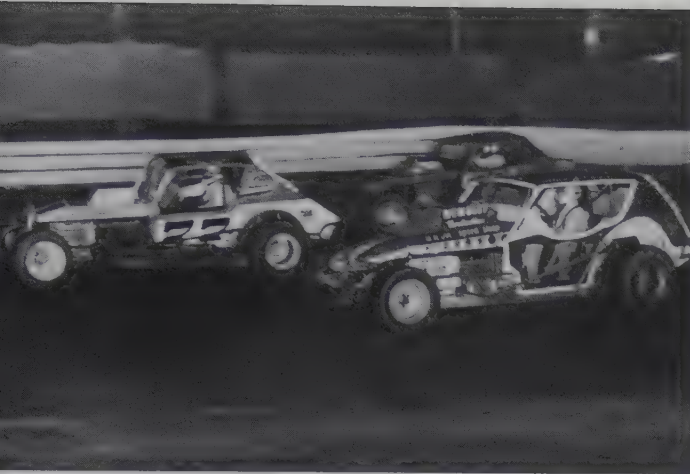
Alan and Danny Johnson

The Johnson brothers, Alan and Danny, have raced at Fonda so many times that they could be mistaken for regulars. Not only do they make all the track’s DIRT tour shows, but if Fonda has a race and their schedule is clear, they’ll be there.

The sons of motor builder Milt Johnson, a pretty fair modified driver in his day, Alan and Danny each have eight Fonda big-block wins to their credit. All have been in extra-distance races. Moreover, Alan has one 358 victory, during Fonda 200 weekend in 1997, on his ledger.

Twice the brothers have been on the winning end of an all-Johnson Fonda podium. In 1982 Danny won a 50-lapper, with Alan and Jack Johnson (no relation) in tow. The following year Alan scored back-to-back late-season 100-lap victories. In the latter, Danny and Jack rounded out the top three. Another Johnson oddity occurred in 1986, when the brothers swiped both ends of a twin-50 show, Alan taking the opener and Danny copping the nightcap.

In 1981 Alan became the first of the brothers to crack into Fonda’s victory lane—but not before having cracked up a car against Fonda’s infamous cemetery wall. The year was 1979 and Alan was steering a coupe that he’d just bought from Mert Hulbert’s team. “I got high all by myself in turn three, lost it in the loose stuff, and hit that graveyard wall almost head on at full speed,” recalls the 45-year-old Newark, New York racer. “The car was totaled. Other than Syracuse, that’s the hardest hit I’ve ever taken.” The following season, 1980, the graveyard was removed, courtesy of a court order from Montgomery County Supreme Court. With it went that widow-maker of a wall.



Alan cites the annual Fonda 200 as one of his favorite races. “I don’t know what it is, but there’s something really special about that weekend. There’s a different atmosphere in the air for that one.” Ironically, Alan has never won the 200.

Danny, age 42 of Phelps, New York, won his first Fonda feature in 1982. His speciality has been Fonda’s annual Syracuse qualifier. Four times—in 1983, 1988, 1992, and 1993—Danny’s taken Fonda’s Super DIRT Series tour stop honors.

Danny, like everyone else, points to the unusual configuration of turns three and four as the secret of going fast at Fonda. “You’re flat out in three and then you have to come to a stop in four to get around Fonda. There’s no other track like it. Merrittville is a little similar, wide open in three and stopping in four, but Fonda’s definitely unique.”

Danny credits his brother, and a pair of deceased Fonda legends, for helping him learn the groove at “The Track of Champions.” Alan has helped me there a lot,” says Danny. “Plus, when I first got started going there, I’d always try to follow Harry Peek and Lou Lazzaro—do whatever they did, run where they ran. That’s how I learned to race Fonda.”

Doug Hoffman

Although he’s one of the most successful modified drivers in history, Doug Hoffman speaks of Fonda with the reverence of a fan.

“There is so much nostalgia there, so much history there. If you like racing and Fonda doesn’t turn you on, somebody had better check your pulse. Fonda has the true sense of a country fairground. And you’ve got the river on one side, the railroad on the other. It would be impossible to build something like that today. The older

(left) Alan Johnson (#14) runs under Jim Johnson (#77) and Harry Peek (subbing for Brian Ross in #93) in 1978. (right) Danny Johnson lost most of the body on his #27] on April 9, 1989, but he kept digging to finish fourth. (Clancy Miller photos)



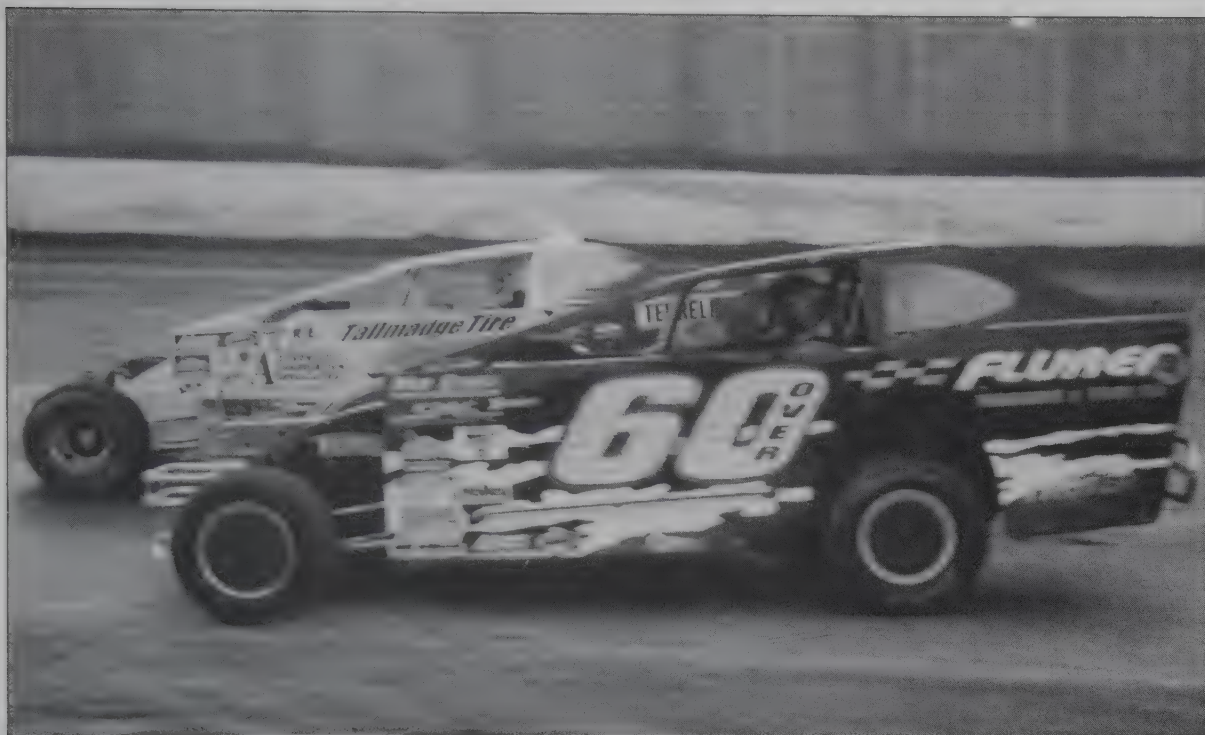
When he talks about Fonda Speedway, Doug Hoffman, shown here in 1987, speaks with reverence. (Gater News photo by Bill Nuver)

you get, the more things change. For me, it's neat to pull into a place like Fonda that hasn't changed in a million years. Well, one thing's changed. They got rid of the old wooden guardrail. If you got into that stuff, you went home in a basket.

"I've become very aware of all of the great drivers that have called Fonda home. I didn't know a lot about racing history until I became a driver myself. But I've been to the DIRT Hall of Fame in Weedsport. I've looked at the plaques. Bill Wimble. Pete Corey. Lou Lazzaro. Ken Shoemaker. Jeep Herbert. C.D. Coville. Ernie Gahan. Bill Rafter. Rene Charland. Ken Meahl. Buck Holliday. Steve Danish. And suddenly it dawns on you: Every one of these guys was a Fonda regular at one time or another. No wonder they call it "The Track of Champions."

"Of course, maybe the reason I speak so highly of Fonda is because we always run so well there. We always look forward to racing there and our past success has a lot to do with it."

Hoffman's career began in late models in 1977 at the old Dorney Park asphalt track near his Allentown, Pennsylvania home. It was at the famed Flemington (New Jersey) Fairgrounds in the early 1980s where Hoffman became a star. The 43-year-old driver has eight



Fonda modified victories to his credit. All have been long-distance special events. From 1988 through 1994—with the sole exception of 1993—Hoffman won a big race at Fonda every year. Doug then had a five-year hiatus from Fonda's victory lane, but then his triumphs in the track's 1999 Super DIRT Series Syracuse Qualifier and in the 2001 Fonda 200 proved that Hoffman hasn't lost his Fonda touch.

Doug Hoffman (#60) darts under Steve Paine (#74) to take the lead and go on to victory in the 2001 Fonda 200. Paine was the 1999 winner. (Clancy Miller photo)

Open Cockpit Racing at Fonda

The first ever automobile race at Fonda was an open cockpit big car show held on September 9–10, 1927. The big cars returned to Fonda several times between 1927 and 1939. (See Chapter 1 for a detailed account of these hair-raising events.)

In 1955 the open cockpit cars returned to Fonda in the form of midgets, under the sanction of NASCAR. Over the next 30 years the midgets would perform three more times under various sanctions.

On July 14, 1956, the United Racing Club sprint cars made a tour stop at the Fonda Speedway. The stock car fans enthusiastically supported the special sprints car show, and the U.R.C. sprint cars have become an annual attraction at Fonda Speedway. (See sidebar on next page.)

Open Cockpit Racing at Fonda

by Les King

(Editors Note: Les King is a noted auto racing historian and photographers. He was at Fonda on opening night, 1953, and has photographed six decades of action on the historic Montgomery County oval. Les picks up the story of open-cockpit racing at Fonda from where we left off in Chapter One, at the close of the big car era.)

For 45 years the United Racing Club (U.R.C.) annual tour stop at Fonda Speedway has been a sell-out main attraction. Since 1956, U.R.C. has put on 44 top flight sprint car shows. The feature winner of the first event was Bert Brooks driving the Deubel/Shaw Ardun powered by a Mercury conversion. Brooks learned to drive at the midget driving school held at the old Century Stadium in West Springfield, MA, and went on to win four U.R.C. championships before being fatally injured in a racing accident in Pennsylvania.

Bobby Courtwright, a transplanted stock car driver, was the winner when the U.R.C. returned in 1957 in a stand alone show (no stock cars) that turned out to be the only afternoon race at Fonda from 1939 to 1974.

On May 29, 1964, U.R.C. returned to Fonda to start a tradition of Memorial Day weekend open-cockpit racing that continues today. The winner in '64 was Wyman "Cookie" Osterhout from New Salem, New York (near Albany).

From 1966 to 1969 Earl Halaquest set up permanent residence in victory circle. He went on to collect a club record of six U.R.C. championships, and was inducted into the National Sprint Car Hall of Fame in Knoxville, Iowa in 2000. Halaquest passed away in 2001.

Buck Buckley is the all-time U.R.C. feature winner at Fonda with five wins. Halaquist has four wins and Dave Kelly, Greg Cloverdale, and Sean Michaels have three each.

The Empire Super Sprints (E.S.S.) raced at Fonda four times. Winners were John Brutcher (1987), Bobby Parrow (1991), Tom Taber (1992), and Craig Lane (1994).

The Eastern Limited Sprints (E.L.S.) raced at Fonda six times. The winners were Doug Emery (1997), Craig Keel (1997), Rich Wood (two wins in 1998 and one in 1999), and Brian Dumigan (2000).

The mighty midgets raced at Fonda four times. The first event was a NASCAR midget show in 1955 won by Fred Meeker. The Northeastern Midget Association (NEMA) came in for a 1957 event won by George Tilton. Hoppy Redner won an independently sanctioned midget race in 1960, and Russ Stoeher won an Eastern States Midget Racing Association (ESMRA) event in 1985.

There have been 58 midget and sprint car features run at Fonda since 1955 and Cookie Osterhout is the only local driver to make it to victory lane. (Hal Rettberg from Albany and Eddie Gallione from Schenectady both raced at Fonda many times and went on to win U.R.C. club championships, but no Fonda wins.) With all the good local drivers who have raced over the years, one can see the high caliber of racing that has been presented at the old fairgrounds.

We can only guess what the next 50 years will bring forth.

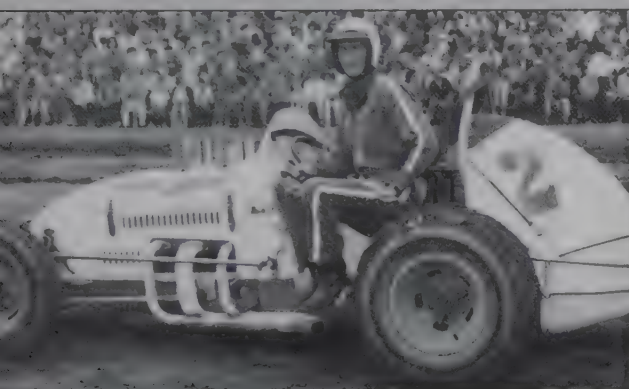
(See Appendix for a complete listing of open cockpit feature winners at Fonda.)



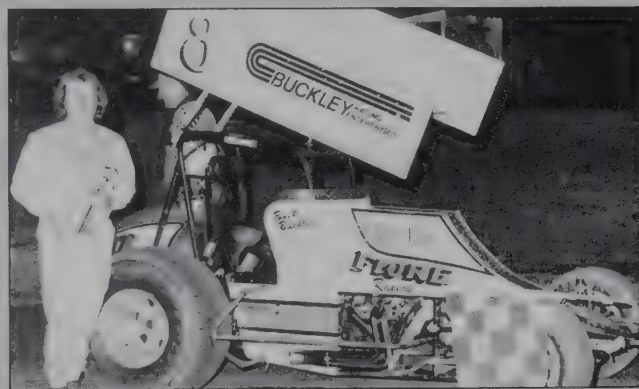
Fredrick Meeker, winner of the NASCAR midget feature on October 8, 1955, poses with car owner Fred Kenan (left) and Fonda starter Chet Hames (right). (Les King photo)



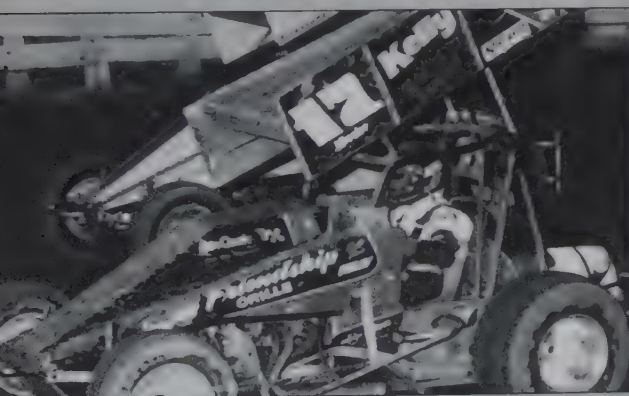
Fonda legend Pete Corey tried his hand in a U.R.C. sprinter at Fonda on July 14, 1956. (Pete Corey Jr. Collection, courtesy of Dan Radbruch)



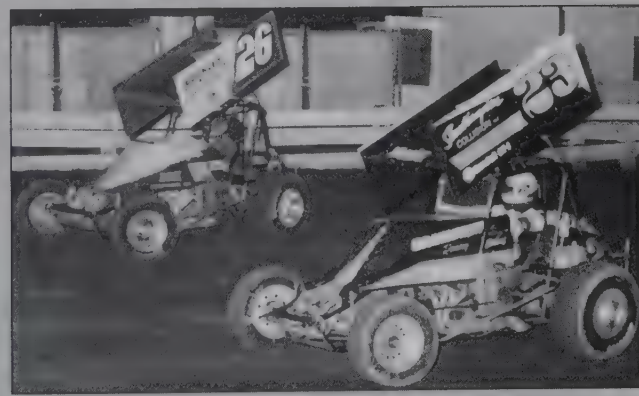
Earl Halaquest, shown in the Nesler Chevy V-8, was a six-time U.R.C. champ and winner of four consecutive Fonda features from 1966 to 1969. (Les King photo)



Buck Buckley wins at Fonda on May 24, 1980. Buckley is the all-time U.R.C. feature winner at Fonda with five trips to victory lane. (Clancy Miller photo)



Dave Kelly (#17) on the way to his third Fonda win on May 23, 1987. (Clancy Miller photo)



Glenn Fitzcharles (#26) works the top to pass Lou Cicconi (#23). "Fitz" won three straight Fonda features in 1993 and 1994. (Clancy Miller photo)



Jack Johnson, in mid-1971, with the car that made him famous. The familiar "A" would be added to his #12 later in the season when he traveled to Rolling Wheels where car owner Bill Sandman and his driver Ed Ortiz had dibs on #12. (Jack Johnson Collection)

Andy Romano starts his coach #97 from the pole in this dramatic 1966 shot by Russ Bergh, riding in Fonda's pace car. (Andy Romano Collection)



Fonda's First Families: The Johnsons and the Romanos 10

IF THERE IS ONE TREND that defines the modern era of stock car racing at Fonda, it is the emergence of families as the primary infrastructure of today's race teams. Growing extinct is yesteryear's car owner/hired driver relationship, increasingly replaced by father/son pairings

So the social fabric that most epitomizes recent history at "The Track of Champions" is a son following in dad's footsteps. The examples are many: Ken and Craig Hanson; Ray Sitterly Sr. and Jr.; Mike Jacobs and Aaron Jacobs; George Proctor Sr. and Jr.; Clem and Pat Dabiere; Jim Johnson Jr. and Sr.; Bill and John Roesse; John Marsh Sr. and Jr.; Stan and John Bellinger; Frank Hoard Sr. and Jr.; Dick, Rich and Dennis Pennock; and more and more than space allows listing. Heck, Fonda even has a father/daughter driver combo: Ray and Jessica Zemken.

However, two families have taken Fonda participation to unprecedented heights. Both are in their third generation of involvement and neither shows the slightest sign of easing off the pedal. They are the Johnsons and the Romanos.

The Johnsons

Hands down, the winningest driver in the history of Fonda Speedway is Jack Johnson, the mainstay of Duanesburg's Johnson family of racing. To date, the 58-year-old campaigner has 138 Fonda big block feature wins—the first on August 7, 1971 and the latest on June 2, 2001. He is also one of the most credentialed dirt modified road warriors with over 400 wins all over the East Coast, including two Super DIRT Week titles.

How is it that this one driver should excel so dramatically over the thousands of competitors who have raced on the tricky track in Fonda over the last 50 years? A study of his situation clearly shows three key ingredients to success: “Jumpin’ Jack” Johnson had the desire, the goods, and the opportunity.

Desire came very early. Jack’s Dad, Rollie, was a journeyman sprint car driver in the post-World War II years. When the stock car craze took over, Rollie got a coupe for Fonda and other local tracks. Jack recalls with passion his first childhood memories of standing next to the popcorn stand near the first turn at Fonda in the ’50s watching his father. “I could hardly see over the fence I was so small. I used to just stand there watching ’em throw mud into the stands, and close my eyes and pretend I was a race driver. I became a fanatic.” His fanaticism grew so strong that over the next 50 years little—not school, not work, not shortage of money—would get in the way of its full expression. “Racing is the only thing I’ve ever dreamed of doing, the only thing I really wanted,” he acknowledges.

Wiry in stature, while quick and strong, Jack was a natural athlete. And he seems to have some special endurance gene of near bionic proportion. It was remarkable how he could ring out a 200-lapper and be fast on the last lap in 1972, but it is even more remarkable that he can do it still. Today his graying hair almost seems painted on, a foil to that youthful face and those penetrating eyes. Despite hits and bangs on hundreds of nights in seasons past, he stands straight and firm, his shadow showing no sign of bulkiness.

Just as our dreamer had the desire and the capability, he had the opportunity. Schenectady was a racing hot bed. Jack grew up right in the thick of it. Electric City garages, owned by the likes of Bob Mott, A.C. Caprara, and Jim Brush, fielded over 20 Fonda cars in the ’50s and the ’60s. The metropolis was abuzz with racing, and there was ample motivation for young Jack to skip school. “By the time I was nine, they had me gutting out old coupe bodies with a torch.” The kid’s persistence was noticed, and he was given a ride in Ray Bunn’s go-kart team. He returned the favor with championships at kart tracks in Rotterdam and Howes Cavern.

The central figure that made all the pieces come together for Jack was his father Rollie. The elder Johnson was your basic workingman racer. Crippled in one leg from polio, he was a popular guy who struggled mightily to keep it all going with his family, his body shop, and his racing. After his Offenhauser sprint car stint, he bought his buddy Paul Broznya’s sportsman coupe, a 1940 Ford with a flathead. The car was numbered 32. It became Rollie’s number and was handed down to Joe. Rollie was steady, but no winner. Jack’s take: “It wasn’t the best car. I remember Dad and his guys working on that car all night. My brother Joe and I watched them through a crack in the floor when we were supposed to be sleeping. I couldn’t believe how

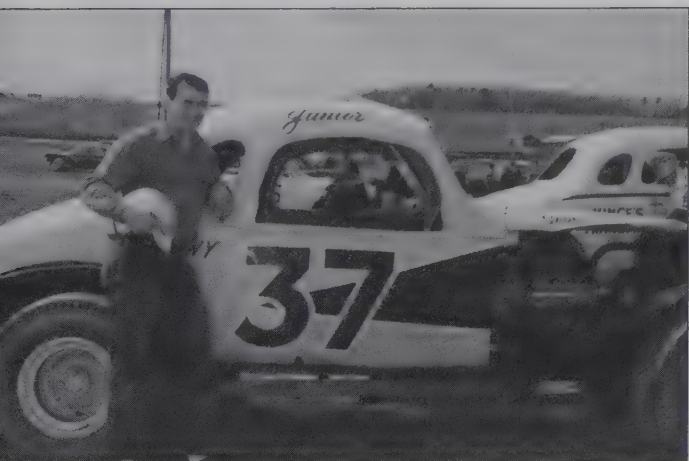


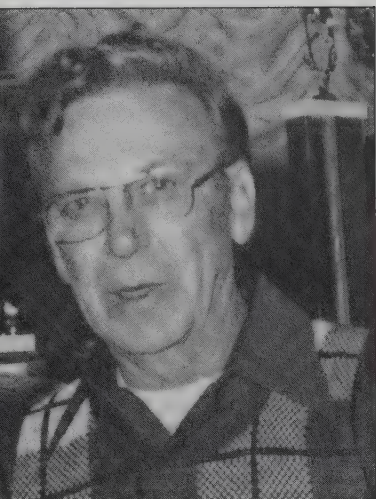
Racing has always been a family affair for the Johnsons. Here's a shot of Rollie's #7 sprinter at the Altamont Fairgrounds in 1948. Left to right: Rollie Johnson, Jack Johnson, Joe Johnson, Rollie's wife Linda, and Mrs. Paul (Nancy) Broznaya. (Johnson Collection)

he did so much with so little. And on top of it, he gave us such a happy childhood. He was my idol."

If there was one specific racing moment in which his idol helped out the most, it was probably the very first night Jack drove a Fonda stocker. Fresh from his tour in the service, the 22-year-old Johnson was chomping at the bit to race. He was crewing on Tony Vilano's #37, the former legendary A&C Bodyworks car then driven by Tony's son Junior. Junior was having a tough go of it. One night in 1966, Tony, who had neither experience nor money, waved his hands in frustration and asked Jack to jump in the car. Totally surprised, Johnson chugged down pit road for warm-ups—and what would be a critical experience. Out on the track he simply could not steer the car, mightily as he tried. Highly discouraged and taking on full blame, he drove back to the pits. "I can't do this," he said dejectedly. "I'm not cut out for it." The normally calm Rollie erupted. "Enough

Teammates Junior Vilano (left) and Jack Johnson (right), shown in 1966, so often swapped cars in the Tony Vilano stable that Fonda announcer Mike Valachovic had fits trying to figure out which one was in what ride. (left: Grady photo; right: Feuz Collection)





Rollie Johnson
(Johnson Collection)

of that, Jack. All you have talked about for the last 10 years is driving. Now toughen up, and get your ass back out there." Rollie then snatched a torch, heated up the king pins to free them up, and waved Jack back out. After 35 years Jack is still out there going around.

The young Johnson's first seasons came at the sunset of Fonda's Glory Years. Jack tried to compensate for his lack of seat time and for the #37's lack of poke by pushing the button. Too hard. "He spent more time in the wall than any driver I know," recalls Clancy Miller, long-time Fonda photographer. The team would go through three cars and 12 motors in a couple of seasons. It was not easy to watch."

Neither Jack nor Tony prospered at the pay-off window. (Ironically, Tony with subsequent driver, Jerry Pennock, won four Fonda features in 1970 alone.) However, Jack was beginning to learn some things from the aging veterans that would define his future style. He speaks of an encounter with the Crescent Hillbilly in the yellow Studebaker. "In Tony's car, I beat Pete Corey in a heat race. He came over afterwards and said, 'You did a helluva job, son. But I'll tell you this. Next time you see me coming up on you, you better move over.' You know, Pete had been my hero, along with Jeep and Kenny, when I was growing up. But when he said that, it drained me. I never talked to him again. Ever."

Jack Johnson collects a
1969 heat win in Tom
Douglas' #91.
(Feuz Collection)

In 1969 Jack drove #91 for Tom Douglas from Amsterdam. The team would show flashes of brilliance, but once again there was that hungry bite out of the fence. In just the second night out, Jack de-

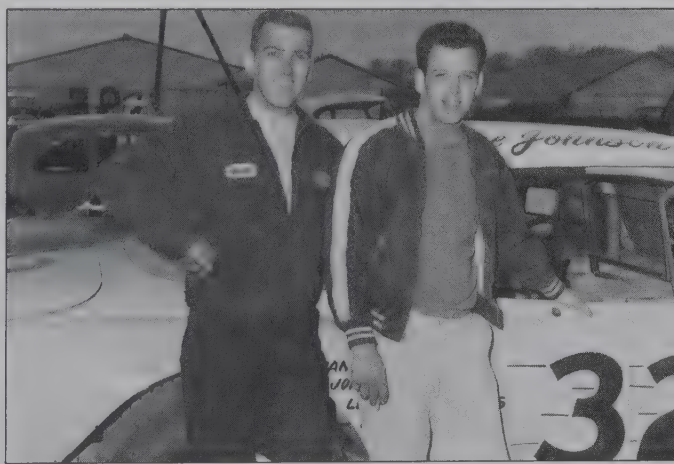
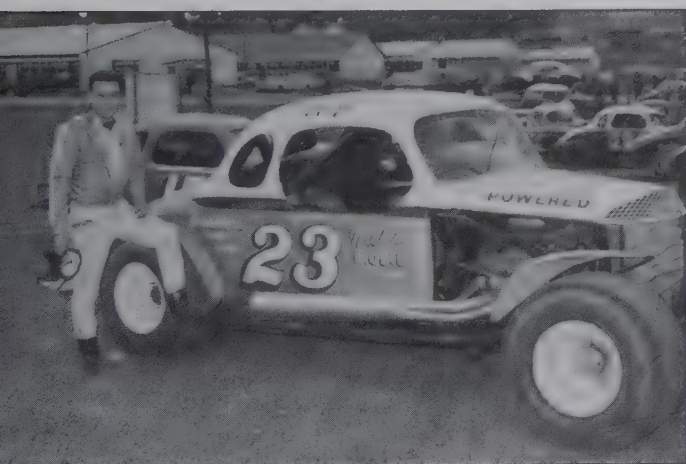


molished Douglas' coupe on the judges' stand wall. They built a replacement Falcon in a week, but once again it would keep breaking. Its faulty Crower injection was a frequent problem and so Jack decided to turn to Lou Lazzaro for help. "I said, 'Louie, will you just help us so we can at least race?' The Monk, who had a Crower himself, responded, 'I don't know anything about it.' That was hard. I wasn't expecting it. I had looked up to Louie, as I did to Jeep and The Shoe. I could ask Jeep and Kenny anything and they would tell me. Of course, I still admired Louie as a driver, but I came to admire Jeep and The Shoe more. They were both drivers and teachers."

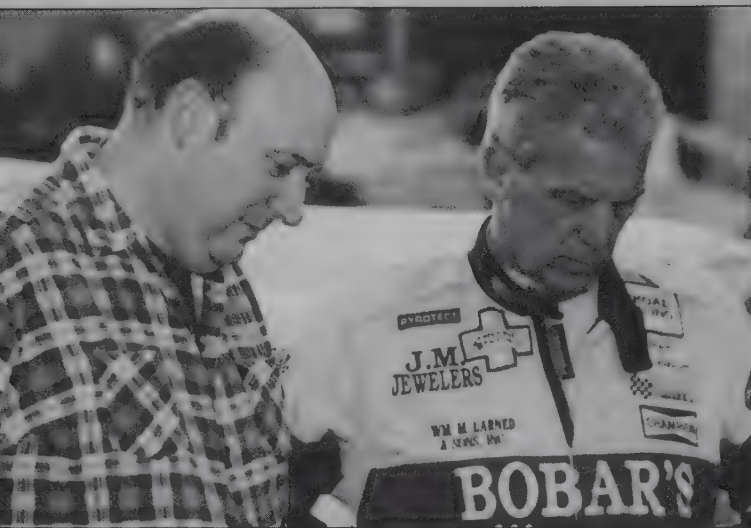
By the end of his second season with Douglas, Tom had had it and Johnson was forced to fend for himself in various rides such as Bernie Maruski's #71, Jimmy Izzo's #900, and Val's #215. Jack was flailing. He began to wonder how he could possibly find the road to success. Two young Schenectady drivers would become important sign posts. They were Harry Peek and Peppy Pepicelli.

A contemporary and neighbor, Harry began his career at the Valley in 1966. The results were unremarkable to say the least—so much so that the laid-back Peek did not even compete in 1967. But, 1968 was another story. He switched to Fonda, debuting a sleek late model of his own construction, and became both Fonda and the state's late-model kingpin. He backed that up with 10 more wins in 1969, plus the track and state late-model championships to boot. Peek was quick to share his secret. "Jack", he intoned, "it was the easiest thing I have ever done because I had new equipment." Harry's whispers conformed to the advice being given to Jack by a fast-emerging Peppy Pepicelli. Pepicelli, a protégé of Rollie since the time Jack was in the service, was also becoming a fine car builder. Pep's coupe carried #23, a reverse of Rollie's 32 numerals. Pep also put together a late-model #32 for Jack's brother, Joe, and it won immediately. Jack was listening carefully when Pep pitched him: "Jack, you just gotta get your own car."

Pep Pepicelli, shown on the left in 1968, springboarded Jumpin' Jack's career by telling him to get his own car. On the right, brothers Joe (left) and Jack (right) pose in 1970 in front of Joe's winning Pep Pepicelli-built late model. (left: Rich Zagata Collection; right: Feuz Collection)



Harry



Harry Peek (left) and Jack Johnson (right).
(Johnson Collection)

Around the turn of the decade in 1970, a new wave of drivers flooded the pits at Fonda. Stars such as Larry Livingston, Jim Riggi, Don Van Guilder, Eddie San Soucie, Todd King, Bill Nelson, and Al Castrucci counted among their number, but none would shine as brightly as Rotterdam's Harry Peek.

Having grown up in an apartment next to the garage that housed the Brush Radio #27 driven by greats Link Petit and George Welch, Harry was bitten by the racing bug at an early age. After a year in the support division at Lebanon Valley, he descended upon Fonda with a late model in 1968 and promptly romped to 23 feature wins in a little over three years. In mid 1970 he embarked on an impressive modified career that would include 20 victories on the Montgomery County oval. Stunningly, the first one came in just his second week of modified racing, and it was the Fonda 200.

Peek was totally versed in the history of

Fonda. His cars, always meticulously conceived and crafted, were respectfully numbered #27. (He called George Welch's widow, Bertha, asking permission to use the number.) However, the handsome, soft-talking, deliberate Peek was cut from different cloth than the rowdy racers who came before him. He was one of the first to draw his designs up on blueprints prior to construction, and there are those who would say he approached his driving the same way. Sue Peek (coincidentally George Welch's niece) describes Harry this way:

"Harry just loved Fonda. His biggest thing was talking about the days when there was three abreast racing and lots of fun—before it got so commercially aggressive, and before people got to buying knowledge rather than learning knowledge. He was a full-time racer. For a time he built chassis with Peppy Pepicelli. He did all his own work.

"He liked to race as high on the track as he could. It came to be called the "Patented Peek Charge." He liked starting in the back because he said it gave him a feel for the track. But he was so careful when he was coming through. He drove two cars ahead of him, concentrating on the cars rather than on the track. He'd always wait for folks to spread out before his charge. He was very fast, but very, very cautious. His driving articulated his personality. We teased him that he should have been a minister. He was so patient about everything, but at the same time he was on a mission. And no matter how bad things got, Harry just smiled.

"He won quite a few races during the '70s and was track champ in '72, '73, '74, and '75. He was also a founder and early

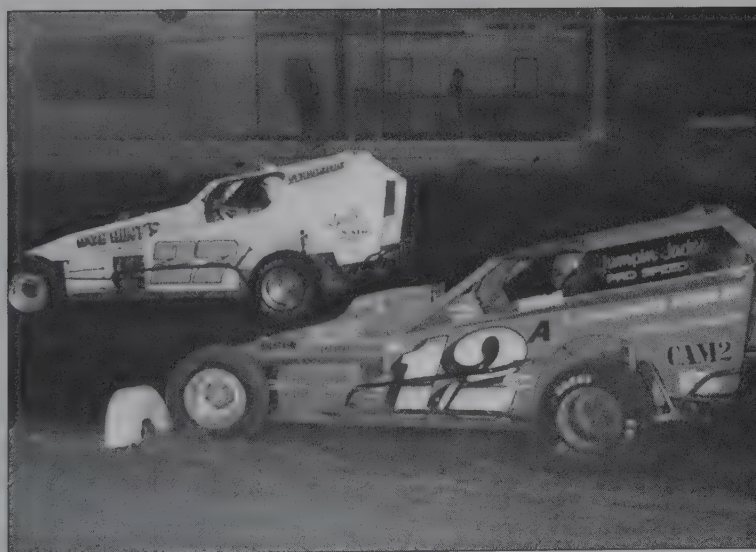
president of the New York State Stock Car Association. In fact, our first date was the banquet in 1971.

"In 1977 he had a bad, bad flip in the first turn and got battery acid in his eyes. Everyone knew it was a turning point. He was not as fast afterwards, but few people knew why. The day of the accident, we found out I was pregnant again, this time with Katie. He freaked out 'cause he realized that he would have to focus on providing more safely for our family of three kids. He joined UPS where he was to work happily for the next 20 years. And right about the same time, Harry was diagnosed with a cardiac arrhythmia, similar to C.D. Coville's situation. He was on medication. It slowed him down. All these things were a real wake-up call."

Peek did remain active into the '80s, driving for himself and others. He would pull off occasional winning runs at Malta and Devil's Bowl. However, his heart problem would not let him be, and the gentle Fonda legend died on February 5, 1998 of cardiac arrest.

(top right) Harry Peek (left) etched his name irrevocably in Fonda history by winning the Fonda 200 on August 5, 1970, his second night in a modified. Fonda promoter Ed Feuz (right) makes the trophy presentation. (Feuz Collection)

(bottom right) Harry (#27) goes upstairs around Jack Johnson (#12A) to win his last Fonda feature on April 27, 1985. (Clancy Miller photo)





Jack and his long-time crew chief JoJo DeSarbo.

(Gater News photo by Mike Collins)

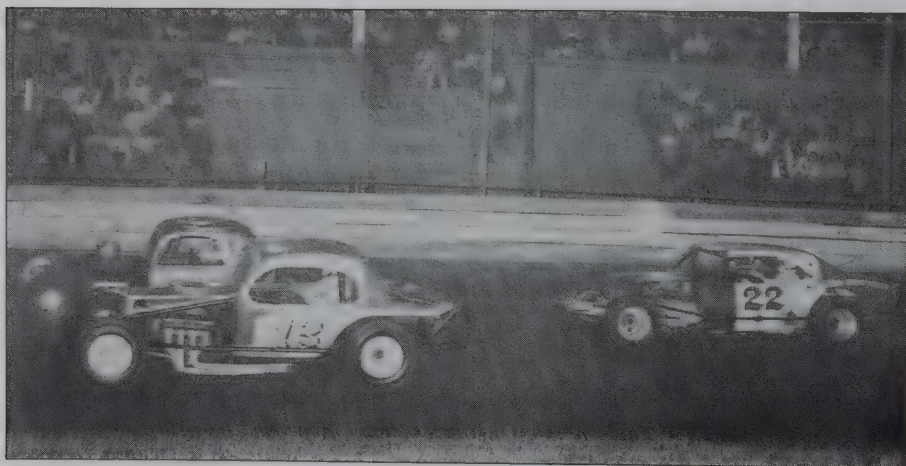
So it was that during the long winter nights of 1971 that the first #12 coupe, a 1937 Ford, was assembled with the best of parts. At the same time Jack was rallying an amazing crew, including his brother Jeff, "JoJo" DeSarbo, Sandy Santa Barbara, Ray Burns, and Joe Bellomo. All remain with the Johnsons today as an informal extended family.

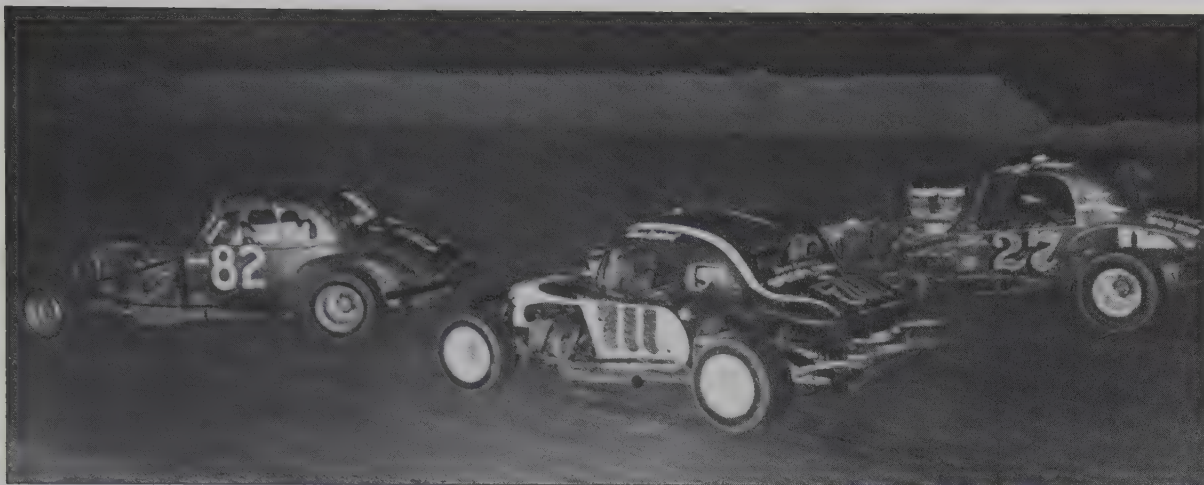
The new Johnson coupe was awesome from the get-go. The first Fonda win came on August 8, 1971. It would, however, be the rainy summer of the following year that Jack really took a shine. He made a major statement at Fonda's 1972 opening night, winning easily and outgunning Lazzaro and '71 track champ, Maynard Forrette. He thought he'd won the initial Fonda Super DIRT Week qualifier on July 22, 1972, only to have the victory given to second-place runner Ralph Homes in a Sonny Seamons-built coupe #82. Officials docked Jack because he had entered and exited the pits in the wrong place, a rule that was in place on only that one night in Fonda history. Jack was to avenge that bitter defeat with a spunky win in Fonda's Permatex 100 on August 12, 1972.

But, the real turning point of the year—and his career—would come late in '72 at the infamous four-cornered "square" Flemington Fairgrounds in New Jersey. Jack stood the racing world on its ear by trouncing the best in the business in a rain-threatened 200 lapper. "I had never seen the track before, but I liked it instantly. It was just like Fonda. I stayed on the outside and won. It launched me. I realized I could run with Billy Osmun, Sammy Beavers, Buzzie—it didn't matter. There's usually a race that stands out in any driver's career. That was mine."

Johnson's growing obsession with fielding top-shelf equipment led him to take a shot in Joe Leto's #50 in 1975. The notorious Leto team had a good kit, but the chemistry was wrong. The Shoe would replace Jack by Memorial Day, while Jack regrouped with a new #12a. He squeaked out his first Fonda championship that summer over Valley renegade Butch Jelley.

Jack darts under Maynard Forrette, in Dick and Larry Roerig's #99, and Dave Lape, in his Camaro #22, on the way to his first Fonda feature win in 1971. (Gater News photo by Dave Wright)





During the mid-'70s, Ralph Compani and Jimmy Gage Jr. normally delivered a wet, spongy surface for their swelling modified field and the somewhat less populous late-model roster. Warm-ups on the heavy clay became nothing short of a test of testosterone. Johnson, along with Don Wayman, The Shoe, and occasional upstarts such as the caffeinated Jimmy Winks, would engage in the wildest broadsliding exhibitionism imaginable. At issue was who could toss clay furthest over the first-turn stands. He admits, "I just loved the warm-ups then. The track was great. The fans loved it, too. It made a better driver out of me. I'd crank her around going into the first turn and never lift." Today it is poignant to hear Jack's son Ronnie talk about watching his Dad. "I used to sit in the first turn

Ralph Holmes (#82), shown above holding off Dave Kneisel (#711) and Harry Peek (#27), was the beneficiary of a dubious official's call in 1972 to win his only Fonda feature. (*Gator news* photo by Mike Piano)



Jack Johnson calls his 1972 Flemington 200 win the defining moment in his career. Flanking Jack to the right are Area Auto Racing News editor Lenny Sammons and flagger Harry Dee. (Johnson Collection)

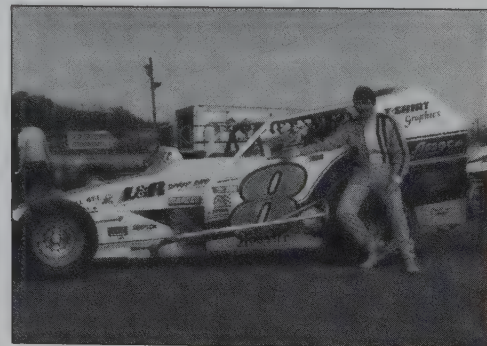
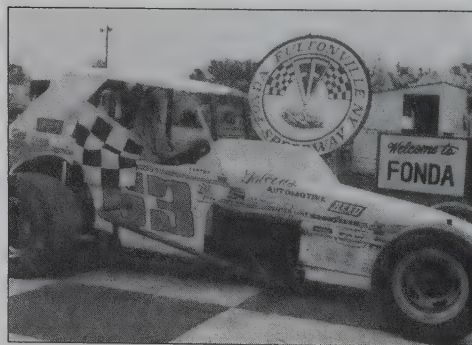
late in the '70s with my Mom. Dad would toss it sideways at the flagger and just blast us all. I remember the only guy who could do it like the Old Man was The Shoe. They always won the warm-ups."

Meanwhile, the immortal Jack Burgess was bestowing a nickname on Jack that would stick for life. Although he hailed from Syracuse, announcer Burgess was fond of a drive-in restaurant in Schenectady called Jumpin' Jacks. Burgess hung the tag on Johnson and it held like glue. With the words of Pep and Harry still ringing in his ears, Jack hunted constantly for advantage, working with chassis from Phil Hausmann, Bill Flagg, Toby Tobias, and finally Dave Kneisel between 1977 and 1979 alone. The latter was the most rewarded, however, as Jack used it to become the first New York driver to win Syracuse's Schaefer 200 in 1979.

The 1980 season brought management change to Fonda's fairground. The Gages were ousted and Ron Compani aligned the Speedway with Glenn Donnelly's DIRT organization. He also replaced the wooden backstretch fence and eventually moved the cemetery and its dirt bank that had proven so alluring to unfortunate racers in the past. He brought in a street stock class below the late models, and his modified assemblage would swell with another wave of rookies similar to the one 10 years before. This time neo-shoes like Gene Bik, Don Ronca, Keith Tesiero, Steve Luse, Bruce Curtis, Warren Axelson, and Dave Barton tested their rookie mettle on the half-mile.

Fonda's 1981 season will be remembered as the year that DIRT phased out 15-inch tires in favor of today's 13-inchers. The tire dalliance did produce some new Fonda winners—George Sifo, Jay Bleser, and Jack Cottrell. Most teams stuck with wide rubber until the drop-dead date of July 4th. But Jack started dialing in his car on 13s in April. When July came around and everybody else was forced to switch, Jumpin' Jack was checked out and gone. He scampered to 11 Fonda feature victories in 1981, including a string of seven beginning on June 13. On August 8th the stands were thick with tension as Jack was poised to break Steve Danish's 1954 record with eight straight. It was not to be, however, as mighty C.D. Coville, manhan-

Surprise 1980 Fonda winners included, from left to right, Jay Bleser (#64), George Sifo (#63), and Jack Cottrell (#8). (left and right: Gater News; center: Johnson Collection)



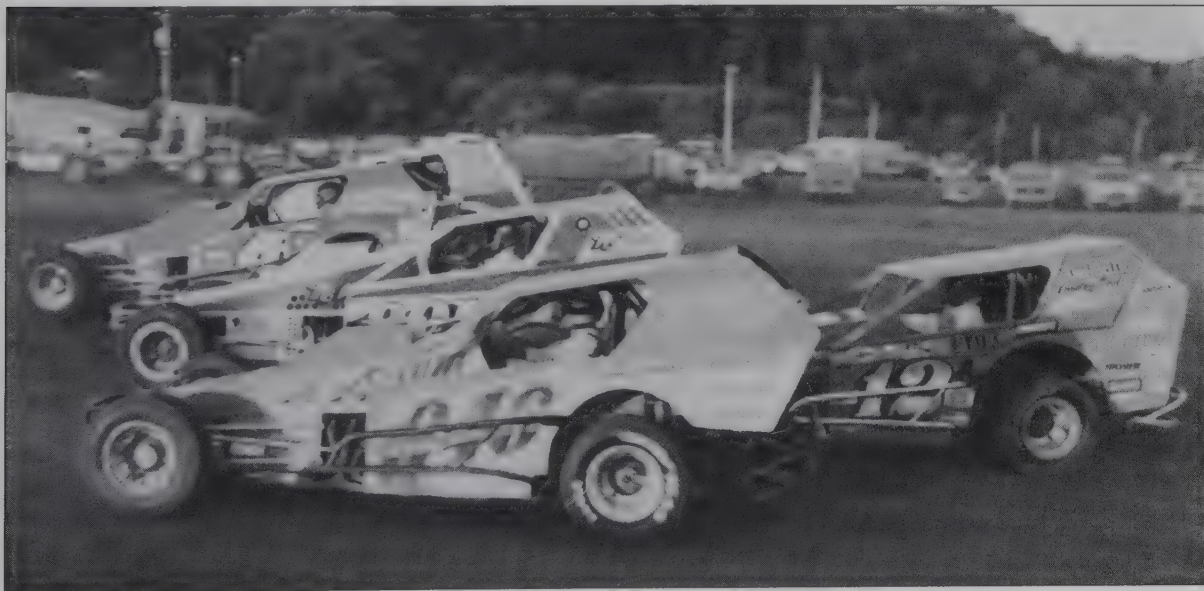
dling Jerry Barnoski's "Perth Lumber Wagon," broke the bubble. Amazingly, the same scenario would unfold four years later when C.D. would again stop Jack at seven, leaving the Cropseyville Courier's record tied, but unbroken.

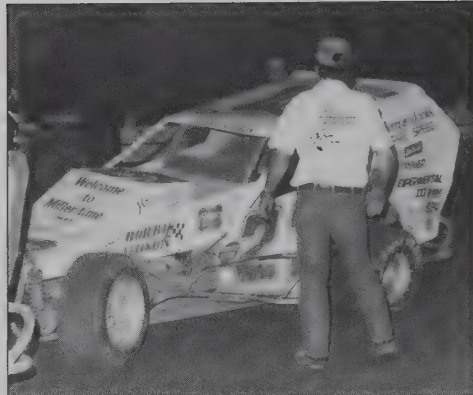
Needless to say, the seeds of rivalry were sowed. Ronnie, who sat through much of it with C.D.'s son Peter, remembers, "Police would have to come up to the grandstands to break up the fights. Actually, it was the fans who had the problem. C.D. and my Dad got along okay." Jack's take on his devil-may-care rival: "Frankly, C.D. was very fast, but a hard racer—and a braggart. I didn't like his style, but we were friends. If I got in a wreck with C.D., I considered it my fault because I shouldn't have been racing with him. When you passed him, you wanted to do it in a hurry." C.D.'s position on the subject was on public display. One of his cars carried a rendering on the nose showing C.D. bulldozing the #12a, and some other cars, out of his way.

Equipped in 1982 with the 12th Troyer "Mud Buss" ever produced—and the first one to run Fonda regularly—Jack would win the track championship yet again. In 1983, however, his dominance was threatened. He was shoed with Hoosier "track tires," and his favored Goodyears were now on the rack. He did win five features, but nine other drivers won also.

B.R. DeWitt Corp., famous sponsor of the late Richie Evans, lent much financial strength to the Duaneburg team in 1984 through the benevolence of its president, the late Gene DeWitt. Usually going with a Hutter small block during the time of Fonda's big-block/small-block wars, Jack was superlative. He won '84's Fonda championship, the Mr. DIRT point title, the Super DIRT Series tour points, and every race at Syracuse, including the 200, where he and his young friend Ray

This incredible 1984 photo by Larry Wrobel tells you just about all you need to know about Jack Johnson. From bottom to top, Ray Dalmata (#643), Alan Holtz (#221), Ben Novak (#4B), and John Kollar (#10%) are four wide in Fonda's turn three, and here comes Jack, stickin' in his nose to make it five. (DIRT Motorsports Collection)





When Bobby Allison (#22A) crashed out of Fonda's August 22, 1984, show (center), the ladder freebies outside turn two hurled beer cans over the fence and hooted "It's Miller Time, Bobby." Kyle Petty (right) drove Paul Dwyer's #1P to a 19th-place finish on July 28, 1987. Petty also ran Fonda in 1986 driving car #643B as a teammate to Ray Dalmata. Harry Gant (left) raced a green and white #33 modified at Fonda on August 20, 1985, got lapped twice, and pulled out. (center: DIRT Motorsports Collection; right: Tim Dwyer Collection; left: Gater News photo by P.J. West)

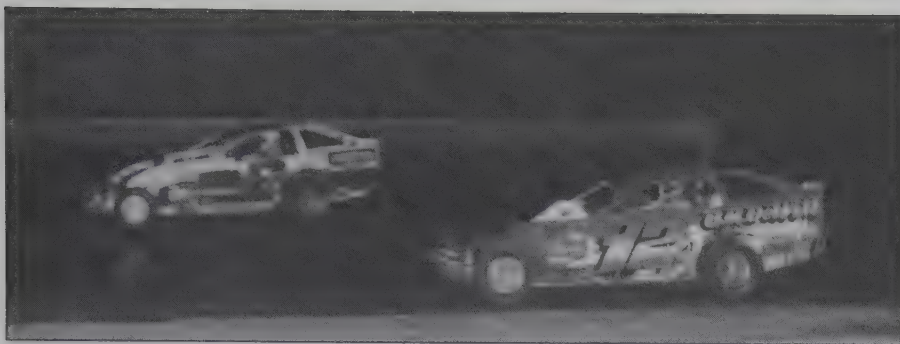
Dalmata shared the front row. These were good times. At Syracuse alone he raked in \$56,500—\$4,000 more than Bill Elliot made that same day with his Winston Cup win at Charlotte. Jack was "The Man."

In 1984 Fonda recognized the new popularity of Winston Cup racing by bringing individual NASCAR stars in to compete against the regulars. First up was personable Bobby Allison. Driving a specially painted #22a "Miller Time" car out of Jack's stables, Allison looked strong before a packed house until, ironically, a six-car crash on the 14th lap took out both Bobby and Jack. (The #22a also prominently displayed "Jumpin' Jack's Speed Shop" signage, signifying Jack's purchase of Frank Trinkaus' time-honored racing parts operation in Fly Creek). The popularity of the Allison event led Fonda management to bring Kyle Petty and Harry Gant to the Mohawk Valley later.

As the '80s wore on, chassis technology became even more pivotal to racing success. Plus, bigger fields at Fonda and elsewhere—fueled by the proliferation of support divisions—caused the tracks to wear out early in the evening. By feature time, the clay was often dry and slick from heavy usage. New driving techniques were required to adapt to both the dynamic movement of the modern chassis and the newly "sealed-over" surfaces. Jack focused on making the transition. "I am from an older time of driving. When I was starting out, I tried to blend the smoothness of Jeep Herbert and the roughness of The Shoe, who was crude but got it done. Over time I consciously tried to adapt this style to the new generation of cars."

Jack's adaptation to the finesse required for hard-track driving was seamless. He conquered the dry slick not only on Saturday nights, but in year-end biggies like the 1986 and '88 Fonda 200s, too. In the latter triumph, on a rock-hard ribbon of black, Jack surpassed Lou Lazzaro and became Fonda's top-scoring driver. In victory lane, track management presented Johnson with 107 silver dollars—one for each of his victories. Jack threw them ceremonially into the stands.

Although Jack is Fonda's favorite son, he has been known to occasionally bail out of the place. He spent most of 1978 at Lebanon



Jack Johnson (#12A) dives under Danny Johnson (#6) to win the inaugural "Thunder on the Mohawk"—and \$15,000—on July 22, 1992. (Ken Dippel photo)

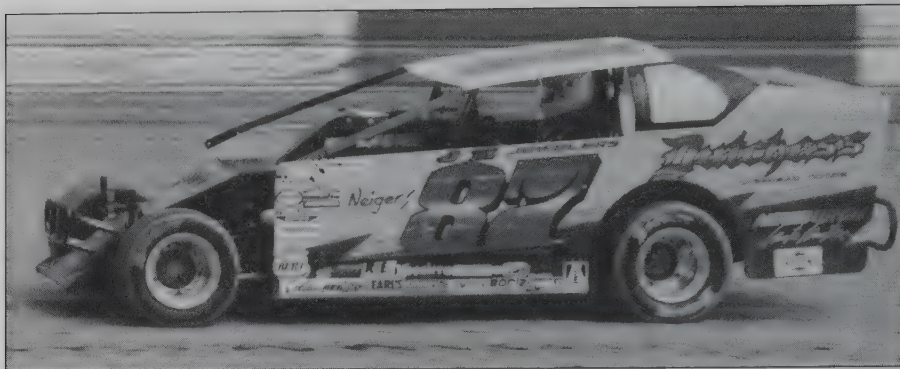
Valley and in 1987 he defected to Canandaigua. The loss of Jack to Canandaigua, among other things, cost Ron Compani his job. After 35 years at the Speedway, "Ronbo" was given the boot by fellow shareholders at the December 22, 1987 organizational meeting of the corporation that ran Fonda Speedway. His brother Ralph Compani replaced him. Ralph's first order of business was to get Jumpin' Jack back to Fonda.

Jack stayed at his home beside the river throughout the '90s. He strutted his stuff by winning \$15,000 at the initial "Thunder on the Mohawk," a well-presented promotion in 1992. Jack considers that victory over Billy "The Kid" Pauch, Doug Hoffman, and Alan Johnson as his most gratifying single achievement at Fonda. And speaking of Fonda's wildly popular "Thunder" races, it is the 1996 edition that holds the distinction of being the first DIRT-sanctioned race to have ever have been televised live, and the first race ever from Fonda to have been broadcast nationally. "We had done a lot of taped shows at

Television trucks fill Fonda's parking lot for the 1996 "Thunder" event, the first-ever national live TV broadcast of a Fonda race. (Alex and Helen Bruce photo)



Jack in 1998 driving Dan Madson's Dutchess Overhead Doors #87.
(Johnson Collection)



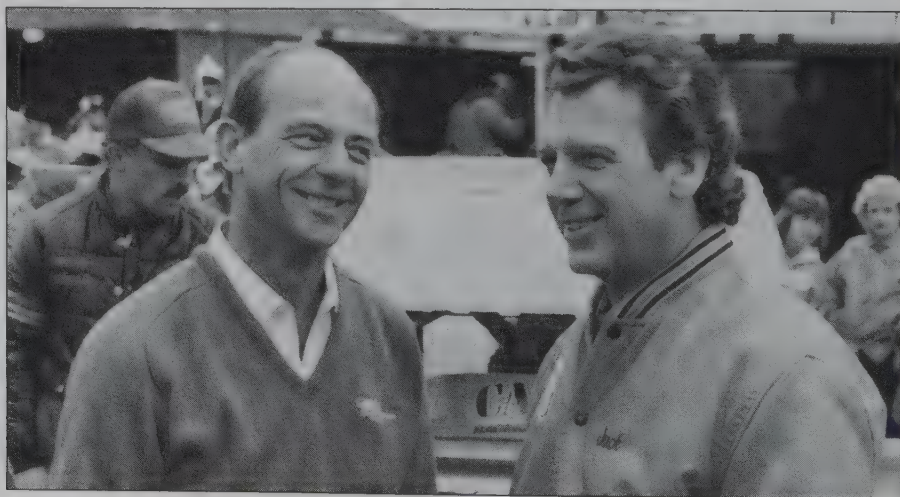
Jack Johnson
(Bittig Collection)

DIRT, but being live was a brand new adventure," recalls producer Terry Rumsey. "It drizzled all night and miraculously stopped five minutes before we were going on the air (9 p.m. EST). I remember walking up those stairs going into the TV truck, feeling like a man going to the guillotine. But it ended up being a great race and television show, with Jim Horton just nipping Dave Camara."

Jack Johnson won the Fonda track championship in '93 and '94 for a soon-to-retire Gene DeWitt, and again in '95 and '96 for Jim Bobar. It has been ride-hopping ever since, with stints aboard the machines of Dan Madson, Charlie Caprara, Wayne Podbielski, Jim Witz, and Brian Goewy. For 2002, Jack is splitting his time between Witz's #12A, Goewy's #20, and Mike O'Shea's Trenton Mack-sponsored #704.

Even now at age 58 when contemplating the future, Jack keeps his horizon short. "My life brought me what I wanted, and I am proud of what I have done. The only thing I regret is that there are no 401Ks in this business. But, then again, I've got a nice house that's all paid for, and a happy family. Right now I'm not into telling everyone how good I used to be. I'm focused on how I'm gonna win my 12th Fonda championship in 2002."

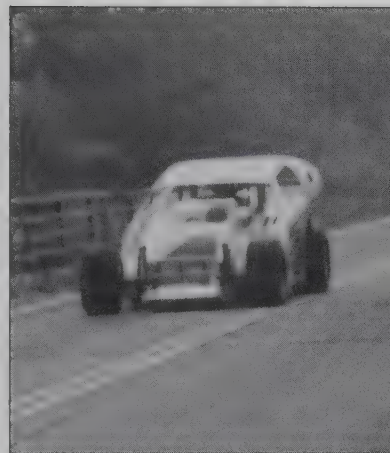
"Take Two." Dick Berggren (left) and Jack Johnson (right) break up during a 1987 TV interview at Syracuse.
(Gater News photo by Dave Hollander)



Old timers might quibble, but the tally sheets prove that Jack Johnson is the greatest road warrior Fonda has ever produced. He's won every major event the DIRT circuit has to offer: Super DIRT Week at Syracuse in 1979 and 1984; the Syracuse State Championship on Labor Day in 1984 and 1986; the Rolling Wheels 200 in 1985, 1995, and 1996; the Eastern States 200 in 1985; the Lebanon Valley 200 in 1982, 1993, and 1994; Weedsport's Northeast 200 four times in 1979, 1980, 1983, and 1988; the Flemington 200 in 1972 and 1984; and the Susquehanna 200 in 1997.

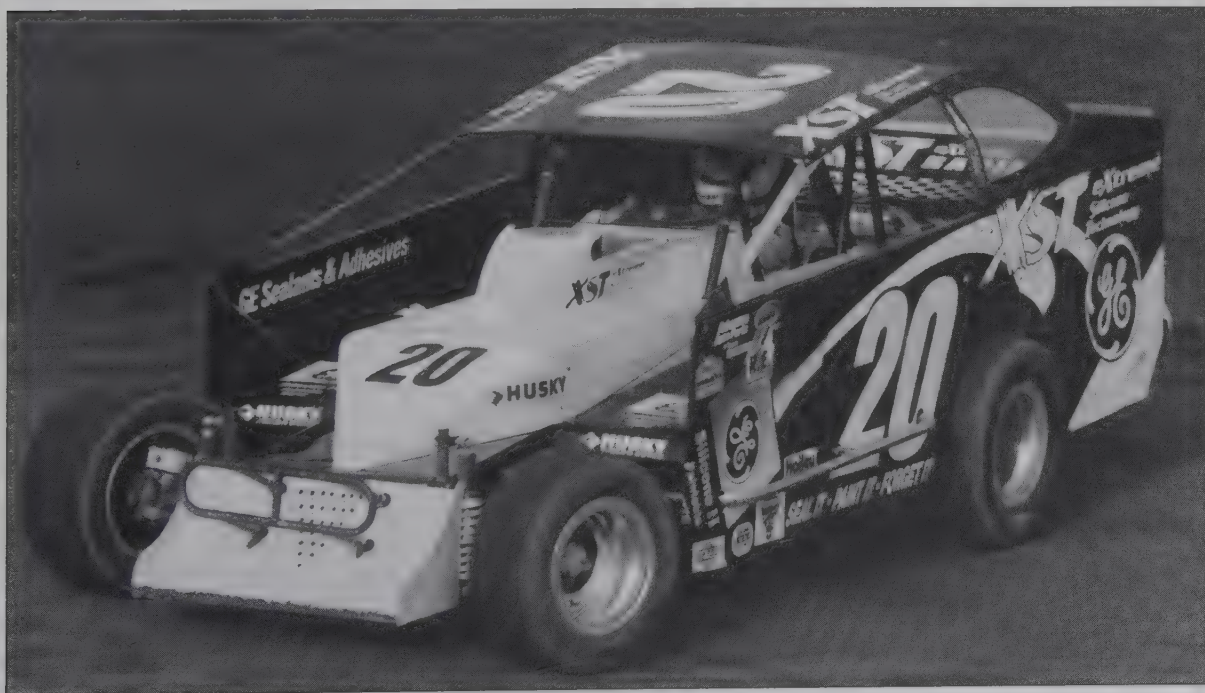
He's won the Mr. DIRT overall point title five times (1980, 1982, 1984, 1985, and 1988). He's won DIRT's summer Super DIRT Series tour points four times (1979, 1980, 1984, and 1988) and its Fall Sunoco tour three times (1986, 1987, and 1988). His résumé stretches far beyond warm months in the Northeast: Jack was DIRT's Florida champ in the winters of 1981, 1984, and 1988, and its Texas champion in the winter of 1989.

And his mastery of the road continued right through the 2001 season, when he won the Super DIRT Series 100 at Orange County in the GE Sealants-sponsored, Brian Goewy-owned #20 team car to famed Winston Cupper Tony Stewart's modified ride. Of course, not to be overlooked is Jack's domination at home. His all-time Fonda win record and his 11 Fonda point titles will probably never be broken. If Yankee Stadium is the house that Ruth built, than somebody ought to give Jack Johnson the deed to Fonda Speedway. And don't forget, he's also the all-time winningest driver at Albany-Saratoga with 81 checkers and counting.



Jack uses Pangborn Road in Duanesburg as a test track to dial in his #12A for 1988's Super DIRT Week. (Herbie Furbeck photo)

Jack in 2001 in Brian Goewy's GE Sealants #20. (Bob Fairweather photo)





(left) Ray Dalmata is the only Fonda driver to have won a track championship (1979) before he won a feature race. When he finally did win at Fonda on September 20, 1980, Jack

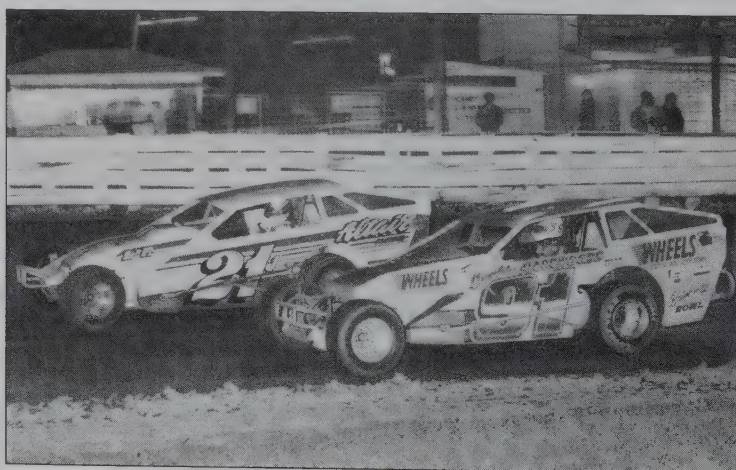
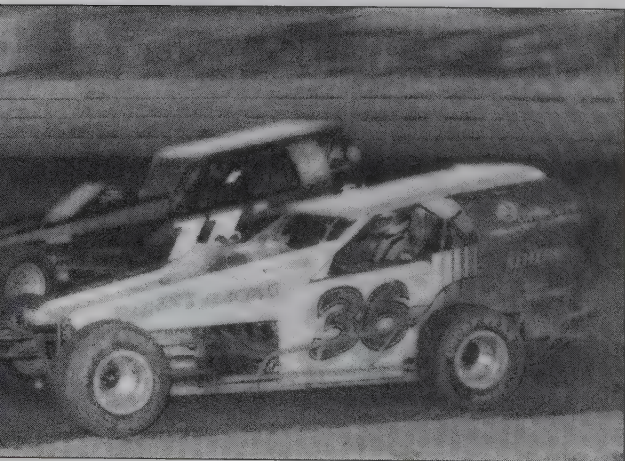
was the first guy to congratulate him. (right) They were reunited on the front row at Syracuse in 1984.

(left: Ray Dalmata Collection; right: Johnson Collection)

Ever since he took note of the different tutorial leanings of Lazzaro and Shoemaker, Jack's role as a mentor has grown. Early on he guided Ray Dalmata to his amazing winless championship in 1979, to Ray's first feature in 1980, and to the front row of Syracuse in 1984. He coached young sonnies like Mike and A.J. Romano. He helped part-timers such as Phil Beaver, who won his only Fonda feature in a car he bought from Jack in 1987. Jack's method of admitting students to his class was basic: "I helped them because they asked."

If that is so, the clever kids who asked the loudest must have been Billy Decker and Dave Camara. Jack spent countless hours with each, admitting, "I probably did go to the next level with these two. They are such good racers. Billy will probably do more because he can be more serious. David is involved in his business, but he is a helluva racer."

Phil Beaver (#36), shown on the left racing wheel to wheel with Dick Schoonover (#11), won his only Fonda modified feature in 1987 driving an ex-Jack Johnson car. Schoonover, Fonda's all-time winningest late-model driver, also won a single Fonda modified main in 1986. Of all the students he mentored, Jack Johnson is probably proudest of Billy Decker (#91), shown on the right dueling with Jeff Trombley (#211) in 1989. (left: DIRT Motorsports Collection; right: DIRT Motorsports photo by Clancy Miller)



Camara Speaks of His Mentor

There can be no question that Dave Camara is one extraordinary driver. He sat in a race car for the first time in 1990, and by 1999 he had racked up 16 Fonda modified wins, two championships, and an enviable road record to boot. Camara's natural talent and the considerable financial commitment made by his family contributed to his success in a big way. So, too, did his special relationship with Jack Johnson, which Camara describes below:

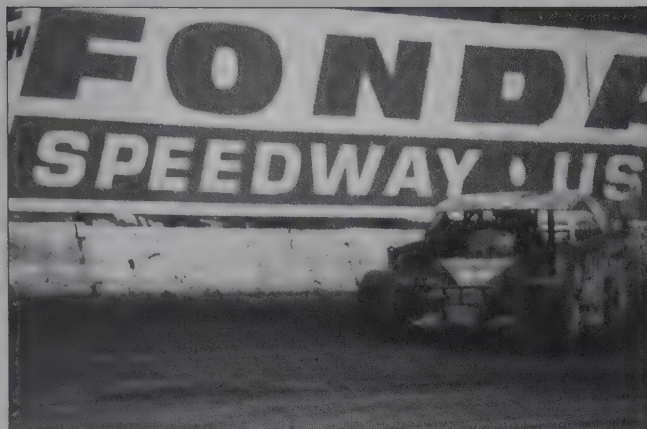
"We were always Fonda fans. Growing up, every Saturday the family would pack up and motor over from Vermont to watch the races," recalls Camara.

"In 1990 we decided to get a car, but not a street stock or something like that. My Dad and I wanted to do it right, but it was actually my brother Danny, about 15 at the time, who pulled us all together. Danny knew Jack Johnson from hanging around the pits. We worked it out that we would have Jumpin' Jack put an Olsen together for us to run at Malta and Jack would help me get used to driving it.

"When we got over to Malta that spring, Jack would take me into the pit bleachers to watch hot laps and explain what the cars were doing and how to compensate both in the pits and on the track. We were real slow at first, but we did end up winning one at Frogtown late that year. I remember I was bugging Jack all the time.

"Later, when we went racing in Canada, Jack helped us long distance even though he had never seen Cornwall or Frogtown. We'd call at 9:00 on Sunday morning for advice, even though he was trying to get ready for Weedsport. He never hesitated to listen or to be interested.

"Then we came to Fonda a couple of times in 1994 and, boy, did I feel totally out



Dave Camara (Clancy Miller photo)

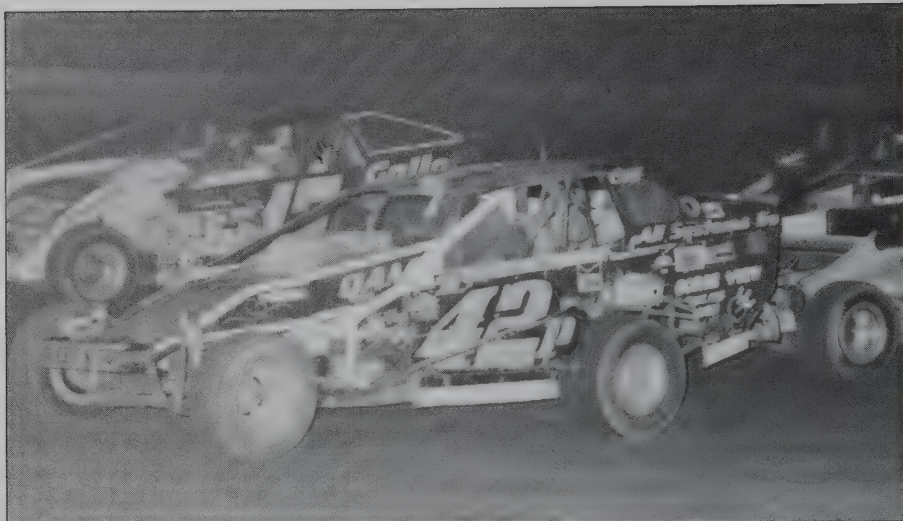
of place. It is so hard to get a grasp of that third and fourth turn. I really didn't like it at first. Then Jack started counseling me and I studied what he and Lape were doing, and he made me fast there, too.

"My worst time at Fonda came the last night of the next year. Jack, Pat Ward, and I were locked in a points chase and I started at the end in the feature. I had to go for it, so I went three wide on the bottom about 10 laps into the race, caught that drain, and flipped big time, pretty well wrecking the car. Pat won the race—Jack the championship.

"There was a whole lot of talk back then by some fans and the media trying to make some competition between Jack and me. But I tell you there was never any tension between us. Never.

"When I did win that first 1998 championship by two points over Mike Romano—again it came down to the last night—that was my best moment at Fonda. There I was, a champion. Jack Johnson had become my friend and teacher. And sometimes I had even been able to beat him. It was incredible. I felt a part of history."

Danny O'Brien (#17),
shown outside of Pat
Ward (#42), won two
Fonda features in 1992.
(Dippel photo)



Jack Johnson is a huge influence on not only the people he helps, and the racers he beats, but on those who beat him, as well. Just ask Danny O'Brien. The 34-year old Kingston, Ontario veteran won two Fonda features in his Leonard Gallo-owned, Troyer-chassis, Feil-big block #17 in 1992. "Those were pretty awesome feelings, winning those two races. Probably the high points of my career," says O'Brien, one of the winningest drivers in Can-Am Speedway history, "because," as he says, "I beat Jack Johnson in both of them. That was my first year in big blocks. Imagine a rookie passin' Jack Johnson to win at Fonda. Boy, it was something." Interestingly, O'Brien's sponsor, Gallo Brothers Construction of Booneville, was the last outfit to resurface Fonda back in 1992, before Reclamation, Inc. and Lucia Construction did it in the fall of 2001.

Jack's evolving prowess as an influence, though, seemed to take on full meaning when along came his closest student of all, son Ronnie, now 28. When Ronnie speaks of his Dad so similarly to the way Jack speaks of Rollie, Yogi Berra might describe it as "it's déjà vu all over again." "Jack Johnson is the best father anyone could dream of having," says Ronnie. "Natalie, my sister, and I grew up going to the races. We've been to Disney probably eight times because of racing in Florida. When I was in school, I knew all the East Coast states and cities from our travels. Dad was the king of the hill, but he always took us and taught us. He is my hero."

The pattern seems so much the same. Like his Dad, Ronnie often skipped school in the '80s. But it wasn't for drugs or beer. It was to help Jack. And just as soon as school was over for good, Ronnie was in the speed shop and on the cars full-time. Ronnie considers it



Ronnie Johnson, shown with Dad and Bobby Allison, grew up seeing places and meeting people that might never have happened but for his father's racing. (Johnson Collection)

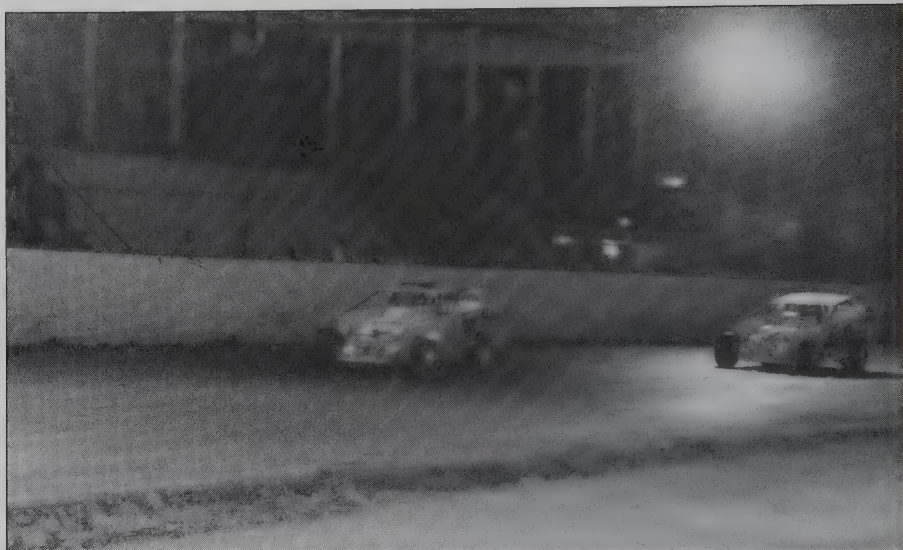
completely natural. "It was just as if my father was a builder of houses and I joined him to bang nails."

Early on Ronnie resisted any urges to drive, although, like his Dad, he had become a go-kart ace. Instead, Ronnie chose to work on Jacks' team. "In the back of my mind I always wanted to drive. I had a car when I was 17, and it was almost done. One night, I got to looking at it and I asked myself if my Dad could win with it. The answer was no, so I knew for sure I wouldn't. I sold it. I know how important a person's image is today."

It would be a full seven years later that the patient son would be offered a chassis by his father. This one, figured Ronnie, had the goods, especially with the parts offered by friends such as Nick Ronca, Dan Madson, and Bernie Riegels. After an impressive CVRA Sportsman stint, in 1998 the younger Johnson joined his Dad at Fonda. On just his second night, he popped a fourth. Incredibly, he won on August 8th, the same weekend on which his father had first conquered Fonda 27 years before.

Brian Goewey, motorsports adventurer extraordinaire, picked up on Ronnie's fast-building momentum and hired him to steer a Coors Light-sponsored car at The Valley. Ron has remained there since 1999. He is runnin' with the tall dogs already, having scored two wins—especially impressive in that they've come during the peak of Kenny Tremont's stranglehold over Howie Commander's high banks. Ronnie has also turned in some inspired runs at the 'Cuse.

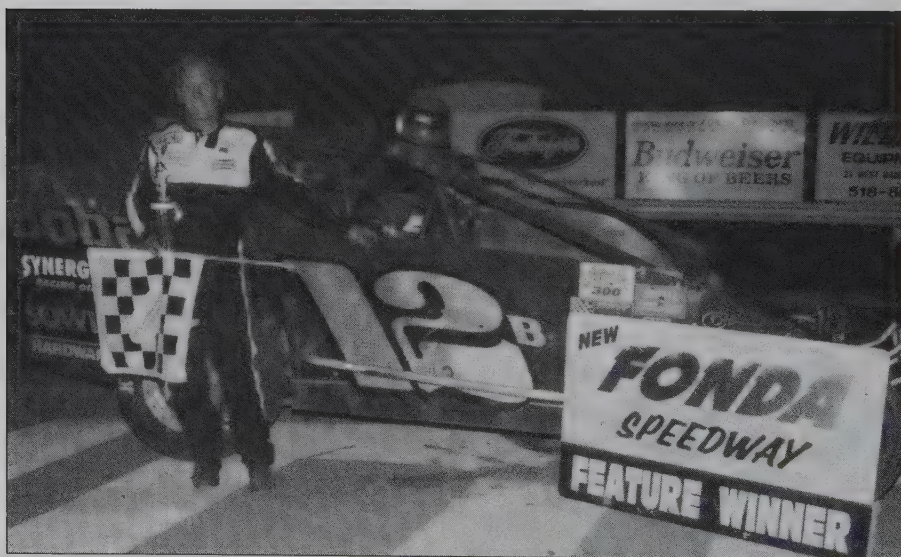
Ronnie Johnson edges
Lou Lazzaro on August 8,
1998, to win his first-ever
Fonda feature.
(Grady photo)



Ronnie's Fonda win, however, had to be the most special. That night Ron got out front early in Dave Bogaurdus's potent entry. He was reeled in and challenged by the looming, ageless Lou Lazzaro. "On the last lap, I knew Louie was there. I could hear him, but I could also hear my Dad's words that, if I was leading, to stay real low coming off four for the checker. I did that, but probably slowed a little too much and Louie almost got me. It was incredible to win. I had been going to Fonda all my life. In victory circle, I didn't do a roof dance or back flips. Then I put my head down and thought about what Dad would say : 'Now this one's history. Gotta move on to the next one.'"

Yogi's right. Déjà vu, all over again.

Jack Johnson
"138 and counting"
(Grady photo)



The Romanos

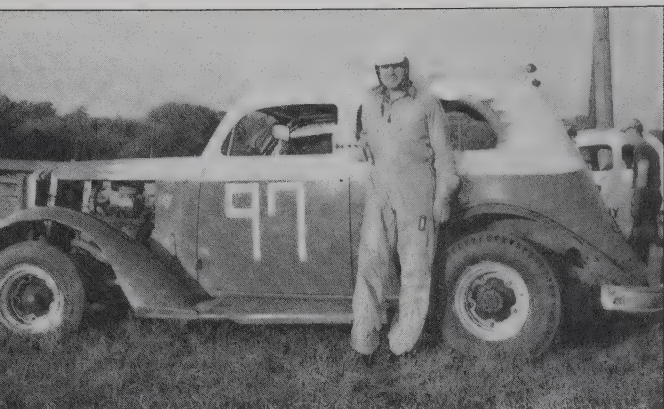
Not all the Saturday night shoes could make it to Fonda for the mid-week George Welch Memorial race in 1959. One was Dutch Reed, forcing young mechanic Andy Romano to drive father Joe Romano's #97—if inconspicuously—himself. It was his first race. A full 43 years later Andy Romano—if inconspicuously—buckled himself into Sam and Linda Smith's #72 small-block modified to do battle in Fonda's McDonald's weekend on October 13, 2001. In so doing, Romano became Fonda's longest-living active driver—quite an intriguing feat in what once was thought to be a young man's world.

Anyone wishing to talk with Romano about it would find him fully accessible. Just go up the hill out of Fonda and watch for Andy's Service complex near the Johnstown line. It's a beehive of activity, and even at age 64 Andy is all over it. There is a towing operation, a used car lot, a multi-bay service area run by son A.J., and a speed and fabrication shop managed by son Mike. Tattered pictures of race cars on musty walls add to the racing motif. And then there is the community part. At noontime a cadre of the town's eldest members descend on Andy's for the daily card game. Players and observers include time-honored Fonda names such as Jerry Jerome, Doc Blanchard, Rebel Ross, and Daytona Dave Ball. It is quite a show.

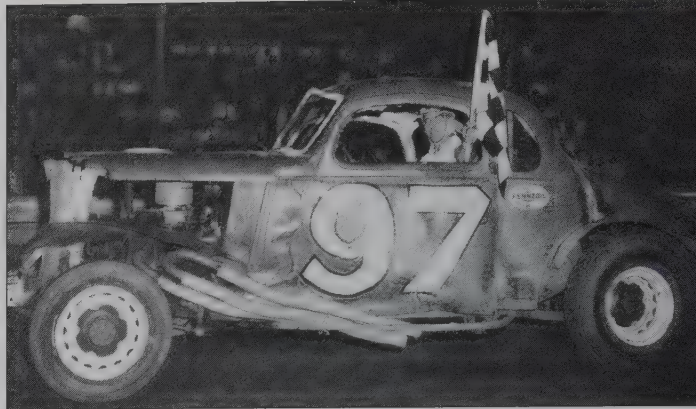
There is a certain seamlessness about Andy's Service, and you get the feeling that this has all been going on forever. Actually, it wasn't there when Fonda Speedway first opened—and at that time Andy Romano had never even heard of Johnstown, New York.

Andy was born in New Jersey to an old-fashioned Italian family very much dominated by father Joe, the patriarch. Joe Romano, a guy who compensated for smallness in stature with loudness of bark, approached life with vigor. He was a nationally known colorist, expert in the art/science of dying textiles and color matching before the technology of spectrophotometry took over. Able to predict which ounce of colorant would save an entire batch of textile from mismatch, he was in great demand. Lee Dye heard about him, recruited him, and moved the Romanos to North Carolina right after World War II. Ten years later, the family was transferred to Johnstown so that Joe could bring color continuity to Lee's Upstate New York facility.

New to the area, Andy followed the crowds down to the weekly Feuz and Gage car wars. Instantly converted to the church of the clay, Andy and three friends intended to partner on a car. By 1957 the project was complete. A 1936 Dodge two-door sedan was gutted, reinforced, and outfitted with a hemi V-8, and splashed with colorful flames and the familiar #97. What was in pieces, however, was the quartet of founders. The ardor of all three of Andy's friends was overwhelmed by auto racing's required level of commitment. To the rescue came Joe, concerned about Andy financing a race car by himself when he had just gotten married.



Herb Dunleavy (left) was Team Romano's first driver in 1957. Dutch Reed (right) wins a Fonda heat race in the Romano #97 on June 11, 1960. (both photos: Romano Collection)



Andy Romano succeeded Tom Kotary as the #97's chauffeur in 1963. He's shown here pacing the field from the pole on April 27th. Fran Kitchen is in car #46 behind him. (Feuz Collection)

Herb Dunleavy was anointed as Romano's first driver, and that rookie season turned out to be a thorough lesson in humility. The next year Dutch Reed assumed the Romano seat. Joe was against Andy driving. "It was a dangerous time in the sport," Andy admits. "I'm always amazed more guys didn't get killed than did." So, when Reed went down the road to his own #90A, the team again looked to the outside. This would be the beginning of the bittersweet relationship with Rome's Tom Kotary, which would ultimately put the #97 in victory lane in a 1962 Sunday night show on Utica-Rome's asphalt. Everyone acknowledged that Kotary was good, and he served up some eyebrow-raising runs even at the hyper-competitive Fonda. Somehow, however, Tom's fondness for the suds kept bubbling up. Finally Andy protested to Joe, "Let me tell you, Dad, I work too hard on this car to have someone drinking before driving it." Andy sacked Kotary, bought a helmet from Frank Trinkhaus' parts truck, and became a race driver.

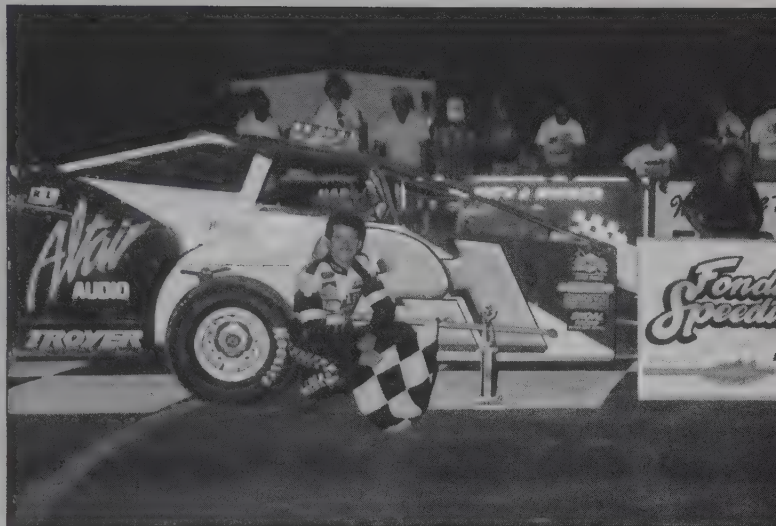


Jeff Trombley: Intentional Champion

It surely was not a surprise to anyone that Jeff Trombley won the modified championship at Fonda in 2001. Although the veteran Altamont campaigner had never led the points chase before, he was no new-comer to victory lane, having chalked up 23 Fonda features over the previous 12 years. What was a bit surprising was just how certain it seemed that 2001 would be his time. A well-planned, well-executed, purposeful effort on the part of Trombley and his crew put him in the lead at the beginning of the season, and they never looked back.

As a young mechanic on the famous #63 modified, manhandled by the likes of Tommy Corellis and Kenny Shoemaker, Trombley had no idea he would be a driver some day. He found himself in the seat by coincidence in the late '70s, first in go-karts and then in mini stocks, all associated with ultra-successful mini racer, Bob Hackell. He then teamed with father and son owner/builders, George and Bruce Schell from Schenectady. They went on a tear, winning 25 mains before going to Fonda with a modified in 1984.

Fonda did not come easily. "It was just so fast—and it changes the whole time," remembers Jeff, now 43. "Nothing is the same, corner-to-corner or week-to-week. Guess that's why I came to like it so much, even though I was crashing a lot." Tutelage from guys like C.D. Coville made Trombley increasingly competitive, and by 1988 he was a winner at Fonda and on the road at places like Weedsport and Rolling Wheels. In the 1990s he was able to attract some high profile owners, including Dan Madsen and Rick and Corky Thum, and the wins



Jeff Trombley sits in Fonda's victory lane in 1993. (Biittig Collection)

continued. Somehow, however, his heart was not still. There was something to be done. And so, in the winter of 2000–2001, Jeff and his wife, Serena, went on the attack. They put an intense focus on their racing and mapped out a four-point strategy to win the Fonda championship—stabilize the team, update all equipment, devise a failsafe preparation and maintenance schedule, and finish every race for maximum points."

Was it worth it?

"I can't tell you what it means to be Fonda champion. It has taken some time to sink in that people could use my name in the same sentence as Lou Lazzaro, Jack Johnson, The Shoe. It's hard to pinpoint just what it is about the place—the speed, the challenge, the lineage? But, I will tell you that now that I am champion, I will never go anywhere else."

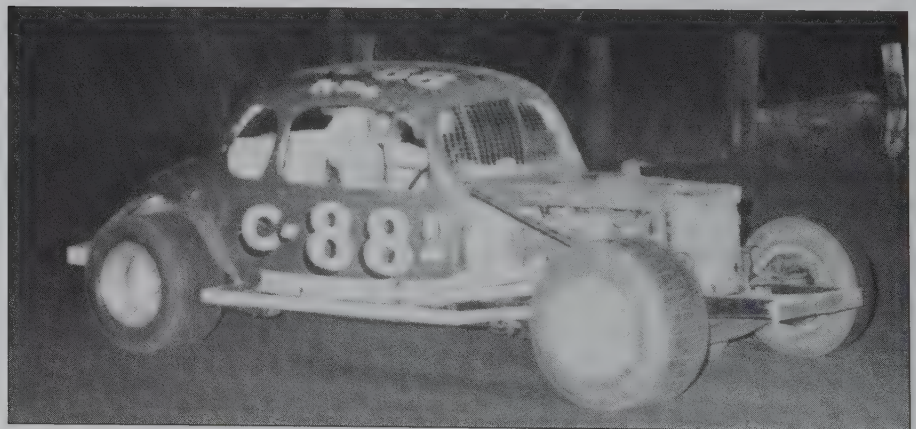
Andy in his injected
sedan after a heat win at
Fonda in 1968.
(Feuz Collection)

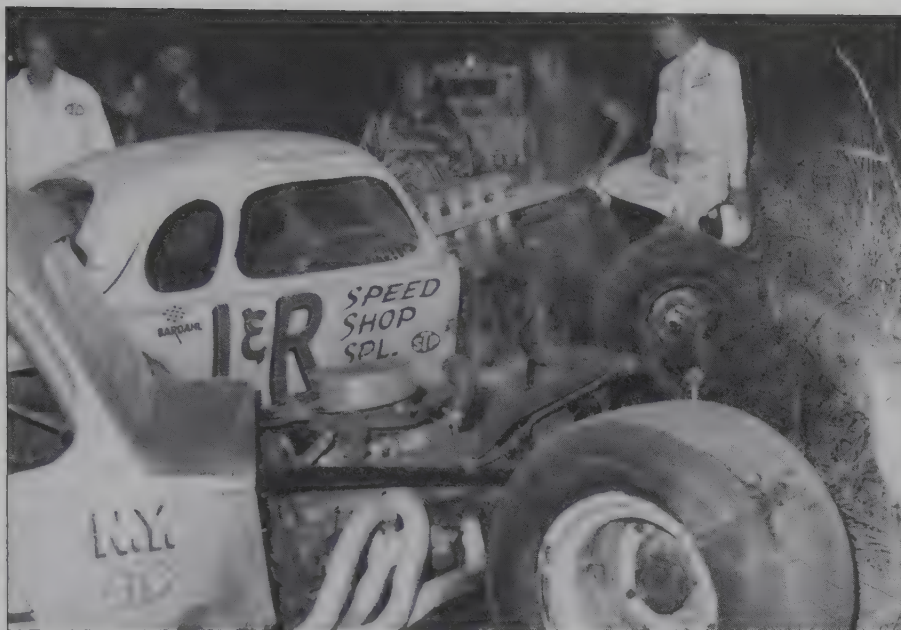


The father/son, owner/driver combo would continue for some 15 years during which the Romanos would become one of the most recognized names in modified racing. They turned into knowledgeable, traveling racers, capable of running on any surface and any size track, and they were always eager to stay ahead of the game technically. The Romanos were among the first to have big-block engines. And then fuel injection. The neighborly Andy remembers: "In those days I would have had to hire a school bus for everyone who wanted to work on my stock car. Nowadays it seems that I could take everyone down there on a motorcycle." Volunteer crewmen are in short supply nowadays.

With all the help in the early '60s, the Romanos were pioneers in fielding two cars—a big-block coach modified and a carbureted coupe. With two cars there was the opportunity to offer someone else an occasional ride—and along came Kenny Shoemaker. Jumping into the modestly powered #97x coupe, The Shoe climbed all over Ray Sitterly on May 25, 1968, yet the #C-88's underachieving cam-

Ray Sitterly (*Gater News*
photo by Dick Tanner)





Kenny Shoemaker picked up a ride in Andy Romano's backup #97X and won with it on June 22, 1968. In Fonda's next race on July 6, 1968, Shoe crashed it badly. Andy worked all week rebuilding it only to see Shoe write it off completely the following Saturday, July 13, 1968, in this grinding crash with Don MacTavish (#L&R). Romano fired Shoe on the spot, saying, "Dammit Kenny, the welds weren't even cool yet."

paigner from Amsterdam prevailed for his only Fonda win. The Shoe would have revenge, though, on June 22nd when he whupped Sitterly, Lape, Narducci, and Dick Clark in a 30-lapper. Andy says, "It was unbelievable how Kenny dusted all of us with that little sportsman. But then he wrecked it bad the next week. And again the week after that, and the welds hadn't even cooled off."

"Dad, this is it," said Andy to Joe. "I spend all week working on Kenny's car while mine just sits there. I'm not gonna go through this." The Shoe was sent packing.

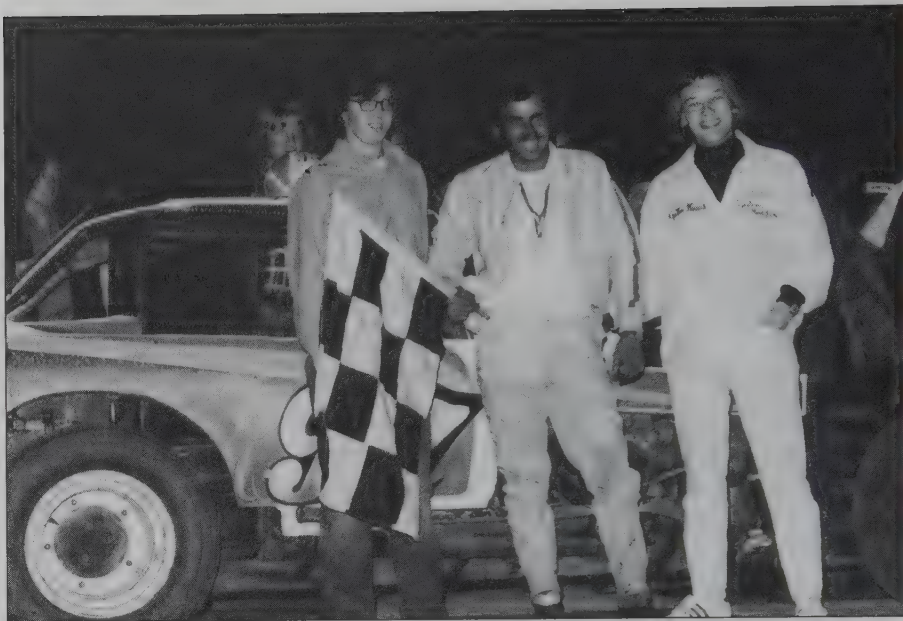
In the early '70s, Joe and Andy purchased a technically advanced Valiant from Langhorne ace Dutch Hoag. Although they did copy this A-frame car with a dirt version for Fonda, most of their racing in



Andy in his Hoag-inspired Valiant in 1971. (Romano Collection)

"Earlier in this book, John Canfield described hanging out at Willie Chest's garage as a boy," says Andy Fusco. "Well, Andy Romano's garage is where I hung out in my youth. For reasons I didn't understand, and still don't, Andy just couldn't win at Fonda. Here's a guy who raced and won all over the state, but always came up short in his own backyard. I remember his father Joe would ridicule him unmercifully saying, 'I'm gonna put Lapey in the car if you can't do any better.'" When Andy (center) finally won his first Fonda feature on May 17, 1975, I was tremendously honored that he asked me (right) and his son Mike (left) to join him in victory lane."

(Mike Romano Collection)

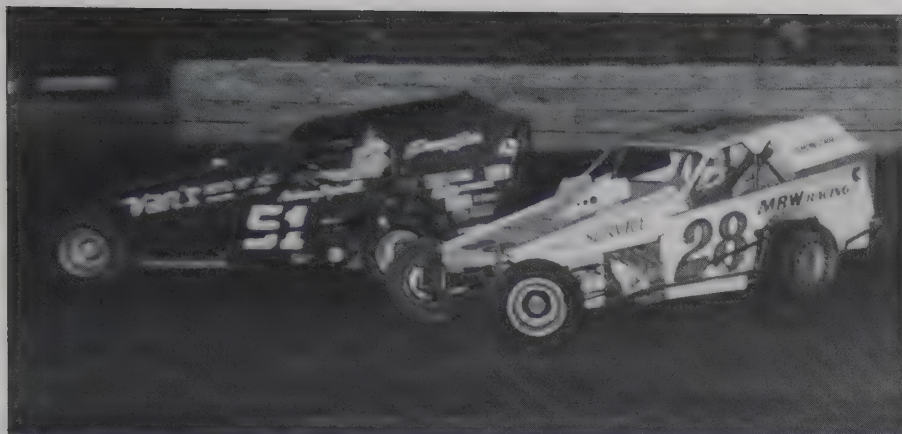


these years was on the then-asphalt weekly tour of Malta, Plattsburgh, and Devil's Bowl. Andy describes this as his best time. He won many races, especially at Plattsburgh and the Bowl.

It would not be until May of 1975, however, that Romano would finally see victory of his own at Fonda. Aboard a gaudily painted #97 Vega with a Tobias chassis, Andy outgunned Joe Johnson, Larry Livingston, Don Van Guilder, and Bob Rees. Romano's victory brought the grandstands to full frenzy.

Andy Romano surely has learned the way to find the checkers, especially during an amazing mid-'80s run with owner Dickie Meyers, when the Romano/Meyers #28 found victory lane almost weekly somewhere in The Empire State. However, Andy seems almost nonchalant about his accomplishments. "How many features have you won in your career," DIRT pastor Rev. David Wells recently asked him. "I dunno," shrugged Andy. "Seventy, 80. Maybe more. Maybe less." It is quite obvious that for many, many years, Andy Romano, has been quite satisfied with his standing in racing without regard to statistics.

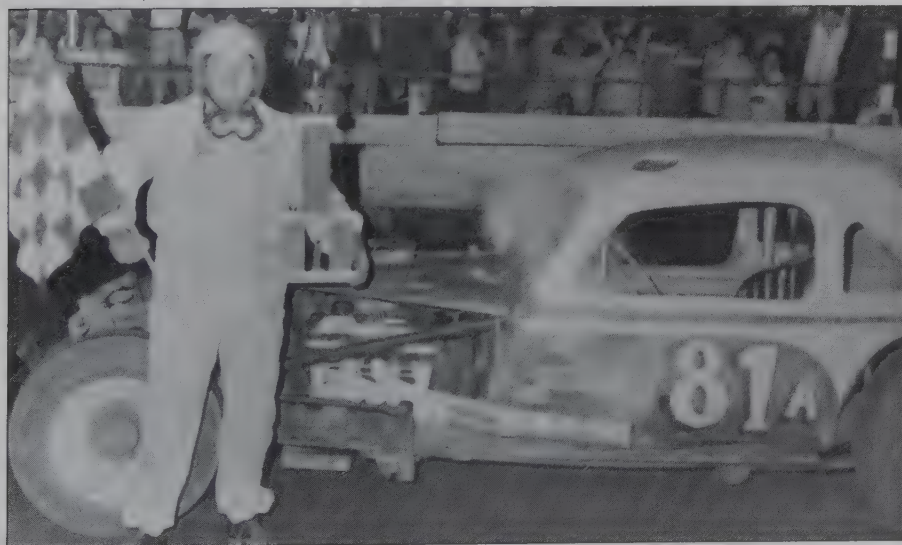
The collection of associates who have made Andy's Service a second home over the years is either a who's who or a rogue's gallery—depending on who you ask. But the most heartwarming Romano-association story belongs to Jeff McWalker. A mechanic at a local Lincoln-Mercury dealership and a long-time Romano crewman, Walker had long dreamed of fielding his own team. Dreams became reality when he became the first African-American to play a significant role in Fonda history.



The winningest stint in Andy Romano's career came at the wheel of Richie Meyer's #28. The Howard Conkey-built Show Car was one of the hottest small blocks in New York, especially at Can-Am where Romano was king. Andy is shown left in 1988 at Fonda racing with a very young Tony Pepicelli in the Lape Champ Car #51. Meyers was one of the most likable car owners in Fonda history, turning his Vietnam disability and his U.S. Post Office pension into a killer race team. Today, Meyers is a 200-average kegler and proprietor of a bowling alley near Utica. (DIRT Motorsports photo by Clancy Miller)

Jeff's notion to have a race car for his hero, Ken Shoemaker, had been conceived in late 1967, when Shoe lost the Wright-Zauntner gig. And when the Romanos fired Shoemaker from their stable in '68, McWalker actually started to build his Ford-powered Ford coupe. Yet the going was slow and the finances thin. That Shoemaker had been able to talk Bob Judkins into a ride for 1969, further stalled the urgency. But in early 1970, Shoe again became available. In '69, Judkins had given Ed Flemke's backup car to Kenny; for '70, he bestowed upon Shoe a brand-new, purpose-built, Fonda-only car, constructed in the Reading mold of narrow rears, wide fronts, and high centers. However, Kenny absolutely destroyed the thing while it was still in primer and Judkins was done at Fonda for good.

Re-enter McWalker. By now he had enlisted the help of Fonda Hall of Fame wrenchmen Tony and Lee Achzet and the three-year project car was nearly finished; but it was devoid of a powerplant. The solution came from an unlikely source. John C. Miller, McWalker's em-



The Shoe winning in Jeff McWalker's #81A on June 6, 1970. (Tony Achzet Collection)

ployer, had sold a customer a new Mercury Cougar with a 426 c.i.d. big block. The car had developed an oil pressure problem, so the factory replaced the engine under warranty. Miller gave McWalker the discarded honker to use in the stock car. Tony Achzet took the FoMoCo big block apart and found that all it lacked was a front oil plug. The dream was now ready to race. McWalker's #81A made its debut in late May 1970 and Shoe got it to victory lane on June 6th of that year. A little bit of that wonderful story lives today: Tony's son Gary Achzet still has that fabled Mercury motor in his street rod.

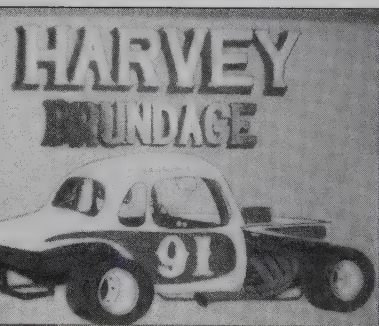
Unlike his laid-back son Andy, Joe Romano got a little ornery in his later years. He was the impatient, competitive type, and he was beginning not to feel all that well. He'd pop blood-thinning pills like they were candy. And there were times when he was overheard chiding Andy for not stomping the throttle. To be honest, it was kind of hard not to hear Joe, or "Put" as he was known to the family. Put sure made an impression on his grandson, A.J. "I remember getting ready to leave for Rolling Wheels on Friday afternoons. Everyone would scatter, leaving Joe and me to go together. No one would ride with him. He was getting old, but that didn't mean he wasn't doing 85 mph up the Thruway, tight on someone's bumper, swearing up a storm, smoking two cigarettes at once. And then he'd be screaming and yelling at the track all night. Arms right up in the air. He sure was entertainment."

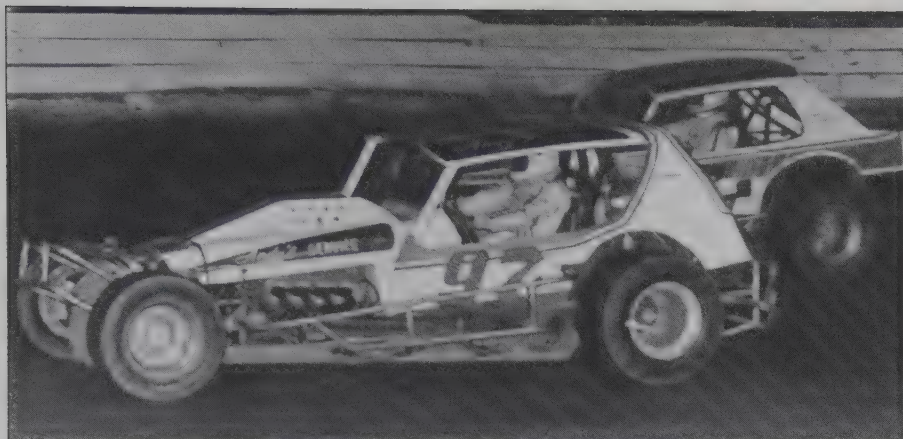
Watching grandson Mike's initial forays at Fonda and grandson A.J.'s frightening adventures on motorcycles, Joe got it in his head they just might become dynamite racers. A.J., now age 40, recalls, "When Dad didn't do well, Put would say, 'Goddammit, Andy, these kids are gonna whup your ass.'" Mike, now age 43, who grew up a huge Harvey Brundage fan recalls it this way. "Starting out, I hit every wall. Wrecked eight weeks in a row once. My Dad thought we should park it for a while. Put said, 'Just keep paying, Andy. This kid's going to be all right.' Put died on December 1, 1979. I won my first feature the next spring. I'm sad Put didn't get to see it. He wanted me to win so badly."

A.J.'s initiation at Weedsport in 1982 was nothing of beauty, either. Bummed out by consistent crashes and injuries in motorcross, the younger brother thought he should retreat to four-wheel racing. Slighter than either Mike or Andy, A.J. required a pillow for seat padding to see over the hood of his L & R machine. That taken care of, Andy recalls his son's first lap. "He over-drove big time, rolled over the bank, and went right out of sight. Next thing I know, he comes marching up, pillow in one hand, helmet in the other."

Andy gave Mike a Howard Conkey Show Car for 1976, and the older son cut his teeth through the balance of the 1970s, mostly at Canandaigua. In his infrequent visits to Fonda, The Shoe would take Mike under his wing. "Kenny walked me out to turns three and four and told me where I needed to be and what my car needed to be doing. And Jack Johnson helped me a lot with scales and setup." The

Mike Romano grew up more a Harvey Brundage fan than a Andy Romano fan. This is how Mike painted one of the walls of his room at home.
(Mike Romano Collection)

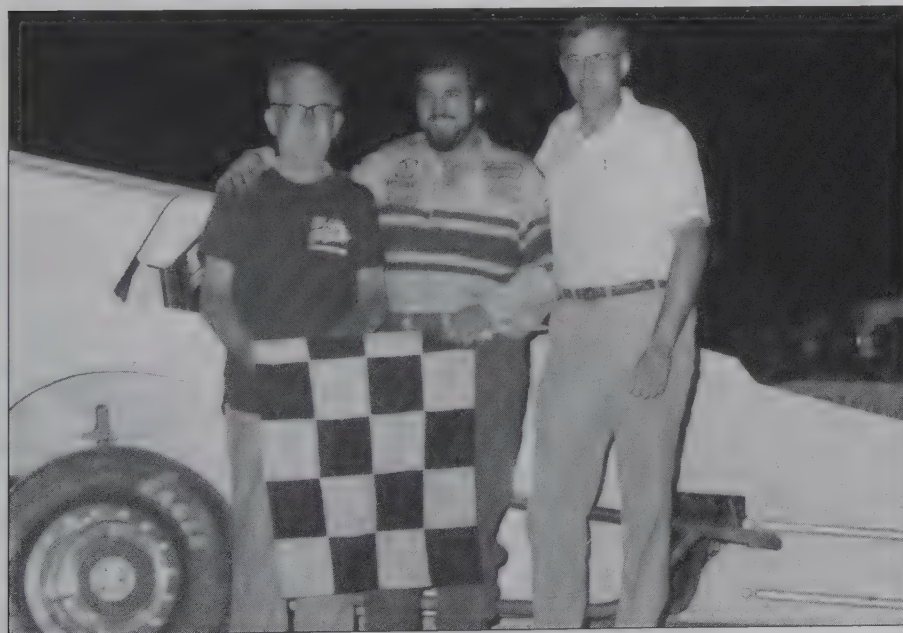




Mike Romano (outside) nudged around Dad to win his first-ever Fonda feature on June 7, 1980. (Clancy Miller photo)

schooling would pay off on June 7, 1980, when Mike put his Cagle car in Fonda's victory lane in a 20-lapper. It was a family affair. "My Dad was leading, also in a Cagle car. I ran him down. The first couple of times I tried him, he pinched me down a little and we traded paint. Then I got a bite and got by him. I won by quite a bit over Louie, and Dad was third." Andy said afterwards, "Boy, it's pretty bad when the guy you knock out of the way is paying the bills."

Mike's next modified win at "The Track of Champions" would not come until 1985, when he wheeled a tiny 311 c.i.d. alcohol-fired small block to victory. This win, at the time of Fonda's big-block/small-block power debates, was in a brand-new Champ Car #3, owned by a pleasant, eighty-something-year-old gentleman named Sam Negrich. Sam had fantasized for years of owning a modified. The team got off to a



Sam Negrich (left), Mike Romano (center), and a sponsor (right) with their Champ Car #3 in victory lane at Fonda on July 20, 1985. (Mike Romano collection)

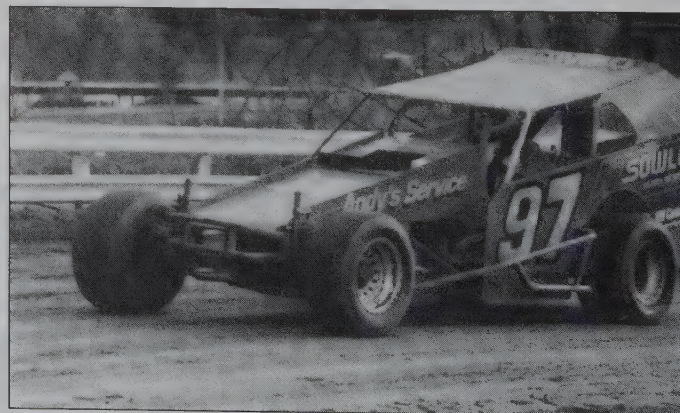
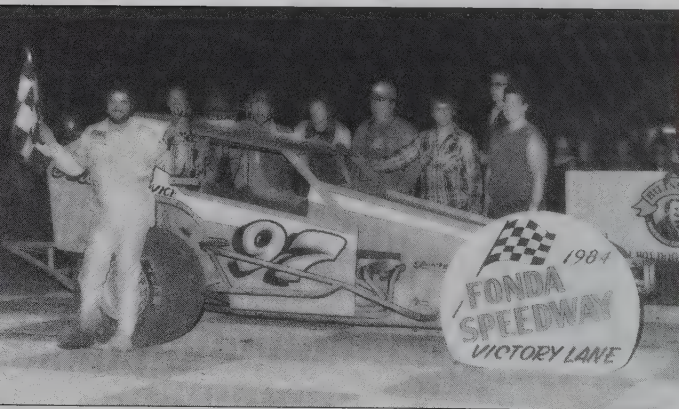
helluva start, trouncing Dalmata, Coville, and Jack Johnson in their feature win. Their season would be brief when family and financial realities soon shut down the operation. "It was right after Sam and I had won Fonda. One Sunday afternoon into the shop marches a bunch of Sam's children and grandchildren," remembers Mike. "They just stood over us, watchin' us work on the car. Finally I asked one of his daughters, 'Can I help you with anything?' 'No,' she said. 'We just came over to see what our inheritance looked like.'"

In the mid-'80s Mike would gain huge experience by doing double-duty at Fonda in the 320 modified divisions and the regular mods. The 320s, which eventually morphed into today's 358 modified class, brought some hearty new talent to Fonda right from the start. Surely a shining star was Paul Parker, one of New England's best dirt slingers, who would return home to New London, New Hampshire with eight Fonda 320 features on his ledger card between May of 1983 and August of 1984. Mitch Gibbs (with nine wins), Paul Jensen, Jim "Rocky" Rothwell, and Denny Young were also formidable early Fonda 320 runners. Mike Romano's modified division ride at the time was an orange #97, owned by Dad and known as "Rambo." Named after the indestructible Sly Stallone movie character, the "Rambo" car became an icon to younger Fonda fans.

Twice Mike had been Fonda's small-block champ, but it wasn't until 1989 that he earned his first big-block track title. Then he took it again the next year for dessert. Mike was driving for Jake Spraker and the pair's title success was a happy notion for track management. Jack Johnson and Dave Lape had been so dominant, that they had been the only Fonda modified champs so far that decade. Mike's 1989 season was especially dramatic because it was the time of his best and worst single nights at Fonda. The best came on October 15th, when he won the prestigious Fonda 200 aboard Spraker's 406 small block. The team pulled off the win by a thorough—but secret—plan to re-jet and re-gear the car and attempt to run the entire 200 circuits on one tank of fuel. After the well-earned win (coinci-

Nightly double-duty in the small-block and big-block divisions really boosted Mike Romano's career in the mid-'80s.

He was nearly unbeatable in the 320s (left), and the modified (right). Note the nickname "Rambo" on the roof of his modified. (left: Clancy Miller photo; right: Biittig Collection)



Jake Spraker: One of the Last of the Owners

Looking over his race car stable, car owner Jake Spraker smiles with weary enthusiasm. "You know, I have to hustle a lot of extra hours to keep all this going, but I'm going to keep at it. Racing is worse than any drug once it gets in your blood stream."

Spraker has been under the influence for almost 40 years. A familiar figure at the Speedway since the 60s, Jake first made the leap to ownership in order to help out his buddy C.D. Coville 20 years later. "C.D. wrecked Cliff Barcomb's car and was in tough times. When I told him I wanted to help him, he told me to buy a boat. But I got him a Troyer car from Bob Sitterly instead." Jake has been an owner ever since, a throwback to Fonda's bygone era when drivers drove, owners owned, and ne'er the two did meet.

Despite the fact that car owners were becoming as scarce at Fonda as coupes and coaches, the role stuck with Jake, and, after his adventures with C.D., he put wheels under Ray Dalmata from 1984 to 1986. Subsequently, Jake—the consummate entrepreneur with interests that included a bar room, a taxi service, and car sales—took up with Mike Romano. They put together a particularly notable season in 1989 winning the modified point chase and the Fonda 200.

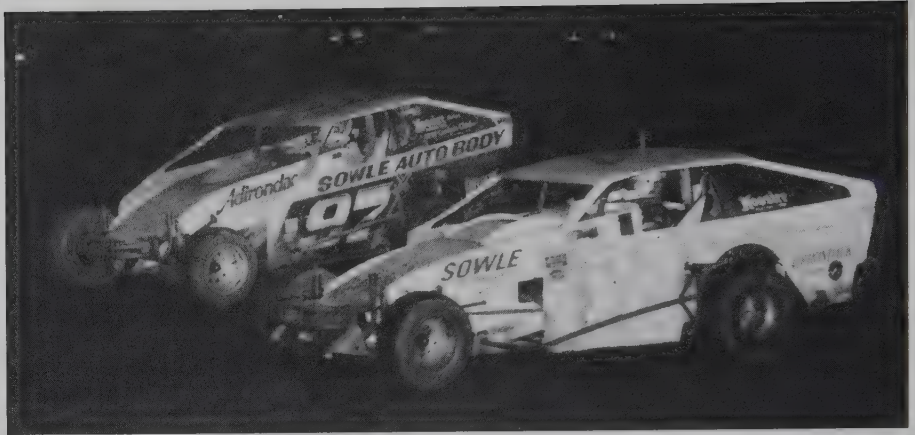
After a few seasons of inactivity, Spraker joined up with Steve Welch and swept the Pro Stock Championship in 1999. Then, much to the pleasure of the capable and personable veteran Tim Clemons, Jake assembled his current operation.



Jake and Nancy Spraker join Tim Clemons in one of their many trips to Fonda's victory lane. (Clancy Miller photo)

Spraker's team consists of two top-shelf sportsman cars, the one driven by Clemons and the second by anyone Spraker considers worthy. For Clemons, the arrangement has been beyond satisfactory, and he delivered Jake 12 features over the 2001 season. "Jake is one helluva guy and a great owner," extols Clemons. "And I should know. In 22 years I have driven a bunch of cars and Jake's are always a pleasure."

Mike in Jake Spraker's #97 (inside) and Frank Cozze in his backup #97X (outside) were teammates for the night during Fonda's Super DIRT Series tour stop on July 25, 1989. (Clancy Miller photo)



dentally with A.J. in second), DIRT rules were changed, making pit stops mandatory in double century grinds. Such a victory at the dusk of the season most certainly dimmed the unpleasant memory of a nasty flip on Banner Night earlier in the year. Coming off the fourth turn in Spraker's #97 Troyer, Mike rolled big-time in heavy traffic, only to stop, be drilled by Bob Ensminger, and to start rolling all over again. The wreck was so violent that Mike's headrest was bent way down. "I was lucky," he admits, "not to have my head taken off."

Mike spent a couple of seasons in the '90s at the tracks in Canada and a couple of seasons on NASCAR's dirt circuit in Central New York. But he returned to Fonda in 1997 in time to welcome Ric Lucia as the new promoter and to become his first modified track champ. Mike was second in points the next three years in a row. He is already the sixth winningest driver in Fonda history, and will have leapfrogged Pete Corey and Ken Shoemaker into fourth before long.

Today, life would seem pretty cushy for Mike. He is comfortably focused on Fonda and on the family speed parts business that supplies Pete Bicknell chassis to racers throughout New York and New England. It is significant just how powerful the Bicknell connection has been in getting some unheralded drivers—like John Kollar, Frank Hoard Sr., and Bob Sitterly—into Fonda's victory lane.

Kollar, 54, firmly credits his customer association with Romano's speed shop and their Bicknell dealership for the turnaround his Fonda career saw in the late-'90s. Kollar had been a Fonda faithful since day one: As a fan from 1953 through 1967 ("I'd go every week with my mother or one of my aunts and we'd save seats for the whole family") and as a modified driver from 1968 to present.

A success in his profession (a fifth-grade elementary teacher in Amsterdam), Kollar was pretty much a flop in his avocation as a Fonda racer. A perennial backmarker, Kollar was burdened by others' ridicule and his own self-doubt. "That I might never win at Fonda, yeah, that thought crossed my mind many times," he reflects.

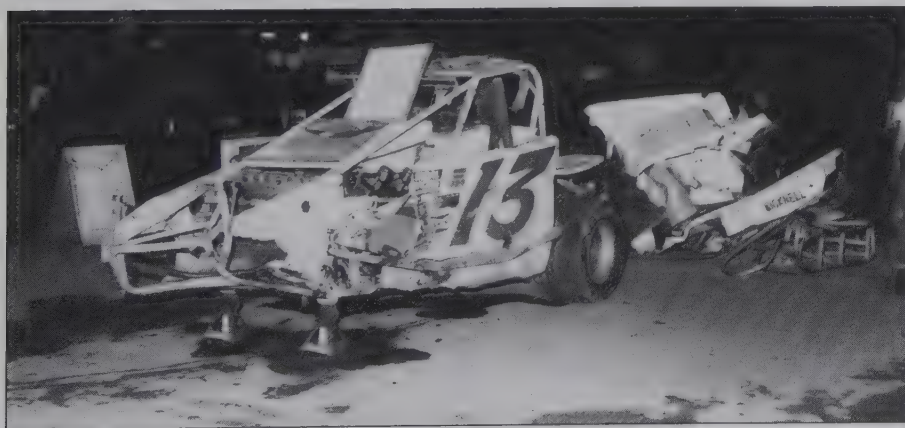


John Kollar (DIRT
Motorsports Collection)

"I won at Malta and at Devil's Bowl and at Utica-Rome. But Fonda was different. Bigger, more difficult."

In 1995 he bought one of Mike Romano's used Bicknells. "I felt the difference the very first lap, saying to myself, 'this is the best car I've ever driven.'" On July 15, 1995 he finally had his #10% in Fonda's victory lane after 28 years of trying. Then he did it again in 1996 and again in 1998. "With my first Fonda win, I could just hear everybody saying it was a fluke. So the second time, I dedicated the win in the post-race interview to everyone who thought this would only happen once," says John. "The third time, I said, 'This one's for all you non-believers who don't think miracles can happen.'"

Bicknell cars also produced surprise Fonda wins for Frank Hoard Sr. and Bob Sitterly on back-to-back weeks in 1994. The '94 season was another one of those years when Fonda management would make a questionable sojourn into track tire territory, this time with McCreary. Manchester, Vermont's Hoard Sr. had been a Lebanon



Frank Hoard Sr.'s Fonda experiences have included a victory and some tough nights, like the one shown here. (Clancy Miller photo)

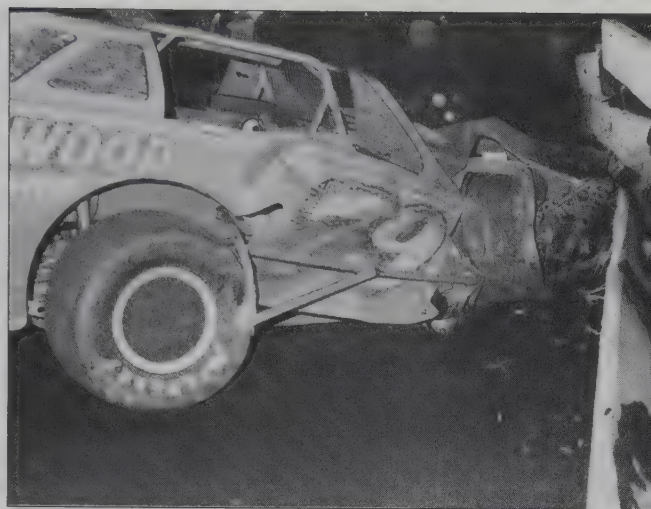
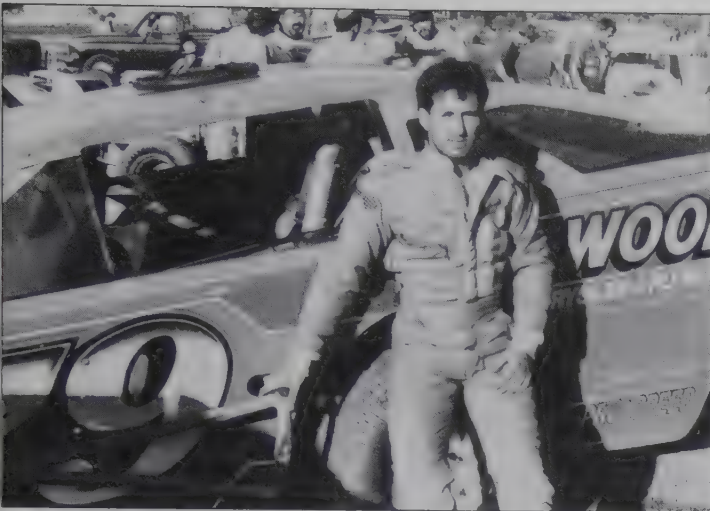
Valley regular from 1970 until a late '80s switch to Fonda. He stayed because he felt that while small blocks were lunchmeat on the long straights at The Valley, they had a shot at "The Track of Champions." "At a momentum track like Fonda, you can keep a small block up to speed in the turns and compete against the big blocks," he observes. On May 28, 1994 that's exactly what he did, starting up front and walking away with his small-block #13. Hoard, 59, and his son Frank Jr. continued to race at Fonda through 2001, but both plan a switch to the CVRA for the future.

"I was resigned to the thought that I was never gonna win one at Fonda in the big blocks," says affable St. Johnsville resident Sitterly, 55. He'd been a Fonda regular since 1966, with only four 320 wins to show for it. All that changed May 21, 1994 in his Bicknell #70. "I won it coming from back in 12th or 14th," he recalls. "I could pass on the top or bottom, both sides. It was just one of those nights where I could do no wrong." Sitterly, nicknamed "El Cid," continues as a Fonda regular today; plus he is highly supportive of his son Otto's racing effort as a successful super-modified chauffeur at Oswego.

While brother Mike was becoming a Fonda superstar, A.J. Romano was taking a tad longer to master the trade. He was very respectful about what he did not know. A.J. comments that, "Learning is so important in this sport. I can't believe some of these newcomers today. They are arrogant. They have the opportunity to trail in

Bob Sitterly poses with his #70 in Fonda's victory lane on May 21, 1994.
(Bob Sitterly Collection)





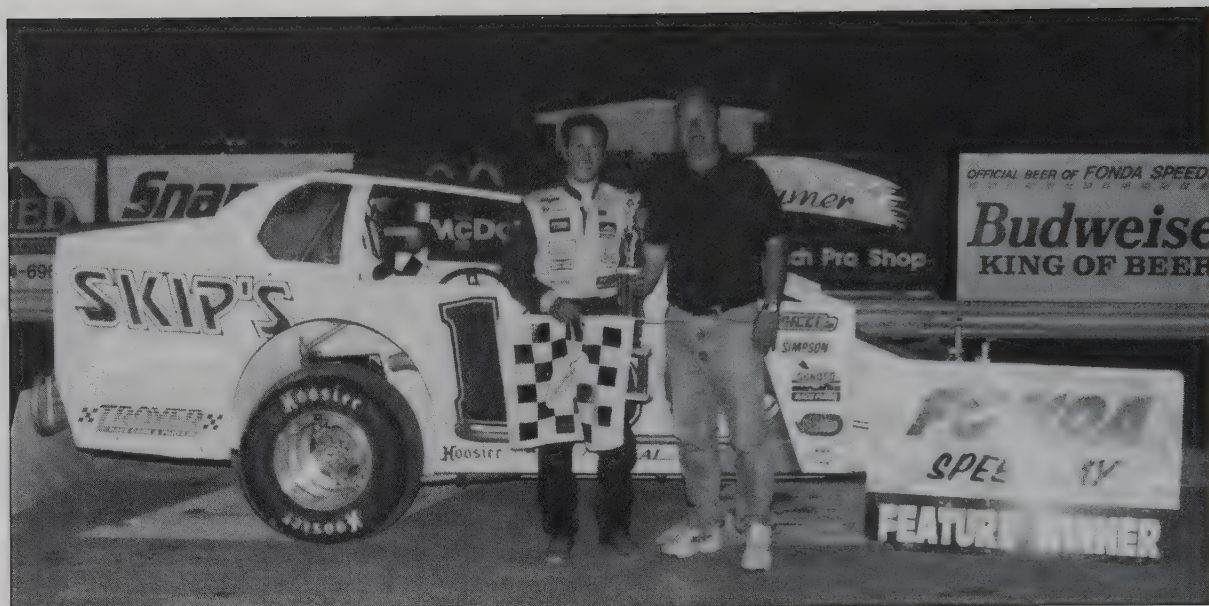
warm-ups behind someone like Mike, or Lape, or Varin, but instead they try to pass them.”

Early on, it wasn't readily apparent that A.J. had this dignified attitude, because the kid was plumb out of control. “I was so hammer-down, I crashed a lot of cars. Many times Dad would tell me so.” Although sometimes it was hard to listen to his father, A.J. was all ears when it came to listening to Jack Johnson. “I’m still a Jumpin’ Jack fan. Dad picked up on this and he would go to Jack and ask him to talk to me about being calmer,” says A.J. “Even in 1991 when I drove for Tom Spencer, he called me ‘Out-of-Control A.J.’ I hope I have gotten rid of that tag by now.”

Fortified by a young team of Gavin Ragusa, Chris “Buckwheat” Atty, and Sparky Browers (and later Jay Dufel), A.J. won the 320 Fonda opener in 1986. But racing is fickle. That same season brought a big disappointment that claws at A.J. even today, 15 years later. “There was a 320 Syracuse qualifier and I was leading until the very end. I came up on a lapped car in three and screwed up by trying to go under it. We both spun out and Mike went by both of us and won. It was horrible. I was so dejected I was sick to my stomach. Then Dave Lape came over to me and said, ‘No matter. You will win your share.’ It meant a lot to me. Now I watch young guys and talk to them. I saw this kid Ryan Odasz take a couple of sportsman races from 18th. I was impressed and I found myself walking over to him and telling him so.”

It was inevitable that there would be some fraternal friction at Andy’s Service over time. Towards the later ’80s and early ’90s, the brothers and their crews became so icy that Andy had to thaw things out on a couple of occasions. Some of the tension started when A.J. moved into a big block in 1987 and stole his first two modified mains that June. A.J. beating his older brother was a bitter pill. Sibling com-

Handsome A.J. Romano (left) rose to prominence in car #79, a number reversal of the familiar Romano #97. But all too often the kid dubbed “Out-of-Control A.J.” ended the night on the hook (right). (both photos by Clancy Miller)



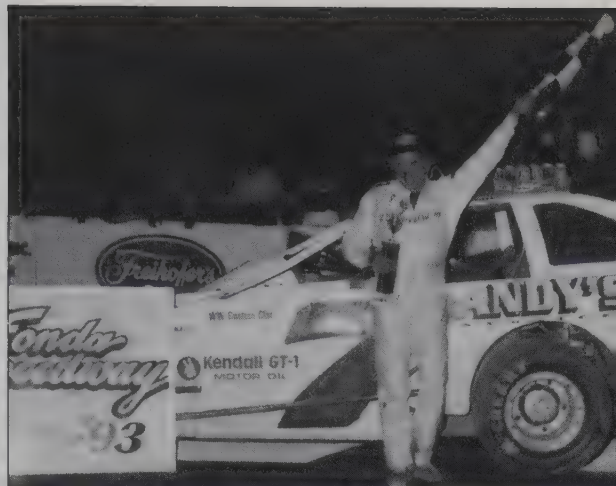
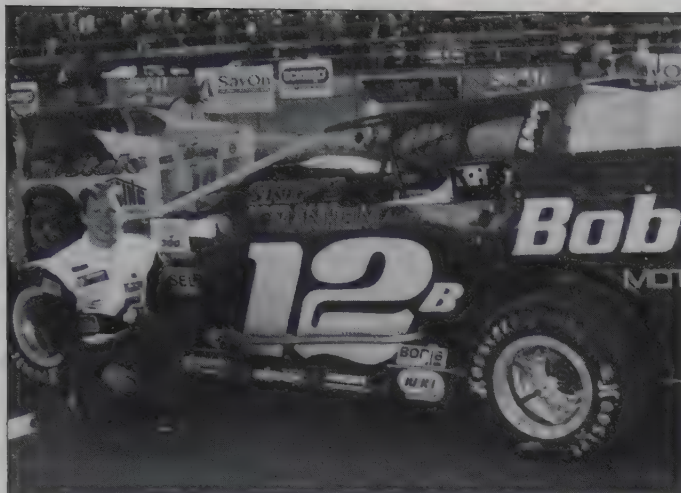
A.J. and his long-time supporter Mike Vacek with Skip Seymour's #16 in victory lane in 1999.
(A.J. Romano Collection)

petitive juices flowed freely. The emotional unease, though, would eventually rinse away.

Like Mike, A.J. spent a couple of seasons on the road, racing for Skip Seymour at Canandaigua. Mike Vacek, a long-time force around the Fonda pits, brokered the deal between Norwich's Seymour and A.J. after Mitch Gibbs left Skip's stable. When Mike and A.J. made their independent returns to Fonda, their relationship became strong, as it remains today. In the words of the younger brother, "Maybe we have just matured, but what a difference. We don't park next to each other like a real race team, but we share lots of information. Monday mornings are data dumps about what we did to the cars, what worked and what didn't."

The Seymour/Romano combo received a real boost early on in 1995 when A.J. drove gallantly to a surprise victory in Fonda's "Rumble," an open-competition 358 version of 'Thunder.' "It was my all-time best night," A.J. smiles. "There were no holds barred. Sail boards, anything. We won \$10,000 over the likes of Brightbill and Pauch. We didn't get home early that night."

Team Romano had a bit of a falling out with Fonda track management in the final few years of the Ralph Compagni regime, and they absented themselves from "The Track of Champions" for a few seasons. But with the advent of the Lucia era, they have solidly and successfully returned to their roots. However, one member of the family tree still yearns to branch out. A.J. has overcome racing injury and illness in recent years, and has refocused himself on a lifelong dream of chasing DIRT points. His late-2001 confederation with western New York petroleum distributor, restaurateur, and car

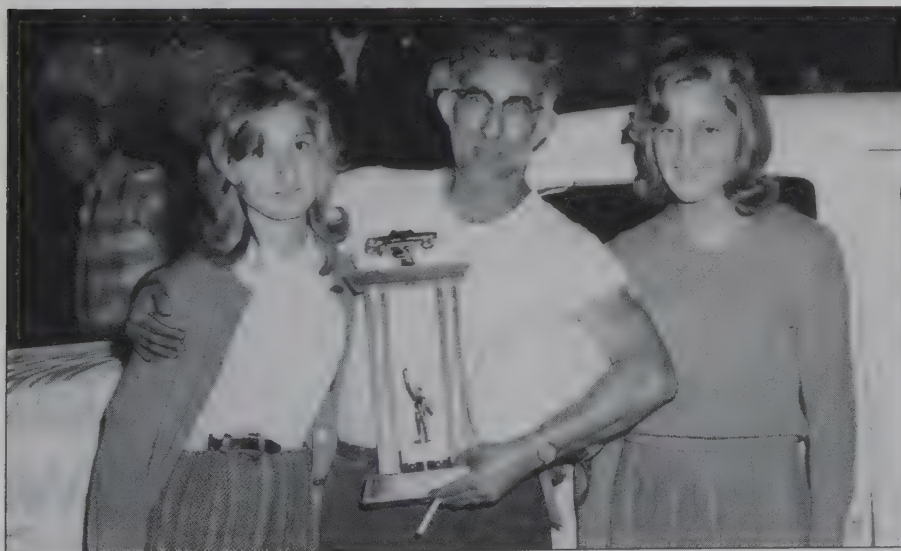


owner Jeff Brownell makes for an enticing DIRT tour prospect for 2002 and beyond. “Besides racing my #16 at Fonda every Saturday,” energetically asserts A.J., “I’ll be racing on the road as often as possible. I’ve worked up to this point for years.”

Of all the familial feats of the Romanos, the greatest may have come in June of 1993. The show on June 5 was a rainout. Mike won on the 12th, A.J. won on the 19th, and ole’ Andy got it done on the 26th. It is a shame that this streak came a full 15 years after Joe had died. “Put” would have been proud. But his son and grandsons should also be proud of Put. Records show that he, too, added to the family’s win list. The outrageous Put once out-crashed all comers in a demo derby, making it three generations of Romanos who have won featured events at Fonda.

Can any family match that?

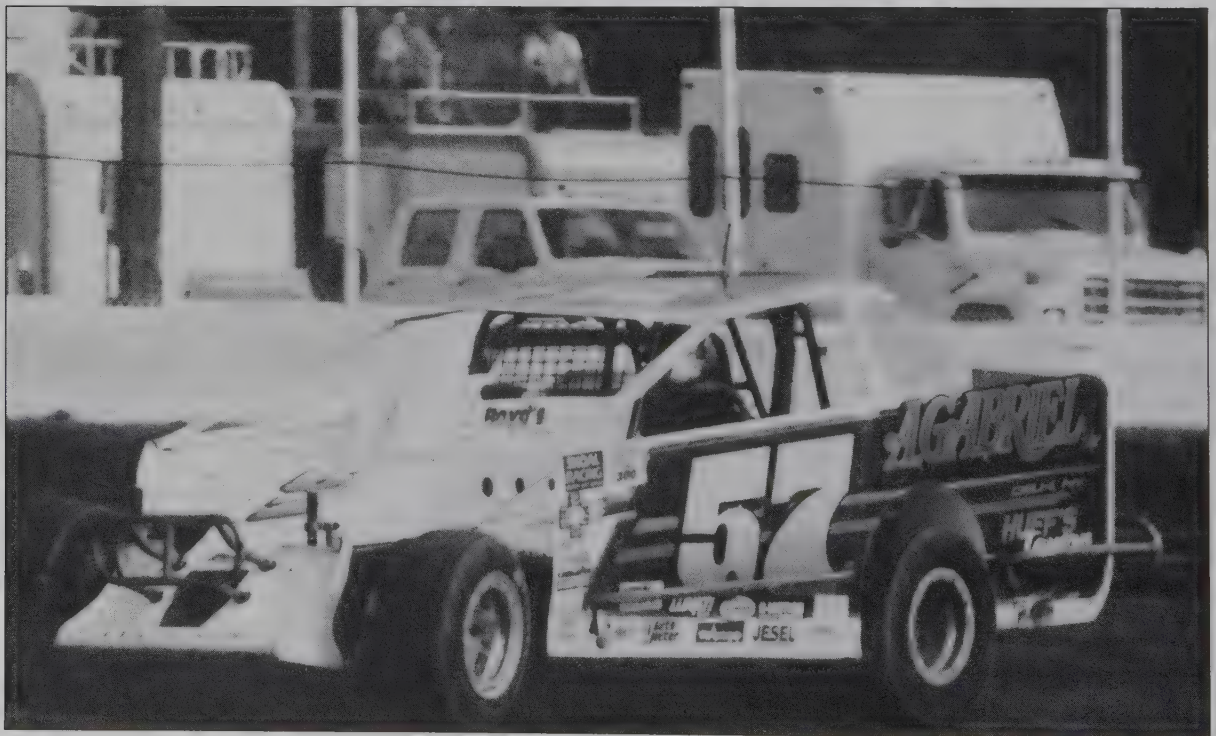
(left) A.J. succeeded Jack Johnson as Jim Bobar’s hired gun. It’s on the road at places like Syracuse where A.J. longs to shine. (right) June, 1993, was “All-Romano” month at Fonda. Here, Andy earned his second big-block win at “The Track of Champions” on June 26th. (left, A.J. Romano Collection; right, Biittig Collection)



The Godfather, Joe “Put” Romano—cigarette in one hand and trophy queen in the other—basking in Fonda’s victory lane after winning a July 14, 1962 demolition derby. (Feuz Collection)



In the beginning stock cars were flat-towed to the race tracks behind passenger cars and pickups. Then, trailers came to be the mode of transportation, as shown above in this infield pit shot taken in the '50s. In the '70s ramp trucks were in vogue, while in the '80s and '90s enclosed trailers became popular. Fans had trouble seeing the backstretch over these new haulers and the pits were moved outside the track, where they had been briefly in the late '60s. The shot below shows Seth Gano racing through the third turn with the car haulers in the background. (above, Grady photo; below, Clancy Miller photo)



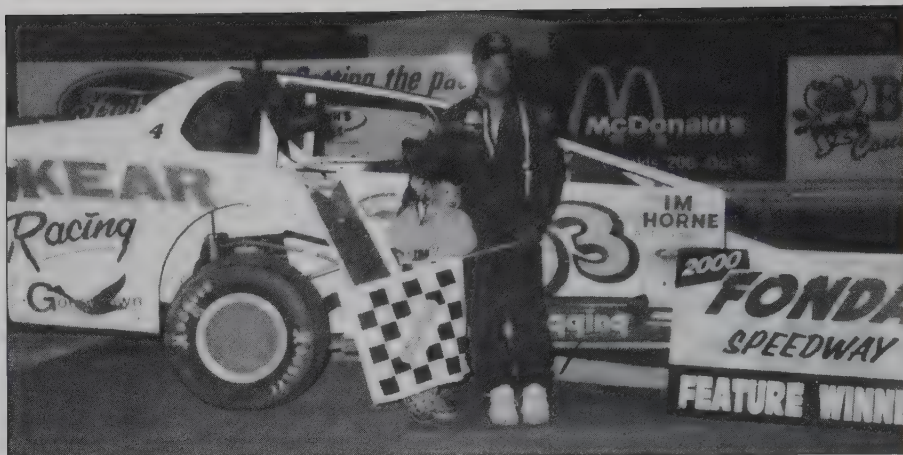
Players in the Second Fifty **11**

RIC LUCIA SITS IN HIS OFFICE planning celebratory events for 2002, Fonda's 50th consecutive season. Lucia, who runs a specialized hauling business and a construction firm in Schenectady, knows the speedway well. As a kid, Lou Lazzaro and Guy Chartrand were his heroes, while his brother was head of Pete Corey's fan club. Ric raced modifieds at Fonda in the '70s—and later sprinters. No stroker, he has an ESS feature win at Accord. Lucia waxes philosophical. "I'm not really the promoter at Fonda. I am the temporary caretaker, the fellow who is overseeing this legacy for 10 years or so until the next guy comes along and has his time at the helm. And don't let anybody—my successor, me, anyone before me—think that he is more important than this place. Fonda Speedway is bigger than anyone who runs it."

Ric and Laura Lucia have accomplished a lot since they took over the track in 1997. New buildings, walls, paint, stands, and appointments lend the fairgrounds a pride and sparkle not seen for years. Drivers and crew chiefs share stories of seeing him working the track at 5:30 in the morning before a race night. There is palpable excitement within the racing network, now that Lucia has brought in the Reclamation folks to grind up the increasingly stony Fonda surface and lay down loads of fresh, pliable clay.

Lucia's work, however, is far from over. It is a time of change for short-track racing in the United States. The wildly popular NASCAR phenomenon, coupled with the closing of marginal short tracks, has contributed to a packed pit area at successful facilities like Fonda. At a McDonald's Fonda 200 weekend, over 200 cars in multiple divisions cram the pits. In contrast, an analogous show—a 100-lapper in the '50s—might have attracted a field of only 40 or so entries. The

Bobby Albert III,
grandson of sprint car
champion Bobby Albert,
celebrates his first Fonda
feature win on August 7,
1999. Albert has scored
two more since then.
(Clancy Miller photo)



more worrying comparison is the grandstand. That '50s race could have attracted 5,000 fans, while less than half that number might pass through the front gates nowadays.

A strong headliner division has always been prerequisite to prosperous times at Fonda. And, as people in the know (such as Herbie Furbeck, see sidebar) would tell you, Lucia seems to have that angle covered. The pages that follow highlight some of Fonda's newest and youngest modified stars. Their personalities are markedly different, but they all share a keen intelligence, Olympian driving skills, and the ability to endure racing's unending tribulations. And, they all share a reverence for the aging Fonda fairgrounds, and a profound respect for the grand and pioneering racers who came before them.

Their perspective was summed up articulately by Bobby Albert III, a promising modified runner from an honored racing family. "When I first won at Fonda and drove up onto the Checkerboard Square that has Harry Peek's #27 and Lou Lazzaro's #4 on it, it was like driving on the bricks at Indy. I climbed out of the car and looked through those hazy lights into the covered grandstands. It was 1999, but to see those people, it could have been the '50s or '60s. I had won at other places before, but to win at Fonda secured a place in history. It was nostalgic and humbling, yet at the same time, the best thing that ever happened to me as a driver."

Tony Pepicelli

"I guess you can just say he outsmarted me when he wanted to start racing," laughs Justin "Pep" Pepicelli about his son, Tony. "I sure wasn't excited about his driving stock cars, but it would have been two-faced of me to get in his way after all the racing I did."

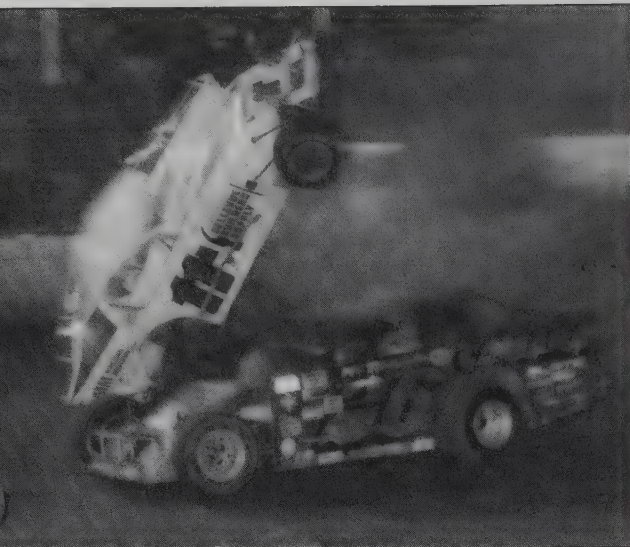
Peppy was referring to 1983 when Tony, a 17-year-old high school student, was pressuring him hard for a race car. Tony was an

accomplished athlete, active in football, basketball, and baseball. He was also a top-notch student, a trait that Pep did not wish to see wasted. So Dad offered his son a deal: "Get through college and I will get you a race car." Tony was quick to comply, and off he went to SUNY Cortland, a sociology major with a minor in business. "I think he pulled the wool over my eyes," says Pep. "He said he was going to race rather than going to school, even though he had straight As. He gave me a shove, but I now know that he was gonna go to college anyway."

Pep honored the deal by building his kid a chassis—and a worthy one. On the night Pep took it to Canandaigua to shake it down, he set a new track record. Young Tony's initial venture at Fonda back in 1984 was so ugly, that it's probably best that Pep wasn't there to witness it. "In the heat race, I just couldn't get used to that fourth turn wall, and I slapped it three times. Jay Bleser was watching and he said, 'Tony, where is your father? You've gotta stop right now, 'cause you're gonna smash this car!' Somehow we managed to qualify. But come feature time, Jay was right. I was out of control from the start—and I ended up hanging it up solidly on that same wall."

Things did go a tad better on some Southern Tier ovals, and Tony was soon accepting rides—with Bill Burgess for whom he won at Five Mile Point in 1988, and then at Thunder Mountain for Jerry Van Dusen, Mike's father. But it would be 1995 before the Pepicelli clan came back with a serious Fonda effort. Tony was psyched. "The place is so special. Maybe it's because I watched my dad there when I was so young, but I look at it differently from other tracks. Somehow it has gotten to be part of my psychology. It is so tough. You must press continuously at Fonda. There are no breathers, no part of the track where you can regroup. It is super fast, but it still has the deceptive feel of a short track. First you have to learn to go fast at Fonda. That's hard enough. Then you have to learn how to pass there, and that is something else again." The big reward would come on May 29, 1999, when Tony outsped Dave Camara, Mike Romano, and Craig Criscone to his first feature.

But once again, Fonda fortune would prove itself fickle. Two months later, Tony lost that winning car in one of the most unusual incidents in track history. It was a Super DIRT Series biggie and Tony was running high, wide, and handsome. Suddenly a torrential rain appeared as if from nowhere and deluged the western end of the speedway. Before officials could even slow the field, there was a massive pileup on the greasy first turn. Several world-class cars, including the Pepicellis' and Billy Decker's, were thoroughly trashed. Tony rebounded, however, and now has six Fonda features to his credit through 2001.



When Tony Pepicelli speaks of Fonda being "so tough" you can believe him. The shot on the left shows his #11 hung high off the first turn wheel fence. Better times would follow. On the right, Tony scores one of his six Fonda feature wins. Tony has also won the Afton track championship. (Clancy Miller photos)

"For 2002 it's pretty much steady as she goes," says Tony, who is topped by only the Romanos as Fonda's most prolific winner the last three years. "That's not to say I am over-confident, though. To be completely honest, when we are towing to the track, I worry about just qualifying." You wonder if Tony really needs to be concerned. 2001 saw him fifth in big-block points, second in the small blocks. And the team was an impressive fifth fast on the consummately slippery/slick surface of the year's finale, the McDonald's Fonda 200.

In any case, Tony does not seem to worry outside of racing. "I'm happy, it's all going the way I want." His way includes the job of manager of Ric Lucia's construction company, a happy marriage to Dionne (herself niece to Jack Miller, well-known Fonda competitor in the '70s), and a captivating two-year old son.

As for Pep, it's clear he's enjoying it all. "We'll race just as long as Tony wishes. I want to see this tradition go on—it's like my career has been reborn. It was amazing to me to see Tony win the Afton track championship and races at Fonda. Tony is a lot better race driver that I ever was. He *never* settles. He's got that strong Kenny Brightbill-type perseverance. He will just keep looking and looking all over that track for some fast real estate. Sometimes, I have seen him find it when it wasn't even there."

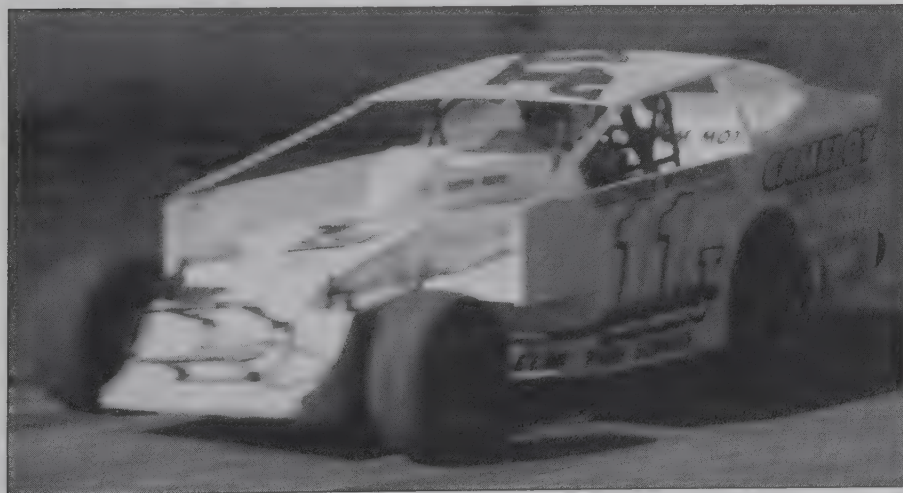
Jerry Pennock Jr.

It is funny how sometimes a specific, seemingly random, incident just sticks in your mind. That happened to Jerry Pennock Jr. at Fonda in the mid-'90s. He was struggling at the time. Things just didn't seem to be going his way, and it was disappointing because he had been racing unsuccessfully for over 10 years.

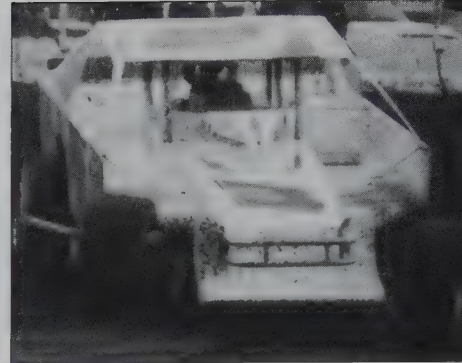
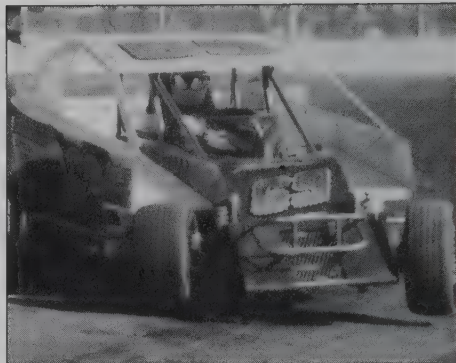
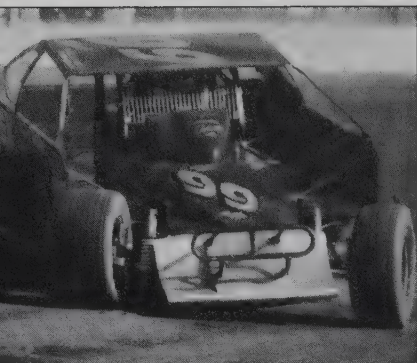
Not at all unlike what went down in the Pepicelli family at the same time, Fonda legend Jerry Pennock Sr. had given his son a race car as a high school graduation present in 1983. Just like Tony Pepicelli, the younger Pennock had been bugging his dad about racing for ages. The final straw was when he asked his father to come down to the garage to see the street stock that he had just picked up. The savvy Jerry Sr. was far from impressed. "Listen, Jerry," he said, "if you are going to go racing, let's get you in the right seat from the start." The seat turned out to be in a modified L&R chassis with a big block. Jerry Jr. wasted little time getting his feet wet, and he was off to Fonda the summer of 1984. But the rigors of Fonda would prove as humbling for him as for hundreds of others in the past. "It was real hard going. The sport was just beginning a huge change. It was becoming so technical and expensive. We had to run what we had—and that only on a limited basis. It was a tough time."

Some 10 years later, Jerry Jr. was climbing out of his Troyer at Fonda, having dropped out with mechanical woes dismally early from a 100-lapper. "Then this stranger came up to me and started asking me a million questions. I don't even know who he was," reflects Pennock. "I was feeling very blue, just plain tired and bummed out. Before he left, he looked me right in the eye and he said, 'Jerry, I want you to know this. Keep driving the way you do, and somebody will come along and take care of you.' I'm not sure why his words stuck in my mind, but I thought many times about what he told me."

Almost spookily, on April 24, 1999 the prediction of the stranger began to take shape. Crew member Charlie Corlew brought Dave Mazeo to the track, hoping to interest him in the races. "Please, try at least to qualify," Corlew urged Pennock. After all, money from Mazeo, a successful Albany-based real estate developer, could make things easier.



Jerry Pennock Jr.'s surprise win on April 24, 1999 not only landed him the trophy, but a lasting sponsorship as well. (Clancy Miller photo)



New drivers, old dance.
Young hot shoes Randy
Hotaling (#99), Brian
Borst (#69), and Craig
Criscone (#3) hang out
between three and four
in old-time Fonda style.

(Clancy Miller photos)

Pennock did qualify, but he did not expect to do much. It was another threadbare night. He was shod with used tires his buddy Dave Camara had given him for \$25 each. As expected, he faded back early on. But then, in yet another case of that curiously finicky Fonda, the track changed dramatically, and Pennock's Bicknell began working. He hustled into second and with seven to go, he reeled in George Audi for the lead. With the formidable Dave Scarborough right behind him and within earshot, Pennock talked his way around the dry oval for the final five revolutions. "Keep on the bottom. Keep straight. Don't wiggle!" Pennock won it—his first, with Scarborough, Bobby Vedder in his small block, Jack Cottrell, and Camara in tow. If Pennock was blown away, so too was Camara, who said later that he was rooting so hard for Jerry that he could hardly concentrate. More importantly, as predicted by the stranger, Pennock's driving so impressed Dave Mazeo that he became the team's sponsor that night. He has been ever since.

After so-so seasons in 2000 and 2001, the Pennock/Mazeo combo is wired for 2002. Three cars wait in the Warrensburg stable. Jerry, who once dreamed of going asphalt, is now fully focused on the clay. "I want to see how far I can get with Fonda and the DIRT Series." Jerry Sr. thinks it is quite a ways. "Jerry has much more finesse than I did. I did what I did with determination—with not backing off for that third turn. I had to bull my way. Jerry did too, but in another way. He struggled for years, paying for everything out of his own pocket. It was obvious to me that he was talented. . . . he just needed that break. He's got good equipment now. I can't tell you how proud it makes me that we have both won at Fonda. How many dads and their kids can say that?"

Mike Fusco

So many things go through your mind when you sit across the table from Mike Fusco at Cronie's, his family's restaurant in Hagsman, New York. Fusco, just now 22, seems so young compared with some of Fonda's grizzled veterans that you wonder how it is that he's al-

ready a respected, feature-winning modified driver. His youthful appearance is only accentuated by serious Gen X packaging—by the just-so amount of hair gel and the gold chains around his neck.

But what comes across most clearly is probably at the root of young Fusco's uncanny success to date. It shows in his eyes; you hear it in his words. The kid has an intensity about him that will not quit. The more you watch and listen, the more seriously you take him. Spend a short time with Mike Fusco, and you will not bet against him in his next race. As Fusco tells his tale, it is clear that he has been able to power himself through three challenges on the road to motorsports recognition. He has one more to go.

Vinnie Fusco Sr. and Jr. had been Fonda followers for years, with Dad taking young Mike along to Fonda each week. The kid was snagged hook, line, and sinker, "screaming for Jack Johnson until my voice was gone." Then, "because I knew I was going to be a driver, when I was eight, my dad bought Ronnie Johnson's go-kart." In this formative period Fusco learned about driving and maintenance, and about teams. He learned well. By 14 he was International Kart Federation Regional Champ-Unlimited Age, and he swept 72 wins.

That success behind them, in 1995 the Fuscos went shopping again in Duanesburg, and this time Jack had a Brian Goewey car set up for sportsman competition at Fonda. The very first lap in that car would offer up Mike's first big challenge. "I pulled into the track, shaking like a leaf. I knew from kart racing this wouldn't be what it looked like from the stands. It isn't like playing basketball in your backyard. You get only one shot. I had been good friends with Timmy Clemons, and he said to follow him around in warm-ups. He took me into three way too hot and—boom, right into the fourth-turn wall I went. I was crushed. It took everything I had to get back into the car, but I knew I had to do it. We won the heat the next week, which was a huge confidence builder. I'm not sure what would have happened if we hadn't."

He would only get better in the sportsman, and he was opening-night winner in 1998. The following year the Fuscos took on Utica-Rome as well as Fonda, winning at both speedways, and Mike was voted Fonda's most popular sportsman competitor. But that year Fusco faced his second challenge. "Louie came up to me and said that if I got really good at Fonda, we could go anywhere and be competitive. So I focused every thought on not just racing, but getting REALLY fast—especially at carrying high corner speed at Fonda. By the end of 1999 I think I had become a driver. I taught myself to go to the outside. Now I love to hammer a good six-inch cushion the way I've watched Jack rock it. But if there is no cushion, I can be smooth. I don't consider myself a crasher."

In the 2000 season Mike encountered his third big challenge. "Even when we got pretty racy in the modifieds, it was very hard for

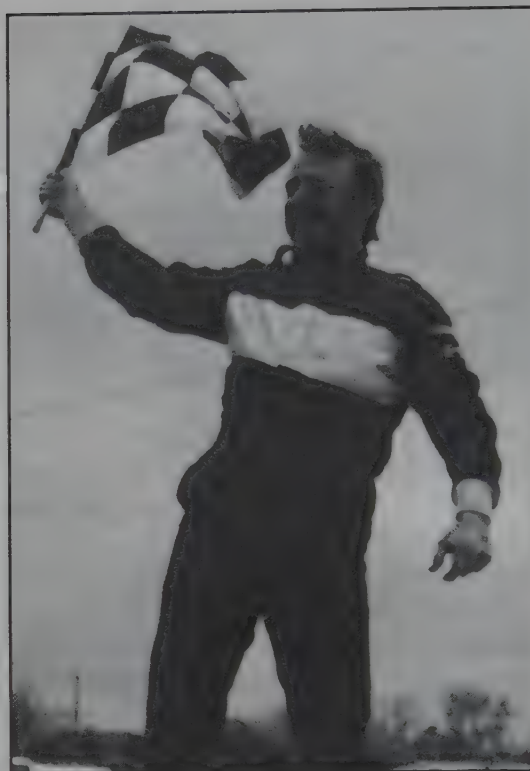
Phlan Hart Talks Pro Stocks

(Editor's Note: Phlan Hart, of Mayfield, New York, is one of Fonda's foremost Street Stock/Pro Stock competitors. He has been a consistent feature winner and was track champ in 1995. An untiring ambassador of the sport, Hart is consistently ranked among the track's most popular drivers. Here's his story.)

"The Street Stock division at Fonda developed out of a Spectator class begun in 1980. Back then a Street Stock was essentially a car off the road with a roll cage and some basic safety features such as a fuel cell and a racing seat. By the mid-'80s more performance products became available such as wider tires and engine modifications. Todd Hoffman was really the first to enjoy the limelight in this new era of Street Stock racing. Todd is the all-time leader with 51 wins in the division. With Todd around, most other drivers felt they had won if they finished up in second place, his dominance was so pronounced. Other chauffeurs who found their way to Checkerboard Square included Danny Ballard, Rick Achzet, Frank Guiffre, Fred Tauss, Eric Arell, and myself.

In the '90's the decreased availability of structurally sound, rear-wheel-drive road cars led to the period of specially constructed tubular race cars. Soon most all of the divisions were replaced with these more technical production racing chassis. A new crop of drivers began to shine in these "bought" cars such as George Audi, Jr., Rob Noviczski, Kenny Gates, Mike Frasier, Steve Welch, and Kenny Martin.

In 1995 the Street Stocks gained major recognition with the formation of a DIRT-



Phlan Hart (Clancy Miller photo)

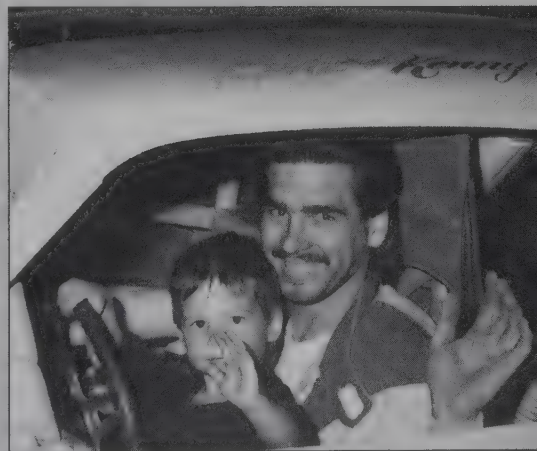
sanctioned Street Stock Championship Trail. This series of 10 races at various tracks encouraged elite competitors from across the state to show their stuff. Many Fonda teams competed, including Rob Noviczski, who won one of the events. I was lucky enough to win three myself and I finished second in points, while Kenny Martin was 10th.

Then in 1997 the Street Stocks got another page in the history books with their introductory race at the New York State Fairgrounds in Syracuse. Many teams produced new cars just to run on the Moody Mile. There was qualifying at Rolling Wheels and then everyone moved their equipment to the Fair. Kenny Martin did Fonda proud by winning the event. I qualified for the pole, which was a big thrill.

With the turning of the century, the DIRT sanctioning body began to appreciate how far the cars had developed and what



April 2001: Mark Sullivan (#28P) leads Luke Klob (#81), Rob Noviczski, and Mike Fritz out of the second corner. (Lucia Collection) On the left below, George Audi, 1993 Fonda Street Stock Champion, celebrates a victory. On the right, "Krazy" Kenny Martin takes a young fan for a kiddie ride. (both photos by Clancy Miller) At the bottom, Geri Newman becomes Fonda's first woman winner on July 26, 1980. (Clancy Miller photo)



a financial commitment they had become. To recognize this new status, the class was renamed the Pro Stock division. The rules were kept the same, and that meant that the days of building a car from used parts in the garage with a welding torch like we were doing 20 years ago were long gone. If this rate of change continues, the Pro Stocks will be some sophisticated missiles in just a few years."

—Phlan Hart



me to get past the thought that I was running with my heroes. Maybe I had too much respect for them and for the track, and I found I couldn't pass them. Then I got to thinking that it was all in my mind. When you think Brett Hearn is going to beat you, he's got you beat. Some people think they are beneath the Lazzaros and Johnsons of the world. I guess I'm more determined than that."

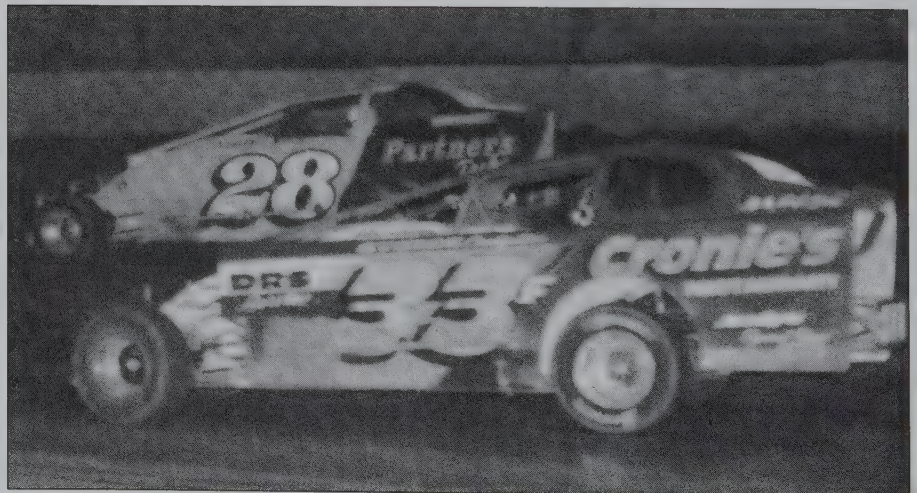
Fusco's confidence and intense self-discipline, striking for someone of his age, worked like a champ. The second night of 2001 he reeled in consummate Fonda veteran Bob Savoie, who had had a pole shot, and handily brought the Cronie's Restaurant Bicknell modified its first win. He did it like a pro. "When I got by Bob, I persuaded myself that I was not in the lead so that I would stay nice and smooth. The track was slippery as ice, so I had to lay the throttle on so easy. But I was sure yelling hard inside my helmet as we came off that fourth turn for the checker!"

As the 2002 campaign approaches, there is more than one entrée on Mike Fusco's plate. He continues to work at Cronie's; he's been accepted into a much sought-after management training position at General Electric; he's attending Fulton-Montgomery Community College as a business major; and he remains mechanic, crew chief, parts washer, and driver of the #33 car.

But the fourth and biggest challenge facing this hyper-charged youngster is to reach the top of DIRT and then move to NASCAR and asphalt full time. But as supportive as his grandpa and dad have been, Mike knows that his dreams exceed his family's ability to fund him. He is candidly realistic. "Money is everything. If we run out and I can find nothing else, I will stop racing. No way am I going backwards." He'll face this hurdle as he has all the others.

Don't bet against him if he ever gets half an hour in front of a prospective sponsor.

Young Mike Fusco (#33) reels in veteran Bob Savoie (#28) on a slick and shiny track. Fusco motored on to win this April 28, 2001 event. (Bob Lansing photo)



Ronnie Holmes

"I was too young back then to remember Dad's racing" says 34-year-old Ronnie Holmes at Ralph's Collision in Oneida, the family business. "But when I was growing up, I was captivated by that Fonda Schaefer 100 trophy that Dad had in his office. I would clean it and dream of racing there and winning a race."

During a successful early career largely at Utica-Rome, Ronnie kept Fonda on his mind. "Fonda has always been an intimidating track. It still is. A lot of people just won't race there. I didn't for a long time because I did not think I was ready. The drivers at Fonda are a step above anyone—how could I ever assume I could beat Jack Johnson?"

But in 1998, Ronnie thought he was prepared for a trial run along the Mohawk—"for fun. I figured some people would talk to me, at least, because I'm Ralph Holmes' son." As it turned out, when the Holmes towed down to Fonda for the '98 season opener, they brought more of Ralph's than his reputation. Given their financial constraints, they had no fresh big block, something they figured would be necessary on a heavy spring track surface. So it was up to the attic of the garage to retrieve that very same 454 with which Ralph had won the Fonda's Syracuse qualifier in July of 1972. The motor, built in 1969, had been sitting in storage, totally untouched. Given the technological advances in racing over the last 30 years, it is astounding that Ronnie was fourth that night. He was delighted but typically modest. "I was so surprised. We came back the next week because the top five are guaranteed starters. Otherwise, I was not even sure we would have qualified. It turned out that we were faster than I thought—not far off, given that motor. And it lasted all year!" They earned two more top fives and a ninth in the points.

Over the next couple of seasons the understated Holmes developed a driving style suited to the more gentle power curve of small blocks. "I got to be very easy on the right foot. I like to charge, but I'm cautious. I like dry slick from the top to the bottom. It calls for a soft foot and not everyone has one," he observes. "I think I am a little shinier when the track shines. Seventy-five percent of the guys don't. I think it's mind over matter. Race the track, not the car." In spite of such a heady driving style, announcers tabbed him "Hot Shoe Holmes," and the nickname became entrenched.

Despite his positive momentum, the costly grind of travel threatened Holmes' aspirations in 2000—until he found opportunity in a friend's misfortune. "Andy Romano was going to be out for a while with surgery, so I asked if I could run his car at Fonda. It worked. We won twice." Ronnie was also winning on Fridays and Sundays in his own gear. Things were looking up.



Ronnie "Hot Shoes"
Holmes in victory lane,
flanked by owners Linda
and Sam Smith.
(Clancy Miller photo)

In 2001 Ronnie again found himself subbing for Andy, this time at Fonda aboard Sam and Linda Smith's #72 VT. The Smiths had just moved to the Mohawk Valley from Northern New England, where they had fielded cars for years on the tiny area bullrings, but no one was ready for what would happen next. On a slick and shiny track on July 28, Ronnie was flying in the Smiths' bow-tie-powered Bicknell and he dusted off the field. And this lavishly celebrated victory was just an appetizer. Holmes and the Smiths did it again in the very next race, a Super DIRT Series 358 100-lapper. Patiently dancing around the low side as others slammed the higher grooves, Holmes took the measure of the best in the business. The seldom-bettered Brett Hearn was second, followed by Steve "The Hurricane" Paine in the star-studded lineup.

"It seemed too good to be true for all of us. That event clinched for us Fonda's 2001 championship," emotes Holmes, unassuming as ever. "After the race, I didn't expect that any of them would know who I was. I did talk to Brett Hearn a little, and he admitted we had a better car." Hearn reportedly admitted to the press that he had not protected the bottom and had been out-driven.

You can take one thing to the bank for sure. Hearn knows who Ronnie Holmes is now. So does everyone else.

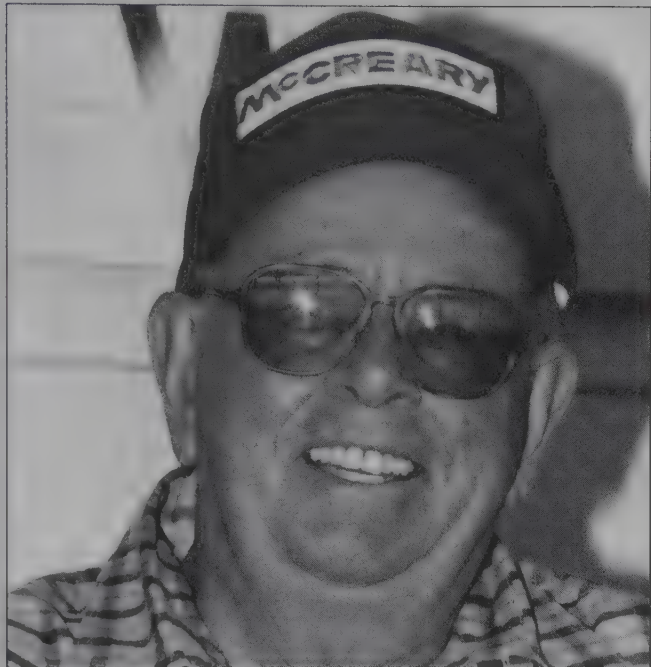
Herbie Furbeck: Super Fan

"I came here in 1953 for most of the shows. Our farm was right next to Ed Feuz'. In 1954, I started sitting right here and I haven't missed but six or so races since then. You could say that Fonda has been my home track. I have been to over 40 speedways between Langhorne and Plattsburgh, but I am always here on Saturday night.

"I've always had some kind of relationship with a car, it seems. I went to school with Jeep—and some of my neighbors (Gibby Wolf and Sam Kitler) had Bob Whitbeck build the #37. I followed that prankster Herbert. Then I was involved with my friend John Bacon who was partners with Floyd Geary in Buck Holliday's car. John became an inspector here over the years. I also traveled a lot watching Bill Wimble.

"Then, more recently, Jack Johnson moved next to me, and I had known Rollie. These days I go over to the Johnson garage almost every afternoon to see what is happening. The other day Ronnie came up to me and said, "You just can't get away from my grandfather, can you?" He had been to the cemetery and noticed that my future grave is almost next to Rollie. He's right. I can't get away from all this!

"Things have changed over the years. In the old days, they used to have good black dirt from the river—and lots of water. It was wild. You could see the ambulance lights going up over the hill to Amsterdam back then. It was part of the show. It's all grown up with trees now. Three heats, a consi, and a main suited me fine. Today's racing (the Saturday before the Fonda 200, October 2001) could go eight hours. But I'll tell you, I'll be here 'til the end. Every feature has something to offer.



His name is Herbie Furbeck and he is one great guy. You can find him on the end of the second row from the top, right behind the starter. Incredibly, he's been there almost every night since Fonda opened. (Gary Dutton photo)

"What's really changed are the people here in the stands. It used to be a real community. We'd all come—set in the same place—be friends. Gradually, they passed away. You don't see as many older people as you used to. It's very expensive for old folks. Now there are a lot of teenagers. I think they come to see a friend of theirs race from time to time, but they aren't necessarily race fans. It's different people every week.

"But, I just love the competition. There are some great new drivers coming along now. I watch Matt DeLorenzo, Tony Farone, and John McAuliffe real closely. I'm 72 now and sure hope I am able to come for a few more years and see what happens."

Bobby Varin

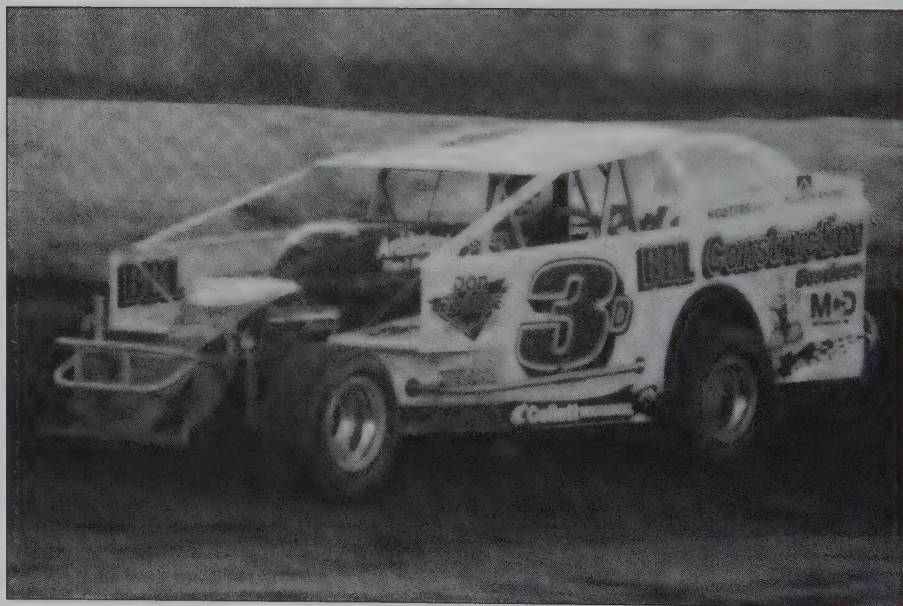
Because of their families' involvement with the track, many current competitors have the Fonda tradition in their blood. Bobby Varin comes from another place. He had never even been to a race when, at 14, he sat in the Fonda grandstands one Saturday night in 1984 with a group of friends. Ironically, today Varin—more than any of the up-and-comers—has become staunch defender of one of Fonda's most time-honored traditions. He is a traveler, very much a road gypsy in the mold of Corey, Gahan, and Johnson. Series races, other races, anything. And he has managed already to emerge as a scrappy ambassador of "The Track of Champions."

The highway certainly presented early and humbling adventures. One was a chilling eight-time, end-over-end tumble at Ransomville in 1989. "It was destruction out there," recalls Varin. "Everything I had was in that crash. I was in tears." But pitfalls soon gave way to multiple wins, and even to an eye-popping pole at Syracuse in 1998 in the Harroll Trucking #35.

The manner in which Varin has gone on the road is reminiscent of Bill Wimble's ride-hopping journey. Like Wimble, Varin has done it on a shoestring—by his own wits, mentor Max Phillips, and the grace of dozens of car owners. "This past year I drove 13 cars for 10 different guys. I've been fortunate. I've had to work that approach because I have a family and all I can afford on my own is Fonda."

Like Fonda-based wanderers of summers past, Varin has captured the attention of the racing world far and wide. One of the first of his marquis wins was a 95-lap Super DIRT Series shootout at Fonda on August 16, 1995. He handily out-throttled second-place

Matt DeLorenzo, a highly active and versatile young modified driver, has yet to snag a Fonda feature, but, according to pitspeak, he's got the goods. (Clancy Miller photo)

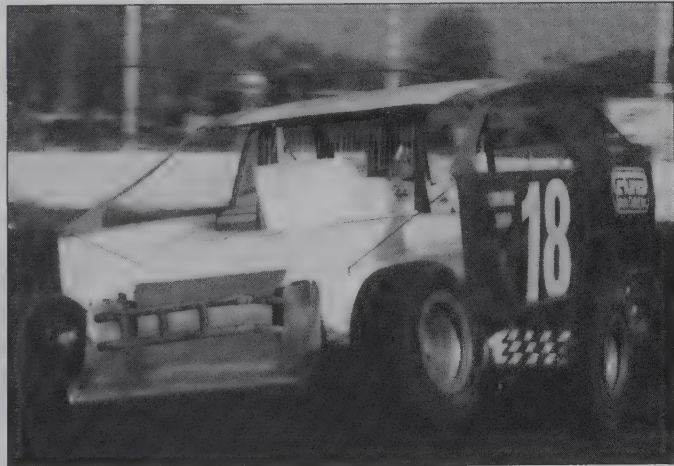


finisher "Barefoot" Bob McCreadie, who was very much at the top of his game at the time. Reflecting back on that night, Varin says, "McCreadie came right up to me afterwards and told me my win was something to be proud of. I thought about that. It was. We flat outran 'em." If that show at Fonda was good for his head, a night at Brewerton two years later would be good for his wallet. Following an ultra-aggressive feature romp, Varin was approached by Dave Cruickshank of Dover Brake in New Jersey. "Dave told me I drove with my heart. He started helping me then—and he still is." The relationship seems particularly fitting, as Dover Brake will be forever remembered as the long-time sponsor of Buzzie Reutimann, one of modified racing's greatest-ever road men.

Despite his wanderings, Fonda remains Varin's epicenter. To date, he has 11 career feature wins there, and was Fonda's 2000 track champ. Varin is a threat each and every time he tows through the gate. "Fonda is racing to me. I see it as what the sport should be. You have to *drive* Fonda," emphasizes Varin. "That's why so many champions have come from there. In 1994, I was the first driver born in the '70s to win a Fonda modified feature. Louie was the first to come up to me and shake my hand, and he told me I would be good. Moments like that can come only at Fonda."

So how was it that this uninitiated 14-year-old in the stands in 1984 got to be so fast? One reason is obvious: Varin has natural talent in spades. After lying about his age and spending a little seat time in the Phillips Brothers' streeter, Varin bought a rusted-out 320 relic from Charlie McMullin for \$1800 complete and ran it as a Sportsman. "It was a tank. I could smash guys and just keep going. The Sportsman class was just starting out, and Alton Palmer was the only good one. I was second to him in the first couple of weeks. I was way over my head, but it woke a couple of people up. I couldn't even put the lug nuts on, but I didn't ask for help like I should have. Didn't want anyone to know I

Bobby Varin has pleased traditional Fonda faithfuls by going on the road—and winning. Bobby is shown here posing for the camera and wide open through turn three. (Clancy Miller photos)



didn't know how." Similarly, late in 1988 Varin picked up a slightly less vintage unit from Jack Johnson and earned an impressive fifth place in his first modified outing ever, a 100-lapper on September 24. He was hands down Fonda Modified Rookie of the Year for 1989.

Varin is no dope; he was the valedictorian of his graduating class at Fulton-Montgomery Community College. But he blushes now on how wrong some of his first impressions of racing were. "When I first saw the races, I remember sayin', 'Those street stock guys look like snails. Those guys are just scared of it.'" Once he got out there and observed first hand that dudes like Todd Hoffman and Fred Tauss were far from pansies, Varin's perspective changed. "Then I knew I was going to have to get a lot faster at this racing business." He succeeded, propelled by a will to win and by a desire "to work unbelievably hard." As his competition became faster and more professional, so did Varin.

Today at age 31, Varin resides in Sharon Springs with wife Earlene (herself a standout Powder Puff performer) and two daughters. He owns a used-car business and is involved in tire recycling. Whether he is heading off to a DIRT point show or a Saturday on the Mohawk, Bobby Varin has but one thing on his mind: "I'm going with purpose and the purpose is to win."

Musical words to the ears of old-time Fonda fans, so eager to have their Saturday night heroes again go forth, conquer, and perpetuate the glory that is "The Track of Champions."

Who's Next

Fonda Speedway has remained vibrant due to the steady stream of talented newcomers who have fulfilled a life's dream of parking their

Up-and-comer Harry Schafer (#1H) is pursued by Rick Achzet (#3) as popular former Utica-Rome track champ Bobby Vedder hammers the cushion upstairs.
(Clancy Miller photo)



modifieds in Checkerboard Square. A feature win at Fonda brings a degree of immortality.

Who will be the next driver to rise from the ranks and end up celebrating in the hallowed ground that is Fonda's victory lane?

Promising contenders abound. Witness Craig Criscione and Matt DeLorenzo, who have been knocking on the door for some time now. How about Randy Hotaling, who has been close a couple of times already? Yet, history had taught us that new winners at Fonda sometimes come from unlikely sources. So in the tradition of Bob Bruno in the '60s and more recently Frank Hoard Sr., will it be a surprise small blocker who gets out there one night and doesn't get caught? Bob Vedder sure hopes so. And Brian Borst looks like a comer.

Or could it be someone following the path blazed by Harry Peek...a driver who emerges from a support division and spring-

A quartet of Sportsman stars who shine brightly. Clockwise from upper left, Ryan Odasz (#88), Mark Ketchum (#15), John McAuliffe (#23), and Jim Davis. (Clancy Miller photos)



boards to modified glory? Fonda railbirds all say that Ryan Odasz, Mark Ketchum, Jim Davis, and John McAuliffe have the goods to get it done in the modifieds.

Or will it be a shocker from the immediate Fonda area, say Harry Shafer, John Marsh Sr., or John Marsh Jr.?

Whoever they are, new stars will emerge. It's as certain as sunrise. Just as it's been for the last 50 years, it will be for the next 50 and beyond at that magical speedplant called FONDA!

John Marsh Jr. (#23) and Sr. (#73) parade lap their modifieds past the Cow Palace. Both await that elusive checkered flag.

(Clancy Miller photo)



Appendix A

Fonda Speedway Track Champions

Modified-Sportsman Track Champions

1948	Buddy Shuman
1953	Steve Danish
1954	Steve Danish
1955	Jim Luke
1956	Don Hendenberg
1957	Pete Corey
1958	Ken Shoemaker
1959	Jeep Herbert
1960	Bill Wimble
1961	Bill Wimble
1962	Steve Danish
1963	Bill Wimble
1964	Lou Lazzaro
1965	Ken Shoemaker (S)
1965	Pete Corey (M)
1966	Bill Wimble (S)
1966	Pete Corey (M)
1967	Maynard Forrette (S)
1967	Bill Wimble (M)
1968	Jerry Cook
1969	Lou Lazzaro
1970	Rene Charland
1971	Maynard Forrette
1972	Harry Peek
1973	Harry Peek
1974	Harry Peek
1975	Jack Johnson
1976	Harry Peek
1977	Lou Lazzaro
1978	Lou Lazzaro
1979	Ray Dalmata
1980	Jack Johnson
1981	Jack Johnson
1982	Jack Johnson
1983	Dave Lape
1984	Jack Johnson
1985	Jack Johnson
1986	Dave Lape
1987	Dave Lape
1988	Jack Johnson
1989	Mike Romano
1990	Mike Romano
1991	Dave Lape
1992	Dave Lape
1993	Jack Johnson
1994	Jack Johnson
1995	Jack Johnson
1996	Jack Johnson
1997	Mike Romano
1998	Dave Camara
1999	Dave Camara
2000	Bobby Varin
2001	Jeff Trombley



Lou Lazzaro (left) and Steve Danish (right)
(Clancy Miller photo)



Jack Johnson (Jack Johnson Collection)



Jeff Trombley (Clancy Miller photo)

Note: This list is composed of the high point track champion in Fonda's headline division, which was Modified in 1948 and 1968 to present, and NASCAR Sportsman from 1953 through 1964. In 1965, 1966, and 1967 the Modifieds (M) and Sportsman (S) raced together, but separate points were kept and two track champions declared.

DIRT 358 Modified Track champions

1995	Tim Dwyer
1996-98	None declared
1999	Jack Cottrell
2000	Mike Romano
2001	Ron Holmes

320 Modified Track Champions

1982	Paul Parker
1983	Dick Schoonover
1984	Mitch Gibbs
1985	Mike Romano
1986	Mike Romano
1987	Russ Flint

Late Model Track Champions

1968	Norm Moyer
1969	Harry Peek
1970	Norm Moyer
1971	Norm Moyer
1972	Harvey Brundage
1973*	Earl Mewhorter (LM)/Jack Miller (LS)
1974	Dick Schoonover
1975	Dick Schoonover
1976	Dick Schoonover
1977	Keith Tesiero
1978	Keith Tesiero
1979	Jack Cottrell
1980	Dick Schoonover
1981	Randy Glenski
1982**	Paul Jensen
1983**	None declared

*In 1973, Late Models (LM) and Limited Sportsman (LS) raced together; but separate points were kept for each class.

**In 1982 and 1983, Late Models and 320 Modifieds raced together. Paul Jensen was the high point driver in a Late Model car in 1982. In 1983, no late model high point man was declared.

DIRT Sportsman Track Champions

1987	Alton Palmer
1988	Fred Tauss
1989	Ron Constantino
1990	Tim Clemons
1991	Tim Clemons
1992	Tim Clemons
1993	Tim Dwyer
1994	Tim Dwyer
1995	Ron Constantino
1996	Alton Palmer
1997	Alton Palmer
1998	Alton Palmer
1999	Alton Palmer
2000	Jim Davis
2001	John McAuliffe

Pro Stock Track Champions

1981	Danny Ody
1982	David Towns
1983	Lester Dieterle
1984	Lester Dieterle
1985	Todd Hoffman
1986	Todd Hoffman
1987	Todd Hoffman
1988	Todd Hoffman
1989	Rick Achzet

1990	Rick Achzet
1991	Eric Arell
1992	Eric Arell
1993	George Audi Jr.
1994	Danny Ballard
1995	Phlan Hart
1996	Kenny Martin Jr.
1997	Kenny Martin Jr.
1998	Bryan Peters
1999	Steve Welch
2000	Rob Novicki
2001	Rob Novicki

Street Stock Track Champions

1997	Steve Burega
1988	Rob Van Aernam
1999	Rob Van Aernam
2000	Dave Horning
2001	Dave Horning

Appendix B

Fonda Speedway All-Time Sportsman-Modified Feature Winners, 1948, 1953-2001

Driver	Total Wins	Winning Seasons	Date of First Win	Date of Last Win
Jack Johnson	138	28	8/7/71	6/2/01
Lou Lazzaro	113	30	5/20/61	5/15/99
Dave Lape	91	30	5/17/69	5/12/01
Kenny Shoemaker	54	14	10/8/55	8/9/75
Pete Corey	50	12	7/25/53	6/6/70
Bill Wimble	43	10	5/31/58	9/9/67
Mike Romano	42	13	6/7/80	8/4/01
C.D. Coville	38	10	5/29/78	5/7/88
Steve Danish	32	7	6/6/53	8/24/63
Jeep Herbert	25	9	7/11/53	8/10/63
Jeff Trombley	24	13	4/30/88	7/21/01
A.J. Romano	23	10	5/15/84	7/14/01
Harry Peek	21	8	8/15/70	4/27/85
Pat Ward	19	11	5/9/87	4/15/00
Rene Charland	18	7	6/13/64	5/24/75
Ray Dalmata	17	7	9/20/80	7/29/89
Brett Hearn	17	11	5/14/85	7/18/01
Dave Camara	16	5	5/13/95	7/17/99
Bobby Varin	11	6	7/16/94	6/30/01
Irv Taylor	10	8	7/20/57	5/30/70
Buck Holliday	9	3	7/18/59	5/2/64
Ed Pieniazek	9	4	4/27/68	6/14/75
Maynard Forrette	9	6	6/3/67	7/26/80
Jimmy Horton	9	7	5/17/77	6/27/96
Danny Johnson	8	7	9/25/82	7/7/93
Alan Johnson	8	6	8/27/81	7/19/00
Doug Hoffman	8	8	8/24/88	10/14/01
Jim Luke	7	4	5/15/54	6/11/60
Jerry Cook	7	3	5/28/66	8/2/69
Tim Dwyer	7	4	5/23/87	7/26/97
Tony Pepicelli	6	3	5/19/99	8/11/01
Jerry Pennock Sr.	5	2	7/19/69	8/22/70
Don Wayman	5	4	4/20/68	5/19/73
Ron Narducci	4	2	8/10/68	5/23/70
Jim Winks	4	3	6/19/74	5/8/76
Pep Pepicelli	4	4	5/23/70	5/9/81
Bob McCreadie	4	4	7/30/85	10/30/93
George Gallup	3	3	9/25/54	7/13/57

Tom Kotary	3	2	9/19/59	6/17/61
Dave Buanno	3	2	6/23/73	10/5/74
Tommy Wilson	3	1	5/14/83	6/11/83
Randy Snyder	3	3	7/25/87	5/26/90
Randy Glenski	3	2	7/9/83	6/20/92
John Kollar	3	3	7/15/95	8/1/98
Jack Cottrell	3	3	9/26/81	4/17/99
Bobby Albert III	3	3	8/7/99	5/19/01
Ron Holmes	3	2	7/1/00	7/28/01
Buddy Shuman	2	1	6/4/48	6/11/48
Earl Mallie	2	2	10/2/54	8/20/55
Bob Fiske	2	1	7/2/55	7/16/55
Don Hendenberg	2	1	6/15/57	6/22/57
Ed Ortiz	2	1	7/28/62	9/15/62
Robbie Kotary	2	2	7/9/60	8/7/64
Lee Millington	2	1	7/18/70	7/25/70
Gary Balough	2	1	7/9/74	10/12/74
Will Cagle	2	2	7/14/73	7/30/74
Ben Novak	2	1	5/7/83	8/13/83
Billy Pauch	2	1	8/20/85	9/28/85
Charlie Rudolph	2	2	10/15/83	10/20/85
Billy Decker	2	2	5/2/87	9/26/88
Danny O'Brien	2	1	6/6/92	8/1/92
Andy Romano	2	2	5/17/75	6/26/93
Kevin Collins	2	2	7/25/90	8/16/94
Bob Savoie	2	2	7/23/94	5/20/95
Billy Gray	2	1	7/5/97	8/2/97
Seth Gano	2	2	7/20/96	5/6/00
Charlie Kotwica	1	1	5/30/53	
Don Courtney	1	1	8/8/53	
Paul Brozyna	1	1	10/3/53	
Lee Bliss	1	1	7/24/54	
Don Stumpf	1	1	7/14/56	
Cliff Kotary	1	1	8/24/57	
Dutch Hoag	1	1	9/21/57	
Earl Spellburg	1	1	8/18/59	
Howie Westervelt	1	1	8/18/59	
Paul Marshall	1	1	5/22/65	
Bob Bruno	1	1	7/31/65	
Ernie Gahan	1	1	7/23/66	
Don MacTavish	1	1	5/4/68	
Ray Sitterly Sr.	1	1	5/25/68	
Jim Hurtubise	1	1	8/1/70	
Ralph Holmes	1	1	7/22/72	
Buzzie Reutimann	1	1	7/4/72	
Dave Pelczar	1	1	4/20/74	
Wayne Reutimann	1	1	7/29/75	
Jack Halloran	1	1	6/26/76	
Jack Farquhar	1	1	7/1/78	
George Proctor	1	1	8/25/79	
Jay Blesser	1	1	5/23/81	
George Sifo	1	1	5/6/81	
Dick Schoonover	1	1	5/3/86	
Kenny Hanson	1	1	7/5/86	
Phil Beaver	1	1	5/9/87	
Kenny Brightbill	1	1	10/17/87	
Bob Ensminger Jr.	1	1	8/13/88	
Bob Sitterly	1	1	5/21/94	
Frank Hoard Sr.	1	1	5/28/94	
Tim Clemons	1	1	5/31/97	
Ronnie Johnson	1	1	8/8/98	
Jerry Pennock Jr.	1	1	4/24/99	
Steve Paine	1	1	10/17/99	
Kenny Tremont	1	1	10/15/00	
Mike Fusco	1	1	4/28/01	
Alton Palmer	1	1	8/08/01	

Fonda Speedway Podium Finishes

Lead Sportsman-Modified Division, 1948, 1953-2001

1948

Date	Laps	Winner	Second	Third
5/21	Rain			
5/28	Cancelled	due to low car count		
6/4	15	Buddy Shuman	Wally Campbell	Johnny Rogers
6/11	15	Buddy Shuman	Wally Campbell	Joe Lediger

1953

Date	Laps	Winner	Second	Third
5/30	25	Chuck Kotwica	Paul Brozyna	Bob Ruchedeschl
6/6	25	Steve Danish	Chuck Mahoney	Dick Egan
6/16(1)	25	Steve Danish	Johnny Perry	George Gallup
6/20	25	Steve Danish	Johnny Perry	Smokey Stover (2)
6/27	25	Steve Danish	Jeep Herbert	Paul Brozyna
7/4	50	Steve Danish	Bob Duffy	Bill Blum
7/11	25	Jeep Herbert	Hully Bunn	Harry Dust
7/18	25	Jeep Herbert	Steve Danish	Pete Corey
8/1	25	Steve Danish	Jeep Herbert	Bill Blum
8/8	25	Don Courtney	Jeep Herbert	Gene Brooks
8/15	25	Steve Danish	Jim Luke	Jerry Jerome
8/22	25	Steve Danish	Jeep Herbert	Paul Brozyna
8/29	25	Steve Danish	Jeep Herbert	Jim Luke
9/12	19(3)	Steve Danish	Jeep Herbert	Ollie Palmer
9/19	35	Steve Danish	Don Hendenberg	George Gallup
9/26	25	Steve Danish	George Gallup	Jeep Herbert
10/3	35	Paul Brozyna	Jim Luke	Jeep Herbert

Rain outs: 6/13, 9/12 (partial)

(1) rain date for 6/1, (2) 7-car field; only 2 cars finished

(3) scheduled for 25 laps, stopped after Gene Brook's car wreck

1954

Date	Laps	Winner	Second	Third
5/15	25	Jim Luke	Paul Brozyna	Cliff Kotary
5/31	25	Steve Danish	Charles Morse	Pete Corey
6/12	25(1)	Steve Danish	Chuck Mahoney	Jim Luke
6/12	25	Steve Danish	Jeep Herbert	Dutch Hoag
6/19	25	Jeep Herbert	Jim Luke	Steve Danish
6/26	35	Jeep Herbert	Steve Danish	Jim Luke
7/3	25	Jeep Herbert	Jim Luke	George Gallup
7/10	25	Jeep Herbert	George Gallup	Tom Wilson Sr.
7/17	25	Steve Danish	Jeep Herbert	Jim Luke
7/24	25(2)	Lee Bliss	Jim Gerow	Earl Maille
7/31	25	Steve Danish	Jeep Herbert	Chuck Mahoney
8/7	25	Steve Danish	Jim Luke	Geo. Baumgartner
8/14	25	Steve Danish	Jeep Herbert	Tom Wilson
8/21	25	Steve Danish	Jim Luke	Joe Wunderlich
8/28	50	Steve Danish	Jim Luke	Jeep Herbert
9/11	50	Steve Danish	Jeep Herbert	Jim Luke
9/18	25	Steve Danish	Dutch Hoag	Jeep Herbert
9/25	25	George Gallup	Don Wayman	Steve Danish
10/2	35	Earl Maille	George Gallup	Don Hendenberg

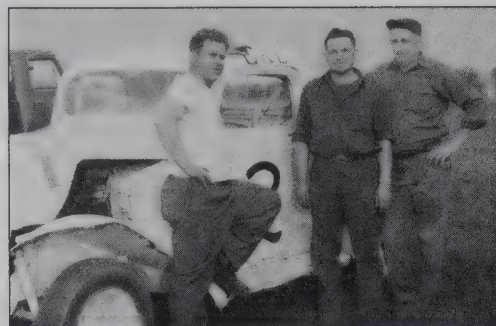
Rain outs: 5/22, 5/29, 6/5 (partial)

(1) 4 laps on June 5, 21 laps on June 21

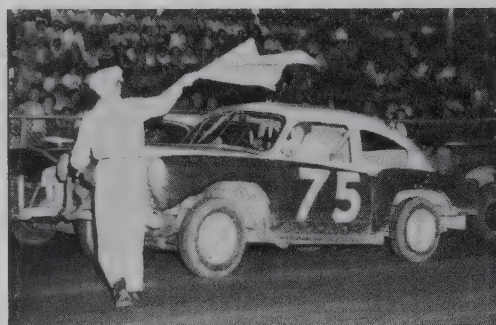
(2) Steve Danish, winner, disqualified for passing on caution

1955

Date	Laps	Winner	Second	Third
5/14(1)	25	Pete Corey	Bob Fiske	Paul Korman
5/21	25	Pete Corey	Bob Fiske	George Gallup



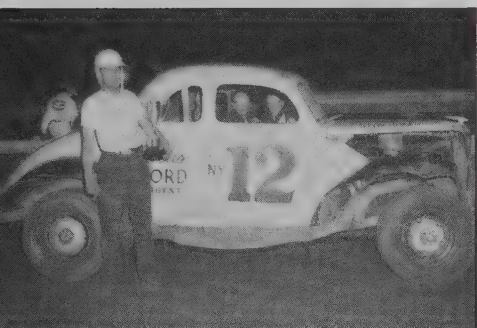
(left to right) Carl "Leadfoot" Tabor, Hoppy Redner, and Tony Achzet. (Boyd Collection)



This Henry J raced at Fonda in 1953. (Feuz Collection)



Ken Jones (Jim King Collection)



Jim "Trapper" Morris (Büttig Collection)

5/28(2)	25	Pete Corey	Bob Fiske	Steve Danish
6/4	25	Pete Corey	Bob Fiske	Steve Danish
6/25	25	Pete Corey	Bob Fiske	Jim Luke
7/2	35	Bob Fiske	Jim Luke	Don Wayman
7/9	25	Pete Corey	Jim Luke	Bob Fiske
7/16	25	Bob Fiske	Jim Luke	Geo. Baumgartner
7/23	25	Steve Danish	Jim Luke	Jeep Herbert
7/30	25	Steve Danish	Jim Luke	Keith Gray
8/6	25	Jeep Herbert	Pete Corey	Pete Corey
8/20	25	Earl Maille	Jim Luke	Jeep Herbert
8/27	50	Jeep Herbert	Jim Luke	Bob Fiske
9/10	25	Pete Corey	Jeep Herbert	Geo. Baumgartner
9/17	35	Steve Danish	Pete Corey	Bob Fiske
10/1	25	Jeep Herbert	Pete Corey	George Gallup
10/8	25	Ken Shoemaker	Jerry Bohling	Jim Morris

Rain outs: 6/11, 8/13, 9/24

(1) Otis Eaton fatally injured (died May 16)

(2) fan Fred Salek killed

1956

Date	Laps	Winner	Second	Third
5/12	25	Pete Corey	Don Hendenberg	Jeep Herbert
5/19	25	Jeep Herbert	Don Hendenberg	Cliff Kotary
5/26	25	Pete Corey	Geo. Baumgardner	Don Hendenberg
6/9	35	Pete Corey	George Gallup	Don Hendenberg
6/16	50	George Gallup	Geo. Baumgartner	Don Hendenberg
6/30	25	Jeep Herbert	Geo. Baumgartner	Pete Corey
7/4	25	Jim Luke	Jeep Herbert	Geo. Baumgartner
7/7	25	Pete Corey	Don Hendenberg	Jim Luke
7/14	25	Don Stumpf	George Gallup	Jim Luke
7/28	25	Jeep Herbert	Pete Corey	Jim Luke
8/4	50	Jeep Herbert	George Gallup	Cliff Kotary
8/11	25	Pete Corey	George Gallup	Jerry Jerome
8/25	100	Jim Luke	Don Hendenberg	Geo. Baumgartner
9/8	25	Pete Corey	Jim Luke	Johnny Perry
9/22	50	Pete Corey	George Gallup	Don Hendenberg
10/1	25	Pete Corey	Jim Luke	Cliff Kotary

Rain outs: 5/30, 6/2, 6/23, 7/21, 8/18, 9/15

1957

Date	Laps	Winner	Second	Third
5/18	25	Jim Luke	Pete Corey	Jeep Herbert
5/25	25	Jim Luke	Jeep Herbert	Jack Murphy
5/30	35	Jim Luke	Jeep Herbert	Pete Corey
6/1	25	Pete Corey	Jim Luke	Jeep Herbert
6/8	25	Jeep Herbert	Don Hendenberg	Pete Corey
6/15	50	Don Hendenberg	Jeep Herbert	Dutch Hoag
6/22	25	Don Hendenberg	Jeep Herbert	Irv Taylor
7/6	25	Pete Corey	Jeep Herbert	Jim Luke
7/13	25	George Gallup	Jim Luke	Don Hendenberg
7/20	50	Irv Taylor	Chuck Mahoney	Geo. Baumgartner
8/10	100	Pete Corey	Dutch Hoag	Jim Luke
8/17	25	Jeep Herbert	Pete Corey	Cliff Kotary
8/24	50	Cliff Kotary	Pete Corey	Irv Taylor
9/7	25	Pete Corey	Ken Shoemaker	Irv Taylor
9/14	50	Pete Corey	Irv Taylor	Cliff Kotary
9/21	25	Dutch Hoag	Don Hendenberg	Jeep Herbert
9/28	25	Pete Corey	Dutch Hoag	Cliff Kotary

Rain outs: 5/11, 6/29, 7/27, 8/3

1958

Date	Laps	Winner	Second	Third
5/17	25(1)	Irv Taylor	Geo. Baumgardner	Steve Danish
5/17	25	Pete Corey	Ken Shoemaker	Irv Taylor
5/24	25	Pete Corey	Jack Ruger	Bill Wimble
5/31	25	Bill Wimble	Steve Danish	Ken Shoemaker

6/7	25	Ken Shoemaker	Steve Danish	George Welch
6/14	25	Ken Shoemaker	Pete Corey	Chuck Mahoney
6/21	25	Ken Shoemaker	Cliff Kotary	George Welch
6/28	35	Ken Shoemaker	Cliff Kotary	Steve Danish
7/12	25	Jeep Herbert	George Welch	Pete Corey
7/19	50	Ken Shoemaker	Steve Danish	George Welch
7/26	25	Steve Danish	Ken Shoemaker	George Welch
8/2	25	Jeep Herbert	Pete Corey	Steve Danish
8/9	25	Pete Corey	Ken Shoemaker	Pepper Eastman
8/16	50	Jeep Herbert	Pete Corey	George Welch
8/23	25	Pete Corey	Irv Taylor	Don Wayman
9/6	35	Pete Corey	Jeep Herbert	Irv Taylor
9/13	25	Irv Taylor	George Welch	Pete Corey
9/20	25	Pete Corey	Jeep Herbert	Joe Wunderlich

Rain outs: 5/3, 5/10 (partial), 7/5, 9/27

(1) 18 laps run on 5/10, 7 laps completed on 5/17

1959

Date	Laps	Winner	Second	Third
5/2	25	Pete Corey	Bill Wimble	Ken Shoemaker
5/9	25	Pete Corey	Steve Danish	Jeep Herbert
5/30	25	Pete Corey	George Welch	Steve Danish
6/6	25	Ken Shoemaker	George Welch	Steve Danish
6/13	25	Ken Shoemaker	Jeep Herbert	Jim Luke
6/20	25	Jeep Herbert	Jim Luke	George Welch
6/27	25	Ken Shoemaker	Pete Corey	Bill Rafter
7/4	25	Jeep Herbert	Lou Lazzaro	George Welch
7/11	25	Jeep Herbert	Pete Corey	Paul Marshall
7/18	25	Buck Holliday	Paul Marshall	Ken Shoemaker
7/25	35	Buck Holliday	Jeep Herbert	Irv Taylor
8/1	25	Ken Shoemaker	Buck Holliday	Irv Taylor
8/8	25	Pete Corey	Buck Holliday	Ken Shoemaker
8/15	25	Pete Corey	Ken Shoemaker	Jeep Herbert
8/22	25	Buck Holliday	Ken Shoemaker	Pete Corey
8/29(1)	25	Bill Wimble	Pete Corey	Buck Holliday
8/29(1)	25	Buck Holliday	Steve Danish	Pete Corey
9/12	25	Pete Corey	Tom Kotary	Jeep Herbert
9/19	50	Tom Kotary	Bill Wimble	Bill Rafter
9/26	25	Jeep Herbert	Bill Wimble	Geo. Baumgartner

Rain outs: 5/16, 5/23

(1) twin-25 features

1960

Date	Laps	Winner	Second	Third
4/30	25	Bill Wimble	Jim Luke	Irv Taylor
5/7	25	Bill Wimble	Jeep Herbert	Robbie Kotary
5/21	25	Buck Holliday	Irv Taylor	Steve Danish
5/28	25	Buck Holliday	Bill Wimble	Jim Luke
6/4	25	Irv Taylor	Steve Danish	Jim Luke
6/11	25	Jim Luke	Jeep Herbert	Robbie Kotary
6/18	25	Bill Wimble	Buck Holliday	Steve Danish
6/25	25	Ken Shoemaker	Bill Wimble	Steve Danish
7/2	25	Jeep Herbert	Steve Danish	Jim Luke
7/4(1)	25	Ken Shoemaker	Geo. Baumgartner	Steve Danish
7/9	25	Robbie Kotary	Jim Luke	Bill Wimble
7/16	25	Ken Shoemaker	Bill Wimble	Buck Holliday
7/23	25	Ken Shoemaker	Bill Wimble	Steve Danish
8/6	35	Ken Shoemaker	Lou Lazzaro	Bill Wimble
8/13	25	Buck Holliday	Ken Shoemaker	Bill Wimble
8/20	50	Buck Holliday	Steve Danish	Lou Lazzaro
8/27	25	Ken Shoemaker	Jeep Herbert	Lou Lazzaro
9/24	25	Jeep Herbert	Lou Lazzaro	Ken Shoemaker
9/24	60	Ken Shoemaker	Lou Lazzaro	Steve Danish

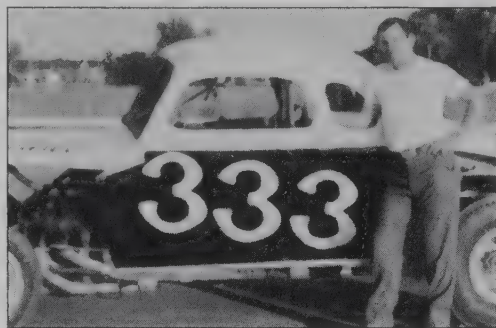
Rain outs: 5/14, 5/30, 7/30, 9/17 (partial)

(1) Pete Corey Benefit Race

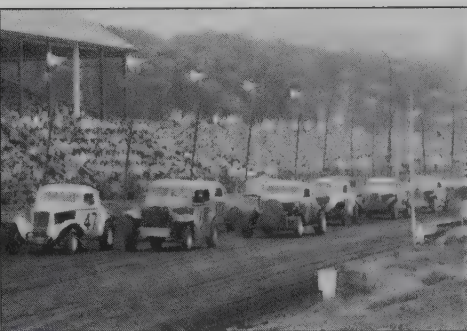


SCODA racing at Fonda in the '50s.

(Feuz Collection)



Ron Quackenbush (Grady photo)



Bugs Bunny (#40) (Feuz Collection)



Mel Austin (Grady photo)



Black Jack DuBrul (Grady photo)

1961

Date	Laps	Winner	Second	Third
5/13	25	Tom Kotary	Pete Corey	Bill Wimble
5/20	25	Lou Lazzaro	Pete Corey	Paul Marshall
6/3	25	Lou Lazzaro	Bill Wimble	Paul Marshall
6/10	25	Bill Wimble	Lou Lazzaro	Steve Danish
6/17	25	Tom Kotary	Steve Danish	Pete Corey
6/24	25	Bill Wimble	Steve Danish	Tom Kotary
7/1	25	Bill Wimble	Howie Westervelt	Ken Shoemaker
7/8	25	Pete Corey	Lou Lazzaro	Steve Danish
7/22	35	Lou Lazzaro	Bill Wimble	Howie Westervelt
7/29	25	Bill Wimble	Dutch Reed	Tom Kotary
8/5	25	Steve Danish	Lou Lazzaro	Ernie Gahan
8/12	50	Steve Danish	Irv Taylor	Jeep Herbert
8/19	50	Bill Wimble	Lou Lazzaro	Tom Kotary
9/9	50	Bill Wimble	Steve Danish	Lou Lazzaro
9/16	25	Bill Wimble	Pete Corey	Jeep Herbert
9/23	100	Pete Corey	Ernie Gahan	Tom Kotary
9/30	25	Bill Wimble	Pete Corey	Lou Lazzaro

Rain outs: 4/28, 5/6, 5/27, 7/15, 8/26

1962

Date	Laps	Winner	Second	Third
4/30	25	Pete Corey	Lou Lazzaro	Jim Luke
5/5	25	Bill Wimble	Ken Shoemaker	Robbie Kotary
5/12	25	Ken Shoemaker	Lou Lazzaro	Dick Nephew
5/19	25	Pete Corey	Bill Wimble	Jim Luke
5/26	25	Ken Shoemaker	Lou Lazzaro	Steve Danish
6/2	25	Lou Lazzaro	Ken Shoemaker	Bill Wimble
6/9	25	Ken Shoemaker	Lou Lazzaro	Steve Danish
6/16	25	Ken Shoemaker	Lou Lazzaro	Bill Wimble
6/30	25	Pete Corey	Bill Wimble	Ken Shoemaker
7/7	25	Bill Wimble	Steve Danish	Lou Lazzaro
7/14	25	Bill Wimble	Ken Shoemaker	Lou Lazzaro
7/21	25	Lou Lazzaro	Pete Corey	Bill Wimble
7/28	50	Ed Ortiz	Steve Danish	Don Wayman
8/4	25	Ken Shoemaker	Bill Wimble	Lou Lazzaro
8/11	25	Bill Wimble	Ken Shoemaker	Lou Lazzaro
8/18	100	Lou Lazzaro	Pete Corey	Steve Danish
8/25	25	Steve Danish	Bill Wimble	Ken Meahl
9/8	25	Lou Lazzaro	Ken Shoemaker	Bill Wimble
9/15	50	Ed Ortiz	Bill Wimble	Lou Lazzaro

Rain outs: 6/23, 9/22

1963

Date	Laps	Winner	Second	Third
4/27	25	Lou Lazzaro	Pete Corey	Bill Wimble
5/4	25	Bill Wimble	Ken Shoemaker	Steve Danish
5/25	25	Bill Wimble	Pete Corey	Lou Lazzaro
6/1	35	Bill Wimble	Ken Shoemaker	Jeep Herbert
6/8	25	Lou Lazzaro	Pete Corey	Ken Shoemaker
6/22	25	Bill Wimble	Ed Ortiz	Lou Lazzaro
6/29	25	Bill Wimble	Ken Shoemaker	Steve Danish
7/6	25	Bill Wimble	Ken Meahl	Ken Shoemaker
7/13	100	Steve Danish	Lou Lazzaro	Jim Luke
7/20	25	Bill Wimble	Irv Taylor	Don Wayman
7/27	50	Bill Wimble	Ernie Gahan	Lou Lazzaro
8/3	25	Bill Wimble	Lou Lazzaro	Steve Danish
8/10	25	Jeep Herbert	Bill Wimble	Robbie Kotary
8/24	200	Steve Danish	Jim Luke	Ed Ortiz
9/7	25	Ken Shoemaker	Lou Lazzaro	Bill Wimble
9/14	25	Bill Wimble	Lou Lazzaro	Ed Ortiz

Rain outs: 4/20, 5/11, 5/18, 6/15, 8/17

1964

Date	Laps	Winner	Second	Third
4/18	25	Lou Lazzaro	Jerry Townley	Ken Shoemaker

4/25	25	Lou Lazzaro	Jerry Townley	Don Wayman
5/2	25	Buck Holliday	Jim Luke	Bill Wimble
5/6	25	Bill Wimble	Paul Marshall	Steve Danish
5/16	25	Ken Shoemaker	Bill Wimble	Lou Lazzaro
5/23	25	Lou Lazzaro	Ken Shoemaker	Paul Marshall
5/30	40	Bill Wimble	Lou Lazzaro	Guy Chartrand
6/6	25	Bill Wimble	Lou Lazzaro	Jim Luke
6/13	25	Rene Charland	Paul Marshall	Bill Wimble
6/20	25	Lou Lazzaro	Pete Corey	Ernie Gahan
6/27 (1)	50	Bill Wimble	Ken Shoemaker	Ernie Gahan
7/4	25	Ken Shoemaker	Pete Corey	Bill Wimble
7/11	25	Lou Lazzaro	Bill Wimble	Ed Ortiz
7/18	25	Ken Shoemaker	Lou Lazzaro	Bill Wimble
7/25	100	Pete Corey	Ernie Gahan	Jim Luke
8/1	25	Bill Wimble	Irv Taylor	Ernie Gahan
8/8	25	Irv Taylor	Guy Chartrand	Lou Lazzaro
8/15	200	Bill Wimble	Ken Shoemaker	Ernie Gahan
8/29	25	Lou Lazzaro	Ken Shoemaker	Robbie Kotary
9/12	35	Ken Shoemaker	Lou Lazzaro	Bill Wimble
9/19 (2)	20	Ken Shoemaker	Steve Danish	Lou Lazzaro
9/19 (2)	20	Ken Shoemaker	Rene Charland	Lou Lazzaro

Rain out: 8/22

(1) Lazzaro won but was disqualified for bumping Wimble and placed 12th

(2) Twin 20s

1965

Date	Laps	Winner	Second	Third
4/24	25	Ken Shoemaker	Ron Narducci	Jerry Townley
5/1	25	Lou Lazzaro	Buck Holliday	Ken Shoemaker
5/8	25	Ken Shoemaker	Bill Wimble	Lou Lazzaro
5/15(1)	25	Ken Shoemaker	Lou Lazzaro	Bill Wimble
5/22	40	Paul Marshall	Ernie Gahan	Bill Wimble
5/29	25	Irv Taylor	Robbie Kotary	Bob Bruno
6/5	25	Lou Lazzaro	Don Wayman	Ken Shoemaker
6/12	25	Bill Wimble	Lou Lazzaro	Jerry Townley
6/19	25	Irv Taylor	Bill Wimble	Lou Lazzaro
6/26	25	Ken Shoemaker	Bill Wimble	Irv Taylor
7/3	25	Lou Lazzaro	Pepper Eastman	Ron Narducci
7/10	50	Lou Lazzaro	Ken Shoemaker	Irv Taylor
7/24	100	Lou Lazzaro	Bill Wimble	Steve Danish
7/31	25	Bob Bruno	Ken Shoemaker	Lou Lazzaro
8/7	25	Robbie Kotary	Cliff Parker	Jerry Townley
8/14(2)	25	Ken Shoemaker	Bill Wimble	Lou Lazzaro
8/21	100	Ken Shoemaker	Irv Taylor	Bill Wimble
9/11(3)	50	Lou Lazzaro	Ken Shoemaker	Ernie Gahan
9/11	25	Ken Shoemaker	Pete Corey	Guy Chartrand
9/18	30	Lou Lazzaro	Ken Shoemaker	Jerry Townley

Rain outs: 4/17, 7/17, 8/28 (partial)

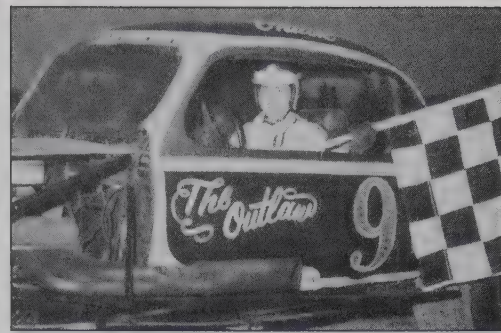
(1) Lou Smith fatally injured (died June 1).

(2) Pepper Eastman killed.

(3) First 12 laps run 8/28.

1966

Date	Laps	Winner	Second	Third
4/16	25	Lou Lazzaro	Irv Taylor	Ron Narducci
5/7	25	Bill Wimble	Lou Lazzaro	Pete Corey
5/14	101	Ken Shoemaker	Lou Lazzaro	Ron Narducci
5/21	25	Pete Corey	Irv Taylor	Ernie Gahan
5/28	25	Jerry Cook	Bill Wimble	Gene Bergin
6/4	30	Bill Wimble	Ken Shoemaker	Pete Corey
6/11	30	Pete Corey	Bill Wimble	Ernie Gahan
6/18(1)	30	Pete Corey	Bill Wimble	Lou Lazzaro
6/25	30	Jerry Cook	Ken Shoemaker	Bill Wimble
7/2	30	Jerry Cook	Ron Narducci	Bill Wimble
7/9	30	Bill Wimble	Guy Chartrand	Jerry Cook
7/16	50	Jerry Cook	Bill Wimble	Ernie Gahan



Chuck Kress (Grady photo)



Clem Dabiere (Grady photo)



Bucky Tesiero (Grady photo)



Ken Canestrari (Grady photo)

7/23	107	Ernie Gahan	Jerry Cook	Bill Wimble
7/30	30	Rene Charland	Pete Corey	Guy Chartrand
8/6	30	Irv Taylor	Lee Millington	Andy Romano
8/13(2)	30	Lou Lazzaro	Bill Wimble	Lee Millington
8/20	111	Bill Wimble	Lee Millington	Guy Chartrand
9/10(3)	30	Lou Lazzaro	Bill Wimble	Pete Corey
9/10	30	Bill Wimble	Jeep Herbert	Jerry Cook
9/17	30	Pete Corey	Jeep Herbert	Lou Lazzaro
9/24	30	Pete Corey	Lou Lazzaro	Bill Wimble

Rain outs: 4/23, 4/30, 8/27 (partial)

(1) Bill Wimble was leading the feature, but lost the lead on a bumping incident with Pete Corey during the 14th lap. Pete Corey offered to concede the victory to Bill Wimble, but the latter refused to accept.

(2) Pepper Eastman Memorial. (3) 7 laps 8/27, 18 on 9/10.

1967

Date	Laps	Winner	Second	Third
4/29	30	Pete Corey	Jeep Herbert	Bill Wimble
5/6	30	Rene Charland	Maynard Forrette	Jeep Herbert
5/13	30	Bill Wimble	Ernie Gahan	Pete Corey
5/20	30	Pete Corey	Lou Lazzaro	Bill Wimble
5/27	30	Irv Taylor	Lou Lazzaro	Dave Lape
6/3	30	Maynard Forrette	Bill Wimble	Dick Clark
6/10	30	Lou Lazzaro	Don Wayman	Ernie Gahan
6/24(1)	48	Rene Charland	Lou Lazzaro	Jack Farquhar
7/1	30	Pete Corey	Bill Wimble	Lou Lazzaro
7/8	30	Bill Wimble	Dave Lape	Andy Romano
7/15	30	Bill Wimble	Lou Lazzaro	Rene Charland
7/22	100	Rene Charland	Bill Wimble	Ernie Gahan
7/29	30	Rene Charland	Don Wayman	Maynard Forrette
8/1(2)	100	Rene Charland	Pete Corey	Maynard Forrette
8/5	30	Rene Charland	Bill Wimble	Ken Canestrari
8/12	100	Rene Charland	Bill Wimble	Lou Lazzaro
9/9	30	Bill Wimble	Ray Sitterly	Jerry Cook

Rain outs: 4/22, 6/17, 8/19, 8/26

(1) Scheduled 50-lap event. Pete Corey led the 48th lap when caution came out for an accident. During yellow, Pete Corey ran out of gas and a squabble erupted. The race was not finished, the matter was sent to NASCAR for adjudication and Charland, who was second at the time, was declared the winner. Pete Corey resigned from NASCAR July 2.

(2) All-Star League race.

1968

Date	Laps	Winner	Second	Third
4/20	30	Don Wayman	Jerry Cook	Dick Clark
4/27	30	Ed Pieniazek	Jerry Cook	Ron Narducci
5/4	30	Don MacTavish	Ron Narducci	Lou Lazzaro
5/11	30	Lou Lazzaro	Ed Pieniazek	Dick Clark
5/25	30	Ray Sitterly	Ken Shoemaker	Ron Narducci
6/1	30	Lou Lazzaro	Jerry Cook	Ed Pieniazek
6/8	30	Ed Pieniazek	Lou Lazzaro	Don Wayman
6/15	30	Rene Charland	Ed Pieniazek	Lou Lazzaro
6/22	30	Ken Shoemaker	Ray Sitterly	Dave Lape
7/6	30	Lou Lazzaro	Dave Lape	Don MacTavish
7/13	30	Lou Lazzaro	Jerry Cook	Dave Lape
7/17(1)	100	Lou Lazzaro	Jerry Cook	Ron Narducci
7/20	30	Jerry Cook	Andy Romano	Dick Clark
7/27	50	Lou Lazzaro	Jerry Cook	Ed Pieniazek
8/3	30	Lou Lazzaro	Pete Corey	Ed Pieniazek
8/10	100	Ron Narducci	Jerry Cook	Andy Romano
8/17	30	Jerry Cook	Ray Sitterly	Ed Pieniazek
8/24	30	Ed Pieniazek	Pete Corey	Jerry Cook

Rain outs: 5/18, 6/29 (1) All-Star League race.

1969

Date	Laps	Winner	Second	Third
4/26	50	Lou Lazzaro	Pete Corey	Ron Narducci

5/3	50	Lou Lazzaro	Rene Charland	Dick Clark
5/10	50	Lou Lazzaro	Rene Charland	Ron Narducci
5/17(1)	39	Dave Lape	Lou Lazzaro	Ray Sitterly
5/24	30	Lou Lazzaro	Rene Charland	Dave Lape
5/31	50	Lou Lazzaro	Rene Charland	Jerry Cook
6/7	50	Lou Lazzaro	Don Wayman	Dave Lape
6/14	50	Lou Lazzaro	Ken Shoemaker	Rich Zagata
6/21	50	Lou Lazzaro	Jerry Pennock	Ken Shoemaker
6/28	50	Ken Shoemaker	Lou Lazzaro	Jerry Cook
7/5	50	Ken Shoemaker	Dave Lape	Jerry Cook
7/12	50	Lou Lazzaro	Rene Charland	Ken Shoemaker
7/19	100	Jerry Pennock	Dick Clark	Ken Shoemaker
8/2	50	Jerry Cook	Lou Lazzaro	Rene Charland
8/9	50	Lou Lazzaro	Jerry Cook	Don Wayman
8/23	200	Lou Lazzaro	Ken Shoemaker	Jerry Cook

Rain outs: 4/19, 7/26, 8/16

(1) Rain-shortened 50-lap feature.

1970 (twin 25's weekly)

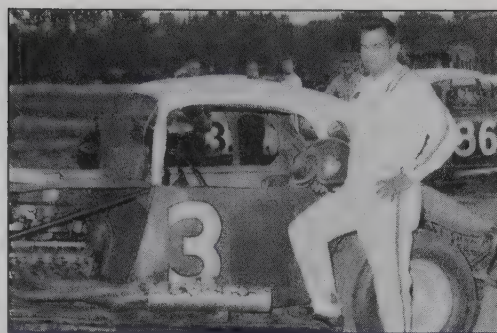
Date	Laps	Winner	Second	Third
4/18	25	Rene Charland	Dave Buanno	Jerry Cook
4/18	25	Ron Narducci	Irv Taylor	Wes Moody
4/25	25	Jerry Pennock	Don Wayman	Lee Millington
4/25	25	Lou Lazzaro	Rene Charland	Bob Langevin
5/2	25	Ken Shoemaker	Lee Millington	Lou Lazzaro
5/2	25	Ron Narducci	Don Wayman	Rene Charland
5/9	25	Lou Lazzaro	Lee Millington	Maynard Forrette
5/9	25	Lou Lazzaro	Ken Shoemaker	Don Wayman
5/16	25	Lou Lazzaro	Rene Charland	Irv Taylor
5/16	25	Rene Charland	Don Wayman	Ed Pieniazek
5/23	25	Peppy Pepicelli	Rene Charland	Maynard Forrette
5/23	25	Ron Narducci	Don Wayman	Lee Millington
5/30	25	Ed Pieniazek	Dave Lape	Bob Langevin
5/30	25	Irv Taylor	Karl Haussel	Jack Johnson
6/6	25	Pete Corey & Don Wayman; dead heat	Wayman; dead heat	Maynard Forrette
6/6	25	Ken Shoemaker	Bob Rees	Rene Charland
6/13	25	Jerry Pennock	Ken Shoemaker	Bob Langevin
6/13	25	Lou Lazzaro	Ron Narducci	Ed Pieniazek
6/20	25	Lou Lazzaro	Maynard Forrette	Ron Narducci
6/20	25	Lou Lazzaro	Ron Narducci	Don Wayman
7/18	100	Lee Millington	Pete Corey	Don Wayman
7/25(1)	25	Lee Millington	Rene Charland	Dave Lape
7/25	25	Lou Lazzaro	Rene Charland	Jerry Pennock
7/25	25	Lou Lazzaro	Rene Charland	Lee Millington
7/25	25	Lou Lazzaro	Bob Langevin	Jerry Cook
8/1	25	Ken Shoemaker	Pete Corey	Ed Pieniazek
8/1	25	Jim Hurtubise	Don Wayman	Rene Charland
8/8	25	Jerry Pennock	Ken Shoemaker	Rene Charland
8/8	25	Don Wayman & Dave Lape; dead heat	Bob Rees	Bob Rees
8/15	200	Harry Peek	Rene Charland	Don Wayman
8/22	25	Jerry Pennock	Don Wayman	Rene Charland
8/22	25	Ed Pieniazek	Lou Lazzaro	Ron Narducci
8/29	25	Harry Peek	Maynard Forrette	Don Wayman
8/29	25	Ed Pieniazek	Jerry Pennock	Lou Lazzaro

Rain outs: 6/27, 7/4, 7/11 (partial)

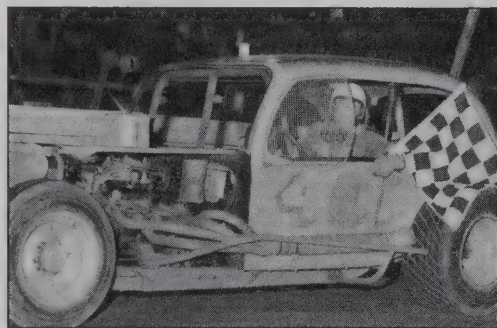
(1) 12 laps 7/11, 13 laps 7/25

1971

Date	Laps	Winner	Second	Third
4/17	35	Lou Lazzaro	Harry Peek	Ed Pieniazek
5/1	35	Dave Lape	Jerry Pennock	Ray Sitterly
5/15	35	Lou Lazzaro	Maynard Forrette	Dave Lape
5/22	35	Maynard Forrette	Dave Buanno	Dave Lape
5/29	35	Harry Peek	Maynard Forrette	Lou Lazzaro
6/5	35	Harry Peek	Dave Lape	Maynard Forrette
6/12	35	Don Wayman	Harry Peek	Ken Shoemaker



Vince Quinneville, Sr. (Feuz Collection)



Bob Langevin (Bittig Collection)



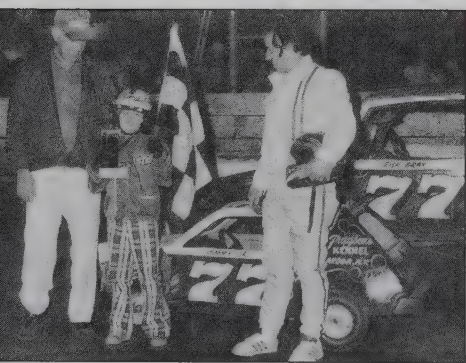
Don Van Guilder (driver) and Jack Blackwood (flagger). (Grady photo)



Les Deuel and Ron Miller
(Grady photo)



Jack Miller (Fusco photo)



Jim Johnson Jr. and Sr.
(Gater News photo)

6/19	35	Lou Lazzaro	Maynard Forrette	Dave Lape
6/26	35	Lou Lazzaro	Dave Lape	Maynard Forrette
6/30(1)	100	Lou Lazzaro	Buzzie Reutimann	Will Cagle
7/3	35	Lou Lazzaro	Dave Lape	Harry Peek
7/10	35	Dave Lape	Maynard Forrette	Ken Shoemaker
7/31	100	Maynard Forrette	Jack Johnson	Peppy Pepicelli
8/7	35	Jack Johnson	Maynard Forrette	Ken Shoemaker
8/14	125	Lou Lazzaro	Maynard Forrette	Jerry Cook
8/21	35	Dave Lape	Jack Johnson	Lou Lazzaro

Rain outs: 4/24, 5/8, 7/17, 7/24

(1) All-Star League event.

1972

Date	Laps	Winner	Second	Third
4/29	35	Jack Johnson	Lou Lazzaro	Maynard Forrette
5/6(1)	67	Jack Johnson	Ken Shoemaker	Harry Peek
5/13	35	Harry Peek	Al Castrucci	Jerry Pennock
5/27	35	Dave Lape	Lou Lazzaro	Jack Johnson
6/10	100	Harry Peek	Jack Johnson	Andy Romano
6/17	35	Maynard Forrette	Jerry Pennock	Ken Shoemaker
7/1	35	Lou Lazzaro	Irv Taylor	Don Wayman
7/4(2)	100	Buzzy Reutimann	Jerry Cook	Lou Lazzaro
7/8	35	Harry Peek	Lou Lazzaro	Don Wayman
7/15(3)	24	Jack Johnson	Lou Lazzaro	Ken Shoemaker
7/22(4)	100	Ralph Holmes	Ron Narducci	Andy Romano
7/29	35	Jack Johnson	Maynard Forrette	Dave Lape
8/5	35	Dave Lape	Ken Shoemaker	Jerry Cook
8/12	100	Jack Johnson	Mert Hulbert	Andy Romano
8/19	35	Lou Lazzaro	Ken Shoemaker	Dave Lape
8/26	35	Maynard Forrette	Harry Peek	Al Castrucci

Rain outs: 4/22, 5/20, 6/3, 6/24

(1) Rain-shortened 100-lap race.

(2) All-Star League event.

(3) Rain-shortened 35-lap race.

(4) Jack Johnson was the first driver to complete 100 laps, but was penalized one lap for an illegal pit stop.

1973

Date	Laps	Winner	Second	Third
4/28(1)	28	Maynard Forrette	Will Cagle	Jim Winks
5/12(2)	35	Dave Lape	Jack Johnson	Harry Peek
5/19	35	Don Wayman	Jack Johnson	Will Cagle
5/26	35	Jack Johnson	Will Cagle	Don Wayman
6/2	35	Ken Shoemaker	Will Cagle	Harry Peek
6/9	35	Ken Shoemaker	Will Cagle	Dave Lape
6/23	35	Dave Buanno	Will Cagle	Jack Johnson
6/30	35	Dave Lape	Jack Johnson	Will Cagle
7/3	100	Jack Johnson	Harry Peek	Dave Lape
7/7	35	Jack Johnson	Harry Peek	Dave Buanno
7/14	100	Will Cagle	Lou Lazzaro	Harry Peek
7/21	35	Harry Peek	Ken Shoemaker	Ron Miller
7/28	35	Dave Lape	Ken Shoemaker	Will Cagle
7/31	100	Dave Lape	Jack Johnson	Jim Winks
8/4	35	Jack Johnson	Ken Shoemaker	Harry Peek
8/11	35	Lou Lazzaro	Dave Lape	Harry Peek
8/14	100	Ken Shoemaker	Jim Winks	Mert Hulbert
8/18	35	Dave Lape	Ron Van Etten	Harry Peek
8/25	35	Dave Lape	Harry Peek	Jack Johnson
9/15	50	Jack Johnson	Dave Lape	Harry Peek
10/6	100	Harry Peek	Tom Corellis	Dave Lape

Rain outs: 5/5, 6/16

(1) Rain-shortened 35-lap event.

(2) Maynard Forrette finished second, placed 5th for passing on yellow.

1974

Date	Laps	Winner	Second	Third
4/20	100	Dave Pelczar	Harry Peek	Lew Boyd

4/27	35	Rene Charland	Dave Lape	Ray Dalmata
5/4	35	Harry Peek	Dave Lape	Lou Lazzaro
5/11	35	Dave Buanno	Maynard Forrette	Jack Farquhar
5/18(1)	35	Dave Lape	Jerry Pennock	Don Van Guilder
5/25	35	Rene Charland	Jim Winks	Dave Lape
5/27	100	Harry Peek	Lou Lazzaro	Ken Shoemaker
6/1	35	Harry Peek	Ed Pieniazek	Jerry Pennock
6/8	35	Ed Pieniazek	Dave Lape	Rene Charland
6/15	35	Lou Lazzaro	Ed Pieniazek	John Richmond
6/22	35	Maynard Forrette	Dave Lape	John Kershaw
6/29	35	Jim Winks	Jack Farquhar	Harry Peek
7/6	35	Ken Shoemaker	Andy Romano	Dave Lape
7/9(2)	100	Gary Balough	Ed Pieniazek	Buzzy Reutimann
7/13	35	Rene Charland	Lou Lazzaro	Bucky Tesiero
7/20	35	Jack Johnson	Ed Pieniazek	Bucky Tesiero
7/27	35	Ed Pieniazek	Jim Winks	Ray Dalmata
7/30	100	Will Cagle	Ernie Marshall	Jim Winks
8/3	35	Ken Shoemaker	Mert Hulbert	Harry Peek
8/10	35	Jack Johnson	Dick Hansen	Harry Peek
8/17	35	Ken Shoemaker	Rene Charland	Eddie Delmolino
8/20	100	Rene Charland	Dave Buanno	Jack Johnson
8/24	35	Jack Johnson	Ken Shoemaker	Mert Hulbert
10/5	50	Dave Buanno	Harry Peek	Eddie Delmolino
10/12	100	Gary Balough	C.D. Coville	Dave Pelczar

Rain outs: 4/6, 4/13, 7/3, 7/4 (partial, completed 7/9), 9/21

(1) Maynard Forrette was the first driver to complete 35 laps, but was disqualified for "jumping" the green flag on a restart.

(2) 7 laps 7/4, 93 laps 7/9.

1975

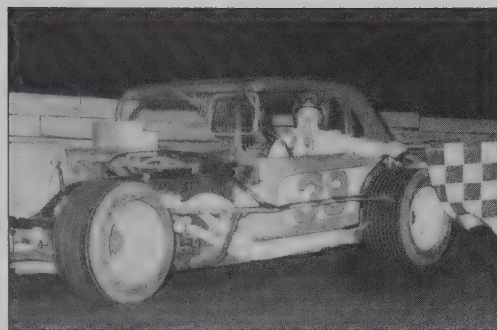
Date	Laps	Winner	Second	Third
4/12	35	Peppy Pepicelli	Ken Shoemaker	Dave Lape
4/19	100	Rene Charland	Jim Winks	Butch Jelley
4/26	35	Ken Shoemaker	Harry Peek	Jim Winks
5/3	35	Jack Johnson	Butch Jelley	Rene Charland
5/10	35	Lou Lazzaro	Ken Shoemaker	Dave Lape
5/17	35	Andy Romano	Joe Johnson	Larry Livingston
5/24	35	Rene Charland	Jack Johnson	Butch Jelley
5/31	35	Harry Peek	Butch Jelley	Joe Johnson
6/14	35	Ed Pieniazek	Butch Jelley	Ken Shoemaker
6/17	100	Jim Winks	Peppy Pepicelli	Tom Corellis
6/21	35	Jack Johnson	Butch Jelley	Harry Peek
6/28(1)	21	Jack Johnson	Charland	Ray Dalmata
7/3	100	Ken Shoemaker	Jack Johnson	Ed Pieniazek
7/5	35	Harry Peek	Jack Johnson	Ken Shoemaker
7/12	35	Harry Peek	Jack Johnson	Ken Shoemaker
7/26	35	Ken Shoemaker	Harry Peek	Jack Johnson
7/26	35	Lou Lazzaro	Jack Johnson	Rene Charland
7/29	100	Wayne Reutimann	Mike Grbac	Jack Johnson
8/2	35	Jack Johnson	Ken Shoemaker	Dave Lape
8/9	50	Ken Shoemaker	Butch Jelley	Lou Lazzaro
8/16	35	Dave Lape	Jack Halloran	Peppy Pepicelli
8/23	35	Harry Peek	Rene Charland	Butch Jelley
9/13	50	Jack Johnson	Harry Peek	Tom Corellis
10/4	100	Jack Johnson	Mert Hulbert	Jim Winks

Rain outs: 6/3, (6/7 from 5/26), 7/19, 9/20

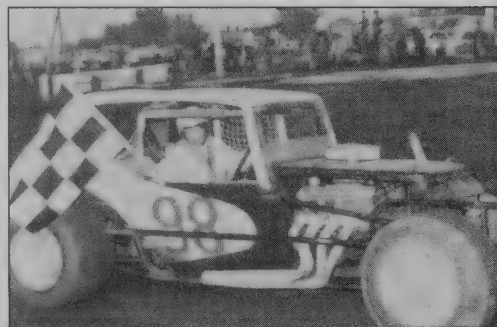
(1) Rain shortened 35 lapper.

1976

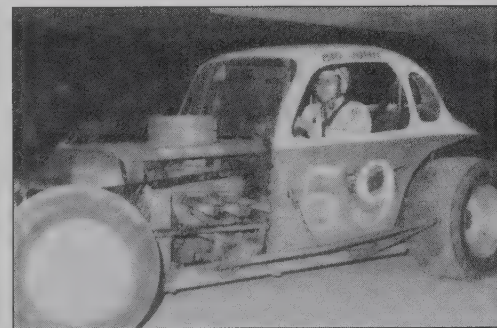
Date	Laps	Winner	Second	Third
4/10	35	Jack Johnson	Peppy Pepicelli	Joe Johnson
4/17	100	Peppy Pepicelli	Mert Hulbert	Mike Grbac
4/24	35	Jim Winks	Harry Peek	Dave Lape
5/8	35	Jim Winks	Jack Johnson	Joe Johnson
5/15	35	Jack Johnson	Harry Peek	Ken Shoemaker
5/22	35	Harry Peek	Jack Johnson	Ken Shoemaker



Bob Rees (Gater News photo)



Ron Van Etten (Grady photo)



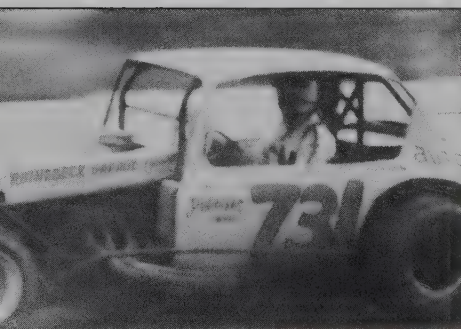
John Kershaw (Grady photo)



John Richmond (Grady photo)



John Ody (Grady photo)



Dick Hansen (Grady photo)

5/29	35	Jack Johnson	Jim Winks	Ken Shoemaker
6/5	35	Jack Johnson	Ken Shoemaker	Ed Pieniazek
6/12	35	Harry Peek	Lou Lazzaro	Ken Shoemaker
6/19	35	Jack Johnson	Lou Lazzaro	Harry Peek
6/23	100	Lou Lazzaro	Harry Peek	Kenny Brightbill
6/26(1)	18	Jack Halloran	Lou Lazzaro	Jack Johnson
7/3	35	Jack Johnson	Lou Lazzaro	Harry Peek
7/10	35	Harry Peek	Ken Shoemaker	Jim Winks
7/17	35	Harry Peek	Jack Johnson	Lou Lazzaro
7/24	35	Lou Lazzaro	Ken Shoemaker	Jim Winks
7/27	100	Jack Johnson	Ken Shoemaker	Kenny Coon
7/31	35	Lou Lazzaro	Dave Lape	Jim Winks
8/14	35	Jack Johnson	Peppy Pepicelli	Lou Lazzaro
8/21	76	Lou Lazzaro	Harry Peek	Dave Lape
8/28	35	Lou Lazzaro	Ray Dalmata	Ken Shoemaker
9/18	100	Lou Lazzaro	Ken Shoemaker	Harold Montayne
9/25	50	Lou Lazzaro	Maynard Forrette	Jack Johnson

Rain outs: 5/1, 8/7

(1) Rain-shortened 35-lapper.

1977

Date	Laps	Winner	Second	Third
4/9	35	Lou Lazzaro	Howie Cronic	Tom Hager
4/16	100	Lou Lazzaro	Larry Livingston	Dave Lape
4/30	35	Dave Lape	Jack Johnson	Lou Lazzaro
5/7	35	Dave Lape	Jack Johnson	Lou Lazzaro
5/14	35	Lou Lazzaro	Jack Johnson	Andy Romano
5/17	100	Jimmy Horton	Alan Johnson	Ray Dalmata
5/21	35	Jack Johnson	Maynard Forrette	Jack Farquhar
6/4	35	Dave Lape	Ed Pieniazek	Nick Ronca
6/4	35	Dave Lape	Larry Livingston	Harry Peek
6/11	35	Dave Lape	Lou Lazzaro	Harry Peek
6/22	100	Lou Lazzaro	Gary Balough	Jack Johnson
7/2	35	Lou Lazzaro	Dave Lape	Harry Peek
7/9	35	Dave Lape	Maynard Forrette	Jack Johnson
7/16	35	Dave Lape	Jack Farquhar	Ken Shoemaker
7/23	35	Lou Lazzaro	Brian Ross	Ken Shoemaker
7/26	100	Lou Lazzaro	Jack Johnson	Mert Hulbert
7/30	35	Lou Lazzaro	Ray Dalmata	Jack Farquhar
8/6	35	Lou Lazzaro	Jack Johnson	Jack Farquhar
8/13	100	Dave Lape	Lou Lazzaro	Jack Farquhar
8/20	35	Dave Lape	Jack Johnson	Lou Lazzaro
8/27	35	Dave Lape	Jack Johnson	Peppy Pepicelli

Rain outs: 4/23, 6/18, 6/25, 9/24, 10/8 (cancellation)

1978

Date	Laps	Winner	Second	Third
4/8	50	Lou Lazzaro	Mert Hulbert	Dave Lape
4/15	50	Lou Lazzaro	Kenny Brightbill	Jack Johnson
4/22	35	Lou Lazzaro	Joe Johnson	Gary Iulig
4/29	35	Lou Lazzaro	Don Van Guilder	Gary Iulig
5/6	35	Dave Lape	C.D. Coville	Jack Halloran
5/20	35	C.D. Coville	Lou Lazzaro	Jack Johnson
5/27	53	Lou Lazzaro	Dave Lape	Gary Iulig
6/10	35	Lou Lazzaro	Dave Lape	Ray Dalmata
6/17	35	Lou Lazzaro	Dave Lape	Harry Peek
6/24	35	Lou Lazzaro	Art Kiser	C.D. Coville
7/1	35	Jack Farquhar	Dave Lape	Lou Lazzaro
7/8	35	Dave Lape	C.D. Coville	Ray Dalmata
7/15	35	C.D. Coville	Harry Peek	Al Castrucci
7/22	35	C.D. Coville	Harry Peek	Jack Farquhar
7/25	100	Lou Lazzaro	Dave Lape	Kenny Brightbill
8/5	35	Lou Lazzaro	Dave Lape	C.D. Coville
8/12	25	C.D. Coville	Dave Lape	Larry Livingston
8/12	25	Lou Lazzaro	Jack Farquhar	Dave Lape
8/19	35	C.D. Coville	Nick Ronca	Ray Dalmata
8/26	25	C.D. Coville	Dave Lape	Lou Lazzaro

8/26	25	C.D. Coville	Jack Farquhar	Lou Lazzaro
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1979

Date	Laps	Winner	Second	Third
4/21	50	C.D. Coville	Lou Lazzaro	Tom Corellis
5/12	35	Lou Lazzaro	Dave Lape	Bob Sitterly
5/19	35	Dave Lape	Lou Lazzaro	Bob Rees
5/26	35	Dave Lape	Jack Johnson	Ray Dalmata
6/2	35	Dave Lape	Jack Johnson	Art Kiser
6/9	35	Jack Johnson	Lou Lazzaro	Joe Johnson
6/16	35	Lou Lazzaro	Jack Johnson	Jack Halloran
6/23	35	Dave Lape	Ray Dalmata	Harry Peek
6/30	35	Jack Johnson	Ray Dalmata	Gibby Fountain
7/7	35	Dave Lape	Jack Halloran	Ray Dalmata
7/14	35	Dave Lape	Jack Halloran	C. D. Coville
7/24	100	Jack Johnson	Alan Johnson	Dave Lape
7/28	35	Jack Johnson	Dave Lape	Ray Dalmata
8/4	35	Jack Johnson	C.D. Coville	Steve Luse
8/11	25	Lou Lazzaro	Stan Wetmore	Jack Johnson
8/11	25	Jack Johnson	Steve Luse	Andy Romano
8/25	35	George Proctor	Art Kiser	Harry Peek

No racing: 4/28, 5/5

Rain outs: 7/21, 8/18

1980

Date	Laps	Winner	Second	Third
4/19	35	C.D. Coville	Lou Lazzaro	Davey Moore
4/26	35	Lou Lazzaro	Jack Johnson	Harry Peek
5/3	35	Dave Lape	C.D. Coville	Mike Romano
5/10	35	Jack Johnson	Alan Johnson	Andy Romano
5/17	35	Jack Johnson	Art Kiser	Harry Peek
5/24	35	Jack Johnson	Dave Lape	C.D. Coville
5/31	35	C.D. Coville	Jack Johnson	Lou Lazzaro
6/7	20	Mike Romano	Lou Lazzaro	Andy Romano
6/7	20	Jack Johnson	Lou Lazzaro	Harry Peek
6/14	35	Jack Johnson	C.D. Coville	Steve Luse
6/21	35	C.D. Coville	Dave Lape	Jack Johnson
6/25	100	Jack Johnson	Alan Johnson	Gibby Fountain
7/12	50	C.D. Coville	Ray Dalmata	Jack Johnson
7/19	35	C.D. Coville	Jack Johnson	Dave Lape
7/24	100	Jack Johnson	C.D. Coville	Maynard Forrette
7/26	35	Maynard Forrette	C.D. Coville	Jack Halloran
8/9	35	Lou Lazzaro	Jack Johnson	Dave Lape
8/9	35	Jack Johnson	Steve Luse	C.D. Coville
8/16	50	Jack Johnson	Dave Lape	C.D. Coville
8/21	100	Jack Johnson	C.D. Coville	Kevin Collins
9/20	35	Ray Dalmata	Dave Lape	Jack Johnson
9/27	100	Jack Johnson	Dave Lape	C.D. Coville

1981

Date	Laps	Winner	Second	Third
4/18	50	Dave Lape	Kenny Brightbill	Jack Johnson
4/25	35	Dave Lape	Peppy Pepicelli	Jack Johnson
5/2	35	Jack Johnson	C.D. Coville	Tommy Wilson
5/9	35	Peppy Pepicelli	Tommy Wilson	Jack Johnson
5/16	35	Jack Johnson	C.D. Coville	Ed Pieniazek
5/23	35	Jay Blesser	Jack Johnson	Ray Dalmata
6/6	35	George Sifo	Dave Lape	Jack Cottrell
6/13	35	Jack Johnson	C.D. Coville	Tommy Wilson
6/17	80	Jack Johnson	C.D. Coville	Kevin Collins
6/27	35	Jack Johnson	Mike Romano	Dave Lape
7/11	50	Jack Johnson	C.D. Coville	Gibby Fountain
7/18	35	Jack Johnson	Mike Romano	C.D. Coville
7/25	35	Jack Johnson	C.D. Coville	Ed Pieniazek
8/1	35	Jack Johnson	Mike Romano	Tommy Wilson
8/8	35	C.D. Coville	Dave Lape	Gibby Fountain
8/18(1)	100	C.D. Coville	Jack Johnson	Jimmy Horton



Butch Jelley (Grady photo)



Laudy Hoyenga (Grady photo)



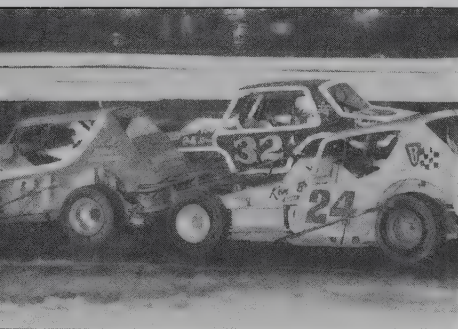
Nick Ronca (Grady photo)



Larry Dalmata (Grady photo)



Bobby Sanders (Grady photo)



C.D. Coville (#61), Kenn Brenn (#24), and Arnie Naparty (#32A).
(Gater News photo by Bob Hunter)

8/22 35 Jack Johnson
8/27 80 Alan Johnson
9/26(2) 100 Jack Johnson
9/26 35 Jack Cottrell
Rain outs: 5/30, 6/20, 7/28, 8/15, 9/19
(1) Race postponed from 7/28
(2) Race postponed from 9/19

1982

Date	Laps	Winner	Second	Third
4/22	50	Jack Johnson	Dave Lape	Alan Johnson
4/24	35	Jack Johnson	Lou Lazzaro	Dave Lape
5/1	35	Lou Lazzaro	Dave Lape	C.D. Coville
5/15	35	Jack Johnson	Dave Lape	C.D. Coville
5/22	35	Jack Johnson	Gibby Fountain	Harry Peek
5/29	50	Dave Lape	Randy Glenski	Ray Dalmata
6/19	35	C.D. Coville	Dave Lape	Jack Cottrell
6/26	35	Dave Lape	Jack Johnson	Tommy Wilson
6/30	76	Alan Johnson	Tommy Wilson	Randy Glenski
7/3	35	Jack Johnson	Ray Dalmata	Ed Pieniazek
7/10	35	Dave Lape	Jack Johnson	Lou Lazzaro
7/17	35	Dave Lape	Jack Johnson	Ray Dalmata
7/24	35	Dave Lape	Ray Dalmata	Lou Lazzaro
7/27	82	C.D. Coville	Jack Johnson	Jimmy Horton
7/31	35	Lou Lazzaro	Jack Johnson	C.D. Coville
8/7	50	Dave Lape	Ray Dalmata	Ed Pieniazek
8/14	35	Jack Johnson	Mike Romano	Randy Glenski
8/21	35	Jack Johnson	Dave Lape	Ray Dalmata
8/26	25	C.D. Coville	Jack Johnson	Lou Lazzaro
8/26	25	Jack Johnson	C.D. Coville	Dave Lape
8/26	25	Jimmy Horton	Dave Lape	Alan Johnson
9/25	50	Jack Johnson	Dave Lape	Alan Johnson
9/25	50	Danny Johnson	Alan Johnson	Jack Johnson
10/17	50	Alan Johnson	Ray Dalmata	Danny Johnson
10/17	50	Dave Lape	Jimmy Horton	Mike Romano

Rain outs: 4/10, 5/8, 6/5, 6/12

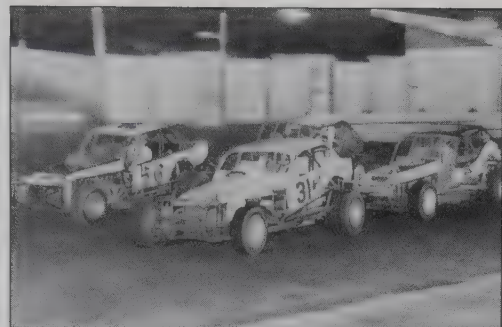
1983

Date	Laps	Winner	Second	Third
4/9	100	Jack Johnson	Ray Dalmata	Charlie Rudolph
4/23	35	Ray Dalmata	Randy Glenski	Alan Johnson
5/7(1)	35	Ben Novak	Ray Dalmata	Dave Lape
5/7	50	C.D. Coville	Randy Glenski	Dave Lape
5/14	35	Tommy Wilson	Dave Lape	Ed Pieniazek
5/21	35	Jack Johnson	Bob Sitterly	C.D. Coville
5/28	50	Tommy Wilson	Mike Romano	Jack Johnson
6/11	35	Tommy Wilson	Dave Lape	C.D. Coville
6/20	100	Dave Lape	Jack Johnson	Danny Johnson
6/25	35	Jack Johnson	Ray Dalmata	Ed Pieniazek
7/2	50	Dave Lape	Jack Johnson	Tommy Wilson
7/9	35	Randy Glenski	Dave Lape	Jack Johnson
7/16	35	Lou Lazzaro	Ben Novak	Dave Lape
7/23	35	Randy Glenski	Tommy Wilson	Jack Johnson
7/26	83	Danny Johnson	Brett Hearn	Alan Johnson
7/30	35	Ray Dalmata	Tommy Wilson	Lou Lazzaro
8/6	35	Jack Johnson	C.D. Coville	Gibby Fountain
8/13	25	Jack Johnson	Jack Cottrell	Dave Lape
8/13	25	Ben Novak	George Sifo	C.D. Coville
8/20	35	Jack Johnson	Dave Lape	Tommy Wilson
8/24	100	Alan Johnson	Dave Lape	Ben Novak
9/24	100	Alan Johnson	Danny Johnson	Jack Johnson
10/15	200	Charlie Rudolph	Ray Dalmata	Kenny Tremont

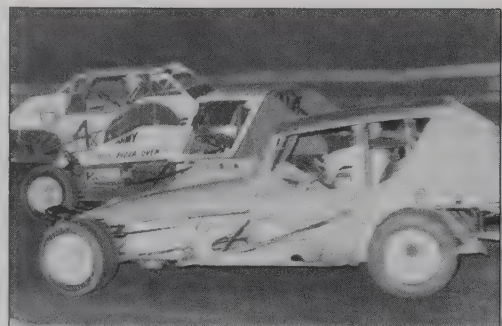
Rain outs: 4/16, 4/30, 6/4, 6/18, 9/11
(1) Race postponed from 4/30.

1984

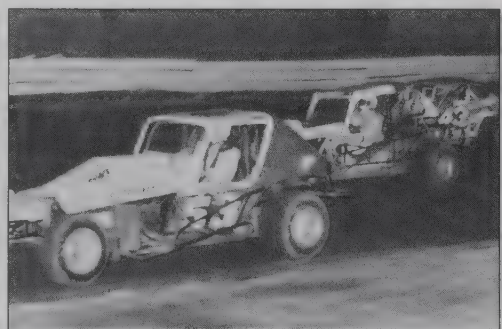
Date	Laps	Winner	Second	Third
4/21	50	Dave Lape	Billy Pauch	Jack Johnson
5/5	20	Jack Johnson	Tommy Wilson	Jack Cottrell
5/5	20	Ray Dalmata	Jack Johnson	Gibby Fountain
5/15	100	Brett Hearn	Alan Johnson	Jimmy Horton
5/19	35	Jack Johnson	C.D. Coville	Ray Dalmata
5/26	35	Jack Johnson	C.D. Coville	Harry Peek
6/2	35	C.D. Coville	Dave Lape	Jack Johnson
6/9	35	Ray Dalmata	Dave Lape	C.D. Coville
6/12	100	C.D. Coville	Jimmy Horton	Brett Hearn
6/16	35	Jack Johnson	C.D. Coville	Jack Cottrell
6/23	35	Jack Johnson	Ray Dalmata	Jack Cottrell
6/30	35	C.D. Coville	Jack Johnson	Ray Dalmata
7/7	20	C.D. Coville	Jack Johnson	Ray Dalmata
7/7	20	Jack Johnson	Dave Lape	C.D. Coville
7/7	20	Jack Johnson	Dave Lape	Ken Hanson
7/14	35	C.D. Coville	Jack Johnson	Ray Dalmata
7/21	35	Jack Johnson	Ray Dalmata	C.D. Coville
7/28	35	Dave Lape	Jack Johnson	C.D. Coville
7/31	84	Jimmy Horton	Danny Johnson	Jack Johnson
8/4	35	Ray Dalmata	Jack Cottrell	Ben Novak
8/11	20	Ray Dalmata	Ben Novak	Dave Lape
8/11	20	Ray Dalmata	Mike VanDusen	Dave Lape
8/18	35	Jack Johnson	Ray Dalmata	Dave Lape
8/22	100	Jimmy Horton	Billy Pauch	Ray Dalmata
9/22	100	Dave Lape	Jimmy Horton	Jack Johnson
10/14	200	Jimmy Horton	Brett Hearn	Jack Johnson
Cancelled: 4/7				
Rain outs: 4/14, 4/28, 5/12				



Gibby Fountain (#31), Larry Livingston (#56), and Lou Lazzaro (#4)
(Clancy Miller photo)



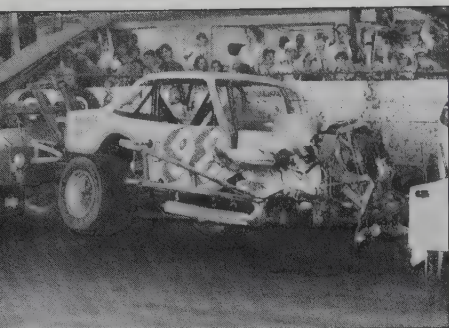
Art Kiser (#29X), George Hunt (#53), and Spike Reed (#4X)
(Gater News photo by Clancy Miller)



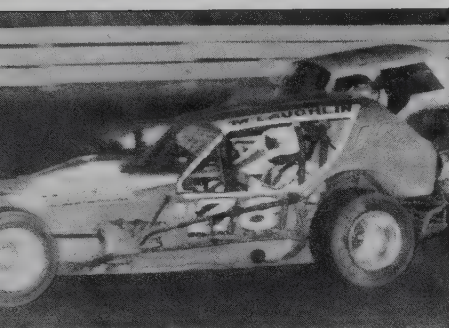
George Hunt (#53), Bob Rees (#3), and Bill Brooking (#43) (Clancy Miller photo)

1985

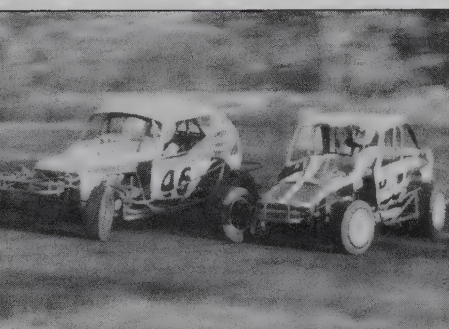
Date	Laps	Winner	Second	Third
4/6	100	Jimmy Horton	Jack Johnson	Alan Johnson
4/13	50	Jack Johnson	Billy Pauch	Ray Dalmata
4/20	35	C.D. Coville	Billy Pauch	Jack Johnson
4/27	35	Harry Peek	Dave Lape	Jack Johnson
5/4	35	Jack Johnson	Mike Romano	Dave Lape
5/11	20	Jack Johnson	Lou Lazzaro	Dave Lape
5/11	20	Jack Johnson	Phil Beaver	Tommy Wilson
5/18	35	Jack Johnson	Jack Cottrell	Ray Dalmata
5/25	35	Jack Johnson	Tommy Wilson	Jack Cottrell
6/1	35	Jack Johnson	Ben Novak	Tommy Wilson
6/8	35	Jack Johnson	Dave Lape	Andy Romano
6/11	100	C.D. Coville	Alan Johnson	Jack Johnson
6/15	35	Jack Johnson	Tommy Wilson	Ed Pieniazek
6/22	35	C.D. Coville	Jack Johnson	Ray Dalmata
6/29	35	Dave Lape	Jack Johnson	C.D. Coville
7/13	20	C.D. Coville	Dave Lape	Phil Beaver
7/13	20	C.D. Coville	Ray Dalmata	Dave Lape
7/20	35	Mike Romano	Ray Dalmata	C.D. Coville
7/27	35	Jack Johnson	Ray Dalmata	Tommy Wilson
7/30	85	Bob McCreadie	Jack Johnson	Jimmy Horton
8/3	35	Jack Johnson	C.D. Coville	Ray Dalmata
8/10	20	C.D. Coville	Jack Cottrell	Jack Halloran
8/10	20	Ray Dalmata	C.D. Coville	Dave Lape
8/17	35	Dave Lape	Tommy Wilson	Billy Decker
8/20	100	Billy Pauch	Bob McCreadie	Ray Dalmata
9/21	100	Jack Johnson	Danny Johnson	Jack Cottrell
9/28	50	C.D. Coville	Danny Johnson	Jimmy Horton
9/28	50	Billy Pauch	Danny Johnson	Dave Lape
10/20	200	Charlie Rudolph	Dave Lape	Ray Dalmata
Rain outs: 7/6.				



Mark LaGrange (Clancy Miller photo)



Mike McLaughlin (Clancy Miller photo)



Mike Arminio (#46) and Ken Hanson (#20) (Clancy Miller photo)

1986

Date	Laps	Winner	Second	Third
4/12	100	Bob McCreadie	Jack Johnson	Ray Dalmata
4/19	50	C.D. Coville	Jeff Trombley	Jack Johnson
4/26	35	C.D. Coville	Bob Ensminger	Dave Lape
5/3	35	Dick Schoonover	Tim Dywer	C.D. Coville
5/10	20	Mike Romano	Dave Lape	C.D. Coville
5/10	20	Jack Cottrell	Dave Lape	Tommy Wilson
5/17	35	C.D. Coville	Billy Decker	Jack Johnson
5/24	35	C.D. Coville	Jack Cottrell	Bob Ensminger
5/31	35	C.D. Coville	Jeff Trombley	Tommy Wilson
6/10	100	Brett Hearn	Alan Johnson	Danny Johnson
6/14	20	Mike Romano	C.D. Coville	Bobby Sanders
6/14	20	Ray Dalmata	Tommy Wilson	Billy Decker
6/21	35	C.D. Coville	Mike Romano	Dave Lape
6/28	35	Dave Lape	Mike Romano	Jack Johnson
7/5	20	Ken Hansen	Jack Johnson	Dave Lape
7/5	20	Lou Lazzaro	Ray Dalmata	Pat Ward
7/5	20	Dave Lape	Tommy Wilson	Ray Dalmata
7/5	20	Mike Romano	Jack Johnson	Tim Dywer
7/19	100	C.D. Coville	Ray Dalmata	Billy Decker
7/26	35	Dave Lape	Jeff Trombley	Pat Ward
8/2	35	Mike Romano	Brett Hearn	Phil Beaver
8/11	86	Brett Hearn	Jimmy Horton	Mike Romano
8/16	35	Jack Johnson	Mike Romano	Pat Ward
8/19	100	Brett Hearn	Jimmy Horton	Bob McCreadie
9/13	20	Jack Johnson	Tommy Wilson	Ray Dalmata
9/13	20	Ray Dalmata	Kenny Brightbill	Randy Glenski
9/27	50	Alan Johnson	Bob McCreadie	Dave Lape
9/27	50	Danny Johnson	Tommy Wilson	Ray Dalmata
10/18	20	Jack Johnson	Mike Romano	Ray Dalmata

Rain outs: 4/5, 6/7, 7/12, 7/29, 8/9.

1987

Date	Laps	Winner	Second	Third
4/11	100	Mike Romano	Kenny Brightbill	Brett Hearn
4/18	100	Jack Johnson	Kenny Brightbill	Mike Romano
4/25	35	Jack Johnson	A.J. Romano	Ray Dalmata
5/2	35	Billy Decker	Pat Ward	Jeff Trombley
5/9	20	Phil Beaver	Dave Lape	Jack Cottrell
5/9	20	Pat Ward	Jack Johnson	Billy Decker
5/16	35	Dave Lape	Ray Dalmata	Jack Johnson
5/23	35	Tim Dywer	Billy Decker	Bob Ensminger
5/30	35	Jack Johnson	Dave Lape	Mike Romano
6/6	35	Jack Johnson	Jack Cottrell	Mike Romano
6/13	35	Pat Ward	Tim Dywer	A.J. Romano
6/20	20	Dave Lape	Billy Decker	Jack Johnson
6/20	20	Tim Dywer	A.J. Romano	Pat Ward
6/29	100	Jack Johnson	Dave Lape	Kevin Collins
6/29	40	Mike Romano	Dave Lape	Kevin Collins
7/4	20	Jack Johnson	Tommy Wilson	Bob Sitterly
7/4	20	Dave Lape	A.J. Romano	Pat Ward
7/4	20	Tim Dywer	Harry Peek	Mike Romano
7/4	20	A.J. Romano	Ray Dalmata	Billy Decker
7/11	35	Mike Romano	Lou Lazzaro	Dave Lape
7/18	35	A.J. Romano	Pat Ward	Mike Romano
7/25	35	Randy Snyder	Bob Ensminger	Ray Dalmata
7/28	87	Brett Hearn	Jack Johnson	Danny Johnson
8/1	35	Ray Dalmata	Jim McMillian	Jack Cottrell
8/8	35	Mike Romano	A.J. Romano	Ray Dalmata
8/15	20	Dave Lape	Tim Dywer	Mike Romano
8/15	20	Ray Dalmata	A.J. Romano	Dave Lape
8/25	100	Brett Hearn	Jimmy Horton	Dave Lape
9/26	50	Tim Dywer	Brett Hearn	A.J. Romano
9/26	50	Dave Lape	Brett Hearn	Tim Dywer

10/18 200 Kenny Brightbill
Rain outs: 4/4, 6/9, 6/27, 8/22, 9/19

Danny Johnson

Jimmy Horton

1988

Date	Laps	Winner
4/9	100	Jack Johnson
4/16	35	Mike Romano
4/30	35	Jeff Trombley
5/7	20	Jack Johnson
5/7	20	C.D. Coville
5/14	35	Lou Lazzaro
5/28	35	Pat Ward
6/4	35	Mike Romano
6/11	35	Jeff Trombley
6/14	100	Danny Johnson
6/18	35	Mike Romano
7/2	50	Pat Ward
7/2	50	Mike Romano
7/9(1)	35	Tim Dywer
7/9	35	Jack Johnson
7/16	20	Pat Ward
7/23	35	Jeff Trombley
8/6(2)	20	Dave Lape
8/9	88	Danny Johnson
8/13(3)	20	A.J. Romano
8/13	20	Bob Ensminger
8/20	35	Jack Johnson
8/20	35	Mike Romano
8/22	100	Doug Hoffman
9/24	100	Billy Decker
10/16	200	Jack Johnson

Rain outs: 4/23, 5/21, 6/25, 8/6, 8/13

(1) Race postponed from 6/25.

(2) Race postponed from 7/16.

(3) Race postponed from 7/30.

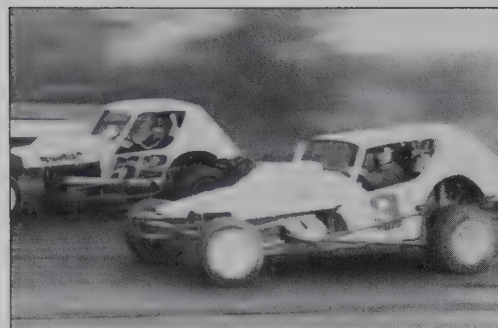
1989

Date	Laps	Winner
4/22	35	Dave Lape
5/13	35	Dave Lape
5/16	50	Mike Romano
5/20	35	Jack Johnson
5/27	35	Ray Dalmata
6/3	35	Dave Lape
6/10	35	Mike Romano
6/17	35	A.J. Romano
6/24	35	Ray Dalmata
7/1	50	Mike Romano
7/1	50	Pat Ward
7/8	35	Ray Dalmata
7/15	53	Mike Romano
7/17	100	Mike Romano
7/22	35	Mike Romano
7/25	89	Doug Hoffman
7/29	35	Ray Dalmata
8/5	35	Pat Ward
8/15	100	Dave Lape
8/19	35	Randy Snyder
10/15	200	Mike Romano

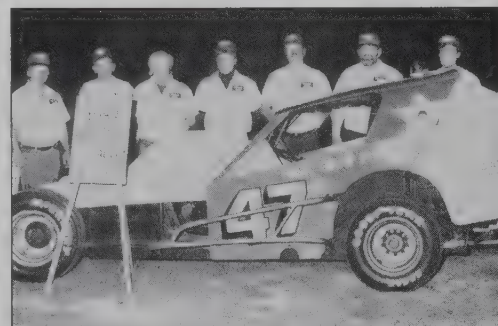
Rain outs: 4/15, 4/29, 5/6, 6/13, 8/12

Second
Alan Johnson
A.J. Romano
Brett Hearn
Ray Dalmata
Jack Johnson
A.J. Romano
Jack Johnson
A.J. Romano
Jack Johnson
A.J. Romano
Bob Ensminger
Jeff Trombley
Tim Dywer
Pat Ward
Pat Ward
Bob Ensminger
Mike Romano
A.J. Romano
Brett Hearn
Jack Johnson
Pat Ward
Dave Lape
Jeff Trombley
Alan Johnson
Ray Dalmata
Kevin Collins

Third
C.D. Coville
C.D. Coville
Pat Ward
C.D. Coville
Tim Dywer
Bob Sitterly
Bob Ensminger
Dave Lape
Jack Cottrell
Dave Lape
Dave Lape
Jack Johnson
Dave Lape
Jack Johnson
Mike Romano
Tim Dywer
Randy Snyder
Jack Johnson
Billy Decker
Mike Romano
Jeff Trombley
Ray Dalmata
Dave Lape
Brett Hearn
Dave Lape
Brett Hearn



Steve Luse (#3) and George Proctor (#52). (Clancy Miller photo)



Rick Gray Benefit (Clancy Miller photo)



Bob Ensminger (Clancy Miller photo)

1990

Date	Laps	Winner
4/8	50	Danny Johnson
4/14	35	Dave Lape
4/21	35	Dave Lape

Second
Billy Decker
Mike Romano
Pat Ward

Third
Alan Johnson
Jeff Trombley
Mike Romano



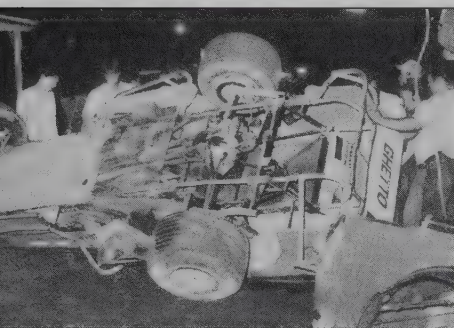
John Bellinger (Clancy Miller photo)

4/28	35	Mike Romano	Pat Ward	Dave Lape
5/19(1)	50	Dave Lape	Lou Lazzaro	Jeff Trombley
5/19	35	Pat Ward	Jeff Trombley	Mike Romano
5/26	35	Randy Snyder	Jeff Trombley	Dave Lape
6/2	35	Mike Romano	Jeff Trombley	Pat Ward
6/16	35	A.J. Romano	Pat Ward	Jeff Trombley
6/23	35	Dave Lape	Jeff Trombley	Mitch Gibbs
6/30	50	Mike Romano	Randy Snyder	Pat Ward
7/7	35	Mike Romano	Dave Lape	Bob Sitterly
7/14	35	Mike Romano	Mitch Gibbs	Pat Ward
7/21	35	Mike Romano	Dave Lape	Jeff Trombley
7/25	90	Kevin Collins	Mitch Gibbs	Kenny Tremont
7/28	35	Dave Lape	Mike Romano	Pat Ward
8/4	35	Jeff Trombley	Mike Romano	Dave Lape
8/11	35	Dave Lape	Jeff Trombley	Mike Romano
8/17	50	Lou Lazzaro	Kenny Tremont	Bob Sitterly
10/14	200	Doug Hoffman	Dave Lape	Mike Romano

Rain outs: 5/5, 5/12, 6/9, 9/22

(1) Race postponed from 5/12.

1991



Jim McMillan (Clancy Miller photo)

Date	Laps	Winner	Second	Third
4/27	50	Jack Johnson	Tim Dywer	A.J. Romano
5/4	35	Pat Ward	Jack Johnson	Jeff Trombley
5/11	35	Jeff Trombley	A.J. Romano	Tim Dywer
5/18	35	Lou Lazzaro	Mike Romano	Bob Sitterly
5/25	50	Dave Lape	Randy Snyder	Jack Johnson
6/1	35	A.J. Romano	Pat Ward	Jeff Trombley
6/8	35	Lou Lazzaro	Dave Lape	Jeff Trombley
6/22	35	Dave Lape	Jeff Trombley	Bob Sitterly
6/29	50	Dave Lape	Mike Romano	Jeff Trombley
7/6	35	Pat Ward	A.J. Romano	Randy Snyder
7/20	35	Jack Johnson	Mike Romano	Tim Dywer
7/24	91	Dave Lape	Jeff Trombley	Jack Johnson
7/27	35	A.J. Romano	Dave Lape	Mike Romano
8/10	20	Jack Johnson	Dave Lape	Mike Romano
8/10	20	Dave Lape	Jack Johnson	Jeff Trombley
8/17	50	Dave Lape	Jeff Trombley	Lou Lazzaro
10/13	200	Doug Hoffman	Mike Romano	Dave Lape

Rain outs: 4/20, 6/15, 7/13, 8/3, 8/16.

1992

Date	Laps	Winner	Second	Third
5/9	35	Jack Johnson	Jeff Trombley	Randy Glenski
5/13	50	Doug Hoffman	Mike Romano	Alan Johnson
5/16	35	Jack Johnson	Mike Romano	Dave Lape
5/23	35	A.J. Romano	Jeff Trombley	Mike Romano
5/28	50	A.J. Romano	Jack Johnson	Bob McCreadie
5/30	35	Dave Lape	Pat Ward	Mike Romano
6/6	35	Danny O'Brien	Jack Johnson	Dave Lape
6/9	50	Brett Hearn	Alan Johnson	Mike Romano
6/13	35	Jeff Trombley	Jack Johnson	Pat Ward
6/17	50	Alan Johnson	Mike Romano	Jeff Trombley
6/20	35	Randy Glenski	Mike Romano	Mike VanDusen
7/4	35	Jack Johnson	Dave Lape	Jeff Trombley
7/7	80	Jack Johnson	Billy Pauch	Doug Hoffman
7/11	35	Jack Johnson	Dave Lape	Mike Romano
7/18	35	Lou Lazzaro	Mike Romano	Jack Johnson
7/22	92	Danny Johnson	Jack Johnson	Steve Paine
7/25	35	Pat Ward	Randy Glenski	Dave Lape
8/1	35	Danny O'Brien	Jack Johnson	Randy Glenski
8/15	35	Dave Lape	Jeff Trombley	Danny O'Brien
8/22	35	Dave Lape	Jack Johnson	A.J. Romano
9/18	50	Mike Romano	Dave Lape	Jack Johnson
10/18	200	Bob McCreadie	Alan Johnson	Jack Johnson

Rain outs: 4/18, 4/25, 5/2, 6/27, 8/8

1993

Date	Laps	Winner	Second	Third
4/17	50	Dave Lape	A.J. Romano	Jack Johnson
4/24	35	Jack Johnson	Mike Romano	Jeff Trombley
5/1	35	Mike Romano	Jack Johnson	A.J. Romano
5/8	50	Lou Lazzaro	Dave Lape	Danny O'Brien
5/22	35	Dave Lape	Jeff Trombley	Lou Lazzaro
5/29	50	Pat Ward	Danny O'Brien	Andy Romano
6/12	35	Mike Romano	Jack Johnson	Jeff Trombley
6/19	35	A.J. Romano	Danny O'Brien	Jack Johnson
6/26	35	Andy Romano	Dave Lape	Mike Romano
7/3	35	Lou Lazzaro	Mike VanDusen	Danny Johnson
7/7	93	Danny Johnson	Bob McCreadie	Alan Johnson
7/10	35	Jeff Trombley	Mike Romano	Pat Ward
7/17	35	Pat Ward	Dave Lape	Jack Johnson
7/24	35	Dave Lape	A.J. Romano	Mike Romano
7/31	35	A.J. Romano	Lou Lazzaro	Matt Waite
8/14	35	Jack Johnson	A.J. Romano	Pat Ward
8/21	35	Mike Romano	Jack Johnson	A.J. Romano
9/24	50	Jeff Trombley	Jack Johnson	Mike Romano
10/30	153	Bob McCreadie	Jack Johnson	Doug Hoffman

Rain outs: 5/15, 6/5, 8/7, 10/17

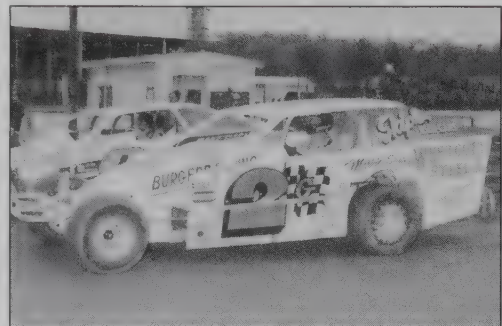


Don Way in the Fonda Fire Department
1938 Dodge truck. (Tim Healey photo)

1994

Date	Laps	Winner	Second	Third
4/25	50	Jack Johnson	Danny O'Brien	Pat Ward
4/30	30	Jack Johnson	Bobby Varin	Pat Ward
5/7	30	Jack Johnson	Dave Lape	Mike Romano
5/14	30	Jeff Trombley	Jack Johnson	John Kollar
5/21	30	Bob Sitterly	Jack Johnson	Jeff Trombley
5/28	30	Frank Hoard Sr.	Bobby Varin	Jack Johnson
6/4	30	Pat Ward	Dave Lape	Jeff Trombley
6/11	30	Jack Johnson	Pat Ward	Jeff Trombley
6/18	30	Jack Johnson	Pat Ward	Matt Waite
6/25	30	Dave Lape	Mike Romano	Maynard Forrette
7/7	75	Doug Hoffman	Jeff Hoetzler	Billy Pauch
7/9	30	Jeff Trombley	Dave Lape	Pat Ward
7/16	30	Bobby Varin	Jeff Trombley	Jack Johnson
7/23	30	Bob Savoie	Pat Ward	Bob Sitterly
7/30	30	Lou Lazzaro	Maynard Forrette	Pat Ward
8/6	30	Dave Lape	Ken Hanson	Dave Camara
8/13	30	Dave Lape	Bobby Varin	Dave Camara
8/16	94	Kevin Collins	Bob McCreadie	Alan Johnson
8/20	30	Pat Ward	Bob Sitterly	Jeff Trombley
10/16	200	Jimmy Horton	Danny Johnson	Jeff Heotzler

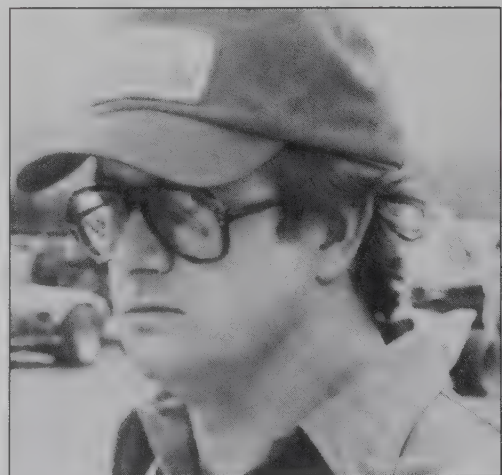
Rain outs: 7/2, 9/23



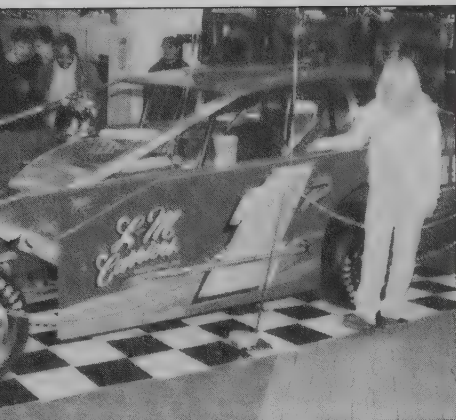
Mitch Gibbs (Clancy Miller photo)

1995

Date	Laps	Winner	Second	Third
4/22	30	Dave Lape	Pat Ward	Maynard Forrette
4/29	30	Jack Johnson	Dave Camara	Jeff Trombley
5/6	30	Tim Dywer	Lou Lazzaro	Matt Waite
5/13	30	Dave Camara	Jack Johnson	Ken Hanson
5/20	30	Bob Savoie	Ron Proctor	Jeff Trombley
5/27	30	Jack Johnson	Dave Camara	Pat Ward
6/10	30	Jack Johnson	Pat Ward	Lou Lazzaro
6/17	30	Jack Johnson	Tim Dywer	Pat Ward
6/24	30	Jeff Trombley	Dave Camara	Dave Lape
7/5	75	Jimmy Horton	Bob McCreadie	Jack Johnson
7/8	30	Bobby Varin	Pat Ward	Maynard Forrette
7/15	30	John Kollar	Mike Ciaravino	Dave Lape
7/22	30	Jack Johnson	Jeff Trombley	Pat Ward
7/29	30	Pat Ward	Dave Lape	Danny Johnson
8/5	30	Dave Camara	Pat Ward	Jeff Trombley
8/12	30	Jack Johnson	Dave Camara	John Kollar



Jim King (Jim King Collection)



Pumpkin Zemken (Clancy Miller photo)

8/16 95
8/19 30
10/15 200
Rain outs: 6/3, 7/1

Bobby Varin
Pat Ward
Brett Hearn

Bob McCreadie
Jack Johnson
Jack Johnson

Doug Hoffman
Maynard Forrette
Bob McCreadie

1996

Date	Laps	Winner	Second	Third
4/20	30	Pat Ward	Dave Camara	Jack Johnson
4/27	30	Bobby Varin	Jeff Trombley	John Marsh
5/25	30	John Kollar	Pat Ward	Tim Dywer
5/29	30	Brett Hearn	Jack Johnson	Dave Camara
6/1 (1)	30	Jeff Trombley	Jack Johnson	Pat Ward
6/1	30	Jeff Trombley	Dave Lape	Bobby Varin
6/15	30	Dave Camara	Maynard Forrette	John Proctor
6/22	30	Dave Lape	Bobby Varin	Tony Pepicelli
6/27	75	Jimmy Horton	Dave Camara	Kenny Tremont
6/29	30	Jack Johnson	Jeff Trombley	Pat Ward
7/6	30	Bobby Varin	Jeff Trombley	Tim Dywer
7/20	22	Dave Camara	Pat Ward	Jack Johnson
7/20	22	Seth Gano	Dave Lape	Pat Ward
7/27	30	Jack Johnson	Jeff Trombley	Doug Mosall
8/3	30	Jack Johnson	Mike Romano	Dave Camara
8/10	30	Dave Camara	Jeff Trombley	Pat Ward
8/17	30	Jack Johnson	Dave Lape	Mike Romano
9/20	50	Brett Hearn	Jeff Heotzler	Mike Romano

Rain outs: 4/11, 5/4, 5/11, 5/18, 6/8, 7/13, 10/19

(1) Race postponed from 5/18.

1997

Date	Laps	Winner	Second	Third
5/10	30	Jeff Trombley	Mike Romano	Tim Dywer
5/24	30	Dave Camara	Mike Romano	Jack Johnson
5/31	30	Tim Clemons	Tony Pepicelli	Mike Romano
6/7	30	Jeff Trombley	Seth Gano	Mike Romano
6/14	30	Jack Johnson	Dave Lape	Dave Camara
6/21	30	Dave Camara	Tim Dywer	Mike Romano
6/26	97	Brett Hearn	Jimmy Horton	Alan Johnson
6/28	30	Jack Johnson	Dave Camara	Mike Romano
7/5	30	Billy Gray	Jeff Trombley	Dave Camara
7/12	30	Jack Johnson	Dave Lape	Tim Dywer
7/19	30	Dave Camara	Jack Johnson	Tony Pepicelli
7/26	30	Tim Dywer	Mike Romano	A.J. Romano
8/2	30	Billy Gray	Mike Romano	Dave Camara
8/9	30	Dave Camara	Tim Clemons	Jeff Trombley
8/16	20	Jeff Trombley	Frank Hoard	Jack Johnson
8/16	20	Mike Romano	Jack Johnson	Dave Camara
9/20	30	Mike Romano	Tim Clemons	Bob Savoie
10/19	200	Brett Hearn	Doug Hoffman	Bob McCreadie

Rain outs: 4/26, 5/3, 5/17

1998

Date	Laps	Winner	Second	Third
4/25	30	Dave Camara	A.J. Romano	Mike Romano
5/16 (1)	30	Jeff Trombley	Dave Lape	Jack Cottrell
5/16	30	Jeff Trombley	Bob Savoie	Tim Dywer
5/23	30	Mike Romano	Jack Johnson	Tim Dywer
5/30	27	Dave Camara	Randy Snyder	A.J. Romano
6/6	30	Dave Camara	Seth Gano	Dave Lape
6/20	30	Jeff Trombley	Jack Johnson	Dave Camara
6/24	98	Brett Hearn	Kenny Tremont	Billy Decker
6/27	30	A.J. Romano	Lou Lazzaro	Mike Romano
7/11	30	Mike Romano	Dave Camara	Ronnie Johnson
7/18	30	Dave Camara	Bobby Albert	Bob Savoie
7/25	30	A.J. Romano	Jack Johnson	Mike Romano
8/1	30	John Kollar	Jeff Trombley	Jack Johnson
8/8	30	Ronnie Johnson	Lou Lazzaro	Jack Cottrell

8/15	30	Jack Johnson	Dave Camara	Mike Romano
8/22	20	A.J. Romano	Mike Romano	Dave Camara
8/22	20	Dave Camara	Jeff Trombley	Tim Dywer
9/19	30	Mike Romano	A.J. Romano	Jeff Trombley
10/18	200	Brett Hearn	Jeff Trombley	Jimmy Horton

Rain outs: 5/2, 5/9, 6/13, 7/4
(1) Race postponed from 5/9

1999

Date	Laps	Winner	Second	Third
4/3	30	Jeff Trombley	Bobby Albert	A.J. Romano
4/10	30	Brett Hearn	Pat Ward	Bobby Vedder
4/17	30	Jack Cottrell	Jeff Trombley	Dave Lape
4/24	30	Jerry Pennock Jr.	Dave Scarborough	Bobby Vedder
5/1	30	A.J. Romano	Bobby Albert	Mike Romano
5/15	30	Lou Lazzaro	Mike Romano	Jeff Trombley
5/22	30	Dave Lape	Dave Camara	Ronnie Holmes
5/29	30	Tony Pepicelli	Dave Camara	Mike Romano
6/5	30	A.J. Romano	Jack Cottrell	Billy Gray
6/12	30	Dave Camara	Dave Lape	Randy Hotaling
6/19	30	A.J. Romano	Mike Romano	Jeff Trombley
6/26	30	A.J. Romano	Ronnie Holmes	Mike Romano
7/10(1)	30	Jeff Trombley	Jack Cottrell	Mike Romano
7/10	30	Bobby Varin	Bob Savoie	Jack Cottrell
7/17	30	Dave Camara	Mike Romano	Ken Hanson
7/21	99	Doug Hoffman	Dave Camara	Mike Romano
7/24	30	A.J. Romano	Jeff Trombley	Dave Lape
7/31	30	Jack Johnson	Tim Clemons	Ronnie Holmes
8/7	30	Bobby Albert	Bobby Varin	Mike Romano
8/21	20	Bobby Varin	Dave Camara	Randy Hotaling
8/21	20	Jeff Trombley	Bobby Varin	Mike Romano
10/17	201	Steve Paine	Danny Johnson	Bobby Varin

Rain outs: 5/8, 7/3, 8/14

(1) Race postponed from 7/3.

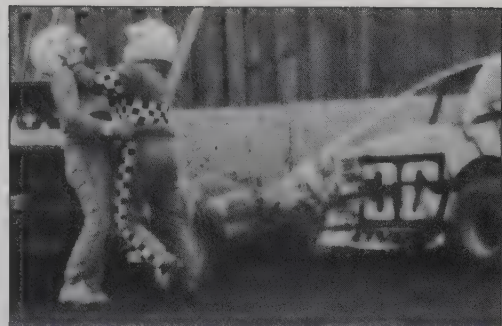
2000

Date	Laps	Winner	Second	Third
4/1	30	Jeff Trombley	Mike Romano	Dave Camara
4/15	30	Pat Ward	Dave Camara	Timmy Fuller
4/29	30	Dave Lape	Alton Palmer	Bobby Varin
5/6	29	Seth Gano	Tim Clemons	Mike Romano
5/20	30	Tony Pepicelli	A.J. Romano	Dave Lape
5/27	30	Dave Lape	Bobby Albert	A.J. Romano
6/3	30	Bobby Varin	Ronnie Holmes	Jack Johnson
6/10	30	Bobby Varin	Tim Clemons	Dave Lape
6/17	30	Mike Romano	A.J. Romano	Ronnie Holmes
6/24	30	Bobby Albert	Tony Pepicelli	A.J. Romano
7/1	30	Ronnie Holmes	A.J. Romano	Mike Romano
7/8	30	Dave Lape	Bobby Varin	Mike Romano
7/19	100	Alan Johnson	Billy Decker	Mike Romano
7/22	30	Mike Romano	Bobby Varin	Dave Lape
8/5	30	Ronnie Holmes	A.J. Romano	Bobby Albert
8/12	30	Mike Romano	Bobby Varin	Ronnie Holmes
8/19	20	Tony Pepicelli	Bobby Varin	Craig Criscione
8/19	20	Mike Romano	Ronnie Holmes	Tim Clemons
10/15	200	Kenny Tremont	Danny Johnson	Bob McCreadie

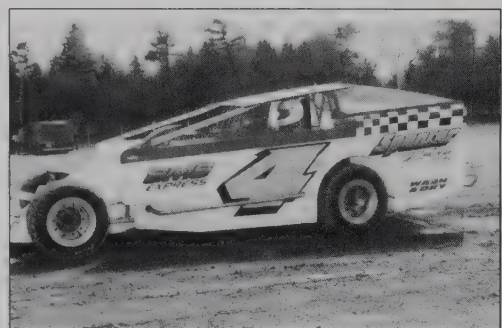
Rain outs: 4/8, 4/22, 5/13, 7/15, 7/29

2001

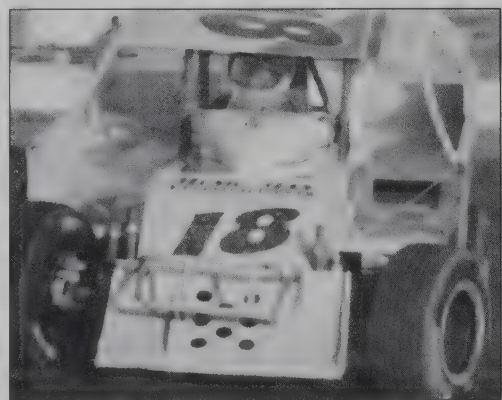
Date	Laps	Winner	Second	Third
4/14	30	Bobby Varin	Danny Johnson	Jack Johnson
4/28(1)	30	A. J. Romano	Dave Camara	Dave Lape
4/28	30	Mike Fusco	Bob Savoie	Floyd Billington
5/5	30	Tony Pepicelli	Bobby Varin	Ronnie Holmes
5/12	30	Dave Lape	Jeff Trombley	Craig Criscione
5/19	30	Bobby Albert	Alton Palmer	Jeff Trombley



Ray Zemken and George Audi.
(Clancy Miller photo)



Floyd Billington (Clancy Miller photo)



Tony Farone (Clancy Miller photo)

6/2	30	Jack Johnson	Mike Romano	Ronnie Holmes
6/9	30	Mike Romano	A.J. Romano	Craig Criscone
6/30(2)	30	Bobby Varin	Mike Romano	Dave Lape
7/7(3)	30	A.J. Romano	Mike Fusco	Mike Romano
7/7	30	Tony Pepicelli	Randy Hotaling	Bob Savoie
7/14	30	A.J. Romano	Mike Romano	Jack Johnson
7/18	100	Brett Hearn	T. McCreadie	A.J. Romano
7/21	30	Jeff Trombley	Bobby Varin	Jack Johnson
7/28	30	Ronnie Holmes	Bobby Varin	Mike Romano
8/4	30	Mike Romano	Jeff Trombley	A.J. Romano
8/11	30	Tony Pepicelli	A.J. Romano	Bobby Varin
8/18	20	Alton Palmer	Matt DeLorenzo	Bobby Varin
8/18	20	A.J. Romano	Jack Johnson	Tony Pepicelli
10/14	200	Doug Hoffman	Bob McCreadie	Billy Decker

Rain outs: 4/1, 4/21, 5/26, 6/16, 6/23

Off: 4/7

(1) Race postponed from 4/21.

(2) Race postponed from 6/23; regular feature rescheduled to 7/7.

(3) Race postponed from 6/30.

Appendix C

Fonda Speedway All-Time 358 Modified Feature Winners, 1988-1990, 1993-2001

Rank	Driver	Wins
1.	Brett Hearn	7
2.	Mike Romano	5
3.	Ronnie Holmes	3
4.	Kenny Tremont	2
5.	Dave Camara	1
5.	Tim Clemons	1
5.	Kevin Collins	1
5.	Billy Gray	1
5.	Robbie Green	1
5.	Alan Johnson	1
5.	Steve Paine	1
5.	Mike Ricci	1
5.	A.J. Romano	1
5.	Bob Savoie	1
5.	Jeff Trombley	1

358 Modified Podium Finishes

The 358 Modified division is a headline class at many speedways in the Northeast. It consists of modified cars equipped with motors 358 cubic inches maximum. There have been 28 358 Modified shows at Fonda since 1988, all run as special events.

Date	Laps	Winner	Second	Third
10/5/88	50	Brett Hearn	Bob Savoie	Ray Dalmata
10/14/89	50	Robbie Green	Ray Dalmata	Bob Savoie
10/14/90	50	Kevin Collins	Pat O'Brien	Bob Savoie
10/16/93	50	Brett Hearn	Kenny Tremont	Danny Johnson
9/30/94	94	Kenny Tremont	Pat O'Brien	A.J. Romano
10/16/94	50	Brett Hearn	Danny Johnson	Jim Horton
7/27/95	75	A.J. Romano	Doug Hoffman	Bob Savoie
9/28/95	95	Steve Paine	Pat O'Brien	Danny O'Brien
8/1/96	75	Brett Hearn	Danny Johnson	Doug Hoffman
10/18/96	50	Brett Hearn	Jim Horton	Kenny Tremont
7/5/97	25	Billy Gray	Tim Dwyer	A.J. Romano
7/29/97	75	Mike Romano	Jack Johnson	Jeff Heotzler
10/18/97	50	Alan Johnson	Brett Hearn	Mike Romano

7/28/98	75	Kenny Tremont	Brett Hearn	Dave Camara
10/17/98	50	Brett Hearn	Jim Horton	Alan Johnson
10/16/99	50	Bob Savoie	Tim Clemons	Bobby Varin
4/8/00	30	Mike Romano	Dave Camara	Ronnie Holmes
5/20/00	25	Mike Romano	Tim Clemons	Matt DeLorenzo
6/10/00	25	Mike Romano	Mike Fusco	Dave Lape
7/7/00	25	Ronnie Holmes	Bobby Varin	Alton Palmer
7/7/00	25	Ronnie Holmes	Brett Hearn	Dave Lape
7/12/00	25	Brett Hearn	Jerry Pennock Jr.	Mike Romano
8/17/00	25	Tim Clemons	Mike Romano	David Townes
9/24/00	30	Mike Romano	Craig Criscone	Alton Palmer
10/14/00	50	Mike Ricci	Danny Johnson	Jack Johnson
4/7/01	50	Dave Camara	Ronnie Holmes	Jim Ryan
8/1/01	100	Ronnie Holmes	Brett Hearn	Steve Paine
10/13/01	50	Jeff Trombley	Frank Caprara	Ronnie Johnson

Appendix D

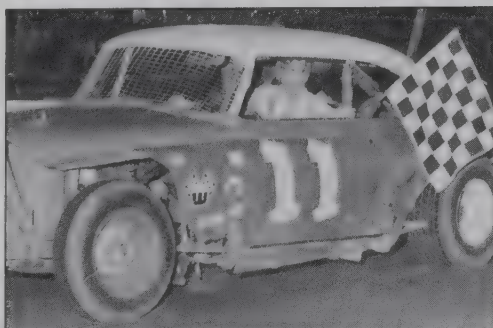
Fonda Speedway All-Time Late Model Feature Winners, 1963, 1968-1982

The late model division conducted one event at Fonda in 1963 and then ran weekly as a support class from 1968 through 1983. In 1982-83, late models and 320 modifieds were combined in the same race. For the purpose of this book, if a driver won a 320/LM combo with a late model automobile, his win is counted below. If he won with a 320 mod, his win is counted on the 320 win list. In 1973 an experimental Limited Sportsman class ran together with the late models. All wins from 1973 are counted below as late model victories. Regarding 1983, the late models and 320s raced together and not every feature was won by a 320; so there are no 1983 events counted below.

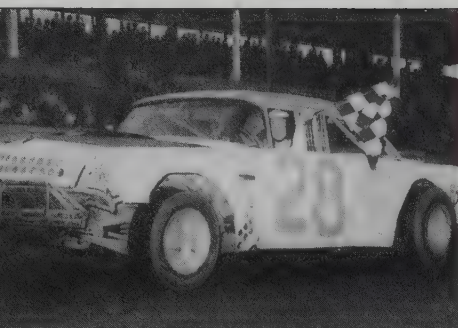
Rank	Driver	Wins
1.	Dick Schoonover	32
2.	Harry Peek	23
3.	Norm Moyer	22
4.	Jay Blesser	19
5.	Randy Glenski	16
6.	Paul Jensen	12
7.	Jack Cottrell	11
8.	Wally Potter	10
9.	Harvey Brundage	9
10.	Joe Johnson	8
11.	Earl Newhorter	7
12.	Jack Miller	6
13.	Dan Antolick	5
13.	Al Peek	5
13.	Keith Tesiero	5
16.	Jim Riggi	4
16.	Dick Sweet	4
18.	Jack Halloran	3
18.	Bruce Button	3
18.	Jerry Christian	3
18.	Nick Lazzaro	3
18.	George Hunt	3
23.	Art Bradt	2
23.	Dick Smith	2
23.	Ralph Holmes	2
23.	Jim Mott	2
23.	Ed Keenan	2
23.	Jim Lighthall	2
23.	Joe Macejka	2
30.	Tom Wilson Sr.	1
30.	Dick Pennock	1
30.	Jim Devine	1



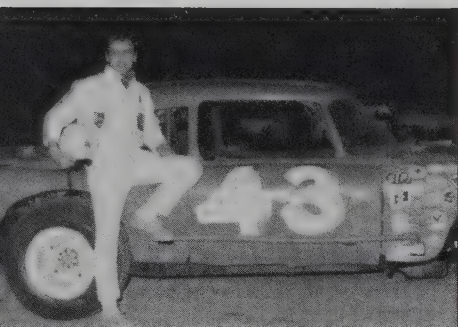
Jim Riggi (Grady photo)



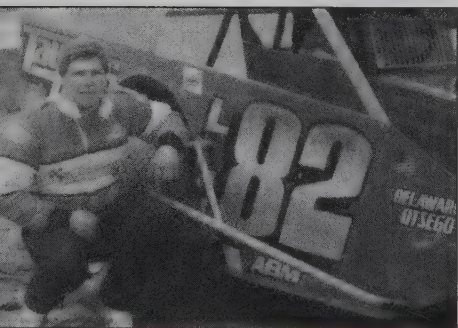
Bob Deming (Gater photo)



Bill Roese (Gater photo)



Don Antolick (Zagata Collection)



Ted Lamb (Clancy Miller photo)

30.	Chris Kubiak	1
30.	Wayne Chinski	1
30.	Bill Brooking	1
30.	Bill Roese	1
30.	Dale Wolcott	1
30.	Keith Gray	1
30.	Arnie Naparty	1
30.	Bruce Curtis	1
30.	Paul Holic	1
30.	Tom Hammond	1
30.	Guy LeClare	1
30.	Doug Newman	1
30.	Walt Koperda	1

Fonda Speedway All-Time 320 Modified Feature Winners, 1982-1987

The 320 modified (also called small block modified) division was a support class consisting of modified-type cars with motors limited to 320 cubic inches. It ran weekly from 1982 (combined with the late models in 1982-3) through 1986 with selected special events in 1987. It was phased out once the DIRT-legal Sportsman class gained popularity.

Rank	Driver	Wins
1.	Mike Romano	21
2.	Paul Parker	10
3.	Mitch Gibbs	9
4.	Paul Jensen	4
4.	Bob Sitterly	4
6.	Jim Rothwell	2
6.	Denny Young	2
6.	A.J. Romano	2
6.	Jack Johnson	2
6.	Ray Dalmata	2
11.	Danny Watson	1
11.	Mark Lobdell	1
11.	Nick Lazzaro	1
11.	Andy Romano	1
11.	Billy Decker	1
11.	Dick Schnoonover	1
11.	C.D. Coville	1
11.	Jim Horton	1
11.	Ron Constantino	1
11.	Doug Carlyle	1
11.	Russ Flint	1
11.	Tim Clemons	1

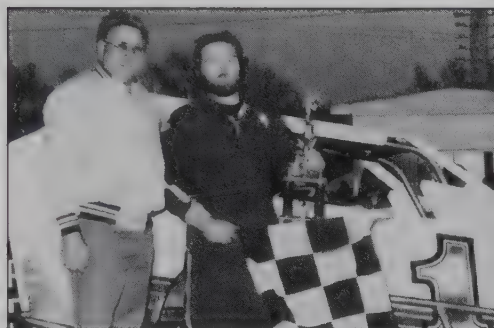
Fonda Speedway All-Time DIRT-Legal Sportsman Feature Winners, 1987-2001

Rank	Driver	Wins
1.	Alton Palmer	56
2.	Tim Clemons	32
3.	Brian Borst	15
3.	John McAuliffe	15
5.	Mike Ciaravino	14
6.	Jim Rothwell	9
6.	Tim Dywer	9
8.	Ron Constantino	8

9.	John Bellinger	7
9.	Mike Ballesteros	7
11.	Jim Davis	6
12.	Billy Gray	5
12.	Bob Vedder	5
12.	Jeff Holt	5
12.	Ryan Odasz	5
16.	Rick Achzet	4
16.	Bob Anderson	4
16.	Drew Fallis	4
19.	Joe Geniti	3
19.	Jim Senzio	3
19.	Dave Rosa	3
19.	Ray Zemken	3
23.	Fred Tauss	2
23.	Joe Johnson	2
23.	Ed San Soucie	2
23.	Brian Gathen	2
23.	Rich Wozniak	2
23.	Mike Frasier	2
23.	Frank Hoard Jr.	2
23.	Steve Akers	2
23.	Bob Hackel	2
23.	Tony Farone	2
23.	Mark Ketchum	2
34.	Wink Hinkley	1
34.	Chuck Burt	1
34.	Todd Ryan	1
34.	Todd Hoffman	1
34.	Mark Sullivan	1
34.	Rick Mill	1
34.	Bucky Tesiero	1
34.	Jack Davis	1
34.	Jim Bobar Jr.	1
34.	Doug Mosall	1
34.	Jimmy Johnson Jr.	1
34.	Chuck Bower	1
34.	Tim Hindley	1
34.	Jere Baker	1
34.	Scott Flammer	1
34.	Pete Campione	1
34.	Joe Rando	1
34.	Mike Fusco	1
34.	Jason Otty	1
34.	Matt DeLorenzo	1
34.	Tim Mayne	1
34.	Craig Boehler	1
34.	Chris Shultz	1
34.	Jamie Christian	1



Eddie San Soucie (Chris Grady photo)



Ron Compani (left) and Ray Zemkin (right).
(Clancy Miller photo)



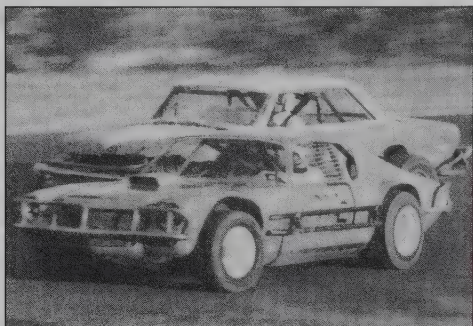
Mike Ciaravino (Gater News photo by Clancy Miller)

Fonda Speedway All-Time Pro Stock Feature Winners, 1980-2001

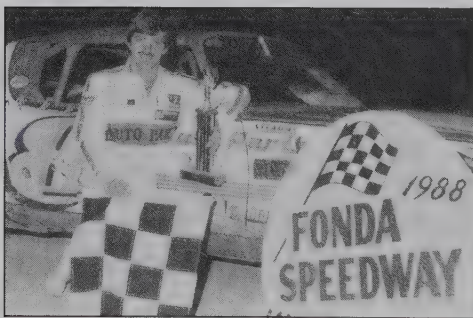
Rank	Driver	Wins
1.	Todd Hoffman	51
2.	Kenny Martin	28
3.	Phlan Hart	25
4.	Rob Noviczski	18
5.	Danny Ballard	17
5.	Tim French	17
7.	Rick Achzet	15
8.	Eric Arell	13
8.	David Towns	13



Ric Lucia (left) and Marty Beberwick (right).
(Clancy Miller photo)



Keith Teserio (#M-3) (Clancy Miller photo)



Todd Hoffman (Clancy Miller photo)

8.	Kenny Gates	13
11.	George Audi Jr.	11
11.	Lester Dieterle	11
11.	Steve Welch	11
14.	Dave Horning Sr.	9
14.	Bryan Peters	9
14.	Chris Morris	9
17.	Conrad Carey	8
18.	Nick Ryan	7
18.	Jim Burton	7
18.	Mark Sullivan	7
21.	Frank Guiffre	6
22.	Paul Carey	5
22.	Fred Tauss	5
22.	Bob Vedder	5
25.	Mike Frasier	4
25.	Scott Noel	4
27.	Rick Cafarella	3
27.	Steve Lockwood	3
27.	Danny Ody	3
30.	Tom Barron	2
30.	Ram Kowalczyk	2
30.	Scott Manshaffer	2
30.	Keith Munson	2
30.	Frank Twing	2
30.	Butchie Irwin	2
30.	Jim Normoyle	2
30.	Bubba Tanner	2
38.	Steve Bidwell	1
38.	Brian Borst	1
38.	Steve Brownell	1
38.	Steve Burega	1
38.	Jamie Christian	1
38.	Tom Coons	1
38.	Chobie Culver	1
38.	Scott Durand	1
38.	Vern Duesler	1
38.	Bob Gamache	1
38.	Tim Hartman	1
38.	Dan Hodgson	1
38.	Dave Hoke	1
38.	Jim Lagenback	1
38.	Geoff Manning	1
38.	Gerald Mead	1
38.	Gerry Newman	1
38.	Willie Reed	1
38.	Ray Sitterly Jr.	1
38.	Steve Slater	1
38.	Dick Sweet	1
38.	Dave Viall	1
38.	Darcy Volans	1
38.	John Vrooman	1
38.	Dan Wood	1
38.	Jim Burton	1
38.	Mike Fritz	1
38.	Tommy Barron	1
38.	Jipp Ortiz	1
38.	Hondo Carpenter	1
38.	Scott Goverston	1
38.	Jay Resch	1

Appendix E

Open Cockpit Winners, 1927-2001

American Automobile Association (AAA) Big Cars

Date	Laps	Winner
9/9/27	20	Bob Robinson
9/8/28	records destroyed	
9/4/30	records destroyed	
10/23/32	10	Bob Troutwine
9/11/37	20	Lee Wallard
9/10/38	30	Johnny Ulesky
9/9/39	30	Fred Carpenter

Midgets

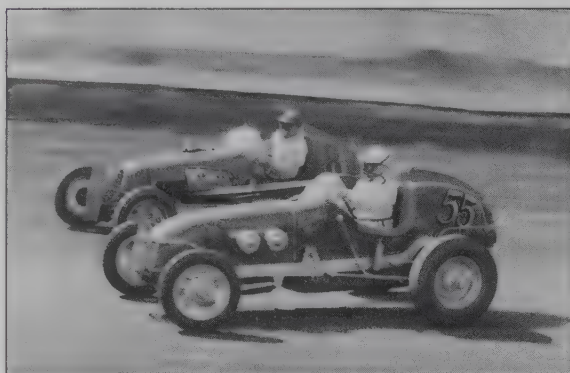
Date	Laps	Winner	Sanction
10/8/55	25	Fred Meeker	NASCAR
5/30/57	15	George Tilton	NEMA
7/16/60	15	Hoppy Redner	Independent
8/3/85	15	Nick Fonoro, Jr.	ESMRA

United Racing Club (URC) Sprint Cars

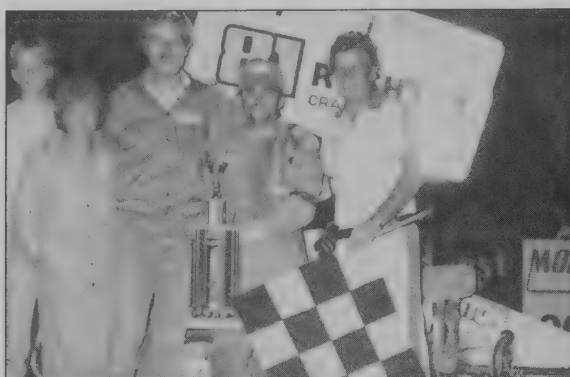
Date	Laps	Winner
7/14/56	20	Bert Brooks
7/4/57	20	Bobby Courtwright
7/11/64	20	Cookie Osterhout
5/29/65	20	Bill Brown
5/28/66	20	Earl Halaquist
5/27/67	20	Earl Halaquist
5/25/68	20	Earl Halaquist
5/24/69	20	Earl Halaquist
5/23/70	20	Gino Swarhout
5/23/70	20	Tom Price
5/29/71	20	Buck Buckley
5/29/71	20	Harry Benjamin
5/27/72	25	Buck Buckley
5/26/73	25	Harry Benjamin
5/25/74	20	Buck Buckley
5/24/75	20	Bill Wertz
5/29/76	20	Jim Winks
5/28/77	20	Charlie Svetes
5/27/78	20	John Draucker
5/27/78	20	Ed Wylie
5/26/79	20	Charlie Svetes
5/24/80	20	Buck Buckley
5/23/81	20	Dave Kelly
8/8/81	20	Jimmy Horton
5/29/82	20	Kevin Collins
7/3/82	20	Kevin Collins
5/28/83	20	Ed Wylie
5/26/84	20	Buck Buckley
5/25/85	20	Dave Kelly
5/24/86	20	Ed Wylie



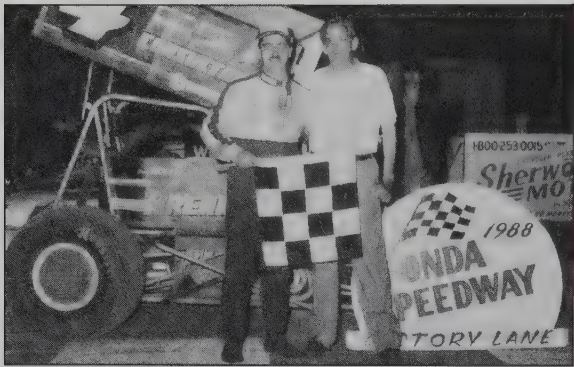
Lee Wallard (J. Earl Way Collection, courtesy of Jim Way)



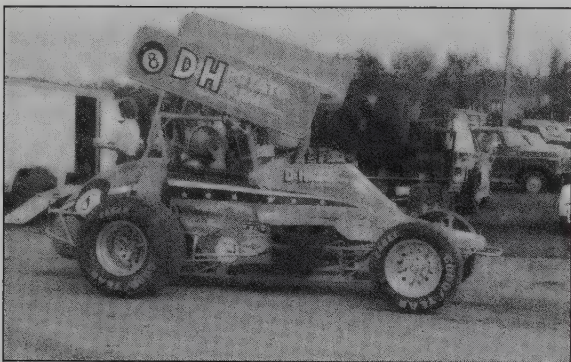
Bert Brooks and Mike San Felice (Les King photo)



Nick Fonoro, Jr. (Clancy Miller photo)



Ed Wylie (left) and George Graves (right)
(Clancy Miller photo)



Jim Shampine (Bittig Collection)

5/23/87	20	Dave Kelly
5/28/88	20	Ed Wylie
5/27/89	20	Paul Molz
5/25/90	20	Jim Baker
5/23/92	20	Kramer Williamson
5/29/93	20	Greg Cloverdale
5/28/94	20	Greg Cloverdale
7/16/94	20	Greg Cloverdale
5/27/95	20	Glenn Fitzcharles
5/27/96	20	Bob Swanley
8/17/96	20	Glenn Fitzcharles
5/23/97	20	Sean Michael
5/24/98	20	Rick Koenig
5/29/99	20	Sean Michael
5/27/00	20	Sean Michael

Note: The 7/4/57 race was a stand alone show (no stock cars)
and the only afternoon race at Fonda between 1939 and 1974.
Rain outs: 5/24/91, 5/26/01

Empire Super Sprints (ESS)

Date	Laps	Winner
7/18/87	20	John Brutcher
9/14/91	20	Bobby Parrow
8/2/92	20	Tom Taber
10/15/94	20	Craig Lane

Eastern Limited Sprints (ELS)

Date	Laps	Winner
6/14/97	20	Doug Emery
8/2/97	20	Craig Keel
8/8/98	20	Rich Wood
9/19/98	20	Rich Wood
7/10/99	20	Rich Wood
5/6/00	20	Brian Dumigan

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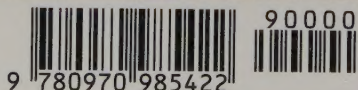
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