



THE RACE DRIVER is only 31, although no race driver is ever really young. He has always grinned a lot, but his pleasant face is more usually serious now, a bit seamed, and his crew-cut hair is receding and thinning to the point of baldness. He's more handsome now than he ever was, the way it is with some fellows as they mature. He is mature now, a serious, conservative fellow, very proud and confident, but not loud or boastful. He speaks softly with just a trace of his old country-boy accent.

"This may very well be my last 500," Parnelli Jones said. "I've always said that I'd like to race in five of them and that if I won one, I wouldn't care if I ever won another race. Well, this will be my fifth and I did win one, two years ago. I wouldn't say for sure it'll be my last. It'll be hard stayin' away, I know that. But, the way I feel now, this is it."

"I deny I'm retiring when people ask, but maybe it's not far from that. I love racing. I always have and always will. But, comes a time you know you should quit or at least cut down. I've tried to cut down. It hasn't worked. Promoters who are old friends and nice guys put pressure on you. I've raced as many as 75 times in a year. Lately, I've still been racing 50 times or so a year. So, maybe a clean break is the only way."

This was in Gardena, a gambling-town suburb south of Los Angeles in the area where Parnelli Jones was raised and learned to race. Rufus Parnell Jones was born Aug. 12, 1933, in Texarkana, Ark., and was moved to Torrance, Calif. as a boy. His name was misspelled on the sides of his racing cars several times and one of these, "Parnelli," stuck as his nickname. He became addicted to auto racing early and used to flip jalopies in the fields with his friends to prove how brave he was. "I used to think nothing could scare me. I was very proud of it," he says.

He quit school and began racing hot rods at 17. He quit for a year and worked at cleaning auto parts in a garage and as a cement finisher. "I hope to tell you there're better ways of earning a living," he grins. So, he went back to racing and gradually worked his way up through midget cars and sprint cars to the championship cars and Indianapolis. One of his early rivals was Johnny Pouelson, who became his mechanic and has his garage in Gardena.

One of his early promoters was J. C. Agajanian, who runs the family garbage-collection and hog-raising business in Gardena, and who runs races at Ascot Park in Gardena, among other places. The extravagant Armenian with the Stetson hat, trim

mustache, fancy clothes and ump-teen dollars in the bank, hired Parnelli a dozen years ago and has been his sponsor, his business partner and his friend ever since.

Five years ago, Parnelli and his girl, Grayce, drove down to Mexico and were married. They bought a house in Compton, but recently sold it and have been renting a small apartment in Gardena while looking for a large house in the area to purchase as their permanent home. They have no children, but may adopt one or two when he retires. Parnelli's father died last year at the age of 74. His mother and stepfather live nearby. His younger brother, Paul, has become a racing driver, too, a somewhat promising one, whose career was temporarily halted by a broken leg suffered in an accident late last season.

Parnelli has been driving 13 years. He spoke about it sitting there in a Hawaiian shirt and slacks as the sun streamed in off the quiet, dusty street outside his small, cluttered, temporary apartment. "I went into it for the sport of it, but I have always tried to have a business-like approach. I race for money," he said.

When he won the Riverside Grand Prix for sports cars last year, he was asked if he might like to try the European circuit. "It might be fun," he said, "but I don't think they pay the kind of money over there that we can race for here. I'm not interested in traveling for fun."

Agajanian says, "Parnelli is the most level-headed driver I've ever had, a fine driver and a careful, clean-living boy. He avoids trouble, watches his money, pays his taxes, is willing to listen to advice and invests wisely." Unlike Troy Ruttman, for example, who blew a bundle and a marriage when he drove for Aggie, Parnelli can come out of it with something in hand.

"Two years ago, when I won the 500, I made \$178,000 in purses, which was a one-year record for any driver anywhere. Of course, Aggie got his

share, but with appearance money and such I still made \$130,000," Parnelli explains. "I earned around \$70,000 the year before that and another \$70,000 last year, though it was not one of my better years. If I can earn another \$70,000 or so this year, I think I'd be in good shape to pack it in. I have a lot of things going for me."

"I've been buying some real estate with Aggie. I own a small piece of a couple of small planes and an airport flying school, but that's really Pouelson's baby. Primarily, I'm in the tire business. Firestone has given me the franchise to sell racing tires for the entire country west of the Mississippi, and I handle passenger tires, too. I have a partner, Vel Miletich of Vel's Ford in Torrance, an old friend and racing sponsor, but I'm very much involved in it personally and actually working very hard at it."

"All this means I'm distracted from racing, which is risky business. I've always wanted to work with my mechanics in setting up my cars. I've always practiced and planned a lot so I know just how each car is handling and what the track is like for each race. Lately, I haven't had the time to do this, or the concentration to do it right, and if I can't, I don't want to race."

RODGER WARD once said, "Most races are won before they're ever run. And most lives are saved long before the accidents. Very careful planning and preparation in the pits and in practice has been the secret to my success, and I'm sure it's the secret to Parnelli's success. He is more serious and works harder and plans better than almost any other driver I know."

With a wistful smile, Parnelli notes, "You do what you can beforehand, because you can't worry about things once you're in a race, you gotta' take chances to win and you do things maybe you shouldn't ought to do, because that's the way it is."

In a stock car race at Milwaukee last year, he blew an engine on his

THAT JONES BOY, **PARNELLI**

"Indy . . . is more than money . . . it gets into your blood and sets you up for life."

BY BILL LIBBY PORTRAIT BY BILL MOTTA



YOUNG Rufus Parnell Jones, an Arkansas lad.

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car, but when Rodger Ward, his teammate in the event, began to feel sick, Jones jumped into Ward's car and drove the last half of the 200-mile race, winning by a full lap.

Another time last year, A. J. Foyt was busy and asked Parnelli if he wanted to drive his sprint car in a small race in Indiana. Parnelli said no, he didn't think he'd take in the race. But, the promoter talked him into it, and when Parnelli's car didn't shape up, he moved into Foyt's idle car and won another one.

He makes these things look easy, but it is never easy to jump into a strange car and it is always risky.

He once said his profession is most dangerous in the early years, when the driver and his foes are not the best, racing in cars and on tracks that are not the best. He used to talk with amusement about the accidents he'd had, flipping here and "turnin' little ol' didoes" there, but he does not any longer. While he is careful and not reckless, he is a charger who takes chances because that is the only way he knows to drive and to win.

He lost his brakes at Indianapolis three years ago when he was leading the race, and while he could not hold the lead, he drove the last 300 miles at 138 mph without brakes to finish 12th. It was when a wheel flew off Foyt's car into his path and he hit his



JALOPY racing is full of bumps and Jones clouts the wall in a Gardena event.

FIRST STOCK car race, at Gardena, ended when this Ford broke a wheel.



brakes that he realized he had none. He managed to steer around the wheel and determined to keep going. The first pit stop he made, he slowed to 20 mph and members of his crew fell on the hot car and dragged it to a halt. The last stop, he deliberately ran over some tires and scraped a wall in order to stop.

Later, he said, "I nearly had to spin a couple of times to avoid other cars and if an accident had happened in front of me, I couldn't have gotten away from it. It was," he grinned, "scary."

HE IS STILL running hard. Several incidents last year testify to this. He drove most of his winning race in the Riverside Grand Prix without a working clutch, for example. "It was OK. I could get by without it," he said. "After all, I did it, didn't I?"

He was disqualified from a meaningless midget car race at Fairbury, Ill., for ignoring a black flag and continuing to race after a rear radius rod snapped and a piece of the metal began to drag in the dirt. "It didn't bother my running," he shrugs. "No matter how small the race is, if I'm in it, I want to win it."

He and Ward were each fined \$600 for ignoring yellow caution flags and continuing to race at competitive speeds and pass cars in a champion-

ship race at Milwaukee. He shrugs, "If others do it, I'll do it. Foyt caught and beat Bobby Marshman with those tactics in a race just before. I want to win as much as Foyt or Ward or anyone else. I can't go givin' 'em an advantage over me. It's tough enough to win without that."

Clearly, fear has not affected his driving, though it may have influenced his tendency toward retirement. He is not exactly afraid. But he knows that if he can get away with certain things because he is a veteran pro, he may not always get away with them. And he is not immune to the sensations of shock and despair and, yes, fear, which comes with accidents he suffers or others suffer.

He had three major accidents last year. He was leading at Indianapolis and was completing a pit stop. As the refueling was finished, the fuel tank cap was slammed back on, it exploded off, and even as he was being pushed away, flames blew up behind him. His own crew and others ran after him and jumped in front of him waving their arms frantically and yelling at him to bail out. He squirmed and fell from his car and rolled on the grass away from it.

Agajanian feels that fumes building up within the tank exploded into flames when the cap was slapped on. He says, "We were using an alcohol-methanol



MIDGET racing captured Parnelli in 1958; he drove this car in URA events.

JONES, in 97, battles in a 1955 jalopy race at Long Beach.



blend. Being in the pits as we were, if we'd had gasoline in the tank, the explosion would have looked like Hiroshima and many lives would have been lost."

Jones agrees about the potential dangers, but disagrees on the cause of the trouble. "I've studied all the movies and pictures I could find," he says. "The paint was bubbling off the car while I was in the pits, which makes me think it was on fire underneath long before, while I was still on the track. I'd had to hit my brakes hard twice in a row, which makes them cherry-red and really hot, and which causes the front end to scrape down; either could have sparked a fire.

"In any event, I'd just grabbed a drink of water in the pits and as I threw the cup away, I heard a pop. I figured the water hit the tailpipe and cracked it and I wasn't gonna' let that stop me. But then everyone was running at me and waving and I knew something was wrong. Could this baby be on fire, I wondered. Methanol burns with an invisible flame. But, when I looked down at my uniform, I saw flames, so I got the hell out of there, as best I could. I just tumbled out and I didn't care if the wheels rolled over me or not.

"I got out of it with second-degree burns on my left arm and both legs and a third-degree burn in one place,

and I missed a few races. But, Ol' Calhoun was through." Ol' Calhoun was the 6-year-old No. 98 roadster built by A. J. Watson, prepared by Johnny Pouelson and driven by Jones in four straight 500s. It was a leader in all four, won one and twice took the pole with new speed records. It is one of the great cars in Indianapolis history and has been rebuilt and sold to the Speedway Museum.

Testing tires in Trenton in August, Jones had the front suspension of a rear-engine car go out on him and he crashed into the rail at 110 mph, which ruptured his fuel tank. It burst into flames and splashed hot fuel on him. He leaped from the car and ran to the infield, where he rolled over in the grass, extinguishing the fire on his uniform. He suffered burns of his right hand and face.

"I got out of it OK," Jones says, "but the car was a total loss, which was just as well. At least I didn't have to worry about that baby any more." That baby was a new Grand Prix-styled car built for his last 500, but which he never liked and never raced.

Driving a sports car in the Monterey Grand Prix at Laguna Seca, Calif., the right rear wheel broke. Parnelli's car spun out into the dirt, narrowly missing another car, ploughed into a bale of hay, split the fuel tank and burst into flames as Jones was yanked out.

"I knocked the hay flying and burning hay was falling on me as I made my move," Parnelli recalls. "I caught my left leg on the emergency brake handle in my hurry to get out and gashed it. I needed 12 stitches in the leg later and the knee was wrenched and I was burned a little, but it wasn't too bad."

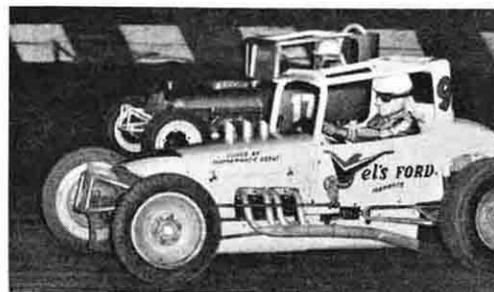
He was lucky. Last year was a bad year for USAC racers. Eddie Sachs and Dave MacDonald were killed in a second-lap crash in the 500 and Bobby Marshman was killed in a crash while testing tires at Phoenix. Bill Horstmeier was killed in a crash in the Springfield 100. Johnny White smashed his spine in a sprint car flip at Terre Haute, Ind., and is paralyzed. Jimmy Maguire crushed his right arm in a sprint car mishap at New Bremen, Ohio, and it had to be amputated.

Jim Hurtubise was severely burned, Roger McCluskey suffered a badly-broken arm and Chuck Hulse sustained head injuries which affected his vision, in accidents which sidelined these drivers most of the season. Veteran Troy Ruttman retired at mid-season, admitting it was getting to him. And this year got off to a bad start when Foyt broke bones in his back and feet when he lost his brakes and crashed in a Riverside stock car event.

WE REMEMBER a talk we had with Jones three years ago. At that time, he said, "Sure, you know you might die doin' this thing. Drivers do get killed and badly hurt all the time. You assume you won't. Most drivers do get out of it all right and you just naturally assume you'll be one. You try not to think about it too much. We don't talk about it too much among ourselves. We're not afraid to. When you start getting afraid to, it's time to quit. You can't drive scared.

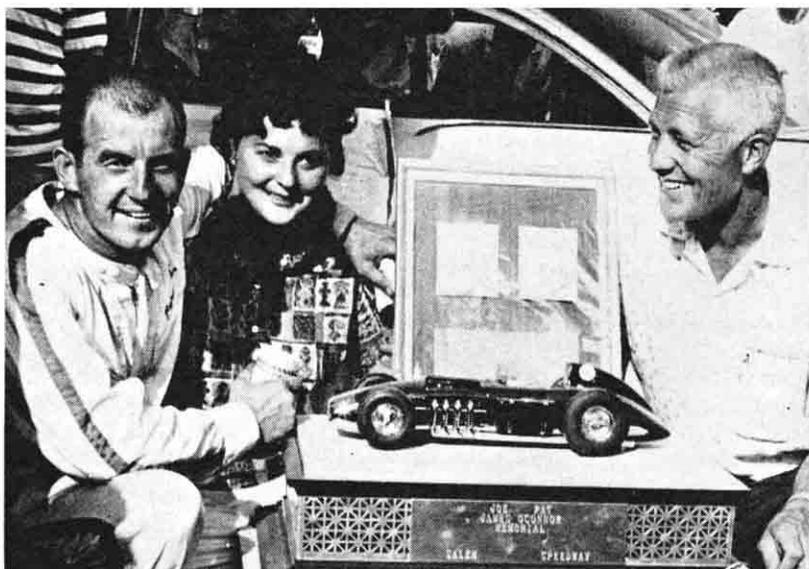
"You need luck. When these things happen, you do what comes natural. You don't have time to be scared. You just react. If there's nothing to do, you just duck low, hang on, try to stay down and hope for the best. Maybe you pray a little. We have pretty good equipment. We're always walkin' away from accidents which the average

WINNING every race he finished, Jones blazed a trail in the modified stockers in '59.





ANOTHER jalopy had "Parnelli" identification.



HAPPY Parnelli and wife Grayce at award presentation in Salem, Ind.

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person would have no chance in, real spectacular things sometimes, which give the fans a real show, but you do sometimes wonder if you're gonna walk away from 'em all."

Jones has seen many things happen and has had many things happen to him since he spoke in this way, but his general attitude has not altered greatly. In his Gardena apartment, he lit a cigarette, inhaled deeply and leaned back with his eyes closed and said, "Every accident you have shakes you up. You try to figure out why it happened, whether you can stop it from happening again, then you try to forget it."

"Every accident another driver has, gets to you. When a driver is killed, it takes a part out of me. I don't want to deny that it bothers me. But, in a sense, you learn to live with it. This is the business. It's a little like being up front in wartime. Some of your buddies are gonna get it. You accept it."

He opened his eyes and stood up and went into the other room to ask Grayce for coffee. He is 5-11 and weighs 175 lb. He is slender, not big, and does not give the impression of strength and power and bravery that, say, A. J. Foyt does, but it is there. He limped as he walked, having been burned by hot oil dripping on his foot in a recent race. But he would drive the next day. He came back in with Grayce and she poured us coffee and she watched his face as he talked about racing dangers.

"When I'm asked or when I give

talks, I always say auto racing is a lot safer than the average person realizes, safer than driving on the highway, as safe as man can make it," he said. "And I really believe that. The people in the business are always working to make it safer."

"The biggest danger lately has been fire. The suits we wear retard fires, but they're not fireproof. I don't think there's any suit that a fireman could wear that would let him walk into the middle of a hot fire and pull a driver out. I'd like to see helicopters overhead during races so they could spread foam on fires, not so much as to smother the driver, but enough to cut down the flames and let someone get in to the guy. We may come to this."

"When you come right down to it, there is no such thing as 100% safe auto racing. Accidents are going to happen. You prevent those you can prevent and learn to accept the rest. I don't think the things that happened last year and in other years play much of a part in my thinking that I'm getting near the time I should quit. But you do know that the longer you go

on, the greater the chance you're taking. No one is telling me to quit. I was a race driver when I married Grayce and she accepts it. She's pray-in' all the time, I know. It's hard on her, I know. But it's my decision."

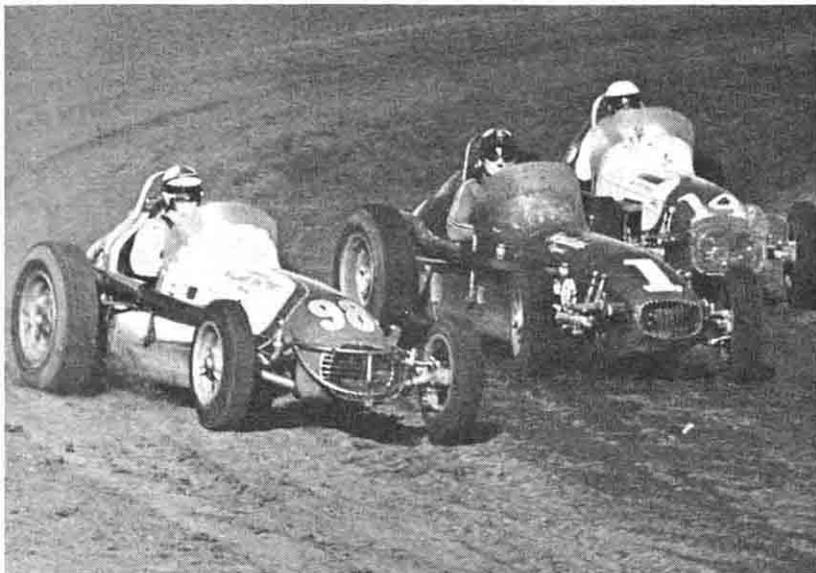
"It's up to him," Grayce said. "But I won't be sorry when it's over."

THE SHIFT from the traditional front-engine roadsters to the rear-engine Grand Prix cars on the USAC championship circuit has made the bravest U.S. veterans nervous and may be hastening Parnelli toward the sidelines. These cars are lighter than the roadsters, have flanked the drivers with fuel tanks and have been usually run on gasoline, which is more explosive and burns hotter than the alcohol blends. Recent USAC and Indianapolis rules changes calling for somewhat heavier construction, for rubber bladder inserts in the fuel tanks, moving the tanks back and requiring two pit stops to encourage the use of the less economical blends have eased fears slightly.

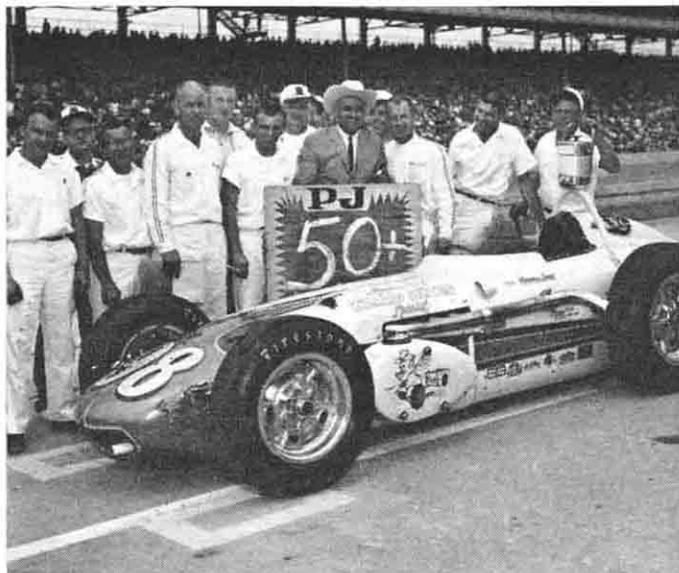
Actually, the lightweights have taken

THAT INFAMOUS trotting match between A. J. Foyt (right) and Parnelli Jones at the Indianapolis Fairgrounds; Jones claims he was snookered!





SPRINTER action pits Jones (98) against Bobby Marshman (1) and A. J. Foyt.



150 MPH barrier was broken by Jones in '62.

only two second places in the last two 500s and have won only four 200-milers in the three years since they were introduced to USAC racing, but it is a notable fact that almost every top U.S. driver has gone over to them. Jones and Foyt were the last two hold-outs, but they went over last mid-season. Virtually every strong challenger in this year's 500 and in the other races on the championship circuit will be running one.

Parnelli says, "It's true the rear-engined lightweights haven't won a great deal yet, but they've proven they're the fastest cars. They've qualified fastest everywhere and led everywhere until they broke down. As soon as we can figure out how to hold 'em together, there'll be no catching 'em. We held out as long as we could, but if we waited any longer it might be too late. This is our racing and we can't have those foreign guys coming over and running us off our own tracks."

Patriotism, we have observed, is rearing its head throughout U.S. racing circles.

EARLIER, Jones won \$100 prize for beating Foyt in match race in Foyt's home town.



"We're just getting to know these cars and we're just beginning to work on them to improve them," Jones continued. "I think the new rules will help. But, basically, they are not as safe a car as the roadster. They are flimsy and don't stand up to impact as well. The tanks are more exposed and closer to the driver and the gasoline they run best on is a lot more explosive and burns a lot hotter than the blends. I've never been afraid in a racing car, but I don't feel as safe in these as I do in our old cars, I must admit. You drive 'em hard, they're gonna' break up. You gotta' baby 'em.

"Why am I running 'em then? Let's put it this way—why is Foyt running 'em, why is Ward running 'em? Because you got to if you want to win, that's why. If you're a racing driver, you have no choice. I think maybe the roadsters are still a little ahead and could still win, but I really doubt it. And if you don't run the equipment that can win for you, no matter how dangerous it is, you stay home and watch TV. That's the safest thing of all. You can't win there, but you can't get hurt, either."

One of the things which troubles Parnelli considerably is that he has not won all he would have liked to have won in racing, not by a long shot. In fact, he has won a lot less than his great prestige would lead you to believe he has won.

He has dominated some of the lesser USAC circuits. He won the USAC national sprint car championship in 1961 and 1962 and the USAC national stock car title last year. He also won a great sports car race, the Riverside Grand Prix, last year. And he throws in other odd titles, like the Pikes Peak Hill Climb, stock car division, last year.

But he has never dominated the USAC championship circuit, which is the big league for him, and he has never won the national title. In his five years on this circuit, he has won only five races—the Phoenix 100 in 1961, the Hoosier Hundred in 1962, the 500 in 1963 and the Milwaukee and Trenton 200s last year.

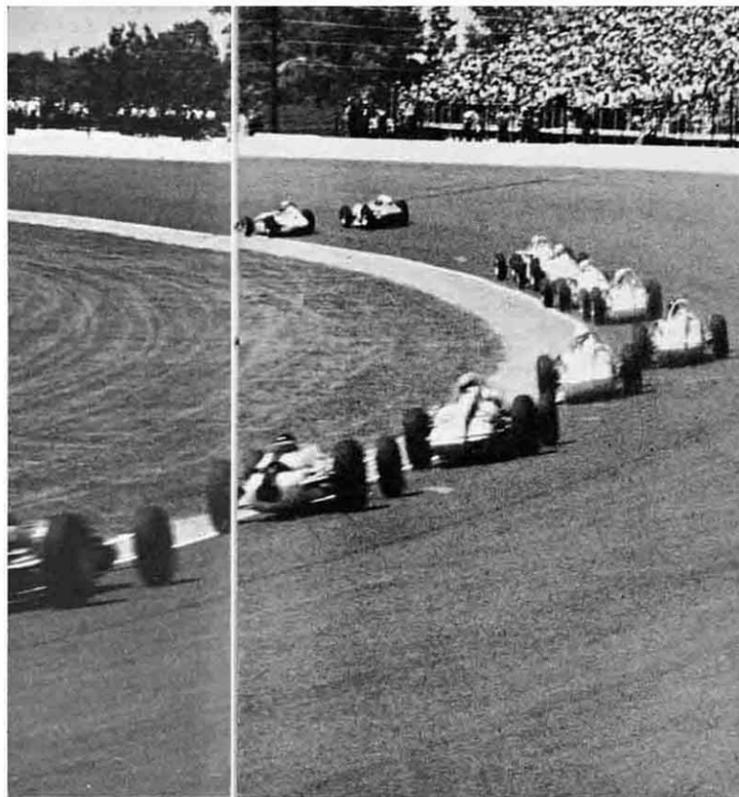
During this time, only two drivers have won more, but they have won a lot more. Foyt has won 27 of these races, including 10 of the 13 last year alone, and both of these figures are USAC records. Ward has won 14, and while he won none last year, he has won 25 in his career. And each has won two 500s and two national titles.

JONES HAS failed to finish about half of his races. Some say he charges too much, pushes his cars too hard. Only this year when Parnelli broke down while leading a stock car race at Riverside, Agajanian said pointedly, "I pleaded with him not to go too hard, to take it a little easy at first, then pour it on if he needed to. And he agreed that was the way he'd race. But, he didn't. And he's just as happy this way. Just so he can tell himself he beat those guys while he was running."

Jones takes exception to this attitude. "It's my job to win. I can't do that if I don't get in front. It is the sponsor's job to give me a car I can win in and the mechanic's job to prepare it so it'll hold up at top speed. If the car isn't fast enough or strong enough, it's not my fault. Actually, I have no complaints with Aggie or Pouelson or anyone else. Everyone is doing his job. Sometimes the breaks go against you in this game. We've just had bad racing luck and there's



BIG WIN at Indianapolis in '63 was Jones' first there, followed fastest-ever qualifying lap of 152 mph. Jones and Hurtubise led early laps in classic battle; sponsor J. C. Agajanian had verbal battle with chief steward Harlan Fengler (left) and Lotusman Colin Chapman (right).



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almost nothing we can do about it.

"I've been disappointed, sure," he added somewhat bitterly. "I would have liked to have won more. I would have liked to have the national title. Maybe I can sweep the boards this year, though I doubt that I'll run enough races. Anyway, I'm not going to keep running until I do. That would be crazy. I'd be taking chances I don't want to take for something I can't count on anyway. I feel I can run with any driver in the world, but I haven't been lucky and there's not a damn thing I can do about it."

Dan Gurney, who in Grand Prix racing has had a record similar to Jones', sympathizes with him: "I think Jones is a great driver," he says. "Foyt has been winning almost everything and Jones has been winning very little, but if I needed a driver and I had a chance to get either, I don't know which one I would take. I consider them equally good, but one has been luckier."

"A couple of years ago, Foyt was breaking down everywhere and everyone was criticizing him. But as soon as he got some cars that would hold up, he's been finishing everywhere and winning almost everything. You can't run back in the pack and win, you

know. To win in this business, you have to be both good and lucky, and sometimes it's more important to be lucky than it is to be good."

JONES HAS been very good and usually very unlucky at Indianapolis. The 500 is very important to every driver, but it is particularly important to Parnelli because it is here he has achieved his greatest prestige and scored his biggest and richest victory; it is here he is considered to be at his best. They say there is one track for every driver and Jones has picked a dandy in Indianapolis.

"If anyone knows Indy as well as I do, it is probably Parnelli," Rodger Ward says. And Ward, who has not finished lower than fourth in the last six 500s for an unparalleled record of success there, should know. "He has not driven there as long as I have, but he has worn out so many tires practicing there, he's had Aggie tearing out what little hair he has left. Jones' style seems just right for Indy. I would say Foyt is the driver to beat anywhere else, but Jones is the man to beat at Indy."

Parnelli approached Indianapolis with his usual serious care. Although he had offers, he did not drive there as soon as he could, but visited the race for a couple of years, studying it, making sure he had the experience and could handle it, making sure he had a car and crew which would give him

a fighting chance before he entered it.

As a rookie there in 1961, he qualified sixth fastest at 146 mph, led the race for 75 miles in the early stages and finished 12th after being injured. A bolt from a car involved in an earlier accident was sucked up off the track and struck his face, cutting him over the eye and nearly blinding him. He refused relief and continued driving. Distracted by his bleeding, he failed to adjust his fuel mixture properly, his engine flooded, washing the cylinders until a piston gave out, his car began to handle badly and he trailed a thick stream of black smoke behind him the rest of the way.

Yet, he impressed pros, who voted him, along with Marshman, a seventh-place finisher that year, co-rookie-of-the-year. "I learned things from him I never learned from any of the veterans," Eddie Sachs once said.

In 1962, Parnelli became the first man to break the 150 mph barrier there, winning the pole with the fast qualifying average speed of 150.3, including a fast lap of 150.7 mph. He led for 123 of the first 125 laps of the 200-lap event, until his exhaust header broke and slipped down, rubbing a small hole in the brake line, permitting the fluid to escape and robbing him of his stopping power. Nevertheless, he continued on and only dropped back as far as seventh.

"He really gave them a show while it lasted," grinned the philosophical Ag-

gie, who had the 10¢ piece of worn brakeline, which cost his team \$150,000, made into a key-chain ornament. He still displays it proudly.

In 1963, Jones repeated as the pole position winner with the fast qualifying average of 151.1, including a fast lap of 151.8. This time, he led almost the entire distance and was able to shake off the seemingly inevitable misfortune to win by 33 sec. in a new record average speed of 143.1 mph, worth \$148,000.

Less than 100 miles from home, a big 23 sec. ahead, Parnelli's oil tank developed a horizontal crack, releasing a small stream of oil back onto his right rear tire and the track. Thinking he had developed a slow leak in the tire, Parnelli cursed and slowed down as Jimmy Clark closed in on him. When he realized what his trouble was, Parnelli got on it again and stretched his lead again, but the going was getting slippery for him and everyone else.

Meanwhile, chief steward Harlan Fengler was in the middle of a wild situation near the finish line as Clark's boss Colin Chapman argued that Jones should be flagged in and Jones' boss Aggie argued that he should not. While Fengler hesitated, the level of oil in Parnelli's tank dropped below the crack and stopped oozing out. Fengler decided to let him continue and Jones rolled on to Victory Lane.

Chapman and other members of the

Grand Prix invasion forces complained that Agajanian, as a long-time important sponsor and promoter, had been granted a pardon that would be denied others. Many of Parnelli's U.S. rivals, including Roger McCluskey and Eddie Sachs, were equally bitter. Sachs needled Jones in an Indianapolis restaurant until Parnelli lost his patience.

"Call me a liar once more and I'll punch you in the mouth," Jones said.

"You're a liar. Go on, punch me in the mouth," Sachs shouted.

So Parnelli punched him in the mouth. Sachs went down and Jones went down on top of him before others pulled them apart. "It was too much to resist," Jones later grinned. Since then, Sachs has died. Jones looks back on the incident wistfully. "Sachs was a needler—it was his way," Parnelli says. "But he didn't mean anything by it. He was a good guy and everyone liked him. We weren't mad at each other for long. Anyway, I think I was right. I don't know who was the last leader they black-flagged out of the 500."

Ward agrees. "You don't pull a man off the track in a race like that when he has a lead like Parnelli had," Rodger says. "You're not supposed to keep running when you're throwing oil, but no one knew how much Parnelli was throwing or if he was the only one. I wouldn't have stopped if I'd been in his place and I wouldn't have wanted to be stopped. I'd have moved up a place and made more money if they'd pulled him in, but I don't think they should have."

THOUGH THESE racing drivers are tough guys who will do almost anything to win, they share a common bond of blood and they are an uncommonly friendly fraternity on the sidelines and away from the track. Jones' closest friend in racing is Hurtubise, but he is also friendly with Foyt. Some years ago when both were on the way up, Jones visited Foyt's home town of Houston, beat him in a match-race in sprinters and he has never let him forget it.

Last year at Indianapolis, the two hooked up in another match-race, but this time in the sulks of harness horses at the State Fairgrounds. Foyt won and ribs Jones about it, but Jones protests the result. "The sonofagun came to me before the race and said, 'Look buddy, we don't know how to handle these things, we're liable to get hurt. Why don't we take it easy and run even around the last turn, then when we get in the home stretch, we can give 'em the whip and see which is fastest,'" Jones recalls with a grin.

"It sounded OK to me and I agreed. So we ran easy. But, in the last turn when I looked over at Foyt to draw

even with him, the sonofagun was giving his horse a hell of a whop with that whip, and the horse jumped and pulled way out in front of me. I gave mine the whip then, too, but it was too late, and I never could catch him. He'd suckered me, but good. When I get my courage back up, I want a rematch. I'll run him right off the blasted track."

In last year's 500, back at serious business, Jones and Foyt were the last two prominent holdouts from the lightweights. Each had a new one to try out, but each reverted to his tried and proven roadster for the time trials and the race. Clark, Marshman and Ward in rear lightweights filled the front row, Clark setting new records with an average speed of 158.8 mph and a fast lap of 159.9. Jones, who settled for the fourth slot with 155.0, and Foyt figured they'd made a mistake and were beaten.

However, first Marshman, then Clark broke down while leading. Ward finally came in second. Jones led until his pit mishap. Foyt went on to win, at an average speed of 147.3, worth \$153,000. And Foyt kept right on winning other races in his old roadster. But after mid-season he joined Jones in the switch to lightweights. Foyt had no luck with his, but Jones won two races.

Jones left his first rear lightweight, built by Dick Troutman and Tom Barnes, on the wall at Trenton. He borrowed two of Chapman's Lotuses for his victories late last season and Agajanian has purchased one of them, the Jim Clark car, for him for this year's 500. However, Pouelson has had trouble adapting the car to the new regulations and a Lola has been ordered from Eric Broadley of England as insurance.

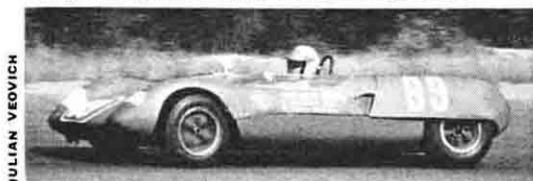
"The Lotus is a good car in good shape, but it may not adapt," Jones says. "As things stand now, we'll run the Lola. These cars have never been raced before but Foyt is getting one and Bud Tinglestad is getting one. They're being built to our individual specifications and they should be good cars, like the Lotuses, only beefier and stronger."

"We'll run ours with the Ford engine, which seems better suited than the Offenhauser to this sort of car. However, the two-pit-stop rule will probably permit us to go with an alcohol blend again, which is safer, even if it doesn't give us the mileage. We're just gonna' have to practice harder and work longer hours than ever before to make the decisions we'll have to make."

There are never more than a dozen driver-mechanic-car combinations capable of winning any given 500 and the new cars the chief challengers will be driving, unproven and in the experi-



VERSATILITY of Parnelli Jones shows well at such places as Pikes Peak, where he won the '64 stock car class in a Mercury (shown getting awards with sponsors Agajanian and Frank Arciero, and driver Bobby Unser), and at Kent, Wash., driving Lotus.



JULIAN VEDEVICH

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mental stages as far as U.S. racing is concerned, make the always difficult job of forecasting this cruellest of events harder than ever.

Without knowing much about their cars as this point, we'll name Foyt, Jones, Ward, Clark, McCluskey, Tinglestad, Don Branson, Dan Gurney, Lloyd Ruby, Jim McElreath and Hurtubise as the key figures this year, which leaves us one short of a dozen.

Foyt has to figure first because he's the best, but he has not yet adapted to the rear lightweights yet. Ward figures high because of his consistent history, but teammate Branson may have a better chance. Both are in their 40s, but Branson seems hungrier.

Jones, who made a rapid adjustment to the new cars, cannot be discounted. We recall Parnelli, sitting in a diner in a madhouse of horsing-around drivers, talking about his first 500 over a cup of coffee. "The first time I went into a turn there at 170 I couldn't resist hitting the brake a little," he grinned, somewhat guiltily. "I'd been told the fastest way to get around was to use no brakes at all. So I tried not to. I tried like all hell, the first time and the second time and the third time.

"I'd be screaming into a corner and I'd be tellin' myself, 'You can do it. You can get around without that brake. You got more guts than anyone. You don't have to hit that brake.' But, then I'd be in that corner and my left foot would move out just like I didn't have any control over it and I'd tap

that brake, just a little maybe, but I'd have to tap it, and I'd slow down a little, and I have to admit I'd feel a little better for it. You know, like I could breathe again.

"Eventually, I found out that by backing off a little sooner, coming in slower, I got around more smoothly, could open up sooner in the straightaway and wound up turning faster laps. You come off your accelerator very slowly and tap your brake just a little, then as you come out of the turn you chomp down on the gas hard. It was a real relief to me when I found out I got around fastest by using the brakes a little. Then, I got into a race where I didn't have any brakes, which was pretty funny. Well, some guys don't use their brakes. Everyone has his own style."

EARLY THIS year, Parnelli talked about it again: "After awhile you get to know Indy real well. But every race is different. You're different. Your car is different. And everyone else and every other car and every other situation is different. So you have to use what you've learned and what you know differently. I honestly think I had my best chance to win my first year there. I think my car was more the best car that year. But I didn't know what I know now. I hung back too long. Anyway, it didn't work out. A couple of years later, it was still a good car, not as good, but things broke differently and it did work out.

"This year, a new car and a whole new thing. I've driven the lightweights in a few races now, I've learned something about them and I've won in them, but I've never driven them at Indy, a 2.5-mile track at 150 mph, for three

hours and some, a whole different thing. You don't push these cars as hard, but you can drive them more consistently and more smoothly. You take the turns better, but you don't get the pull out of the turns or the acceleration at the end of the straights the roadsters used to give you.

"Basically, I don't think any of us have too much trouble adjusting to them. If you're a racing driver, you can learn to handle any car pretty quick. I think these cars will carry us to new records this year. I think it'll take 162 or 163 to win the pole and I think it'll take darn close to 160 to even make the starting field. I don't think we're anywhere near top speed at Indy yet. It's only a matter of a couple of seconds a lap to 175 or even 200. Great traction like the dragsters get could do it.

"Is it getting too fast to be safe? I don't know. Maybe we're not building 'em good enough yet. Maybe you reach a point where a human being can't handle these things at certain speeds. I don't think I'll be around to find out. I'll be sitting in the stands by then. I do know that I have felt safer and more comfortable at 150 with some of the new equipment under me than I used to feel at 140 with some of the old equipment. You can't go 150 or 160 if your car won't let you do it, you know.

"Every year Firestone and the other guys come out with a new tire that pushes your speed up two or three miles per hour. To tell you the truth, these guys boosted the switch to the rear lightweights. It used to be we needed the heavier car with the weight distributed differently throughout the car to get the traction we needed. The

new tires give you such a fantastic bite, you don't need all that weight. The lighter you are, the faster you go, so in come the rear lightweights."

Of course, Parnelli is prejudiced where Firestone is concerned, but he insists he will run Goodyears or anything else which seem best to him. In this he is following the lead of Foyt, who tested for Goodyear last year, but switched to Firestones for the race. "You don't worry about sponsors or anything else," Jones says. "You run the best of any kind of part you can find. You run what can win for you. This race is too important to do any different."

When we spoke to Jones those several years ago, he said, "I really enjoy racing. You get a sensation of power out there on the track. You're doing something most people would be afraid to do. And the competition is terrific. You want to win. So you push yourself just a little harder. If luck's with you, you win. Most people work hard every day of their lives and yet they never have anything. Maybe they don't risk anything, but they don't have anything to risk. I have everything I could want in life. I have to risk it all the time, but that was the only way to get it and it's the only way to keep it.

"This business has been real great to me. I never had anything. I always been kinda' poor all my life. I don't

even have a high school education. If it hadn't been for racing, I'd of really had to struggle all my life. It's made me a lot of money, made me a little important, given me a real great life. I want you to believe this: I lead a darned good life. I got a new house, a new car, a new boat. I go first-class. I water ski. I gamble in Las Vegas. I fish in Canada. I do anything and everything I want. So long as I drive. And I figure if I should get one of my buggies upside down tomorrow, and hurt myself badly, or kill myself, it'd be all right, 'cause I had myself one terrific time while I was at it."

THIS YEAR, an older and more reserved Parnelli Jones stood at the window of his apartment in Gardena and talked somewhat differently. He used to say, "I'm just a dumb so-and-so who got lucky." He doesn't say it any more because no one would believe him. He is a more polished person now, he has a solid bank account, good investments, a growing business, a good marriage, and he wants to enjoy the things he has gained at such great risk.

"I don't regret anything I ever did. I've always loved racing and I always will. But, it's getting harder and harder to do it right. I doubt that I'll drive any midgets or sprinters this year, no dirt track races, not even Aggie's at

Ascot, which I've always driven. I think this'll be my last year on the champ circuit and I'll stick to the paved tracks, even if missing the others costs me the championship. I don't know if I'll drive any more sports car races. I will drive stock car races, and if I want to drive a few races later on, I'll stick to these. You got a chance to do it right if you stick to one kind of car, and this pays pretty good and is fairly safe.

"I wouldn't want to lie to you or to myself. I don't know how I'll feel later on. It'll be hard to turn my back on Indy. Winning there doesn't just set you up that one year, it sets you up for life. And it's more than money, it gets in your blood. I won her, but I feel like I want to win her this year as much as I ever did. But if I can walk away from her, I think maybe I should. Unless I change my mind, I think I'm gonna' try to."

He limped back to a chair and sat down. "Oh, hell, man, it's been a ball, but it gets harder. I don't enjoy the travelin'. We move into Indianapolis every summer. I want to find us a house here and settle down. I got a beautiful boat I never get a chance to put on the water. I want to have some fun. And I got a business I want to run. Maybe," he said, "I just want to live like everyone else in the world for a change." ■

