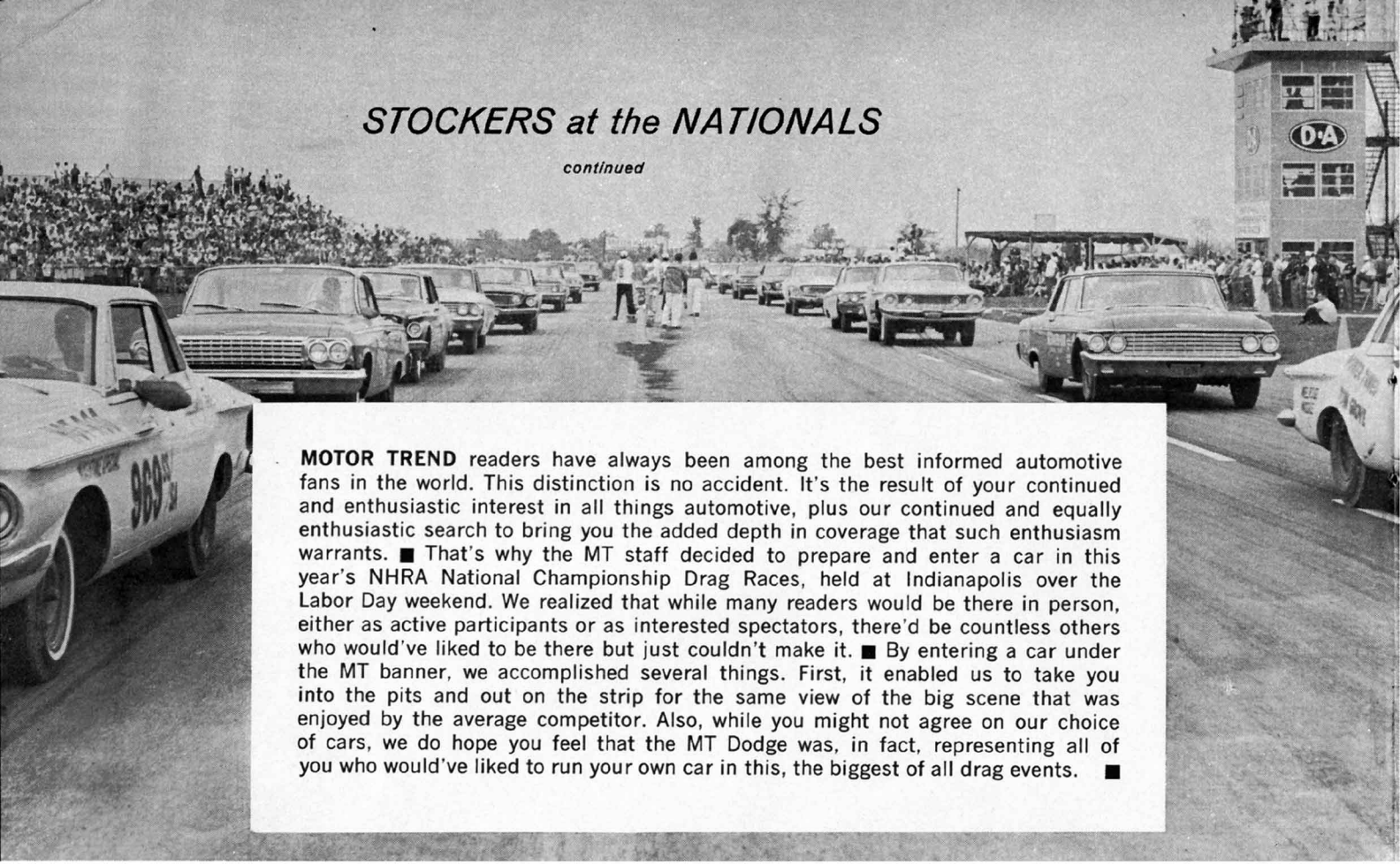
STOCKERS AT THE NATIONALS

Stockers four years ago were the dregs of dragging . . . today they lead the field in popularity and excitement. The following pages point up the action of this year's NHRA Nationals, as seen through the windshield of MT's Dodge SS/SA.

STOCKERS at the NATIONALS

continued



MOTOR TREND readers have always been among the best informed automotive fans in the world. This distinction is no accident. It's the result of your continued and enthusiastic interest in all things automotive, plus our continued and equally enthusiastic search to bring you the added depth in coverage that such enthusiasm warrants. ■ That's why the MT staff decided to prepare and enter a car in this year's NHRA National Championship Drag Races, held at Indianapolis over the Labor Day weekend. We realized that while many readers would be there in person, either as active participants or as interested spectators, there'd be countless others who would've liked to be there but just couldn't make it. ■ By entering a car under the MT banner, we accomplished several things. First, it enabled us to take you into the pits and out on the strip for the same view of the big scene that was enjoyed by the average competitor. Also, while you might not agree on our choice of cars, we do hope you feel that the MT Dodge was, in fact, representing all of you who would've liked to run your own car in this, the biggest of all drag events. ■

by Jim Wright, *Technical Editor*

Ever since the Super-Super/Stock battles became *the* events at the country's drag strips, we've wanted to do some research on just exactly why (and how) these big brutes go so well. Reader mail showed that a lot of you wanted to find out, too. With this in mind, we chose a Dodge Dart with the "413" Ramcharger option and automatic. This project became Number Two in what we plan will be a long series of active participation research projects. (The 24-Hour Corvair Enduro as reported in the March issue was Number One.)

Preparation chores were headed by John Geraghty, popular West Coast automotive and marine engine specialist, garage owner, and sometime contributor of technical articles to these pages. John was assisted by Rich Prehal, also of Geraghty Automotive and a drag racer in his own right, and yours truly. What it took to put the big red Dodge in a competitive state of tune is an interesting story in itself, and one we plan to unfold in the January issue of MT.

Every year the Nationals attract more and more entries, and this year was no exception. Over 1000 cars, spreading to 67 classes, signed in for the Eighth Annual Big Go. The popular Super-Super/Stocks accounted for 108 of these: 83 sticks and 25 automatics.

Early arrivals began checking through inspection on Thursday, with the bulk arriving on Friday. And while the pit area at Indianapolis Raceway Park is one of the largest anywhere, by the noon deadline on Saturday it didn't look as if another car could be squeezed in. By necessity, the inspection line was routed through and around most of the 2½-mile road course. At its peak on Friday, the line was a huge dragon of activity.

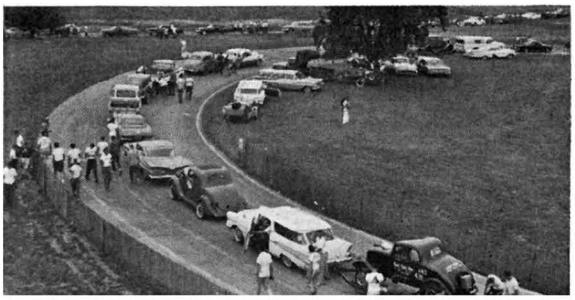
We'd originally planned to allow plenty of time for a leisurely tow back to the meet, but if you've built cars, you know what can happen to plans like those. At 3AM Wednesday, we'd just finished assembling the engine. John and Rich took a few hours off for sleep before tying everything up, and I went home to get ready to catch a plane for Indy. By midnight Wednesday, John, Rich, and the car were on their way, and 43 hours later they were in Indy.

Saturday morning, we were in the inspection line. Everything checked out fine, except we found out the long rear outlet on the muffler didn't quite constitute a legal tail pipe. Seems the tail pipe has to extend at least to the front of the rear wheels. A quick trip to one of the local muffler shops, and we were legal. We got back to the strip just in time to see it closed down because of rain. Quite a few of the stock classes, and most of the sports car classes, had been run — so the day wasn't a complete washout.

Sunday dawned cloudy but dry, and the tempo at the strip really picked up, with most of the hot classes being run. Jess VanDeventer cinched the hot car division world championship when he blasted his very clean Chevy-powered B/Modified roadster to a class win. The win climaxed a hard-fought battle that had Jess neck-and-neck through most of the season against Jim Nelson for the coveted title.

Tom Strum finished off his very successful quest for the stock car world championship points title with a class win in his potent C/FX Chevrolet. Both champs received a new Pontiac Grand Prix from Hurst-Campbell of Glenside, Pennsylvania, for their efforts.

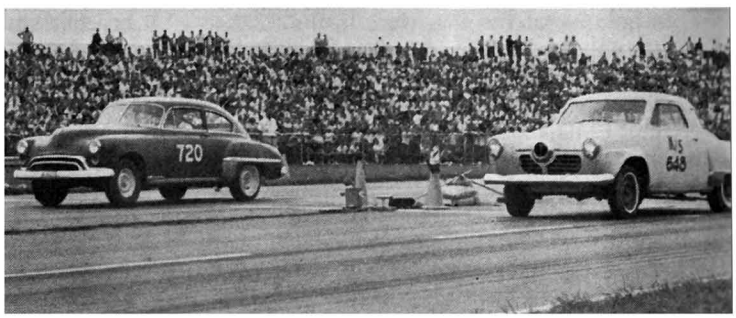
The crowd got a preview of what it could expect in the upcoming eliminations when the storming stockers took to the strip for their warm-up runs. Sub-13-second runs were too numerous to mention. The honor of the West Coast was upheld when the Maverick Dodge posted a very quick 12.50 ET. Don Nicholson, Winternationals' Mr. Stock Eliminator, came through with a 12.60 in his always fine-running '62 Chevy. The Ramchargers '62 Dodge got down to 12.56. A



Technical inspection line twists around most of the 2½-mile road race course.

The action and spectator interest ran very high in the lower stock classes, which included a total of over 300 entries. Tom Paske (723) took home a trophy in B/Stock class.

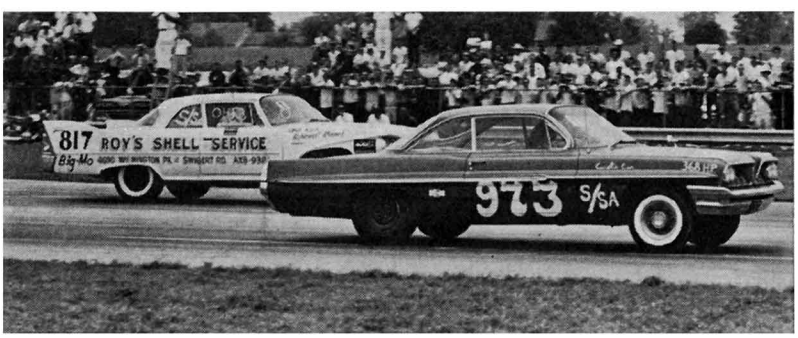
A/Stock was one of the three stock classes in which the winner was found to be running other than factory stock equipment.



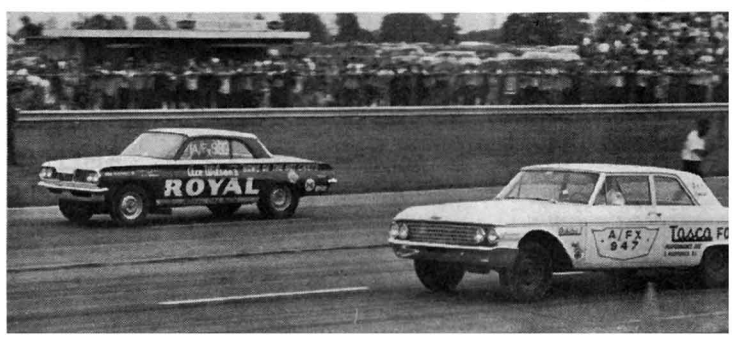
The "Chicken Hawk," '51 Stude owned and driven by Ted Harbit, carried off class gold with a creditable 16.90 ET, 80.93 mph.

It had to be seen to be believed, but R. D. Griffin took class in his turbocharged Corvair, with a 15.31 ET, 89.10-mph run.

Paul Hatton proved that eight-in-a-row could still go well enough to capture L/S class. Car is sweet-running '39 Buick.



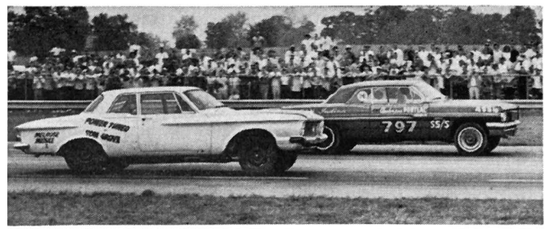
Carol Cox, one of two women entered this year, pulled repeat of her Winternationals victory. Husband, Lloyd, tunes the car.



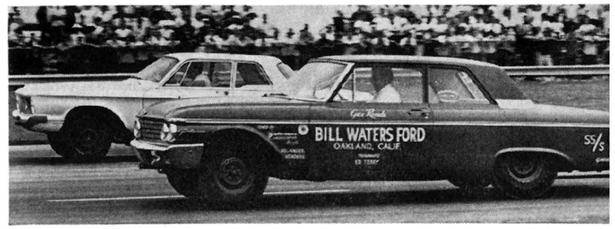
Entries were heavy in the factory experimental class. Fords were trying out fiberglass body panels and aluminum bumpers.

Don Nicholson, Winternationals' Mr. Stock Eliminator, had to be satisfied with a win in B/FX when he broke his SS/S Chevy.

Dragmaster's Golden Lancer had a big "413" under the hood, couldn't match Mickey Thompson's fast class-winning Tempest.



Action was heaviest in the Super-Super/Stock stick division, where there were 83 entries. Class battle lasted 10 rounds.



Ford threat never materialized, as top-flight drivers like Gas Ronda went down early before quicker "409s," "413s," "421s."

whole lot of the cars were in the 12.7 to 12.9 bracket, and the top speeds ranged from 112 to 114 mph.

We took our turns and were more than satisfied when the first run of the car, engine, and driver produced a 12.80 ET at 110.27 mph. Since this was the first time out for us, we spent a lot of time between runs looking for valve settings that produced the best results. Two different sets of recommended plugs turned out to be too hot, and a third set proved too cold. We did manage to get in five runs before they shut down the warm-ups. Two of these were under 13 seconds, and three were in the low 13s.

We admit to goofing slightly in the class eliminations. They were scheduled for late in the afternoon, but since a slight drizzle had upset the schedule and it was almost dusk, we figured the automatic class would be postponed until Monday morning. We had the tow bar half on when the P.A. began blasting for SS/SA class to come to the line. The engine was dead cold when we pulled up on the line. This is where the mill seems to perform best – but not with the too-cold plugs that were still in it.

This proved a costly error, because I couldn't get to run clean within the stall speed limit of the automatic transmission. When the flag came up, my opponent (Al Procopio in the Cecil County Dragoway Plymouth from Elkton, Maryland) was long gone before I could get the Dodge to clean out and run. Al's winning ET was 13.20, while ours was 12.86 – which goes to show how important getting off the line is. There were a few Fords and Pontiacs in this class, but it came as no surprise to anyone when a MoPar ended up in the top slot – the MoPar in this case being the fast '62 Dodge of Al Eckstrand, Detroit attorney. Al, as always, did a masterful job of punching his way through the opposition for the class win.

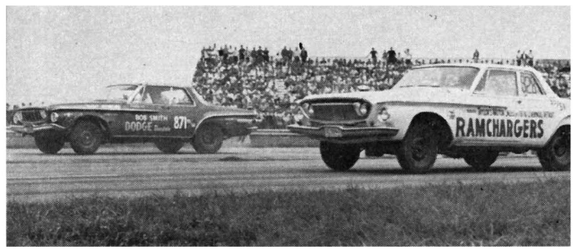
The factory experimental classes were brought out to show the people what they could expect to show up in the S/S classes in the near future. Most interesting were the fiberglass hood, front fenders, door panels, and deck lids on the Fords. They also had aluminum front bumpers – obviously their answer to the aluminum front ends on the Pontiacs and Chevys. We watched one weigh in at 3355 pounds, which is about 400 pounds under their advertised shipping weight.

Mickey Thompson's hauling "421" Tempest outclassed a host of fiberglass Fords and aluminum Chevys to capture A/FX honors. In B/FX, it was Don Nicholson in a '62 Chevrolet.

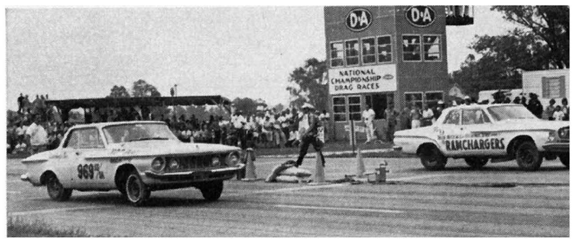
There were plenty of stick-shift MoPars entered in the SS/S class, but this has always been the traditional stronghold of the "409" Chevys, and this year proved no exception. Because of the large entry list, it took 10 exciting rounds to narrow the field down to the last two cars. The MoPars went like gang-busters in the early rounds, picking up eight wins against four for the "409s," three for Ford, and two for Pontiac. But in the end, Dave Strickler and Hayden Proffitt faced each other with "409s" for the gold. Dave got a slight lead on the start, but Hayden was inching up on

A/FX Tempests had the big engine with stick shift. Thompson car had big Pontiac drive train, while other ran beefed stock.

Last round of the stick division Donnybrook found two "409s," representing East and West, pitted against each other. When the flag went up, it was the East Coast all the way.

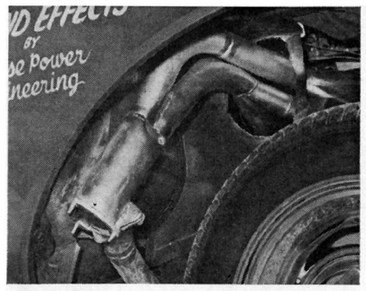


Big MoPar automatics consistently turned fastest times. Maverick (871) was top speed champion, with one run of 114.94.

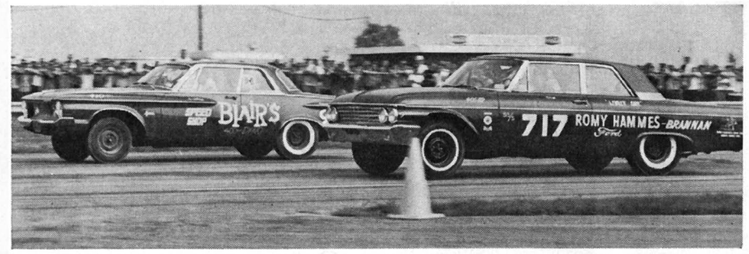


Ray Brock in the HOT ROD MAGAZINE *Plymouth was on the losing end of a "Beat Brock" campaign instigated by the Dodge crew.*

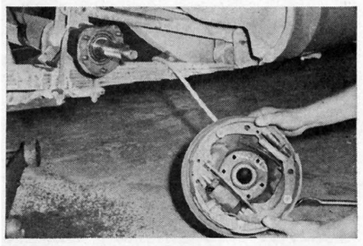
Al Eckstrand (827), top Midwest Dodge driver and attorney, ably presented his case for the SS/SA class, copped verdict.



Most West Coast MoPars discarded the factory headers for these lightweight jobs.

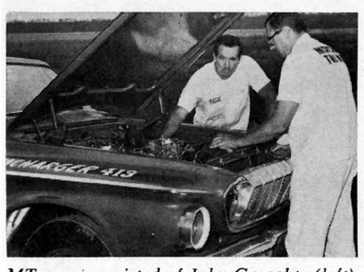


The top crowd-pleaser proved to be this sight of 50 of the fastest going for the coveted Mr. Stock Eliminator title. Dick Brannon's handling kept his Ford alive into the finals.



MT car had Traction-Masters, M & H tires, big shocks, and non-self-adjusting brakes.

MT entry went down in the first round of class run-offs, but came back stronger in the big stock eliminator blast to take out three cars, including the fast SS/S Tin Indian.



MT crew consisted of John Geraghty (left), Rich Prehal (not shown), and Jim Wright.

Everyone had the same problem between the quick eliminator runs – that of trying to keep performance up by cooling down the engine. Ice packs, wet rags, cold water helped.

STOCKERS AT THE NATIONALS *continued*

him as they reached the lights. When the Chrondek win-score light went on in Strickler's lane, the predominantly eastern crowd went wild. Dave racked up a 12.97 ET against Proffitt's 12.83, proving again that the first couple of feet are the most important.

With class eliminations out of the way, the stockers retired to the pits to lick their wounds in preparation for the big stock eliminator go that would see 50 of the fastest putting on one of the most action-packed bashes seen anywhere. Our 12.86 ET in class eliminations left us very much alive for the big one, and John and Rich had spent most of the day in the pits getting us ready for it.

Meanwhile, the crowd wasn't given any respite as the big A/A dragsters were rolled out to decide the top eliminator title. Don Garlits, Jack Chrisman, Gordon Collett, Connie Kalitta, and Pete Robinson ended up as finalists after a hard fight that had seen most of the country's top rails making a bid for the crown. Garlits' famous Dodge-powered Swamp Rat IV opened the final rounds by taking out Pete Robinson, while Jack Chrisman in Mickey Thompson's new rail edged Connie Kalitta's Bounty Hunter. The Garlits entry drew a single and soloed, while Chrisman paired with "Collecting" Collett.

Collett's engine was suffering from a cracked block, and he couldn't match the blistering 8.60-second ET (low of the meet) that Chrisman forced on him. This left Garlits and Chrisman paired for the big run. Don lost valuable time in a wheel stand on the starting line, and Jack was away first. The Garlits Dodge came on strong, but not quite strong enough to catch Jack, who captured the race and the title.

The crowd was really primed for the stock eliminator blast, and as the 50 fastest made their parade lap past the stands, the fans cheered like mad as they picked out their favorites.

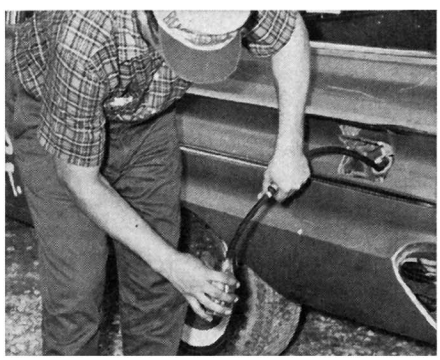
The MT Dodge made a better showing here, taking out a couple of Ford "406s" and a big Pontiac before falling victim to Jim Thornton in the Ramchargers Dodge. While running against Arlen Vanke's Tin Indian during the second round, we chalked up our best ET at 12.65 and 113.20 mph. This was the fastest official ET recorded during the stock eliminator battle.

When most of the smoke of the early rounds cleared, four drivers had outlasted the others: Hayden Proffitt in his Cone Chevrolet Special; Jim Thornton, Ramchargers Dodge; B. Maverick Golden, Bob Smith Dodge; and Dick Brannon in an outclassed but not outdriven Ford.

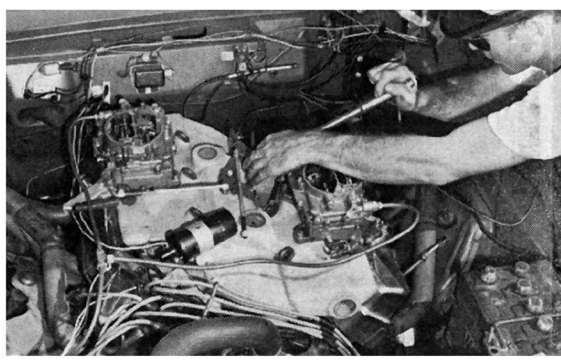
In the next-to-last go, Thornton bested Brannon, while Proffitt took care of Maverick, and then it was Chevy vs. Dodge and stick vs. automatic. Proffitt's long experience and top-flight shifting were evident as he gave it everything he had and pulled the big Dodge by several car lengths from light to light. Thornton had the Ramchargers entry straining mightily, but just couldn't touch the "409's" 12.83 ET and 113.94-mph top speed.

As the new Mr. Stock Eliminator was accepting his laurels, the threatening skies finally opened up, and that put an end to the Eighth Annual Nationals. Now all that remained for the many contestants was the long tow home. /MT

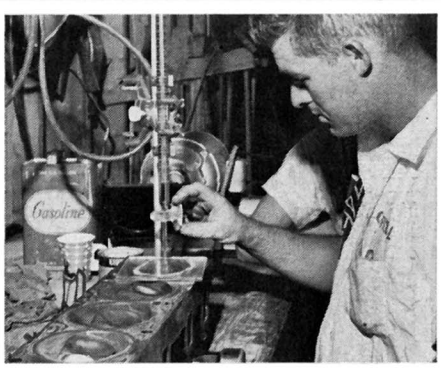
Large entry list for the Nationals even taxed the big facilities of Raceway Park.



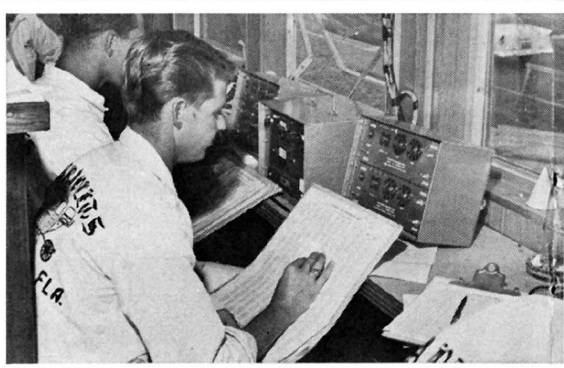
Disqualification resulted when fuel check showed home brew gas in E/SA winner.



Arriving early, Maverick (and others) tore down for inspection before meet started.



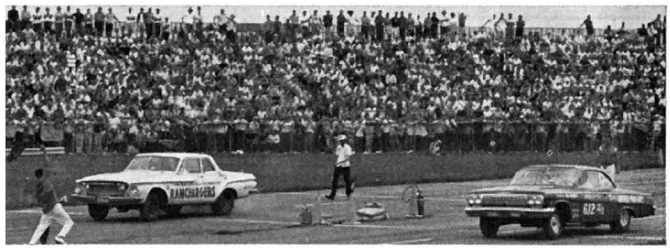
Combustion chamber checks on class winners disclosed illegal heads in four cases.



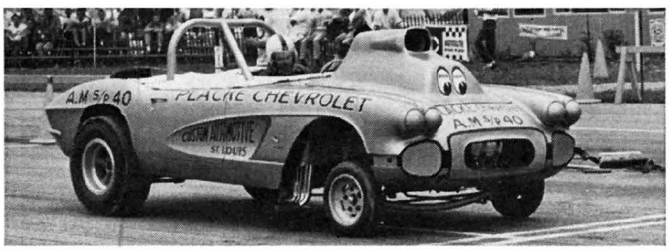
The Cabriolets car club, Hialeah, Fla., did a masterful job in the timing stand.

See Details of MT's Dodge in January Issue

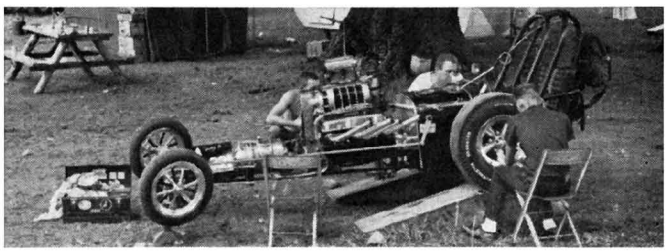
On his way to the stock eliminator crown, Hayden Proffitt got even with Dave Strickler for handing him a defeat in class go.



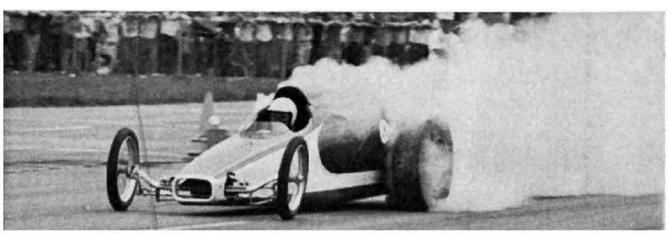
Final run of the big show saw Proffitt's stick "409" pitted against Thornton's automatic "413." It was stick all the way.



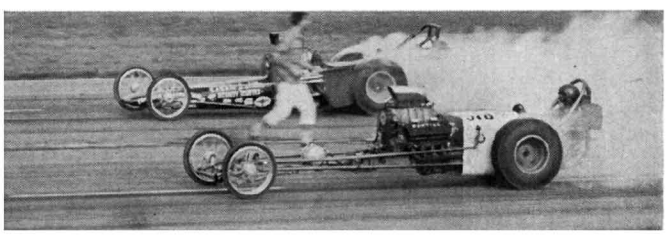
Large blower bubble on hood and 12-inch midget wheels on the front gave this '62 Corvette a "not of this world" appearance.



A portion of the grounds was set up as "Tent City" for the outdoor types. Things weren't so hectic here as in the pits.



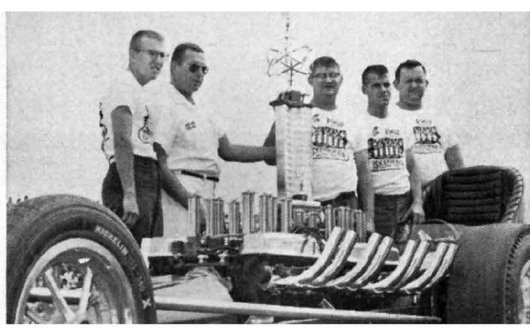
The Speed-Sport air-turbine-powered rail made a silent, tire-smoking demonstration run that produced a sub-nine-second ET.



Jack Chrisman is shown taking the Mickey Thompson Pontiac-powered rail to the front on his way to Top Eliminator spot.

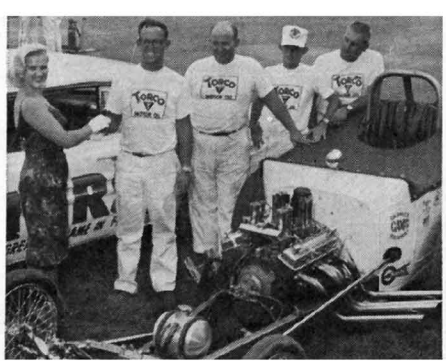
Proffitt and engine-builder Thomas accept Stock Eliminator trophy from Wally Parks.

Mrs. George Hurst presents Golden Shifter Award, Pontiac Grand Prix to Tom Sturm.

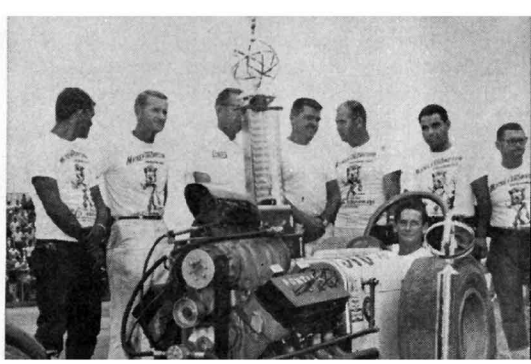


Frye Brothers' twin-engined rail took the MOTOR TREND *Best Engineered Car Award.*

Don Garlits (right) set a new record of 180.36 driving in Connie Kalitta's car.



Jess VanDeventer takes delivery of a new Pontiac Grand Prix from Mrs. G. Hurst.



The Jack Chrisman-Mickey Thompson car featured an all-aluminum Pontiac engine.