

Book Reviews



GENTLEMEN, START YOUR ENGINES, by Wilbur Shaw (Coward-McCann, Inc., \$5.00). This is the autobiography of a man who had enough energy, intelligence and ambition to succeed in virtually any field. It so happened, however, that he was Wilbur Shaw, with an inborn love of cars, and, particularly, the racing of them. It makes a good story, one not often told by such men in their own words.

Enthusiasts who may be more interested in considerable details of events, cars and places probably will be disappointed that the late Wilbur Shaw chose to make this such a personal account of his life, rather than devote more attention to the sport. For instance, he treats briefly and rather superficially with his horrifying flip over the rails at Indy; a more minute account would have been appreciated, since few survive to explain how drivers react.

The postwar revival of the Speedway is the climax of the book. "To me," Shaw wrote, "the track was the world's last great speed shrine, which must be preserved at any cost. I felt that all I was, or ever hoped to be, I owed to the Indianapolis 500-mile race. I accepted the situation as a personal challenge. . . ."

Shaw, obviously, won his battle, but not without experiencing opposition in the form of indifference, along with critical issues (like the 1947 drivers' strike). But he had his way, and today his monument is the annual Memorial Day classic, the highlight of each year in auto racing.

Some day, no doubt, there will be a movement to further perpetuate his memory, perhaps through a special event at the Speedway. This book should help further the idea.

INDIANAPOLIS 1955

(Continued from page 16)

will boost you 30-40 horsepower over the output with methanol only or, say, an average 380 hp at 5500 rpm. Meyer-Drake have experimented with up to 25% nitro with the 270 in the lab, and achieved better than 400 hp . . . but this is getting pretty rough to use on the track.

The boys are pretty tight about the nitro subject around the garages, but as far as I could find there is not much more of the stuff being used this year than last. Probably over half used it to qualify, but I doubt if one in ten tried to use it in the race itself. Most used a 10-15% mixture, and I found no one who tried to mix more than 25%, at least with the 270 Offy. There were fewer scored cylinder walls, broken cranks, broken rings, melted pistons this year than last.

ENGINES

It was another Offy year. The few cars that tried to buck the tide—the Novi, Herb Porter's supercharged Wolcott Offy, the Dodge V-8, the Bardahl Ferrari—were all clobbered by various fates. Porter's blown 176-cu.-in. Offy looked like the best bet to crack the charmed circle. Herb has been shedding tears and sweat over this iron for five years. His big gremlin was always the fuel feed on the overrun when the driver was off the throttle for the turns; the thing would "load up," then cough and spit when the throttle was opened again. (This loading up is much more of a problem with alcohol than with gasoline.) This year it looked like he had it licked by putting the throttle butterflies right on the four ports with the fuel injectors, and pumping free air through the blower. A throttle-operated dump valve on the manifold keeps blower pressure from going too high when the throttles are closed. This layout eliminates all loading up and, by keeping pressure on the throttle at all times, you get instant and positive response coming out of the turns. With 500+ hp available, Russo could easily out-accelerate everybody on the straights, and he lapped at just under 141 mph in practice. A very promising project blew up when a supercharger bearing froze, locking the engine and wheels, and throwing the car into the wall. Nobody hurt . . . but Porter isn't getting any younger! Better luck next year, Herb.

The Dean Van Lines Dodge, built up by Tony Capanna, surprised everyone by lapping at 140 mph in practice. What most people didn't know was that they needed 85% nitro to do it! These are the facts of life that face anyone who would attempt to compete against the 270 Offy with the same number of cubic inches in a basic stock engine. You have to burn practically straight nitro to do what the Offy does easily on alky. You can't expect to win the race on that basis. The AAA is allowing basic stock engines to go to

336 cu. in. in all championship racing except Indianapolis. They might let the bars down at Indy next year; if they do, look for the Chrysler Firepower to get in some hot licks (it will put 440 hp on straight alky with stock bore and stroke). If they don't, a guy's crazy to try to compete with 270 cu. in.

Not much new on the Offy 270 itself. You might be interested to know that a lot of the fellows are using special cams in this engine. The Meyer-Drake people who build it recommend not over 5500 rpm at any time; so they design cams that will put the peak of the horsepower curve about at this point—and get some 340 hp (on alky). Some of the mechanics, though, aren't so conservative, and really want to wind out down the straight; some gear to come out of the turn at 5200 rpm—and hit as high as 6300 on the back stretch! These fellows will often go to some specialty cam grinder like Winfield and have special cams made up that will peak above the 6000 mark. This is good for an extra 20 hp or so. That's what McGrath did, and with the help of a little of the jiggle juice, he wound up to 173 mph on his record lap at 143.79!

Stu Hilborn introduced an improved fuel injector this year, with relocated pump relief valve that gave better throttle response coming out of the turns. But, wouldn't you know it; one of the first guys to use the new setup accidentally got a metering valve stuck, his engine loaded up badly . . . word swept through the garages that the new injectors were no good—and Stu ended up taking 18 sets back! Better luck next year, Stu.

CHASSIS

There were the usual sleep-robbing problems of getting the chassis to handle right this year. You'd be surprised how important this angle of the racing game is. I know the mechanics are just as concerned—maybe more so—about getting through the turns another 3 or 4 mph faster than they are about blowing off everybody with acceleration down the straights. Biggest headache this year was the new Monroe shock absorber, which most of the fellows used. It turned out that these shocks had been developed at the Speedway last summer using a big, heavy Chrysler-powered Kurtis roadster, and the valving was all wrong for the lighter Offy-powered jobs. A liberal mixture of sweat and midnight oil was required to get this bug under control by the first qualifying week-end.

Meanwhile, the Kurtis "roadster"-type chassis with offset drive line, Halibrand magnesium wheels (16" on front and 18" on rear), and dual spot brakes seem to be growing in popularity. Out of 33 starters this year, 19 were roadsters! So, until you can beat it with something better, it still looks like the winning combination at the Brickyard is a Kurtis roadster with a well-tuned 270 Offy—and a big lead foot! •