



CITY PAPER PETER LUI

GOING FAST NOWHERE

It's No Drag Racing at Dorsey Track

By Robert W. Bly

THE SCREAMING OF two thousand fans is all but drowned out by the roar of automobile engines as over a dozen stock cars battle for position on the quarter-mile, oval dirt track at Dorsey Motor Speedway.

The track is packed dirt, watered every night, but tonight it is too dry; the cars kick up great clouds of dust

as they slide around the turns. Stacey Schaeffer, number 52, is in complete control of his '66 Chevelle, and follows the same strategy on each lap, taking the outside of the track on the straightaways, then diving in low toward the inside on the turns.

"You get all your power on the straightaways," explained Schaeffer,

who wins the qualifying heat, "then you dive into the turn. That'll bring the back end of the car around"—the back wheels actually slide, and some cars come out the turns almost sideways—"and that's what gets you around the curve.

"If you stay down low (on the inside) on the straightaways, and you're going in fast on turns, you're

gonna drift to the outside on the turns . . . it's not good to be on the outside 'cause the top of the turn is loose and you got to take it easy."

Schaeffer is number one in the street stock division at Dorsey but *only* at Dorsey; the Speedway is privately owned and the races not part of a larger circuit.



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Big Ed prefers the more powerful, super-modified late model cars to the smaller stocks. "A late model is 30 to 40 miles per hour faster than a stock. The miles per hour is what you're after. That's the thrill of it: the speed—because if you didn't have the speed, why race? You know, you could get out there with bicycles . . ."

The cars burn a special racing fuel, Cam-2. This 108 octane mixture costs nearly two dollars a gallon and, when racing, Ed's car burns a gallon a lap; that's 0.25 miles per gallon.

Fuel is not the primary expense. A late model car represents a \$10,000 investment plus an additional five to six thousand dollars for upkeep and repairs over the racing season, which runs from April to mid-September.

The stakes for winning do not reflect the expense of racing: first place in the late model division pays \$400 every Saturday night, second \$350, and so on down the line. Pit Steward Barbara Ritter explained that the drivers call it "tow money"—it gets you there and back.

Big Ed concurs. "If you got to think about price, don't own a race car." Dilks and Ed and perhaps a handful of top pointers (consistent winners) meet expenses. The rest of the drivers take seasonal losses ranging from a few dollars to a few thousand dollars, and both drivers and mechanics may spend up to 40 hours a week working on the cars

ed Ritter, who has worked at Dorsey Speedway for 25 years, starting out as a kid selling programs, "they will try to spin one another out to make the other driver lose position. If they spin you out and don't get caught, they put you behind (move you to the rear)."

Such maneuvers make for exciting racing but can precipitate some action up in the bleachers, Ritter noted: "If we have accidents, close calls, where one driver's group of fans think he's been sent to the rear uncalled for, then you may have some rowdiness in that section of the stands, because you've got tight fan clubs here, and if Will's fan club is sitting on this side and Rick Jones fan club sits on the other side, and they seem to get together after a few beers, you're going to have some rowdiness . . . or an exchange of opinions."

The fans are young, mostly 12 to 17 year-old kids. But the kids are not alone. "This is a family track," said Ritter proudly. "If you see kids in here you'll generally see their parents with them, and their grandparents."

Stock leader Stacey Schaeffer's chief mechanic is his nephew; his father-in-law helped him build the car. As for Barb Ritter, who comes from a family of eleven kids, the track is home to most of her clan: "Mom runs the track, Ray is head of maintenance and everything else, my grandmother runs the novelty booth, my great aunt works cash on the main stand, my aunt Katherine

Jones goes into the turn sideways and always travels low down. Wilks is notorious for travelling high up . . . he comes out of a curve high and stays high." Ritter explains that while Jones covers less ground on the inside, he has to straighten out, while Dilks offsets the disadvantage of covering more ground on the outside by "getting that better straightaway wind." "But each guy has their own method of driving on this track."

Both Dilks and Big Ed come in third in their respective heats, qualifying them to "draw a pill" for the feature. Although starting positions for the qualifying heats are determined by a driver's standing—the best drivers start in the rear, the worst in front—starting positions for the feature are determined by drawing numbered gold balls—the pills.

"It's pill time, late model drivers, pill time!" Ritter announces over the pit loudspeakers from her tower. Drivers clamber around her to draw; Big Ed complains that he hasn't had a good draw all year.

Ed would like to take the number one belt buckle away from Dilks, would like to beat him in the feature tonight, but it isn't an obsession with him:

"A lot of people have a fever to win. Mine is to finish. Whether I'm last, first, second . . . I want to finish." In a field of experienced late model drivers, 90 percent should finish if the track is in good shape, which it usually is at Dorsey. With a group of street stockers, where

change rear to change gear ratios in the rear real quickly . . . 3-speed transmission . . . molly-tube framing . . . stripped down body . . . fiberglass hood . . . magnetos instead of an alternator for higher reliability . . . stall headers, keep 'em outta the way so they won't be destroyed . . ."

Dilks's mechanic puts in about 40 hours work a week on the car during the season and makes little or no money from it. "I just like building something, seeing it go out on the track and really accomplish something, and, you know, say 'I was a part of it and helped it get there.'"

Sadly, the Big Ed/Will Dilks rivalry may not survive the season.

"I'm thinking about selling both my cars and working here next year," said Ed, who was recently the subject of a Monumental Films documentary for the Air Force on car maintenance and safety. "I'm getting to be a little old for it. At 46, hey . . ." He pulls up his shirt, revealing the purple bruises that spot his enormous paunch; though the car's interior cage is constructed of a frame of bars that usually protect drivers from serious harm, most get pretty banged up during a night's racing.

"When we (Dilks and I) get side by side we get everybody standing up. Still, I'm getting a little old for it."

Qualifying late model drivers are "on the fence" now, ready for the feature race. The races are officiated

by the starter, or flagman, Melvin Seredicz, and the track director, "Mister Bill" Griffin. Seredicz and Griffin are aided by four "cornermen" who watch the action at each of the oval's four turns. Most of the positioning and passing is done going into and coming out of the turns, not on the straightaways.)

Pit steward Ritter, her assistant Ken and I watch the race together. Big Ed, in the lead and sliding dangerously close to the outside wall is having trouble with Will Dilks on his tail. Suddenly, Ed spins out, unable to control his car coming out of the first turn, and puts himself to the rear, acknowledging the fact that the spin was his own fault and not caused by Dilks. Big Ed never leaves the last-place position again, and though Big Ed and Will Dilks cross the finish side-by-side, it is because Dilks, in first place, has lapped Big Ed.

The roar of the late model race easily doubles the noise from the street stocks. It is one in the morning, and calls from complaining neighbors end the night's racing before the features for stock and figure eight can be run, postponing those events until next Saturday night.

In the pit, now overflowing with fans, Big Ed is unhappy. He lost, he says, because "my brakes went out, my front shocks broke . . . a little bit of everything went." The damage was severe enough to retire the car for the rest of the season. Big Ed says that the track was in bad shape, too, having been watered between races: the water sat on the already-packed dry dirt "like ice," making the track loose and slippery.

Barb's brother, maintenance manager Ray Buchanan, is unhappy with his job performance. "I just like being out here and giving 'em something to run on." He shakes his head sadly. "The shape the track's in tonight—it's all my fault."

"You can't help the weather," I offer.

He shakes his head again. "You can't tell 2000 people and a hundred drivers that. No . . . it's all my fault." Ray will work an eleven hour shift lasting until nearly four in the morning for twenty dollars pay.

Across the pit from Big Ed, an exhausted Will Dilks climbs out of his car, and is immediately surrounded by children and young, pretty girls begging for an autograph. "Will, please sign this, Will." He signs while talking with his crew, and tries not to show that he is enjoying the attention. During the week he is a master mechanic for a tire company, but tonight, after winning the feature race in the late model division in Dorsey Speedway... Mario Andretti never had it so good. ●