

# Tribune

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## Souvenir Section

Volume 34

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# Checker Flag Waves Goodbye

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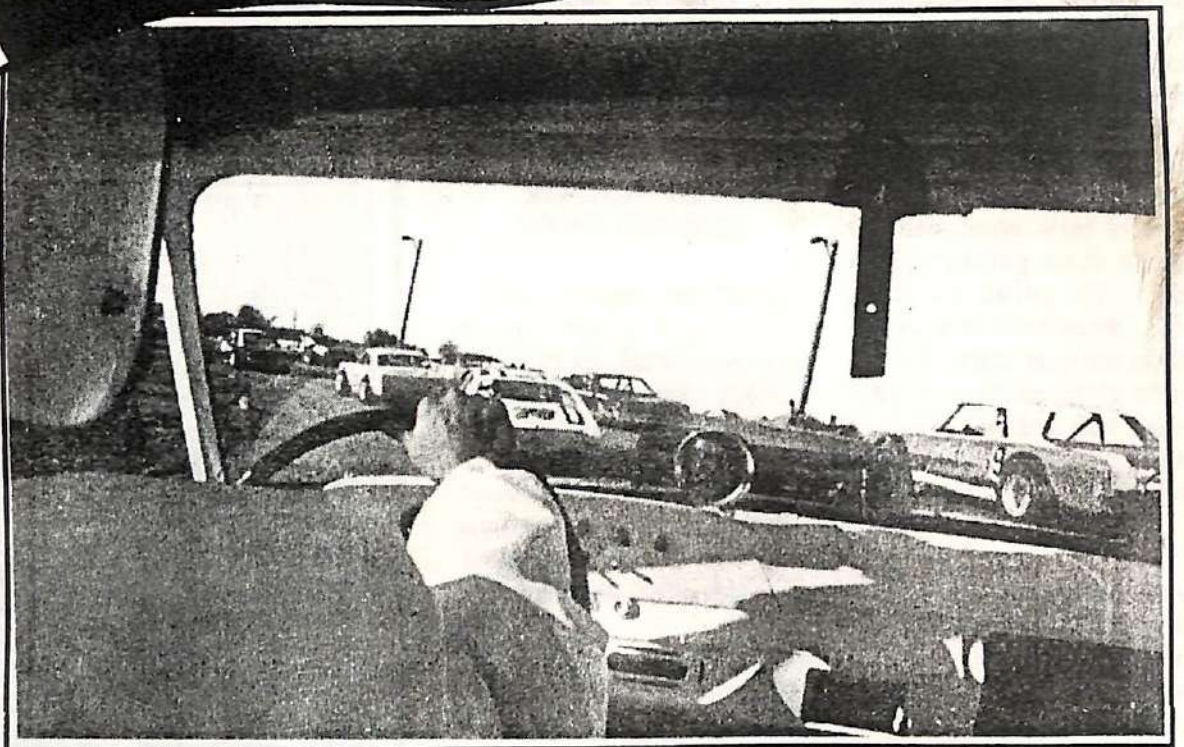
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By Ken J. Lori



Welcome, Tribune readers, to our souvenir, nostalgic salute to Checker Flag Raceway. Even if this topic excites you as little as going to confession, we ask that you flip through and pay your respects to those who spent so much of their lives on a block of land, originally isolated on the outskirts of Windsor. Most recently known as Windsor Speedway, that fabulous figure 8 has been more than one granny square in the quilt of our community. This my friends marks the first year we haven't heard the distant roar of those cars racing on what will always be remembered as "Checker Flag".

Those of you knowledgeable in automobile racing, will discover my lack of experience in this field. For that, I apologize. On the flip side, though, many readers unfamiliar with the sport will benefit because the stories are written for the eyes of stock car illiterates, and appeal more to our sensitivities. To truly honour and appreciate Checker Flag, dialogue and reminiscence take precedence over stats and facts. All quotes offer their reminiscence in the spirit of fond memories and are not meant to offend.

So, join us, will you? And peruse some faces and names, enjoy the stories and memories, and witness the conflicts and highlights as we climb behind the wheel of our retrospective car. When our ten laps slow to a halt, we will have paid tribute to a small, but desperately needed, fraction of the many who entertained Windsor and Essex County denizens for thirty summers at Checker Flag. So, squeeze into the grandstands and get ready to taste the rubber and dirt, hear the roaring engines, feel the night time excitement, witness the crashes and photo finishes, smell the popcorn, scan a program, watch a fight, and so much more as you hear the tales told by former racers, ex-owners and long ago employees of the stock car race track on County Road 42.



# The History of Checker Flag

In 1961, Francis Pratt ran a go-kart track on two-hundred acres of land located on what used to be Highway 2. Later that year, Pratt, who was interested in transforming the land into a full fledged stock car race track, approached Johnny Banks with an offer to go 50/50 on the ownership. Banks, who was too involved in his own car alignment business decided not to accept Pratt's offer. However, once word was out that he was interested in constructing a track, Herman Modlinsky and Dennis Fauteux approached Pratt with an offer to be three-way partners. Pratt accepted, thus making himself, Modlinsky, and Dennis Fauteux the first owners of Checker Flag Raceway.

One year later, Checker Flag was completed and ready to pick up where Dayus, Windsor, and Blue Bird Raceways all left off. Their 1/4 mile dirt track fast became the major sporting attraction in Windsor, with over 80 car-entries, hosting up to 3500 spectators on a regular basis.

When Herman Modlinsky passed away in 1966, Pratt sold out to Dennis Fauteux's sons, Gary and Ron. Of the three Fauteux, seventeen year old Gary poured the most time into it.

"Herman had died," says Gary, "and my dad never had much interest in it so it was like, 'go out there and see

what you can do to keep the thing running.'"

At only seventeen, Gary was spending nearly 80 hours a week, grooming the dirt and preparing the track for Wednesday and Saturday nights.

In 1967, they expanded the track to 1/3 of a mile and in 1969 they stretched it to 3/8's.

"One of the best nights," recalls Fauteux, "was when we expanded the track to 3/8's. On our opening night we had about 5,200 people squeezed in with a capacity of only 4000. We had cars backed up on County Rd. 42. We had to turn a lot of people away."

Fauteux attributes Checker's popularity to its unique set up.

"I don't know of another track where you can be that close to the action. Even the people in the back of the stands were only fifty feet off the track. The front row was only seven or eight feet away."

In the early '70s, Fauteux felt the pressure to invest more money into the track so, instead, he sold it.

"Basically, the Association [Western Ontario Stock Car Racing Association] and the drivers decided that if it was going to continue it should have an asphalt track. We looked at the initial investment but couldn't justify the improvements that had to be made so we sold it to John

Fahringer and his group."

In 1974, Fauteux handed the reigns to a consortium of three major and five minor investors. Of the three primary owners, I spoke to two: Jack Monaghan and John Fahringer.

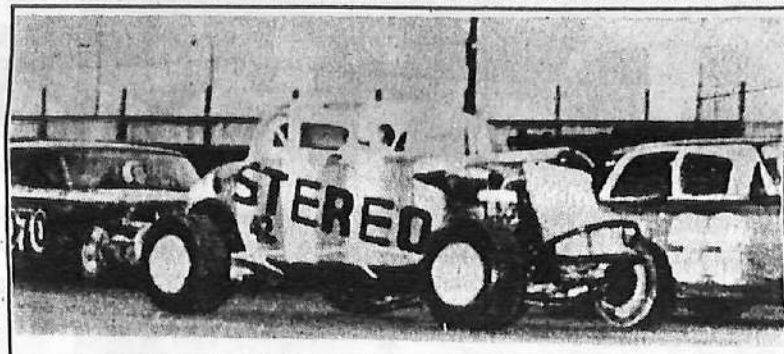
## A LITTLE BACKGROUND

Getting his start at Checker Flag, Jack Monaghan has been one of the most respected drivers in southwestern Ontario since the mid-60s.

John Fahringer had a full stock car career centering around the track: "I went from being a spectator to a car owner to a car driver to president of WOSCRA to owning the track in 1974."

Fahringer, owner of Farhal Mechanical Contractors, and Jack Monaghan are seated in Fahringer's office as an August sunset shimmers through the window behind them. While Monaghan answers a question, Fahringer flips through an old Checker Flag program. That scenario reverses, then back again, and then they share a laugh about past particulars.

Along with Mark Kalbol, John Fahringer and Jack Monaghan initiated the purchase in the spring of '74, fought a continuous battle with Sandwich South Town Council, and not only kept Checker Flag on its feet in the '70s but stimulated addi-



tional interest in stock car racing in Windsor.

To attract American competition they changed the name to Checker Flag International Speedway and immediately began track improvement to help sustain the big crowds of earlier seasons. This team of eight laboured, fought,

Racing on the old dirt track (courtesy of Armand Robinson)

laughed, drank, argued and, most significantly, complimented one another by presenting an exciting show twice a week throughout five full summers.

## Ownership Shift in 1974

**Q - Why were you interested in buying Checker Flag?**

**Fahringer:** "We weren't satisfied with the progressiveness that Checker Flag was having. Dirt track racing was going by the wayside. As racers, we really didn't like the way things were being done."

**Q - Then what?**

**Fahringer:** "I had spent a lot of time with the Fauteux when I was part of the club [WOSCRA]. We talked about spending money on it but they complained that there was no profit in it. I said, 'Why not sell it to somebody who'll do something with it?' And they said, 'Find us a buyer and we'll sell it right away.'"

## ROUND 1 WITH TOWN COUNCIL

Soon enough, the Fauteux threw out a figure that Monaghan, Fahringer and Kalbol subsequently gobbled up. \$100,000 later, those three plus five minor partners became the third official owners of Checker Flag. Unfortunately, the transition didn't happen that easily.

**Fahringer:** "The major problem came at first when there was noise that we were even buying it. The neighbours roused up a big storm at Sandwich South Town Hall to try to close it down."

**Monaghan:** "They went around and collected signatures and petitions, then went

to town council to protest against everything. We went through hell to buy that thing. We gave up on it a few times, then went back to it."

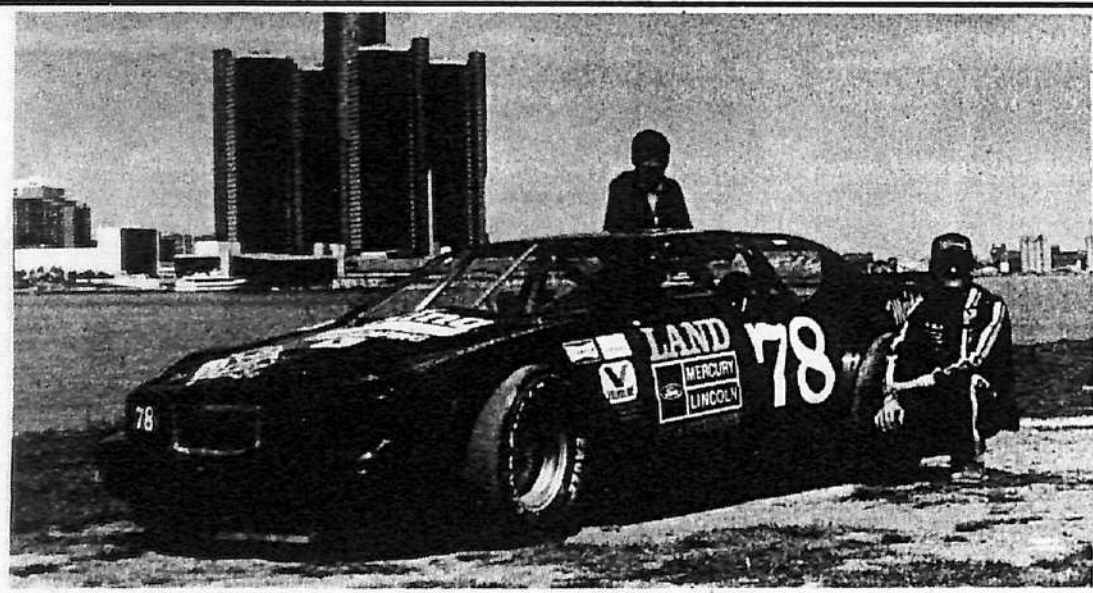
**Fahringer:** "Yeah, we walked out of more than one council meeting where we said, 'Forget it.'"

## WORK, WORK AND MORE WORK

The partners finally won the battle in the spring of '74. However, it was made very clear that their license would be revoked upon failing to adhere to the new rules. Of the regulations imposed, the major ones included an earlier curfew, an asphalt track, an increase in the seating capacity and construction of a concrete retaining wall for spectator safety. Soon after, the new team went to work on improving track conditions by doing all of the above and then some. The old dirt track stadium of the '60s was completely overhauled by adding new lights, better speakers, cleaner washrooms and more grandstands.

**Fahringer:** "We had to immediately go to the bank to put our houses up and put our name on the line to borrow the money to invest in the race track. The renovations cost far more than the purchase of the track."

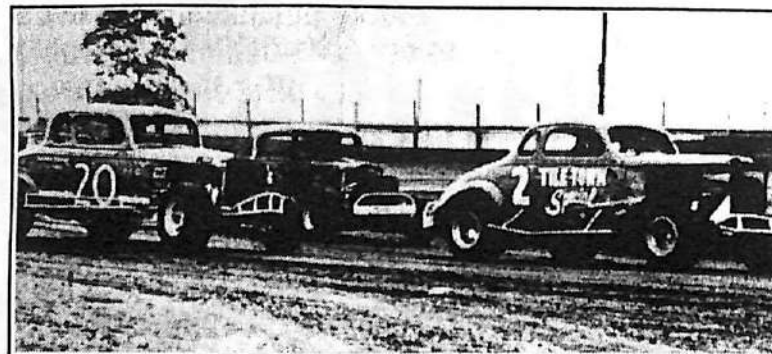
**Monaghan:** "Taking in partners was probably the best thing we ever did because we had interested



Years from now, **CHECKER FLAG** will be long forgotten. The drivers that raced there will be just a memory. The only thing we know for sure that everyone will remember is the night they got beat by Don Mallat.

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parties and workers and doers."

**Fahringer:** "Each partner was in charge of something: one had the concession stand, another had the ticket booth, another was in charge of keeping the track in good shape. On race night we were all doing something. Then, on Monday nights we'd all get together to criticize ourselves and each other."

Neither Monaghan nor Fahringer miss the time they poured into track. On race days [Wed. and Sat.] they'd leave their businesses at noon, then work straight through to midnight because, "there was repair work to be done after every race," says Fahringer, "even if the fish flies came out." When their duties were finished, one lucky partner would be assigned to rush the results down to the Windsor Star at 1:00 in the morning! Then, every Monday night the team congregated for a couple hours to discuss problems and complaints voiced by participants and fans.

**Monaghan:** "When there was eight of us doing it, it was a lot of fun. It was a two or three hour jam session. Then, we had to go out Tuesday and Wednesday to fix things up that were damaged the week before. We self-operated it."

**Fahringer:** "We'd fight and argue, but when we left that room everything was settled."

#### WOSCRA

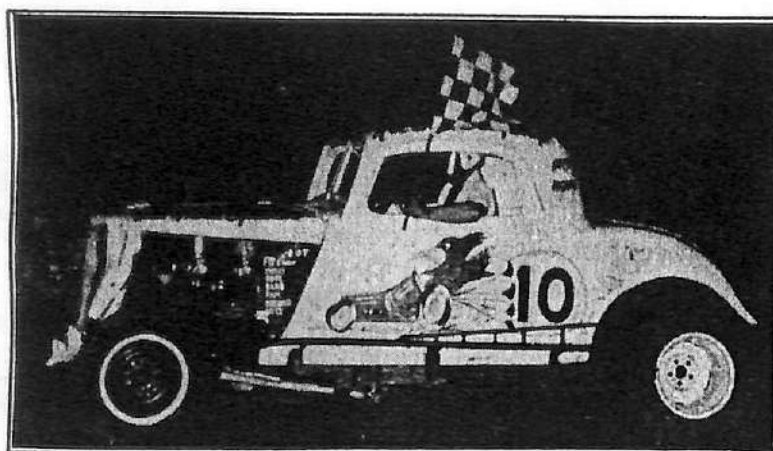
The Western Ontario Stock Car Racing Association originated at the birth of Checker Flag in 1962. WOSCRA was created to act as a governing body for stock car racing strictly at Checker Flag. In order to participate in racing and be eligible to go into the pits you had to be a member of WOSCRA. All members met regularly with an executive board, secretary, treasurer, vice president and president. WOSCRA's first president was Fred Gamble.

The Association's purpose was to promote stock car racing by negotiating and bargaining with the track owners for purse structures and better track conditions. WOSCRA made the rules, controlled the pits, organized race nights and put on the show.

John Fahringer chuckles while recalling the monthly gatherings. "We had some rip-roaring meetings," laughs Fahringer, "but we controlled our own problems. For example, if a guy was cheating, we took care of it. Sometimes we had to discipline our own people which was hard, but it made for some pretty interesting meetings."

**Q - How big were these meetings?**

**Fahringer:** "Three to four hundred people would show up. It would fill the basement of the Drop In Tavern (now Peppermints)."



Armand Robinson winning a Feature, circa 1964

**Q - Were you ever forced to discipline fellow owner, Jack Monaghan?**

**Fahringer:** "Hell, Jack was the worst one!"

Eventually WOSCRA was fazed out because the club members felt confident in Fahringer's and Monaghan's ability to enforce fair rules and control the pits. The owners didn't mind, but the stress level shot up.

**Fahringer:** "There was never an end to the criticism. You would always have the people in the stands, no matter what you did, complain that 'this was wrong, or that was wrong.' And it was the same thing with the drivers, no matter what decision we made. We were constantly trying to please everybody. The flagman used to make some pretty tough decisions so we'd hire the biggest guy to do the job."

**Monaghan:** "There was never a dull moment on race night. I guess that's what kept people coming."

#### THE BUSINESS SIDE

**Q - Was Checker Flag a good business venture?**

**Monaghan:** "We did alright but it was a lot of work. It's not a job that ends in the summer. You had to work hard to get sponsorship, like Molson and Black Label. We earned it. We earned it just trying to buy it, first of all. Then we earned it with what we had to spend and all the work we had to do."

**Fahringer:** "We paid off our loan in a little over two years."

**Q - How was your attendance level?**

**Fahringer:** "I'd say 2500 people would come on a regular basis. Wednesday's we'd have bigger crowds than Saturday's. We'd jam the place. A lot of time we had standing room crowds."

It was the biggest attraction, sporting wise, in the city of Windsor. We used to out-draw any [sports] team, even the Spitfires."

#### ROUNDS 2 THROUGH 7

Each spring, the residents within ear shot of the track

would be at it again, buzzing around the ears of town council. In the consortium's second season, 1975, the neighbours complained about the track's noise level. To appease the residents, special meetings were conducted outside of ordinary council sessions where Fahringer and Monaghan would listen to their grievances. The owners eventually conceded to an earlier curfew time of 10:15 pm, and agreed to control the noise. Then, in February of the following year, 1976, more special meetings were held to debate Checker's future. The griping neighbours attempted, though unsuccessfully, to pressure Town Council into revoking the license once and for all.

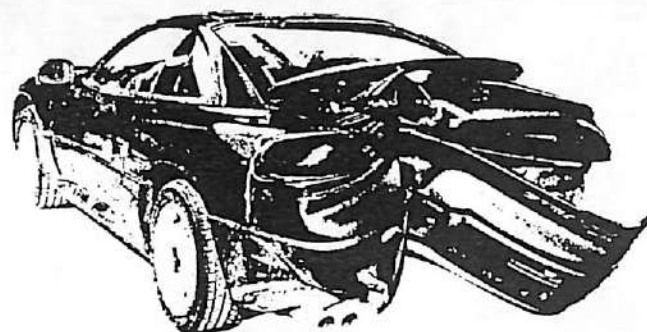
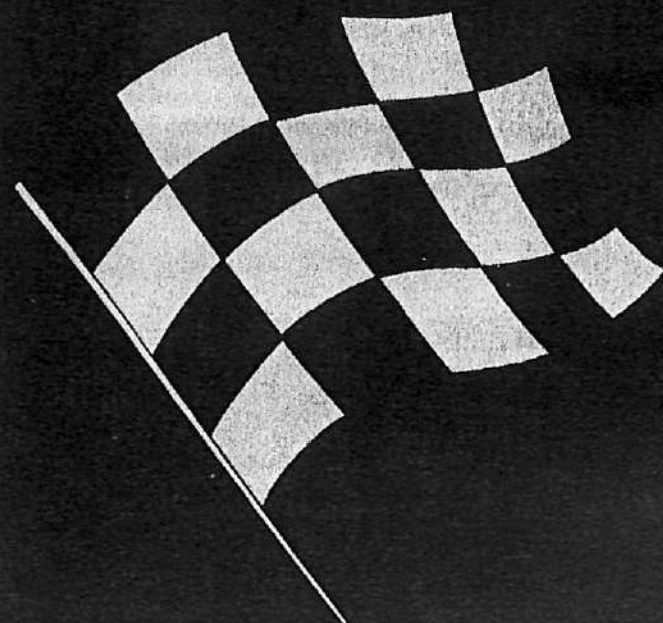
The "noise level" debacle sprang up yearly to the dismay of the owner at the time.

**Monaghan:** "They got the Ministry of Transportation down there one night while the races were going on to check out the decibel rate of the cars. An airplane that was flying into Windsor airport made more noise than the race track, so that did us more good than harm."

In 1979, the consortium split up leaving only Jack Monaghan, Ed Soulliere, and Norm Hallowick to call the shots. John Fahringer, along with the other four, opted out. In 1983, the name was changed once again to "Checker Flag Motor Speedway", with Hallowick and Soulliere releasing their grip in ownership. Monaghan still owned Checker, but leased it to the previous year's track manager, Bob Robinson. Five more years went by and Jack renounced control and left Checker in the hands of Bob Robinson.

(continued on back page)

## STOCK CAR Racing



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## Stan Earish: The Golden Boy of Checker Flag

Checker Flag programs to get a taste of race night and every time I see Stan's picture I smile because he looks like a huge teddy bear. When I finally spoke to him that lovable image shone through. Its too bad he didn't have much to say because he was the nicest, most humble athlete I've ever met. And he was very soft spoken, which explains why quotes from Stan have yet to appear. In fact, rather than spewing about all of his victories, he'd speak in one liners.

"It was just a hobby," he'd say. "It was a challenge and we just wanted to see what we could do." Winning consistently was just a hobby? Spending six nights a week in a sweaty garage working on greasy motors, busted fan belts, radiators, transmissions and tires was a mere hobby?

Among the forty-plus wood and silver trophies standing in his basement, one particular gold plated plaque stood out. It read: "1964, Stan 'the Man' Earish, from your faithful fans," accompanied with eight names inscribed beneath. Next to that was a Checker Flag "Most Popular Driver" award. It's these tributes that Stan Earish seems most deserving of.

For example, Stan didn't exactly beat his gums bloody when asked to cite his edge over his forty competitors, "The car handled really good. We had the power." Gosh Stan, I can't get a word in edgewise! Anybody who believes that car power alone is enough to challenge the track record four times an evening for thirty weeks through eleven summers would be as naive as The Beave.

"It was a lot of fun," says Stan quietly. "Most of the guys were pretty nice but it got to a point where a lot of those guys had a lot of money in their cars and I'd just go out there and beat 'em. Then they'd scratch their head and say, 'What's wrong here?'" And then three or four chuckles escape that smile, the same smile seen in the black and white photos taken years ago.

Then Stan perks up and reveals some inside info which was probably never whispered to Windsor Star reporters who would hound him after every race:

"Being the car to beat brought on a lot of trouble. These boys were serious. It got to a point where WOSCRA started picking on me. They thought I was cheating. One year I paid over \$4000.00 in fines" for violations as small as leaving the track before a race ended.

Fortunately, \$4000.00 was easily paid off by a man who took home an average of \$1000.00 a week from Checker.

"I'd just go out every week and they'd have the check ready for me." Wohh, hold it. You're not bragging, are you Stan? So I prod him to keep boasting but he clams up, smiles and emits that benign laugh.

"I had a good team," he says with a grin. "Nothing ever broke down because we always checked everything." Yeah, uh huh? My mouth begins to foam, expecting more secrets.

"All the little things helped because a lot of guys would just drive their cars without checking."

Okay, so lemme get this straight. You had a car that

handled well, a skilled mechanic and you always checked everything. That's it? "We wouldn't let anybody in our garage," peeps Stan with tight lips. "Don't do it Stan, don't blow the lid off this thing. But he continues anyway."

"People would come around to see what we had but we wouldn't let 'em in the garage." No, no, no! You've blown it! The cameras are rollin', pal! You've lost your head, Stan man! There goes that mouth, flap flap, yap yap yap.

So, you've mentioned everything but yourself, Mr. Earish. Ironically, I think you forgot to mention the real key to your success: yourself, with much more than just the makings of a great driver, but with all of the fixings of a super

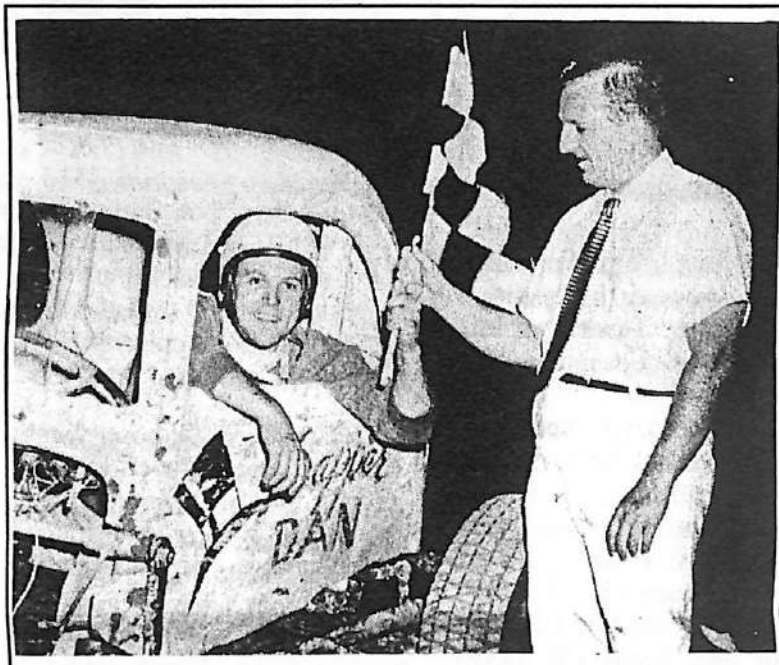
human. It's no wonder you were fined regularly, Stan; it was your slick success at accepting success that caused competitors to try to strike you down. It was that graceful smile and childish giggle that made you despised by WOSCRA, Stan.

How can you pound the track at 90 miles per hour, be handed the Checker flag time after time, and just giggle? I don't even know how to describe you, Stan - we see so few athletes with your humility.

And that's why eight strangers went to the trouble of purchasing and personalizing a plaque for you. Stan Earish - the nicest winner Windsor's ever seen.

And do you know what Stan said to me as I was walking out of his house? He stood in this hallway and said, very peacefully, "I hope you make a nice, little article."

I could talk to quiet people for hours.



## Farewell Checker Flag

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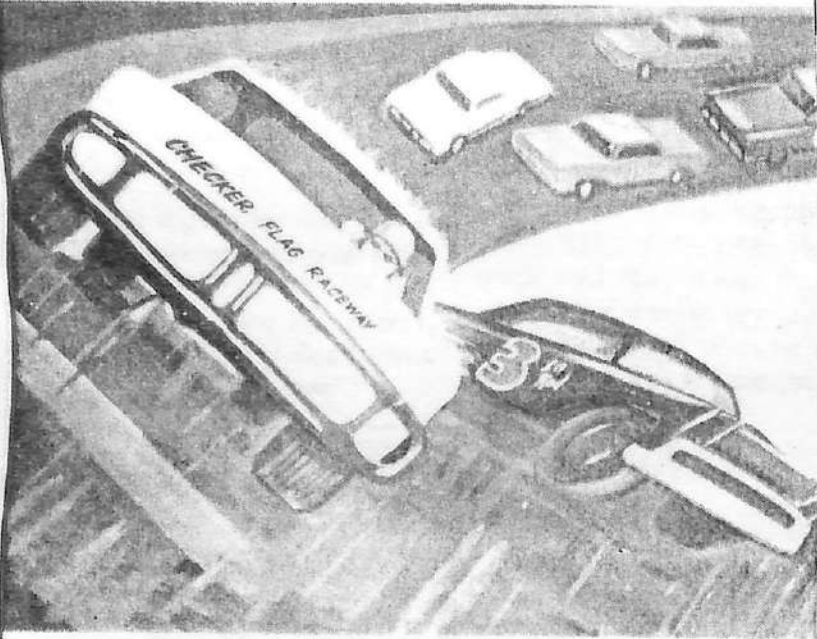


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**CHECKER FLAG** RACING



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# Anecdotes

The first story comes from the animated mouth of Len Edwards. Len was hired on as the Track Manager and Public Relations man in 1979, working for Jack Monaghan, Ed Soulliere and Norm Hallewick.

Len begins this chapter by recalling a practical joke he played on his boss, Ed Soulliere.

"We used to have this Suicide Seldon guy put on a show. He'd come out, crawl into a coffin, then blow himself up. He'd blow dust all over, get up, then walk away. So it was my job to order the dynamite from the quarry in Amherstburg.

One night it rained and we had to postpone Seldon's act till the next week so I stored the dynamite in a cabinet drawer in the office. One day, Soulliere walks in the office and says, 'What the hell is this?' Get that crap outta here!" So the next day me and Seldon detonated it in the infield. What was neat was that the sticks of dynamite were grey, the same colour as the garden hose at the track. So I cut up the garden hose and made six sticks of "garden hose dynamite". I wrapped them up, then put them back into the cabinet.

So I'm in the office one night while the races are going on. He rolls up in his car, late as usual. He walks into the office and I says, 'I got something I want to show you.' I open up the filing cabinet - now don't forget the grandstands are full of people - and I says, 'Ed, what do I have in my hand?' He says, 'That damned dynamite. I told you to get rid of that.' So I threw it at him. He ran and crapped himself or maybe he crapped himself first, I don't know. People outside heard the commotion and got scared and I said, 'Folks, it's just garden hose, but Ed don't know any better.'

To me that was a high point. He didn't talk to me for two weeks. That was the whole point!"

(Ed was called six times, but refused to return the calls)

**Stan Earish on Johnny Banks:**

"He was bad. By Feature time he was drunk. He'd come up to my face and say, 'I'm gonna put you into the wall.' I don't know how he drove like that."

Jim Renaud on the rowdy fans:

"Some of the fans were meaner than the drivers. They'd come into the pits and just tear you up. Some of the women were worst than the men, swearing, and

cursing and calling names. Their boys are out there and that's all there is to it."

**Don Mallat, when asked whether he will miss racing after twenty-five years:**

"Nah, not really. It's like being married for twenty-five



1973 Carling Top Point Drivers-Hobby Class

POS.	CAR#	DRIVERS NAME	POINTS	POS.	CAR#	DRIVERS NAME	POINTS
1.	8	Roy Poisson	93	17.	7	Marry Graham	15
2.	88	Doug Spollar	47	18.	0	Clyde LaBonte	14
3.	42	John Lewis	46	19.	35	Mark Bennett	13
4.	21	Paul Moore	41	20.	69	Bill Killaire	12
5.	97	Gerry St. Onge	33	21.	01	Doug Francis	12
6.	09	Mike Knowler	31	22.	48	Mike Martin	11
7.	10	Jim Desjardins	31	23.	10	Bob Quinby	9
8.	43	Bob Lewis	27	24.	44	Marve Wilder	9
9.	06	Oscar Sullivan	27	25.	4	Bob Sexton	9
10.	76	Rudy Brooks	25	26.	12	Larry Best	8
11.	9	Russell Wood	24	27.	11	Ray Foster	8
12.	6	Ron Johnson	22	28.	14	Wayne Durocher	7
13.	19	Bob Laroque	21	29.	16	Dean O'Connor	7
14.	87	Terry Souchuk	20	30.	21	Danny Moore	6
15.	95	Larry Weir	18	31.	8	Gary DesRosier	5
16.	75	Ron Pfahler	18	32.	09	Ken Taylor	5



## 1975 Calendar of Events

MAY	Sat.-3	Practice Day 1-4 p.m.	1:00 4:00 p.m.
	Sat.-10	Opening Day Super Stocks & Sportsman	7:00 p.m.
	Sat.-17	Regular Racing	7:00 p.m.
	Sat.-24	Export "A" Trophy Series - 100 Laps	7:00 p.m.
	Sat.-31	Regular Racing	7:00 p.m.
JUNE	Fri.-5	Lions Club Rodeo	
	Sat.-6	" " Rodeo	
	Sun.-7	" " Rodeo	
	Wed.-11	Start of Street Stock Racing	7:00 p.m.
	Sat.-14	Regular Racing	7:00 p.m.
	Wed.-18	Racing	7:00 p.m.
	Sat.-21	Regular Racing	7:00 p.m.
	Wed.-25	Racing	7:00 p.m.
	Sat.-28	Freedom Festival Feature	7:00 p.m.
JULY	Wed.-2	Racing	7:00 p.m.
	Sat.-5	Demolition Derby and Racing	7:00 p.m.
	Wed.-9	Ladies' Powder Puff and Racing	7:00 p.m.
	Sat.-12	Mid-Season Championship Super Stocks	7:00 p.m.
	Wed.-16	Mid-Season Championship Sportsman	7:00 p.m.
	Sat.-19	Export "A" Trophy Series - 100 Laps	7:00 p.m.
	Wed.-23	Mid-Season Championship Street Stocks	7:00 p.m.
	Sat.-26	Midget Sprint Cars	7:00 p.m.
	Wed.-30	Racing	7:00 p.m.
AUG.	Sat.-2	10th Annual HiHo Hot Dog Derby & Reg Racing	7:00 p.m.
	Mon.-4	Big "A" Tractor Pull	12:00 noon
	Wed.-6	Racing	7:00 p.m.
	Sat.-9	Regular Racing	7:00 p.m.
	Wed.-13	Racing	7:00 p.m.
	Sat.-16	Demolition Derby and Racing	7:00 p.m.
	Wed.-20	Racing	7:00 p.m.
	Sat.-23	Midget Sprint Cars	7:00 p.m.
	Wed.-27	Racing	7:00 p.m.
	Sat.-30	Carling Championship Series - 100 Laps	7:00 p.m.
	Sun.-31	Windsor Bicycle Club Races	1:00 p.m.
SEPT	Sat.-6	Season Championships and Racing	7:00 p.m.
	Sat.-13	Season Championships and Racing	7:00 p.m.
	Sun.-21	Carling Invitational 100 Laps	12:00 noon



# and Quotes

years. If you got out of it, you wouldn't really miss it."

**Jim Renaud on Don Mallat's temper:**

"One night went after one of the Meloche boys with a tire iron. He said that he just wanted to bend his fenders, but somehow I don't think that that was the case."

**Stan Earish on being fined for "supposedly" cheating:**

I'd bring three or four of those guys down to the gas station and say, 'Look, I'm filling my car with regular gas!' Then we'd go to the track and they'd say that something was in my gas. I'd say, 'Gee, I must be a pretty smart guy if I can pull that off.'"

**Len Edwards on the closing of Checker Flag:**

"It's too bad because it gave four or five hundred guys something to do every day. Some of these guys became professional because of it. It made men out of some of the boys; it taught them how to lose and how to win."

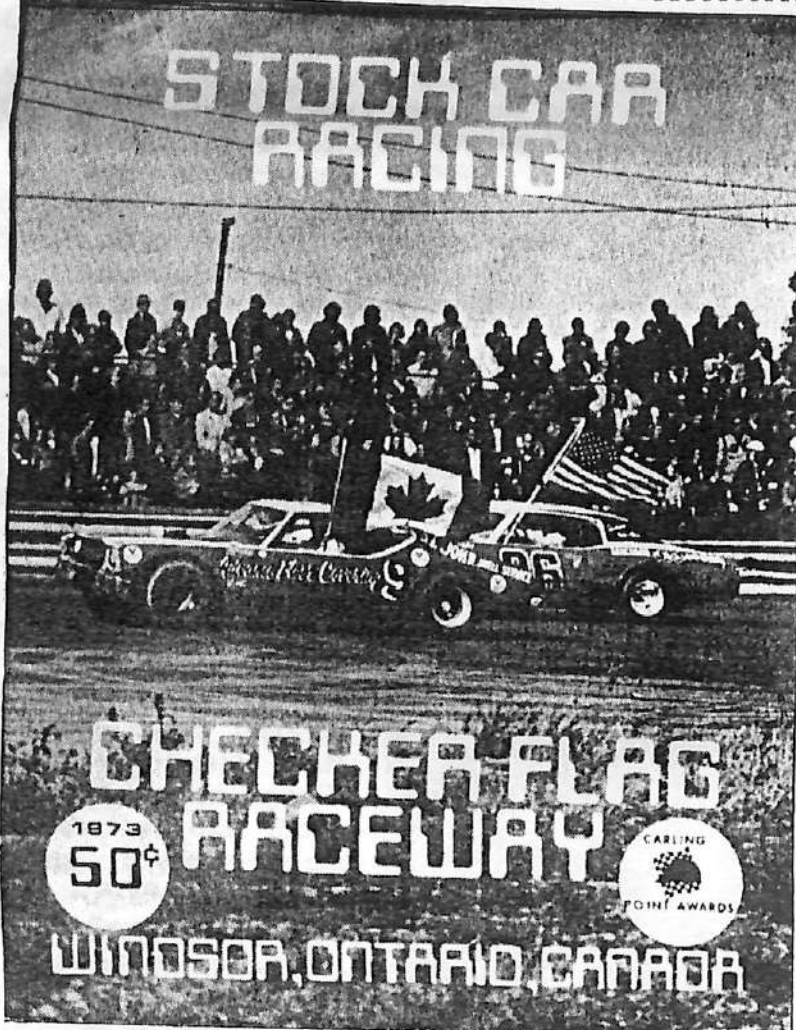
I feel that Windsor needs racing but people around here won't let you build another track. I mean, look, they're gonna allow gambling casinos, but you can't race a stock car."

**Announcer Don Smith, on the Powder Puff races, which features women drivers:**

"They smashed so many cars, they gave it up."

**John Fahringer on fellow owner Mark Kalbol:**

"On race nights we'd have a fire truck in the parking lot in case any accidents happened or any fires. One night, I looked out there and it was gone! Ten minutes later, Kalbol comes driving back in the lot with a double decker ice cream cone! I was jumpin' eight feet high."



**Johnny Banks:**

"Jack Monaghan and his guys would be workin' on his car every night. I never had that type of dedication. A lot of times I'd tell my wife I was working on the car, but I'd be on a bar stool."

**Johnny Banks on being WOSCRA President in 1966:**

"Most of the time I broke my own rules and had to penalize myself."

**Gary Fauteux on the Powder Puff:**

"The hardest thing for the women to do was getting their husbands to let them use the car."

**Jack Monaghan on Checker Flag in the 1970s:**

"We had some of the most competitive Export A racing, and that's a quote from Export A people. We had some damn good racing. It was noted by the sponsors."



Rick Morneau is bumped into the pond during a demolition derby, circa 1986

## CARLING 1973 Carling Top Point Drivers-Late Model Div

POS.	CAR#	DRIVERS NAME	POINTS	POS.	CAR#	DRIVERS NAME	POINTS
1.	9	Stan Earish	554	16.	44	John Alexander	91
2.	78	Don Mallot	590	17.	98	Tony Dekole	84
3.	33	Dave Craig	413	18.	34	Don Bray	82
4.	27	Andy Gordon	306	19.	28	Armand Robinson	76
5.	22	Frank Charette	292	20.	76	Bill Doherty	57
6.	73	Leroy Couvillon	282	21.	57	Ernie Wood	26
7.	31	Steve Miller	275	22.	17	Ton Kamarowski	24
8.	8	Ken Richards	264	23.	69	Mike Harvan	21
9.	0	Ron Menard	236	24.	8	Jack Monaghan	19
10.	23	Jerry Lewis	200	25.	39	Gary Morton	18
11.	100	Jim Renaud	196	26.	10	Kirk DesRosier	17
12.	12	Julius Czombos	186	27.	48	Ron Trepanier	16
13.	15	Larry Jackson	138	28.	09	Tom Williams	14
14.	66	Mike Smith	106	29.	57	John Banks III	14
15.	108	Erv Baumgarden	104	30.	10	Joe Holden	14

**Ex-owner John Fahringer on disciplining a cheating driver:**

"We heard that this Joe Holden had added some oxytone to his gasoline which wasn't legal because the rule was that you could only have straight gasoline. When we found out, we took a sample down to the University of Windsor to have it analyzed because he had won a championship feature. When it came back, the professor confirmed that it was oxytone but that it had no effect on the combustibility of the gasoline. So, now

the argument became, 'Fine, he was cheating but he could have pissed in the tank and it would have done the same thing.' Then the argument went, 'Yeah, but oxytone is easier on the engine so he'll have longer engine life.' So what do you do? Do you take his championship away and all of his money, or do you just slap his wrists? ... We ended up taking it all away from him. From what I remember, I don't think he was too happy."

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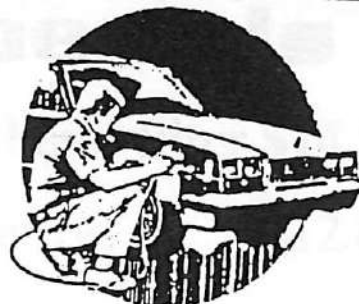
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**Don Smith, or "Speedy"** as they called him in his racing days, was probably the most loyal and devoted Checker Flag participant from day 1 to its final season in 1992.

Don's involvement in car racing began in 1950 by driving his Belle River buddy's 1936 Ford Coupe at Dayus Raceway. He immediately became a major contender at Dayus and Windsor Speedway as well as tracks in Michigan and Ohio. In fact, says Smith, the Americans harboured hostility against the Windsortie for always "heading back to Canada with their money."

After a few years of driving, Smith decided to climb out of the car and become a Flagman or Starter working both at Dayus and Blue Bird Raceways. However, with those two closing down in the late '50's, Don was hired

at Checker Flag Raceway in 1962, its first full racing season. Smith enjoyed his role as Flagman but he says, "Nothing in the world can give you a bigger high than racing. When the adrenaline gets going, you can take all the drugs in the world and it just doesn't compare."

When asked who his biggest supporter was, Smith chuckles.

"My mother. She used to get all wound up in the stands and she'd argue with the fans and everything else. She was my number one fan."

During Checker's first five years, Don was the Starter/Flagman, responsible for enforcing the rules on the track. After waving his last checkered flag in 1967, Don was promoted once more within the realm of racing, rising up to the scorer's tower to become full-time announcer or, as he titles it, "continuous mouthpiece." That year, the crowds averaged approximately 3,000 people as Don began his new and most cherished career. With the exception of one season, Smith announced every race at Checker Flag between 1967 and 1992. His task in the booth was to

"make a verbal excitement in the crowd," says Smith. "The more I can wind 'em up, the more I like it myself. Even if the race isn't close, I'll make it close."

This driver turned flagman turned announcer had another



*Announcer, Flagman, Program Man, hell of a nice guy, Don Smith*

responsibility considered by most to be vital for the fans to enjoy the show. Smith, who's been employed by the Windsor Star for many years, published and printed every single Checker Flag program starting in 1963. From selling advertising space, to type-setting articles, to accumulating pictures, to designing the front cover, 'ol "Speedy" handled the entire operation for thirty years.

Even though Don has announced at Ridgeway, he misses Checker Flag: "I'm really disappointed," mutters

Smith. "We're the motor city capital of Canada yet we haven't got a speedway."

Don attributes Checker's demise on a few factors. Besides the rising cost of the sport, he blames the former property owner for his lack of concern. "He was an absentee owner," says Don. "He really didn't have much interest in it other than owning the property. I don't know if he's even been up there."

Furthermore, Smith believes that the speedway was doomed from the start.

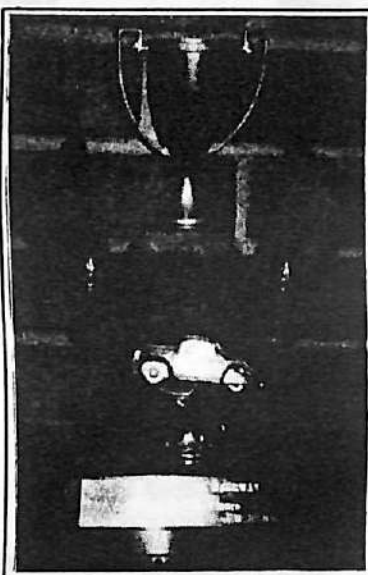
"Government boards, county and city officials don't like speedways period. That's the really unfortunate part because I don't think you'll see another one Essex County. The government does everything to stop it."

Aside from all of his stock car related accomplishments, everyone remembers Don Smith as an essential element of Checker Flag. In fact, the most common thing I heard from everyone I talked to was, "You should really talk to Don Smith."

"Don's been a great advocate of the sport," said local car racing legend Johnny Banks.

Former Checker Flag owner, Jack Monaghan, added his sentiments: Don was definitely one of the most dedicated, die hard people. He worked on the program and the announcing and did a good job."

Gary Fauteux summed it up best: "Checker Flag would have went down much sooner if it wasn't for people like Don Smith."



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# Checker Flag 'Big Gun' Don Mallat

Don Mallat drove his first lap at Checker Flag in 1968. Twenty-five years and a truckload of trophies later, he sits in his family room overflowing with the same excitement he had at twenty-seven years old when he and his '57 Pontiac first challenged the big guys on Highway 42's dirt track. Not only did Mallat eventually become a "big gun" at Checker Flag in the 70's, but he was a consistent winner in the 80's and '90's as well, speeding his way to victory throughout Ontario, Michigan, Ohio and even Florida.

Smiles are plenty while Mallat, now 52, energetically speaks about his car racing achievements. And we chat, surrounded by four walls plastered with snapshots from the past, including new and old pictures of victory laps and crewmen. In his blue jeans and black t-shirt he leans forward and acquaints me with his very first racing season.

"I tried to duplicate Stan Earish's car," says Mallat, "because he was always the guy to beat."

Two years later, Mallat defeated the mighty Earish in total points which, Don attests, was his main objective from the beginning.

"When I started out (in 1968), my goal was to be in the top ten at Checker, and I finished ninth. My goal in the second year was to be in the top five. I finished fourth. Then the third year, I was track champion....we worked day and night at my brother's garage," says Mallat with a smile. Then without losing eye contact, he shakes his head slowly, "It's hard work, man. It's a lot of time and a lot of money."

After first snatching the points purse in 1970, Mallat became a regular winner at Checker and other tracks for a quarter of a century thereafter.

"The way I was brought up was, 'Don't get into anything unless you do it right.' And the only way to do it right was to win."

And winning he did. "I've probably won about 100 features at Checker. Jack [Monaghan] and I are probably pretty close on that." At one time, Mallat had won 16 races in a row at Checker Flag. He even held the track record for a while at 16.55 seconds. The 1978 season was one of Mallat's best, earning him the title of "tri-track" champion by winning at Mt. Clemons, Checker Flag and Toledo. In the late '80's he won three straight years in New Smyrna Beach, Florida on the CASCAR circuit.

When asked to explain the essential components of a steady stock car winner, Mallat answers, "It takes a lot of work, and aggressiveness on the track. You can't have any fear, but you have to be smart too. You can't just drive with your foot to the floor because you'll end up tearing up your car. You have to think. You watch what's happening as you're getting towards the front, seeing what other cars are doing. You study 'em before you get to 'em."



The next thing I know, I'm in his billiards room where several trophies stand tall and big photographs gleam from the wall. His passion for racing continues to bubble as he recaptures the sensation of having his hands on the wheel. With his teeth big and white, he describes the technique used when steering into and out of a corner:

"You'd get up to about 85 or 90, then you'd hit the brake, throw her sideways, try to keep it at that momentum, then shoot out of the corner like a rocket. It was sorta fun. There were a lot of guys who couldn't do it and they'd run into you - boom, boom! You drove yours sideways, he'd get his sideways, then he'd spin out in front of you and come down and slam you in the front." He lets out a loud laugh,

I gathered awful quickly that Don had a passion for racing, "maybe I was too serious," he admits, "but I didn't like getting into anything half-ass. It's just the way I am."

I soon learned that being a champion driver requires special abilities common to only those few who excel at the sport. Windsorite Don



Later on, Don reminisces about Checker Flag, blending his vigour with a touch of sanctity, "When Fauteux had it, it was a going concern. That place was packed every Wednesday and Saturday. People didn't have a place to sit so they'd squeeze in the aisles. Kids were climbing on the fence and everything else. We had a lot of competition then, so people were talking about the races during the week, too. That created a great kind of atmosphere."

Compare that quote to the following: "In the '80's everything changed: no more 'Qualifying Heats', no more 'Helmet Dash', no more 'Pursuit'. We just had two heat races and a Feature. So, then, a lot of fans who used to love to get to the track early, buy a program, write down all the times and talk about the races had lost all that."

Mallat happens to be one of those few, but if not for Checker Flag he may not have followed through with racing.

Several kids from this area would love to carry on the legacies of Earish, Monaghan and Mallat but

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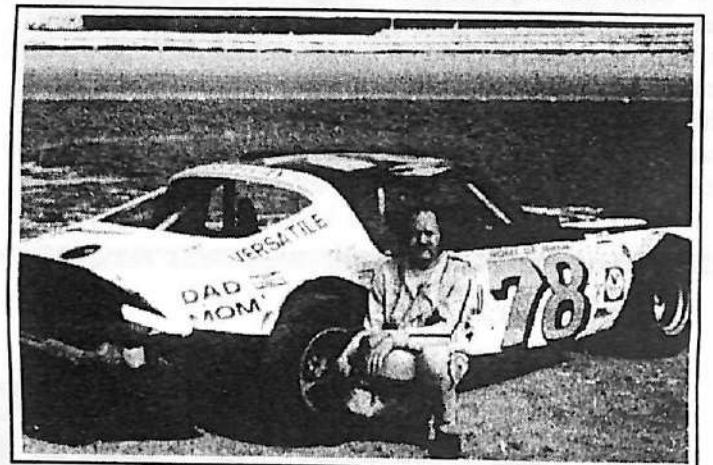
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the opportunity has now passed. This generation won't hear a kid from Essex County say,

"I tried to duplicate Mallat's car because he was the guy to beat."

And that's kinda sad.



(above) Sittin' in the 70's, (left) winning in the 80's standing proud in the 90's, Don Mallat

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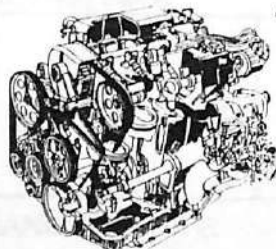
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# Ray Morneau Remembers...

In his driveway sits a stock car on a trailer; in the back yard is a black van with all kinds of car racing insignia pasted and painted on the side. On the inside of Ray Morneau's house is a room decorated and dedicated to Checker Flag.

"It was home away from home," remembers Ray, as he lights up a cigarette. "I was there from opening day till the day it closed. I started out working on a car then got into scoring in the tower. Then I did the flagging."

Ray and I talk inside a life sized scrap book dressed up with a shelf of trophies, toy cars, posters, articles and huge framed photographs of his racing boys, Ray Jr., Rick and Randy, all of whom were born and raised at Checker Flag.

"When the kids were three years old, I'd take 'em to the track and sit 'em behind me when I was flagging."

Because the flagman's main job is to enforce rules, referee the race and occasionally defend his decisions physically he's usually a large man. Ray, however, is the exception to the rule, but was rarely forced to protect himself with clenched fists: "Never in all my years did

anybody climb up the tower and try to hit me. They always felt that I was fair to them. They coulda thrown me onto the track if they wanted, but they respected me."

## Ray remembers...

... "One night," recalling an error he made and subsequently regretted, "when I had a caution flag out, Duke Sozenchuck and Marty Dupuis' son pulled beside each other - they were good friends and they were talking to each other, which I didn't know - but they bumped cars, and I thought they were trying to get at each other so I threw 'em both off the track. Boy, were their families mad."

... "We had some great times out there," continues Ray. "One thing about racing though: if you get into a fight with a guy on the track - like one night I watched Stan Earish and Joe Holden actually fist fight and then the next night at the the track in Mount Clemons, who's sitting together? Joe and Stan. I even said to Stan, 'I can't believe you two guys. Last night you were fighting and now you're sitting together.' But that's racing."

... "After the races we'd always go to Lepain's Tavern on Walker Road. If there was a fight in there, you'd always figure that Johnny Banks was in the middle of it. But the drivers all stuck together. They could hate each other on the track but if one got hurt they'd all be over to help him out. That's the way racing is."

"That's the way racing is," says Morneau repeatedly - almost like he's pleading its innocence, its goodness, its benefit, the happiness it brings, the camaraderie it kindles, the relationships it forms and the involvement it initiates.

## Ray remembers...

... Close friend, Don Dame, who passed away last year:

"Don was my buddy from way back. I used to help him when he got into racing. Then when my kids got into racing he sponsored them. That's why we carry his name on our cars today. We'll carry his name on our car as long as we race. He was a real good man. He worked hard for what he got but never got a chance to enjoy it."

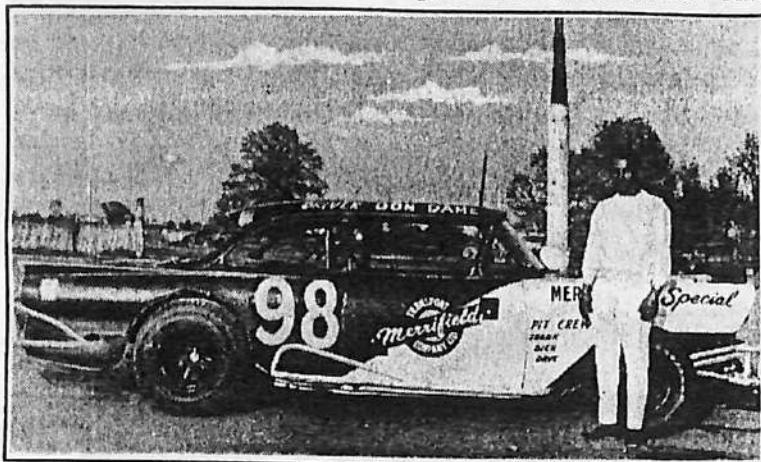
... Co-flagman and driver Joe Holden, who was involved with Checker since the early 60s: "Joe was

a big man. When he was flagging he was strict. You didn't stop your car and ever climb up the tower because he'd wipe you right off the map."

... refereeing demolition derbies: "You'd line about

bangin' each other. That's where you have all the arguments. And the crowd would get behind me and yell, 'Ray, he's doing it on purpose!'"

"I got so mad at him once at a meeting. He said to me, 'How do you expect me to pace these cars around?' And



"The Hustler," Don Dame, circa 1963 (courtesy of Armand Lachance)

100 cars against the wall, throw the green flag, then close your eyes."

## Ray remembers...

... the toughest driver to referee: "Don Mallat would tempt me. I had a rule that who ever was leading the race would set the pace for the pack. Well, Mallat would play games with me. He'd be leading but then would come out of one or two turns, slow down, and have everybody all bunched up and they'd be

I said, 'Well, if you can't do it then you do the flagging' and I'll jump into your car and do it for ya!"

... young driver, Len Couvillon (Leroy's son):

"When you've been around the track a long time and you watch these kids grow up, you can see what they're doing wrong. One year Len Couvillon was leading in points, with Jack Monaghan in second. Len had 'think of ol' 3 [Monaghan's number]' painted on his dash. And I'd watch Couvillon and I'd see



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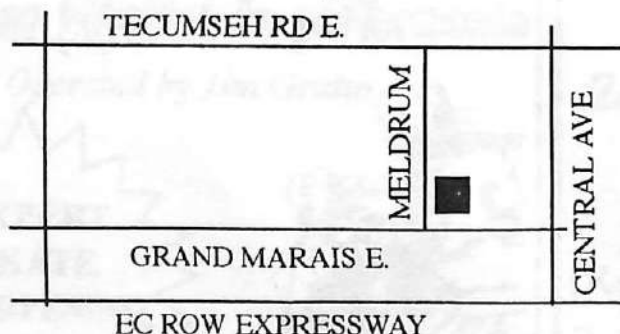
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Amidst their memorabilia, Ray Sr., Randy and Ray Jr. Morneau (far left). That's a life-sized Rusty Wallace (Nascar champion) glaring at us from the centre.

that he wasn't driving like he could - so I went over to talk to Len and I said, 'Listen, Len, do me a favour, the first thing you do is take this sign painted on the dash and get it the hell outta here!'"

... racing's changing-ways over the years: "In the old days, in the 60's, if you had problems with your car, the big boys like Mallat, Dame, Monaghan would give you parts. They'd even help you fix your car. But then it got into big sponsors and money and some of 'em wouldn't even let you in their garage to see their car. It became a business. When we first started Checker Flag, it was fun. We'd run into each other but we'd all work together to get the guy out there for the next race. But that's what killed racing: it became a business."

... Checker Flag: "Leslie, a guy who drives in NASCAR, got his start at Checker - on national television he said that he got his start in Windsor. He said, 'Anybody who can drive Checker Flag can drive anywhere.'"

It was a hard track to drive.

One corner was flat, the other was steep.' If you could conquer Checker, you could race anywhere."

Sons Ray Jr. and Randy join us at the end my Checker tour. For them, it's just the beginning, as they lay photo albums on the pool table and take over for their dad.

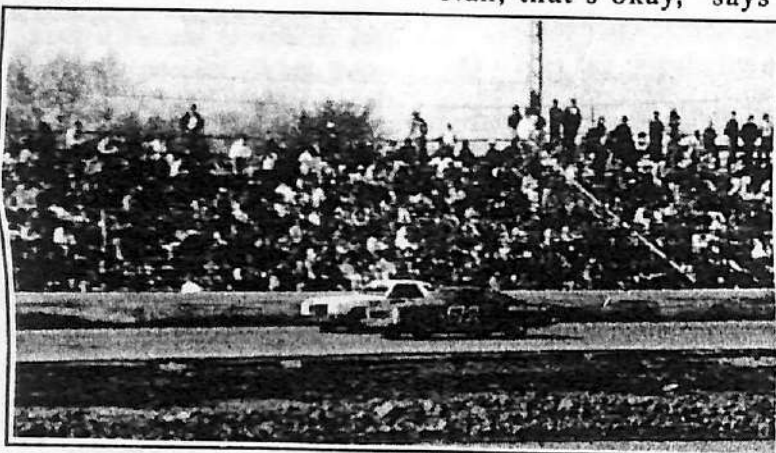
"It was a place where everybody met," says twenty-two year old Randy, ex-Checker employee and current driver. "Everybody I know I met from the track. I met my first and only girlfriend there. Now that the track is closed," laughs Randy, "I can't get rid of her."

"You couldn't get a seat back then," says twenty-nine year old Ray Jr., referring to the early 80s. "Within six years you could get a seat anywhere you wanted."

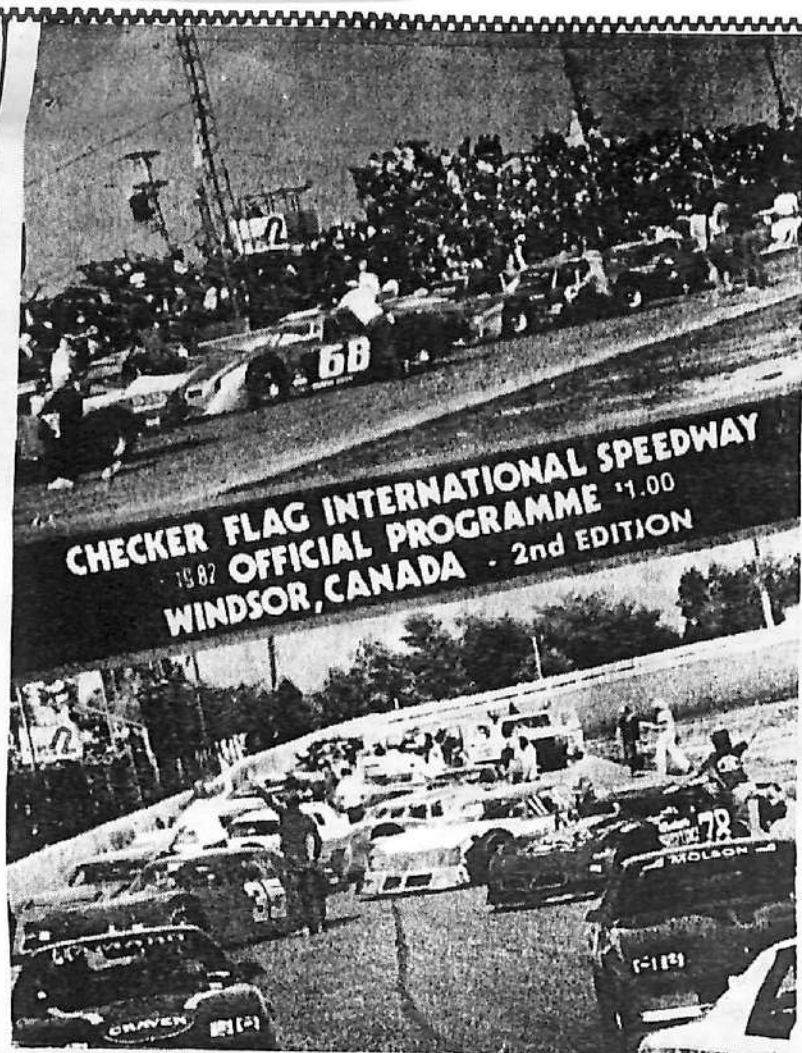
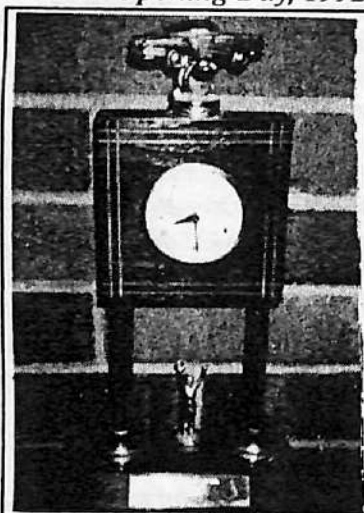
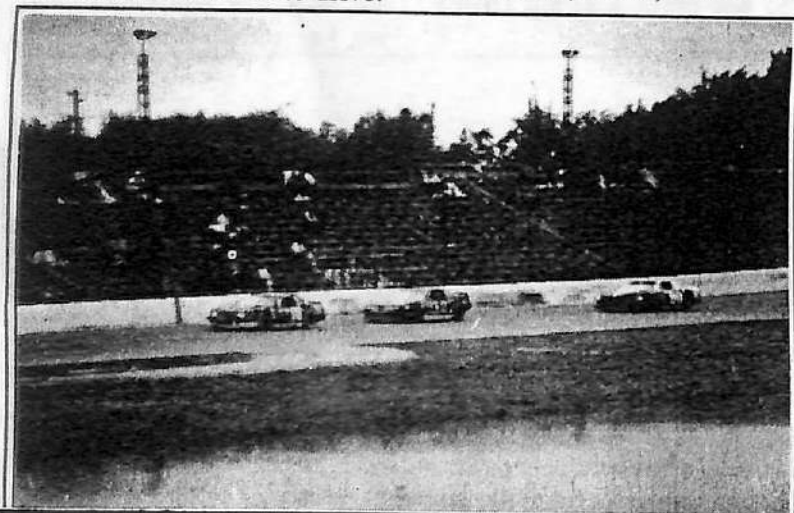
Hitting me left and right are quotes from a true Checker family. My head twists back and forth, nodding, listening, engrossed and absorbed in the emotion within this Checker Flag shrine. "I have to leave now," I say with a handful of pictures, a video tape

and some articles. "Lemme help you put some of these pictures away."

"Nah, that's okay," says



(above) Ray Jr. vs. Randy in front of a capacity crowd, circa 1987, (below) Doin' the wave on Opening Day, 1992



Randy. "Now that it's out, I'm gonna look at it for a while. Once you get us talking about racing, we don't stop."

"Yep," says Ray Jr.

Ray Sr., sir, any last comments?

"It was good." He pauses and clears his throat. "All the time we were out there, it was good. We really miss it, I'll tell ya. We really miss that place."

I start towards the door, but Randy keeps talking and follows me, clinging to the stranger who walked in and asked, "What do you remember about Checker Flag? Stupid question. It should have been: 'Do you remember anything but Checker Flag?'"

"I hate driving by that place now," says Randy with wet eyes. "I just hate to see it sit there."

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**A**s my Checker Flag journey dragged into autumn. Next stop: Jim Renaud's house, on a cool October evening. Excited that my work was nearly finished, I swiftly sailed up his steps and rapped on his door. Two hours later, my mood reversed 180 degrees. I stepped slowly down that same concrete porch and ambled into the night, bleak and subdued with the whole Checker mission.

I was suddenly buried in thought, feeling grizzled and sad for Windsor's automotive addicts and those race track inhabitants who retreated regularly to Checker Flag. There's so much more to salvage, I thought. Much more than I originally imagined.

Two hours of talking to "Gentleman" Jim Renaud - driver, mechanic, car builder, former WOSCRA president - was not enough time to sample every course of the Checker meal. I walked out of his home feeling inadequate and guilty, seizing what I realized all along: that much more needed to be uncovered and explored.

So I climbed into my car, turned the key, switched on my lights, pushed the clutch down, then sped away. In my rearview mirror stood Jim Renaud in his dusty basement, flipping through albums filled with newspaper articles, pic-

tures and prizes from the past. "We were all good friends," he commented on the Checker family. "We all got along. In the early days there was a lot of camaraderie."

From Matchette street in the west end, I steered onto E.C.

just in ecstasy." Jim is moved by his own story. "That was probably the best night I ever had in my life. It was the most memorable."

But there is a void in his voice; a residue of depression sticks to his words. But he lightens up



Jim Renaud with a rooftop of trophies, circa 1964

Row and began my slow trek home. While checking my side mirrors, I caught Jim Renaud once again, peering through his glasses at a photograph of himself holding a trophy on race night.

"On this championship night I was the fastest time," he said. "I won the Helmet Dash, the Pursuit, the heat race and the Feature. I cleaned house that night. When I came home I was

when talking about winning the Hot Dog Derby seven consecutive years. The Hot Dog Derby was an event sponsored by Hi Ho Restaurant. Participants would race a few laps, stop, unstrap their helmet, climb out of the car, eat a hot dog and drink a coke, then finish the race. Jim was the King of the Hot Dog hill for nearly twenty years.

"One year I was beat because a guy shoved the hot dog down

his coveralls," he said with a smile. "Another time, I ate two hot dogs and still beat everybody."

And then he came back to.

"It's nice that we can come back with those types of memories," he sighed.

Memories. That race track is flooding with memories and moments but I was only exposed to a tiny sliver of who and what lived there. Twelve pages doesn't do that track justice, but it's all we can do. It's unfortunate that people like Russell Wood, David Craig, Len Couvillon, Marty Dupuis, Baz Westfall, Joe Holden, Ron Menard, Bob Merrifield, Jimmy Vandelinder and a phone book full of others aren't able to share their finest hours and personal triumphs and laughs with our small community. I wish everyone could understand the depth of the loss incurred by the past and future car junkies in our flat county.

And as I watched Jim Renaud scratch the grit off his old trophies and lose himself in his past I wondered about the other one thousand people who are also losing their favourite playground.

"Look here," Jim seemed to say as he pointed out his stock car and mechanical achievements.

"This was me when I was recognized for my talents."

Jim, speaking on behalf of Windsor's race car enthusiasts, presented their case in a quiet, down to earth way.

"Racing was in your blood," he said. "You'd work your fanny off all week long. Winters, summers, it didn't matter. I remember one night when I came home after working forty-eight straight hours."

Designing chassis and race cars is a talent possessed by a factory full of Windsorites, and

Checker Flag used to offer that chance for car specialists to demonstrate their expertise, obtain some recognition and prove to everyone that they were, indeed, winners.

What will future kids do, with those same talents, to show that they, too, are winners?

Those recking balls will crush more than just an oval track; collapsing as well will be a lively history and the potential of a similar future.

By habit, I look again into my rearview mirror. And there, reflecting back at me is every boxer who ever stepped into Checker's ring.

And I plead: "I can't get to yas. That's all I can do."

And they reply: "We've heard that before."

(continued from page 23)

## THE MAGIC QUESTION

Q - Why did Checker Flag fall to mediocrity and then to oblivion after the consortium got out of it?

Monaghan: "Bad management. I think they stopped enforcing the rules at Checker Flag. If a sport doesn't have a set of rules, than it isn't really a sport, is it? The rules must be the same for everybody and not

have different standards for different people. When people in the stands get to know this, they stop coming. And that's why I quit racing there."

Fahringer: In the '60s and '70s 200 racers would make the rules, then live by them. Then, it evolved to where Jack and I were making the rules but we knew what the racers wanted. They had to bring the club back in [in 1988] because Checker Flag wasn't doing a great job of it."

Q - Has the popularity of stock car racing dwindled since the '70s?

Fahringer: "The sport of stock car racing is as popular as ever."

Monaghan: "Stock car racing far exceeds anything going these days. I watched one on TV last week where there was 110,000 people."

In those five years, Checker Flag entertained over 80,000 spectators with several big sponsors [ie. Molson Export, Firestone Tires] supplying huge purses to attract top notch competition from Ontario, Michigan, and Ohio. As well, the owners dabbled in creative venues such as tractor pulls, bike races, rodeos, Hollywood stunt shows, dare-devil features, Suicide Seldon, who blew himself out of a coffin, Ken Carter, who would jump a

row of twenty cars and, the best received of all, plain old Demolition Derbies.

## LAST WORDS

On the absence of a track in Windsor:

Monaghan: "It's too bad. It really is a shame. Everybody has to go down the road to race now."

Fahringer: "It doesn't give the local guys a chance to go out and see if they're interested in that sport."

Monaghan: "It's too bad because it can keep a lot of kids occupied because they become so consumed in it."

## THE FINAL DECADE

When discussing its downfall, most people agree on one definite cause: bad management. Apparently, Bob Robinson, although successful in his first few seasons, failed to offer good racing at Checker Flag in the latter 80s and 90s. Says long time flagman Ray Morneau: "When Robinson first took over, he really improved it. He poured a lot of money into it but I don't know what changed Bob."

Ray's son, Randy, who raced regularly in the 80s, voices his view: "When he first came, he did an unbelievable job. Robinson had

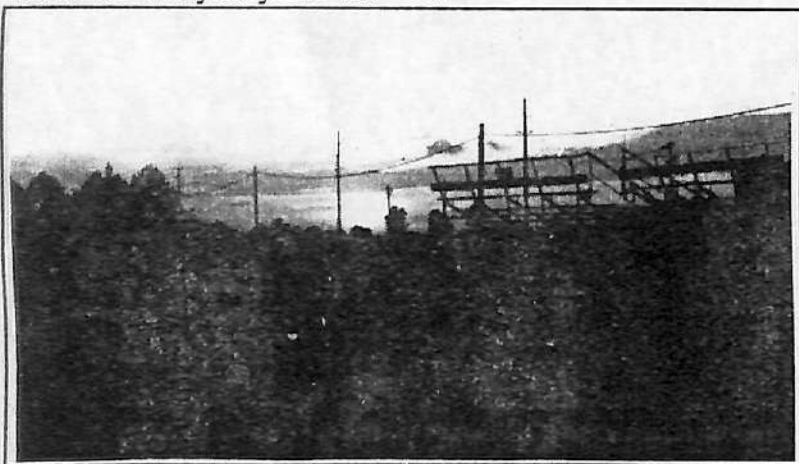
NASCAR drivers come over - he had all the big guys. A few years later he didn't have one big race."

Eventually, the track couldn't survive on the weak attendance. In 1990, it's name changed one last time to "Windsor Speedway" in an attempt to rejuvenate interest, but it was unsuccessful.

By its final season in 1992, admission fees were up to \$9.00 making it an expensive evening for any family. Last October, Checker Flag/Windsor Speedway entertained its last race on the old track.

To the joy of some neighbours, but to the dismay of many drivers and fans young and old, Checker Flag will no longer be. Many memories, fights, cheers, trophies, announcements, popcorn, programs, overloaded parking, blowing dust, night time excitement, revving engines, accidents and a slew of stories will be buried beneath the quiet subdivision of old County Rd. 42, the highway which once connected nowhere to nowhere. But, life is full of yesterdays and Checker Flag is now one more document within that huge filing cabinet of lost eras. For all drivers, fans, owners and mechanics who played on Checker's stage for thirty years, we say goodbye

(Well said Ken, Thanks.)



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