

# A Day That Spanned The Sport's History

By Jon Thompson

LONG BEACH, Calif.—The idea of having a bunch of hoary old Grand Prix drivers thrashing a bunch of outdated GP cars around the newest racing circuit in Grand Prix racing may have seemed like no more than a whimsical, low-key trip back through time to some observers and fans. But to the drivers involved, the vintage car race that took place on Long Beach's United States Grand Prix West circuit March 27 was anything but low-key.

Dan Gurney, for instance, the pilot of Tom Wheatcroft's lovely old 1959 BRM, took it all very seriously. The day before the race he governed his diet very carefully, abstained from strong drink and went to bed early. When he showed up at the Start/Finish line, ready to climb into his 17-year-old classic racing machine, he found himself short one pair of driving gloves and had to take emergency measures, but when the flag fell none of that mattered; Dan put the hammer down, and he flashed off and away from the rest of the pack and never was headed. He drove the old BRM with the same verve that many racing fans remember very well indeed, drifting the car through the bends, letting its stern wriggle just a bit as it exited Long Beach's tight corners. When it was over a smiling Gurney climbed out of the old racer to shake hands with a broadly grinning Tom Wheatcroft. "I love it," Gurney said "I drove one like it in Cordoba, Argentina 17 years ago. I finished second to Trintignant."

Well, that's fine; Gurney loved it and had a ball, and the crowd loved it too, but what about the rest of the affair? For starters it boasted 10 of the biggest names ever to be emblazoned on the flanks of racing machines, and 10 of the most significant machines ever to put a wheel



Juan Fangio, sitting straight up in a short sleeved shirt, with his still-massive arms sawing at the wheel, managed to get fastest lap on his way to third place.

Jim MacQueen

trackside. In addition to Gurney and his Wheatcroft BRM there was Black Jack Brabham in a 1959 Cooper, Stirling Moss in a 1954 Maserati 250F, Juan Manuel Fangio in a 1955 Mercedes-Benz W196, Carroll Shelby in a 1952 Ferrari 375GP, Maurice Trintignant in a 1952 Talbot-Lago, Rene Dreyfus in a 1932 Tipo 51 Bugatti with Innes Ireland along as riding mechanic, Richie Ginther in a 1927 Bigatti Tipo 37A, Phil Hill in a 1926 Bugatti Tipo 37 and Denis Hulme in a 1957 Cooper. A veritable three-star selection of machinery and drivers, to be sure, and from outward appearances Gurney wasn't the only party to be taking things

seriously. Mercedes-Benz, for instance, which had anted up one of its beautiful 1955 GP cars for the event, rented Ontario Motor Speedway a few days before the race so that Fangio could have a bit of time in which to acquaint himself with the car. When the car fell victim to a broken piston, the German company flew a whole new car in from Unterturkheim instead of fixing the engine in the first car "because it was easier this way."

Race morning found all 10 cars hunkered down in their own special section of the GP garage area in the Long Beach Arena, mechanics with their heads

and hands under hoods, drivers standing nervously by and flunkies busily keeping the aging sheet metal as dust-free as possible. The area was jammed with spectators edging as close as possible to the retaining fences, trying to get just a glance at the drivers and cars. They all got their chance when finally the old timers got all lined up at the Start/Finish line on Long Beach's Ocean Boulevard. They were flagged off in pairs, each pair a few seconds apart and Gurney, sitting on the front row, squirted off into the lead as

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## SCCA Announces Schedule For Nine Bosch VW Races

DENVER—Dates and sites for the nine remaining 1976 Robert Bosch VW Gold Cup series for Formula Super Vee have been announced by sanctioning Sports Car Club of America.

The popular series for VW based open-wheel, single-seat racers will feature 100-kilometer (approximately 62-mile) races at major road racing circuits around the nation, each carrying a \$10,000 race purse paid to the top 25 finishers, the winner taking home \$2500.

Robert Bosch Corp., which joined Volkswagen of America in sponsoring the professional Formula Super Vee series last year, is also posting a \$20,000 contingency points fund to be paid to the top 10 drivers in the championship point standings at season's end.


The series began in January at Daytona Beach, Fla. and continues May 9 at Pennsylvania's Pocono International Raceway with the final event scheduled for Oct. 10 at Watkins Glen, N.Y. All events will be co-featured with other SCCA professional races, including the Formula 5000 and Trans-American Championship series events.

Among top competitors expected to contest the 1976 Robert Bosch VW Gold Cup crown are Tom Bagley, State College, Pa., winner of the Daytona opener and 1975 series runner up; Howdy Holmes, Alexandria, Va.; Richard Melville, Kingston, Jamaica; Bob Lazier, Vail, Colo.; Benny Scott, Hollywood, Calif.; Billy McConnell, Whitmore Lake, Mich. and Bill Alsup, Woodstock, Vt.—all of whom placed in the top 10 in the 1975 standings—as well as James Crawley of Philadelphia, SCCA's 1975 Castrol Rookie of the Year.

Car preparation rules remain unchanged from 1975 and starting grids are expected to average 35 Super Vees. To date, 55 drivers have indicated they will be competing in a majority of the races.

The Super Vee formula was introduced in 1969 with selected professional races held the following year. The series began in 1971 with Volkswagen of America sponsorship.

The 1976 SCCA Robert Bosch VW Gold Cup series schedule is:  
 May 9, Pocono International Raceway, Long Pond, Pa.; May 30, Nelson Ledges Road Course, Garrettsville, Ohio; June 20, Mosport Park, Ont.; July 11, Watkins Glen Grand Prix Circuit, Watkins Glen, N.Y.; Aug. 8, Mid-Ohio Sports Car Course, Lexington, Ohio; Aug. 15, Brainerd International Raceway, Brainerd, Minn.; Aug. 29, Road America, Elkhart Lake, Wis.; Sept. 12, Road Atlanta, Gainesville, Ga. (tent.); Oct. 10, Watkins Glen Grand Prix Circuit, Watkins Glen, N.Y.



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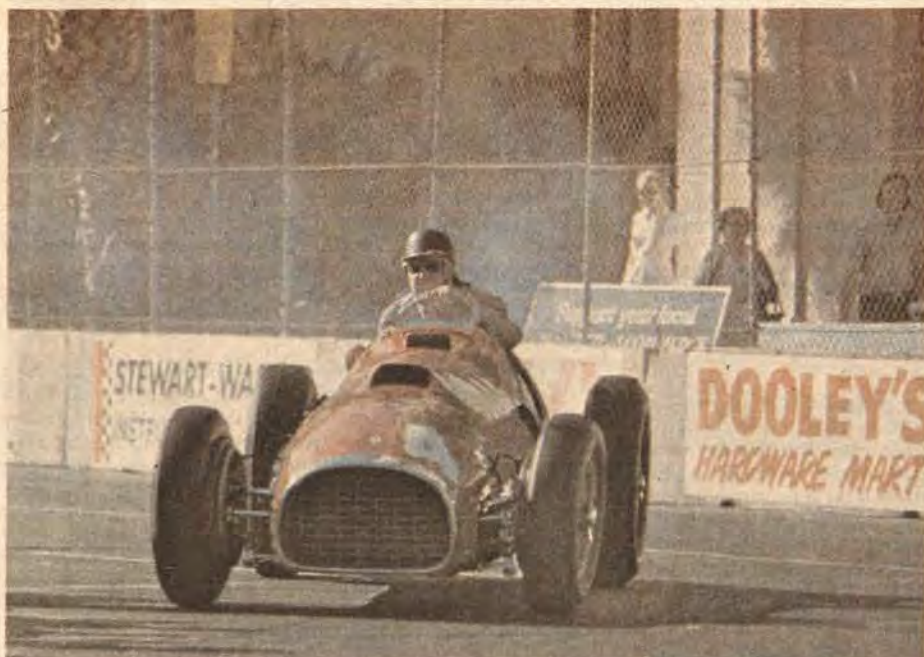
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One thing you can say for Carroll Shelby: win, lose, or break, he always has a good time. Alan Sessarego



Dan Gurney took the Long Beach vintage event more seriously than most—but he won. Miles Ottenheimer

# Crowd-Pleasing Vintage Race Goes To Dapper Dan Gurney

**Continued From Preceding Page**  
the flag fell and never lost his position; Brabham stayed in second spot. Fangio drove like the master he is, flicking his silver mount here and there, giving it huge doses of power, and though he set the fastest lap of the event, a 1:45 flat, 2.8 seconds faster than Gurney's best time, he was unable to catch and pass Brabham's flying Cooper.

Denis Hulme, who started the race in sixth position, had a little better luck. On the third lap of the event he got by Maurice Trintignant's Talbot-Lago and on the next lap he was past Shelby's Ferrari as the Italian car's V12 engine blew. Hulme was firmly in possession of fourth place, and that's where he was when the race ended.

The Maserati 250F of Stirling Moss didn't get even that far, going out in the very early few laps with mechanical problems. At the halfway point the top four were in the positions they would occupy at the finish of the event: Gurney, Brabham, Fangio and Hulme.

But if some of the other drivers couldn't go fast, at least they could have fun; before Shelby's car's engine went away, for instance, he was about to lap Dreyfus and Ireland when Ireland made a naughty gesture at him. Shelby did the only thing he could do. He shook his fist at the pair, laughed heartily, and drove around them.

When it was over and the retired GP pilots had coasted their stuttering machinery to a halt on the tarmac on Ocean Blvd., Gurney accepted the traditional bottle of champagne and promptly doused everyone at hand, including drivers, crewmen and reporters, smiling hugely all the while. In the end, eight of the 10 starters made it through the 10 laps, with Moss' Maserati and the Bugatti of Hill succumbing before the race ended.

All in all, seeing greats like Gurney and Fangio blast these fantastic old racers around the GP course that less than 24 hours later would be the scene of a championship Formula One event was a remarkable experience, but did it prove anything at all, it seems to have demonstrated that men like Gurney, Brabham, Fangio, Hulme and the rest just don't lose their competitive urges. To the millions of American racing fans who grew up idolizing these men, there just couldn't be better news.

## Record Entry For Mint 400

LAS VEGAS, NEV.—The largest pre-entry on record in off road racing assembled for the drawing for starting numbers for the Mint 400, April 24-28, the richest race in the sport. With \$100,000 in guaranteed purse, plus enormous contingency monies, the Mint 400 attracted a total of 406 entries for the random drawing for starting numbers. There were 323 four wheeled devices and 83 motorcycles in the draw.

Competing in the single-seat class, 1973 Mint 400 winner Parnelli Jones drew #182 for his "funny" Blazer, and Mickey Thompson drew #184 for his new V-8 powered buggy. Defending 1975 champion Gene Hirst drew a lucky #62 for his Sandmaster Hustler, and teammate Bobby Ferro is just in front of him, #57 in his new Sandmaster Hustler II. Two time Mint 400 winner Fritz Kroyer will face a lot of traffic from his starting position of #292.

The Bicentennial number 76 went to Modern Motors driver Ivan Stewart, putting him into a visual battle with rivals Ferro and Hirst. Modern Motors teammate John Johnson will also fight traffic from #270 for his single seater. Former Indy 500 champion Johnny Rutherford starts at 265 with his two seat buggy.

Lucky number one went to Dale Flores, who is driving a class 11 Bug, the slowest class in the race. Rolf Tibblin drew #2 for his two seater; he won the bike division in both 1972 and 1973. Tibblin will also be competing for Husqvarna on Sunday as well as driving the two seat buggy on the Tuesday car race. With three weeks left until race day, the Mint 400 is expected to reach a total entry of 500, which will be another record.

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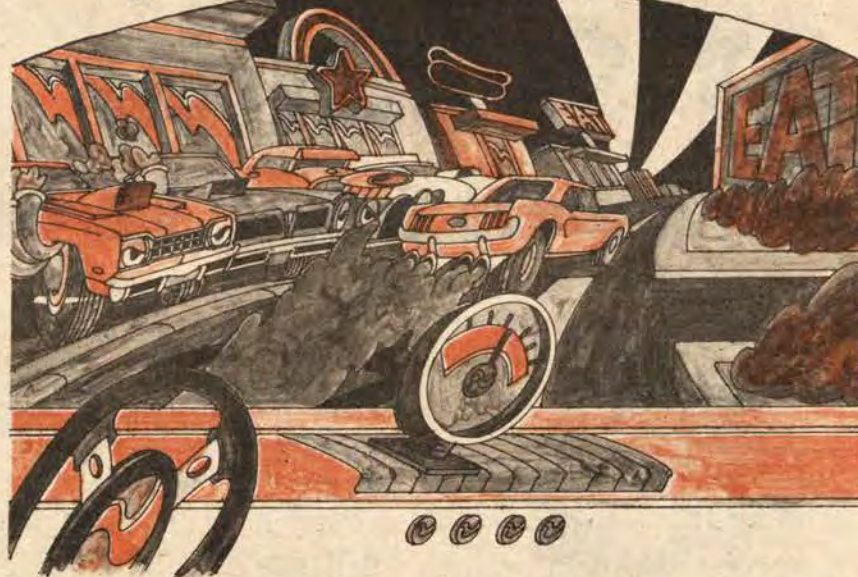
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