

AUTOWEEK VOLUME 27

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AUTOWEEK®

PUBLISHED WEEKLY



75 CENTS

Car Sales Soar; Slowdown Over?

A surprise reversal in mid-December new car sales has brought about an increase of nearly 33% over the year-earlier figure, but auto industry analysts still are hesitating to pronounce the recent slowdown dead.

In the period of Dec. 11-Dec. 20, dealers delivered 223,556 new cars, as compared with 189,826 units for the same period in 1975. (There were eight selling days in this period this year, as compared with nine in 1975; percentage increases are calculated on a daily basis.) Deliveries for the period were from 25,000 to 30,000 units higher than analysts had predicted.

One analyst has boosted his estimate for the entire month of December by 25,000 vehicles, to 675,000. Others are forecasting sales as high as 685,000 units. The latter prediction would put 1976 December sales a solid 14% above the same month in 1975.

The reasons for analysts' reluctance to greet the strong mid-month as the shape of things to come is last year's particularly bad period. The week 1975 period was caused by a nationwide General Motors sales contest early in the month. Such contests tend to lower sales in the period

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Volvo Delays Chesapeake Production

ROCKLEIGH, N.J.—AB Volvo of Gothenburg, Sweden has announced that it is postponing start of production at its nearly completed automobile assembly plant in Chesapeake, Virginia. The company will, however, continue to use the new facility as an import center for Volvos shipped from other factories.

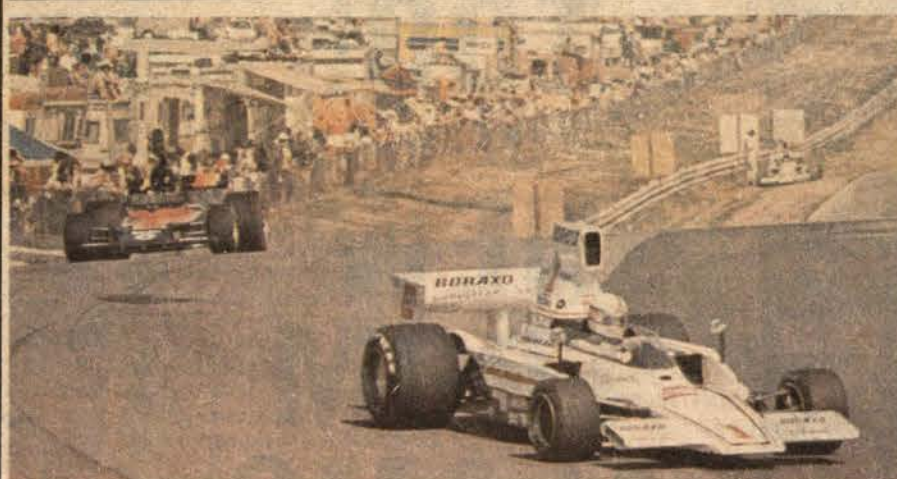
Mr. Hakan Frisinger, senior vice president, AB Volvo, in charge of car production, said the decision to delay assembly of Volvos in the U.S. was prompted by unforeseen changes in the automotive market which have sharply reduced demand for most European-made cars.

The new Volvo facility has been used since early this fall as an import center. Cars produced at existing Volvo factories are shipped to Portsmouth, Virginia and then trucked to Chesapeake. Technicians perform numerous inspection and preparation operations on the cars prior to their reshipment by rail or truck to Volvo dealers throughout the eastern United States.

Volvo first announced its plan to build cars in the U.S. in 1973 after the Swedish automaker had conducted an extensive search for a new production site. The company's commitment to the U.S. market made locating in the United States a logical move. The original plan called for a total investment of \$100 million with an eventual capacity of 100,000 cars annually.

"We are proceeding at this time with the intention of producing cars at the Virginia facility as soon as worldwide market conditions permit," Mr. Frisinger added.

Year-End Racing Review



1976 was a good year for racing. With a few exceptions, the major series went right down to the last race or two before the championships were decided. Cale Yarborough (Number 11 in the top photo) got his first NASCAR Grand National crown in 19 years of trying, and Brian Redman (Number 1 in the lower photo) took his third consecutive Formula 5000 title, leading some to observe that he's the best ever to drive in the stock-block series SCCA killed late in the season.

The full story on these and all the other major racing series is in Autoweek's year-end review beginning on page 7.

LATE NEWS

● The Argentine Grand Prix is still in doubt, apparently. ACCUS' Tracy Bird, the only major racing official Autoweek could find at work during the week between Christmas and New Year's Day, said his office has received nothing official to indicate whether the race is on or off. Mario Andretti, for one, is on the edge of his seat wondering whether he should plan to head for South America or not.

● IMSA reports it has received the official entry for the David Hobbs supposed-to-be-McLaren BMW 320i for the Daytona 24 Hours. Hobbs' co-drivers are listed as Sam Posey and Ronnie Peterson, and the car was entered by BMW Motorsport, not McLaren. Presumably that is a temporary situation.

● USAC veteran Lloyd Ruby, the hard luck king, is reported to have a ride in the 1977 Champ Car series with Fred Carillo. They are trying to secure a Romlin Lightning, the same model Roger McCluskey ran last year.

● Lotus Formula One driver Gunnar Nillson may drive Bruce

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Depailler Smashes Ricard Mark

"We have at last sufficient knowledge to predict the handling characteristics of a Grand Prix car from our wind tunnel experiments. It is a milestone in our development program at Elf Team Tyrrell," said design director Derek Gardner at the conclusion of testing with a new aerodynamic shape on the six-wheeled Elf-Tyrrell.

Patrick Depailler's fastest lap on the full circuit at Paul Ricard was 1:46.6—four seconds faster than the official lap record held by Jochen Mass in the Marlboro-McLaren at 1:50.6! Fastest test lap by World Champion James Hunt in the new M26 Marlboro-McLaren was 1:47.2 and Jacques Laffite in the V12 Gitanes-Ligier lapped at 1:48.9.

Confirming the efficiency of the new body shape on the Elf-Tyrrell, Depailler's

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Stratos' U.S. Debut Set

DAYTONA BEACH, Fla.—A Lancia Stratos is expected to make its American competition debut in the February 5-24 Hours of Daytona at Daytona International Speedway.

The Stratos is set to be entered by Anatoly Arutunoff of Tulsa, Okla. and to be co-driven by Jose Marino.

The car is powered by a V6, 2.4-liter engine producing 310bhp at 8500rpm.

With the entry, Lancia will have joined the Ferrari Boxer, Chevrolet Monza and BMW 320i in selecting Daytona International Speedway as the site for their American competition debut.

This year will also premier the \$10,000 Daytona-LeMans Trophy award. It will be up for grabs by the fastest GT car of American manufacture in top 10 qualifying on Thursday, February 3.

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Jaguar XKE 3.8, 4.2	CP	100.00	50.00	—
Triumph TR5, TR250	CP	100.00	50.00	—
Triumph TR7	DP	200.00	100.00	50.00
Triumph TR6	DP	200.00	100.00	50.00
Triumph GT6, all	DP	100.00	50.00	—
Austin Healey 3000	DP	100.00	50.00	—
MGB, MGB-GT	EP	200.00	100.00	50.00
Triumph TR2, TR3, TR4	EP	100.00	50.00	—
Austin Healey 100-6	EP	100.00	50.00	—
MG Midget 1500	FP	200.00	100.00	50.00
MG Midget/Sprite 1275	FP	100.00	50.00	—
Triumph Spitfire 1500	FP	200.00	100.00	50.00
Triumph Spitfire Mk III & IV	FP	100.00	50.00	—
MGA, all	FP	100.00	50.00	—
Austin Healey 100-4	FP	100.00	50.00	—
MG Midget/Sprite 1098	GP	50.00	—	—
Triumph Spitfire Mk I & II	GP	50.00	—	—
MG Midget/Sprite 948	HP	50.00	—	—
Morris /Austin Cooper	CS	50.00	—	—

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Never Mind The Rest, Redman Wins Again

The big question out there in racing land, now that the CanAm is up and Formula 5000 is down, is, "how well will Brian do?"

An interesting question, particularly in light of the fact that for the third straight year, Brian Redman, driving for Jim Hall and Carl Haas, took his Lola T332 to the top of the F5000 championship standings last season. Though he drove as cleanly and as forcefully as ever, Redman squeaked to this championship, with a season-end tally of three main event wins, a third, a sixth, an eighth, and a DNF.

The first race of this truncated, seven-race series, was held at Pocono May 9, and though Redman won the thing, he clearly was given something to think about: Danny Ongais outqualified Redman, led him in a heat and then in the race, and spun his way into a solid second place.

backmarker, Jones pounced and shot through to take the lead and the win. Oliver was second, and Teddy Pilette was third in the Team VDS Lola T430.

Three weeks later at Watkins Glen July 11 Jones did it again, but this time in a new March 76A, forsaking his Yip Lola. Redman was fastest qualifier, with Unser second fastest ahead of Warwick Brown. Jackie Oliver started from the eighth row, but before many laps were over Unser had spun off the course in the rain, and Redman took evasive maneuvers. That left Teddy Pilette leading from Brown, but then Pilette spun, letting Brown into the lead—and then spun. That put Ollie into the lead, and there he looked like staying until the track started to dry, his tires went off, and he spun, knocking a hole in the oil sump of his Shadow's Dodge engine and putting himself out. Brown then led for a bit, was passed by Unser,



Dan Gurney was thwarted again in his attempt to capture a road racing championship, as his glum look attests. Vern Schuppan, though, may make things right in '77.

qualifying lap ahead of Teddy Pilette and Jackie Oliver in second and third spots, and with the win in the championship round. Ongais and Unser took second and third positions. Redman jumped off to a good lead, and though tire problems allowed contenders Ongais and Unser to cut deeply into his cushion, those problems were not serious enough to cost Redman the win, which gave him enough points so that a third place finish at Riverside, the last race of the season, would give him the championship.

But first that handicap race on Sunday: that one was won by Vern Schuppan. The start consisted of nine groups, between one and nine cars each, the slow guys at the front, and Redman all by himself at the end. Warwick Brown was second, and Derek Brown was third.

The last event of the season, and since the Formula is dead for next year, maybe forever, was at Riverside International Raceway Oct. 16. Al Unser won his heat, Jackie Oliver won the other heat, Unser took the final, and Redman won the

championship. Qualifying times were topped with Al Unser's run, two tenths faster than next-fastest man Alan Jones, with Vern Schuppan third fastest. The first heat was no contest, with Unser leading wire-to-wire. Alan Jones finished in second place, with Danny Ongais blowing a rod out of his Chevy engine and coasting across the line in third place. Heat two was won by Jackie Oliver, but that came as a bit of a surprise, as Redman had led most of the heat. The pass came on the next-to-last lap when Redman's third gear went away, giving Oliver the advantage. He went on to win from Redman, and Brett Lunger, who finished in third place.

The final found Unser on the pole and Oliver next to him, and when the flag fell Unser simply drove off into the distance for another flag-to-flag win. Oliver finished in second spot and Redman, who now seemed completely unable to keep up with either Unser or Oliver, hung on to third. But third was enough, and Redman got his third straight F5000 championship.

Bagley Bags The Gold Cup Super Vee Series

Formula Super Vee, always a frighteningly tooth-and-nail, hammer-and-tongs sort of series, opened 1976 with more of the same, with an added fillip: the cars which made their debuts at Daytona Jan. 31 looked a lot more like race cars than had their predecessors.

All the Super Vee constructors had passed the off season deep in experimentation in aerodynamics. The results were some exotic chassis configurations. On the banking at Daytona that first afternoon out, they began to resemble Indy cars.

Tom Bagley—who eventually won the Bosch Gold Cup, after some awful mid-summer luck—showed up for the first race, and it was just as well, since he won it. He ran away from the pack in qualifying, garnering the pole position in his Kent Oil Zink. His time in doing so was 2:04.251, and he set the fastest lap in the race by bettering this time by a tenth.

Bagley is about the only driver in the series who builds his own engines. Other drivers have come to expect more power from him, even to the point of discussing performance versus driving skill. Such arguments hold little merit, however, in the matter of competition as keen as it is in Super Vee.

Still, Bagley's extra power meant a sizeable advantage. Whatever his secret, it became clear at Daytona that he was onto something. In Super Vee there rarely are endless drafting parades. While it is true that on any track with a long straight two cars generally can run quicker than one, in the cutthroat world of Super Vee, drivers tend to avoid such cooperation. The long trains will get hitched up on the straights, but the competitors prefer the banzai slingshot into the first turn.

And since "every man for himself" is

the prevailing mood, Bagley's power advantage can be put to good use. He has the ability to break away from whatever car is trying to cruise around in his wake, as well as to slingshot around the occasional draftee when he sees fit.

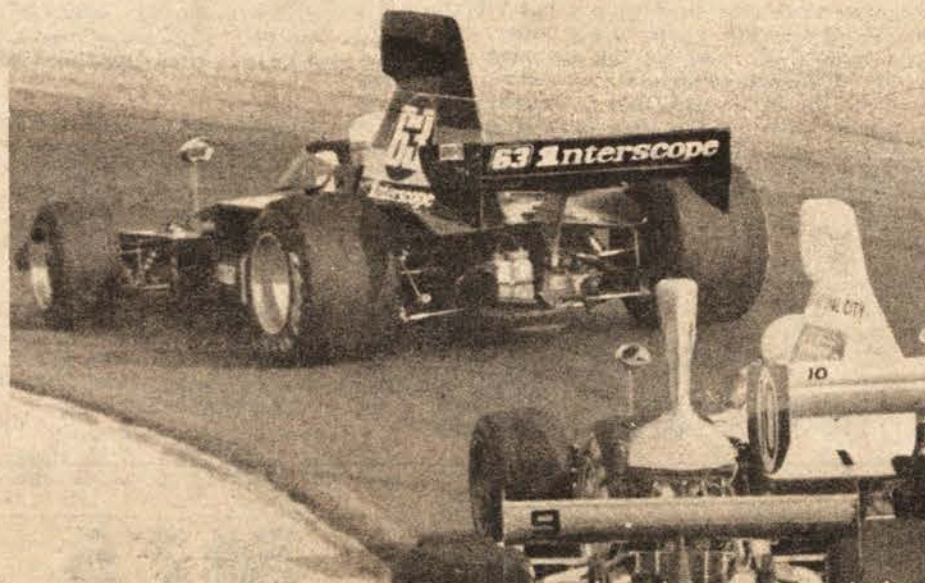
He had no opportunity to see fit at Daytona, where he led every lap. Bagley had won the year-earlier opener in spectacular style, however, starting from the back and proving his skill every foot of the way to the front.

One curious factor at the Daytona opener was a pace lap crash involving Scott Ovel, Jom Grob and Juan Coches. But curiouser and curiousest, as history repeated itself at Pocono May 9. There, at the Jaycee Grand Prix, the starter refused the green at the end of the second pace lap and James George missed his cue and drove his Lola T324 on top of Jerry Schaub's Lola T324.

Once the Pocono festivities were under way, the actual contest was for everything back of first. Bertil Roos qualified fourth and finished first. Roos, it might be pointed out, operates a driving school at the Pocono plant, and really knows his way around the place.

But Roos in his Jerry Jolly-owned Lola T324 was followed around the track by a rolling war for the next four places. He opened up a lead of almost 10 seconds, as Bob Laifer, Fred Phillips, Bill Henderson and Bill Alsop demonstrated the aforementioned draft-for-a-time, then shoot-to-kill Super Vee strategy.

Interesting cars that might have climbed higher dropped out early. Among these were Chris Gleason's Modus, which exited with a jammed throttle on the third time around. Billy McConnell found his computer-designed Essex SB-1 deve-



Probably the major surprise of F5000 in 1976 was the maturation of Danny Ongais (63) as a road racer. Watch for him in '77.

As mentioned, Ongais took the pole, but Redman wasn't asleep—he had second fastest time ahead of Alan Jones in the Teddy Yip Lola. At the end of the event the order was Redman, Ongais, and Vern Schuppan in the Jorgensen Eagle, with Jones a distant seventh.

The second race of the series, which ran at Mosport Park, Ontario, June 20, saw Jones and Oliver exploiting the chinks in Redman's armor. Oliver won the qualifying heat, and was pulling out a solid lead in the final. Eventually, however, Redman and Jones began catching him. Redman's catchup drive ended when his throttles jammed open, causing Brian to effect a fix which dropped him to an eventual eighth place. That left Oliver in the lead, but with Jones hot on his tail, and when Ollie made a mistake in lapping a

who in turn was passed by Jones—and those three confirmed the first three finishers.

Oliver finally took a Formula 5000 win at Road America July 25 from a seventh row starting position. Unser, A. took the fastest qualifying lap, with Brian Redman and Warwick Brown second and third fastest, but at the end it was Oliver, Unser and Vern Schuppan. Oliver's win might not have happened but for some interesting mechanical happenstances. First, the engine in Redman's Lola broke a valve spring and Brian was out of the final after 22 laps. Second, Unser over-revved his Lola's Chevy engine, taking the edge off it. Thirdly, the Shadow crew found that a mere change of oil in the race car's transaxle cured a serious handling problem.

August 8 at Mid-Ohio, Redman got serious about this business of winning motor races, and once again showed the troops how it was done. He started out by qualifying more than a second faster than next man Alan Jones, and then whipping up a 29-second lead before taking the flag in the final ahead of Jackie Oliver and Danny Ongais. Alan Jones, who was by now in the thick of the points chase, was unable to start because of gearbox problems.

August 28 found the Formula 5000 troupe back at Elkhart Lake's Road America for the penultimate round of the series—and more. The championship round, it seems, was slated for Saturday, with the much touted Elkhart Lake Handicap running on Sunday as the feature event. Again it was Brian Redman, both with the fastest

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Bagley

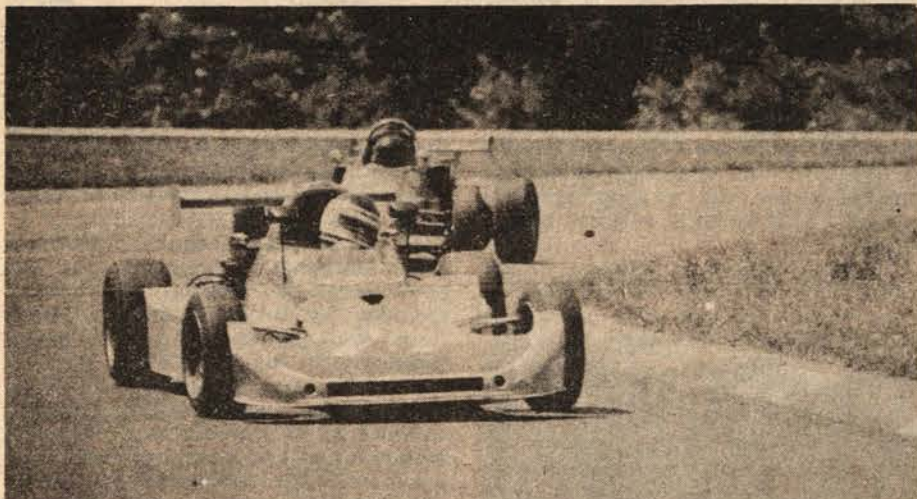
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loped fuel starvation on the Pocono high banks, and he was out in two.

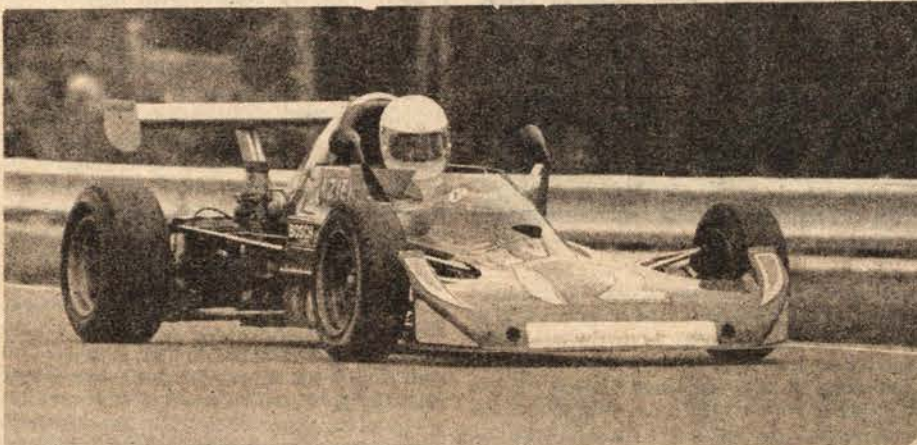
As the Bosch Gold Cup competition wound on, Bagley came back for the third round at Nelson Ledges May 31. Here he qualified third, then got off to a very healthy start by leaping in front of pole man Herm Johnson. As he led the first lap, Johnson and Fred Philips pressed

still wasn't hurt by two of the fiercest competitors in the series' being eliminated from the running, as well as by Follmer's spending a good long time trapped behind Chris Gleason as he moved up from his Number 12 qualifying spot. Third was The Fox again, Bill Henderson.

Lazier made it two in a row at Mid-Ohio the next month, shooting away from his pole position and beating out second man Tom Bagley by 10 seconds. Bagley had worked his way up from eighth, but couldn't do any better. Bagley, for that matter, had his hands full just maintaining second against a determined last-lap assault by Herm Johnson. Johnson first



In Super Vee racing, this is a big lead.



Bob Lazier gave it a good run for his money, but in the end it was Tom Bagley out front.

hard but couldn't change the one-two-three positions. And Chris Gleason was running a very determined fourth to keep everybody honest.

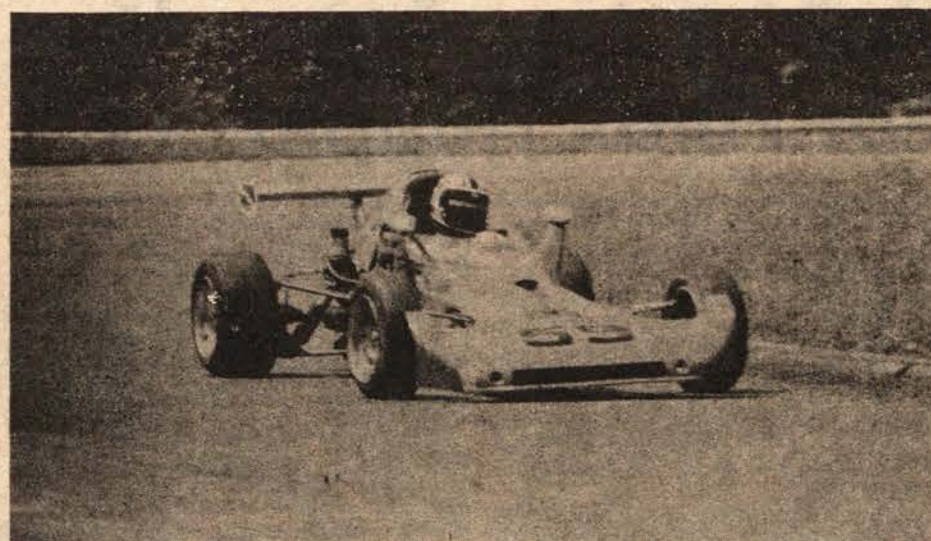
Bagley wound up with the points lead he had in mind, as he maintained first position all the way through. Once again, Bob McConnell had his troubles, finishing 23rd with two pit stops.

However, he learned different at the very next outing, at Mosport the next month. There, Bagley held the lead, although by a margin at which Bob Lazier was chipping away steadily, until Lazier decided to mount a serious challenge around the three-quarters point. Bagley opened up and ran the race's fastest lap on Number 15, and then on 16 he was getting down to the business of lapping backmarker Chris Skoppe. Skoppe at this time performed a spin, and the unlucky Bagley collected Chris' Eldon.

Bagley made it as far as the second turn before retiring with a punctured tire and suspension damage. Lazier also made it into this tangle, but he and Skoppe both remained in the fray with body damage. Lazier took second place behind Bill Henderson, "The Fox."

Lazier did considerably better at Watkins Glen the next month, playing a reliability game against such as George Follmer in a Lola originally slated to be driven by Follmer's young nephew.

So Lazier, who earned every foot of it,



Super Vee rookie George Follmer ran to second place in a borrowed car at Watkins Glen—he might go somewhere in time....

erd tends to encourage parades, and by the second time around Johnson was angling every which way to try to shake off his train. By lap three it had started to work, because he had a good second on Bagley, who had passed Lazier.

It was the next time around that Johnson, blown oil seal and all, started polluting the atmosphere with far more black smoke than seemed in order.

With Johnson out of the picture, Bagley once again was using his power to keep ahead of the procession. A missed shift into an oily Turn 10 with five laps to go allowed the train to close in on him again. Henderson was second and Bill Scott third.

Going into the final race of the season at Watkins Glen, Bagley had won half of the events but was up only two points on Lazier, who had won only two races. This made for some exciting racing, as it was clear that both Bagley and Lazier meant to win. The pole went to Bagley, with a 2:00.593 clocking, two seconds over the record in terrible foggy weather. Saturday's practice went down the drain,

flushed by intense rain, extreme cold and gale-force winds.

The weather improved, and following a messy start involving a delayed green flag and a wrecked racing car piloted by William Rogers, Bagley led away, with Herm Johnson pressing him very hard. Bill Henderson was third, but Lazier was having his troubles with a new brand of tire, spun off and came back in 13th.

Particularly irksome to Lazier was one Bruce MacInnes, regular Zink Formula Ford driver whose ride was sporting a Bagley-built powerplant. It certainly would be greatly to Bagley's advantage if MacInnes were in there taking points which Lazier needed. Not that MacInnes was running interference. The brawl developed, as a matter of fact, but it was MacInnes who came out a distant second, leaving the track abruptly into the fence as Lazier got around him aggressively on the last lap.

So Bagley, who finished the '74 series third and was runner-up last year, came up winner of the 1976 Robert Bosch Volkswagen Super Vee Gold Cup title.



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