



place would cost him, was just as confident. "I had him about a foot and a half."

While every piece of amateur photo information was studied, Petty and Beauchamp cooled their heels, and racing fans across the country waited while Hearst Metrotone Newsreel pictures were shipped to New York for development and study. Then the news was finally published: It was Petty by about 24 in.!

On receiving the news, Lee smiled; "I was never worried, but I'm glad to get it over with."

The First Daytona 500 had been such a driver-spectator success that 90,000 fans were anticipated for the 1960 run. The race—known in stock car circles as "The Big One"—was to carry a jackpot of \$88,000, one of the highest pay-offs in stock car history. The Speedway—now called the "Big D" by awed racing men who had seen its peculiar tri-oval shape—was in perfect condition and in one year had gained a reputation as the world's finest enclosed race track.

President Bill France wanted his layout to be not only the world's fastest but also the safest; and to insure this he insisted on rigid adherence to certain rules. All cars were to be equipped with roll bars and drivers were to wear crash helmets. Also, hubcaps had to be removed before each run. A hubcap breaking loose at high speed would be more dangerous than a piece of flying shrapnel.

Because one 500-mile race does as much damage to an automobile as four

years of regular driving, this emphasis on safety is important far beyond any one event. Automobile manufacturers watch race results to learn more about the strengths and weaknesses of their products. Some of the improvements derived are safety glass and belts, longer-wearing tires, and better brakes.

Daytona also follows the NASCAR (National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing) edict as to what constitutes a stock car: "All cars must be production models, and must use only engine parts and operating components that are offered to the average customer from production catalogs."

The 1960 500 drew all the old 1959 drivers, along with plenty of new ones. One of these, Wilbur Rakestraw, of Dallas, Ga., had the names of the people who had helped finance his 1960 Ford stenciled all over the car. "The boys like to see their names in action. If they hadn't chipped in, I wouldn't be here. This machine cost about 7000 bucks and that ain't hay in Dallas, Georgia."

The race ended with all the drama of the 1959 meet, when a comparative unknown, Junior Johnson, Ronda, N.C., whizzed over the finish line in a 1959 Chevrolet which had been set up in less than seven days by master mechanic Ray Fox.

Minutes before, Bobby Johns had looked like a sure winner. Johns, from Miami, Fla., had set the pace for 190 of the 200 laps and had a 7-sec. lead over Johnson. Then, coming into the west turn Bobby had the kind of tough break that gives drivers gray hair. His

rear window popped out, and the resulting turbulence swirled his car into a spin; by the time he got his vehicle back under control he had lost 18 sec. that couldn't be regained.

Johnson, a lanky 6-footer, could hardly believe it. "I didn't think I could run with the older boys, so I worked out a real complicated strategy—I just went flat-out and hoped for the best."

After the ceremony in the winner's circle a newsman sidled up to Junior and asked him why he likes to drive. Johnson, who admits to an aversion to peanuts, black cats and broken mirrors, laughed heartily, "Hell, it's fun! There's nothing like it. It gets in your blood and goes all over you. It's that and being a mechanic. When you're a mechanic you want to see what you can get out of a car. This Daytona course is a wonderful track. All you have to do to win here is to have it under you."

Like all NASCAR drivers, Johnson started driving in the "hobby division," which requires a \$15 a year permit. Any driver can qualify for this license and, after proving himself on short tracks for small purses, may move on to an actual professional status by purchasing a professional license. Holders of this \$20 permit are eligible to enter the better-paying events, like the Daytona 500.

Top pay is excellent. Rex White, 1960's Grand National Champion, won \$45,280 in 40 races, or over \$1100 per start! And as interest increases in stock car racing, now the third ranked spectator sport in the country, so does the

# BIG D

*Both a shape and a place, it's the toughest test in stock car racing.*

BY STACK SUTTON

IN JANUARY 1959, excitement in stock car driver ranks rose high at the prospect of the Daytona International Speedway's opening, and the upcoming Daytona 500. Interest in the Speedway, billed as the world's fastest, was so high that Tim Flock, one of the most popular drivers in stock car history, came out of retirement to compete. After seeing the new race plant, a 2.5-mile asphalt oval, top mechanic Red Vogt stated, "It will take at least 120 mph to win this one."

Long before the race, some of America's best stock-car drivers had jammed the course for qualifying runs. Among them: Fireball Roberts, Joe Weatherly, Johnny Beauchamp, Banjo Mathews and the famous father-son team Lee and Richard Petty. By race time 60 drivers had qualified and Curtis Turner and Fireball Roberts had been established as favorites to take the cream of the \$68,000 in cash prizes.

Daytona 500 Day in 1959 fulfilled all the excitement it had promised. It not only bore out Red Vogt's prediction that it would take at least 120 mph

to win, but ended as the most controversial 500-mile late-model stock car race ever run! At the finish line Lee Petty, of Randleman, N.C., and Johnny Beauchamp, of Harlam, Iowa, crossed the line in a dead heat after a 200-lap car killer at a record breaking average of 135.52 mph.

Track president Bill France and flagman John Bruner, on the spot, agreed that it "looked like Beauchamp by about two feet." However, when 12 out of 12 onlooking newsmen picked Petty the results were declared unofficial until all available information could be thoroughly sifted. A harried France said, "There has never been a photo camera used before in racing, but I'm going to see if such a device would be practical. I've been in the business for 30 years and this is the tightest finish I've ever seen."

Frustrated Petty, who had driven his Olds into the winner's circle, said disgustedly: "I just hope the man who got to that line first collects first prize money. I'm sure I won." Beauchamp, reflecting on the \$10,000 that second

HUBCAB-TO-HUBCAP finish in inaugural race required photos to prove Lee Petty (42) beat Beauchamp (73) by inches. Car 48 was 1 lap behind.



# BIG D

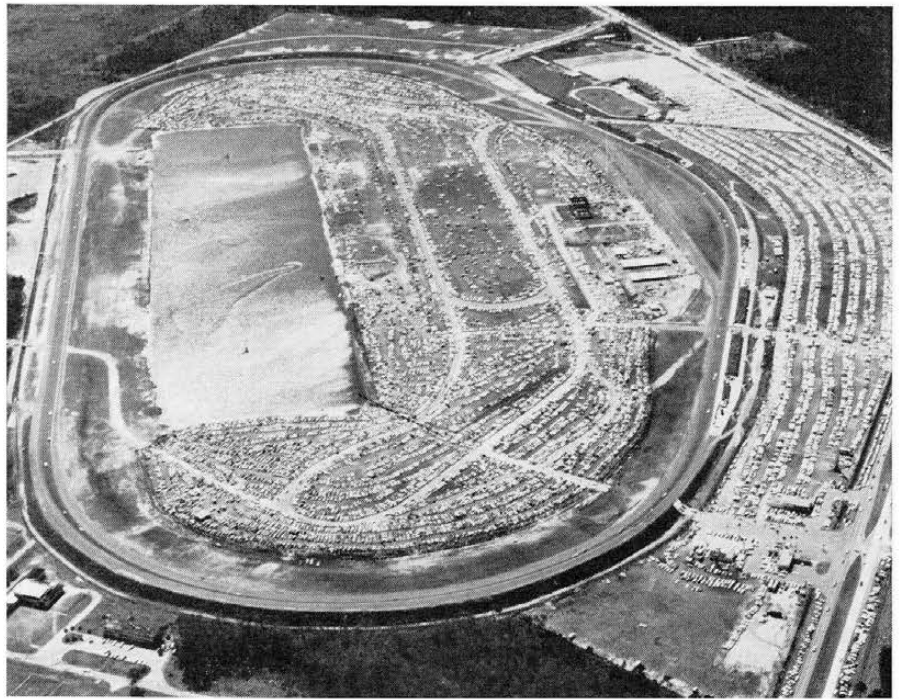
pay-off. In 1959 the Daytona 500 offered \$68,000 in prize money, in 1960 \$88,000, and the 1961 jackpot rose to \$98,000.

Pontiacs dominated the 1961 qualifying heats and everyone expected a new record on Feb. 26, 500 Day. But, according to Fireball Roberts: "Brute speed isn't enough to win a long stock car race. You need a cool head, lots of strategy, and a damned good pit crew."

There is unanimous appreciation of the pit crew. As driver Bud Moore put it: "The most important thing in the race is getting in and out of the pits. You can figure at least four stops per driver. To show just how important pit stops can be, remember last year. Both Johnson and Johns had four, while Curtis Turner, the pre-race favorite, ran into a lot of trouble and had to make 12. He finished 57th."

Chief mechanic Red Nichels chimed in: "There will be 15 to 20 cars capable of winning. Anyone who sits in the pits for over 35 sec. will be hurting."

At race speeds, tire trouble is always a major worry. Heat is a tire's most deadly enemy and a blowout at 120-140 mph means disaster. Treads dissipate some of the heat and tire companies design special tires for every track. For a race like the Daytona 500 tire pressure varies greatly from ordinary driving. Cars carry 70 lb. in the



**AERIAL VIEW OF** Daytona track shows vast parking area jammed during National event.

right front tire, 45 lb. in the left front, 50 in the left rear and 55 in the right rear. The reason for such heavy pressure in the right front is to compensate for the extra pressure exerted in making continuous left turns. As a guard against tire breakup, each tire is carefully checked during each pit stop with a pyrometer, and as an added safeguard many drivers cut holes in the floorboard so they can watch their tires during the race. To the uninitiated, it might seem that there wouldn't be much to see at 140 mph, but the instant the tread wears off a white streak

begins to show, meaning that it's time to get off the track.

As was predicted, a Pontiac won the "Big One" in 1961. Marvin Panch, a local product, finished 16 sec. ahead of Joe Weatherly, who had started the 200-lap grind in the outside pole position. Panch, second-string driver for Smokey Yunick, had no speedometer in his car and had to depend on pit crews to keep track of his speed. To say that Panch was delighted would be the year's understatement—he hadn't won a major stock car race since 1957.

The 1962 meet, rated the world's

**FORD BATTLES** Pontiac on curve.



**EARLY DAYS AT** Daytona had stock cars competing on sandy beach course.



JACK CANSLER

fastest 500-mile race, had a total purse of \$106,145, the biggest yet. Due to increasing speeds, the starting field was cut from 60 cars to 50, making qualification tougher than ever.

According to one sports writer it promised to be a real "gasser"—about four miles to the gallon. On a 500-mile run this figures out to roughly 120 gallons per automobile and, as NASCAR limits late model stocks to a maximum 22-gallon gas tank, it calls for at least four pit stops per driver.

Because the Pontiacs seemed to have an edge in power, most drivers expected drafting to play a big part in race strategy. Drafting means letting the slip-stream of a faster car tow you along with its suction. Fred Lorenzen, race driver from Elmhurst, Ill., explained it this way: "A car traveling around the Speedway cuts a 'tunnel' through the air. If another car falls in closely behind, the trailing car is sucked along by the partial vacuum between them.

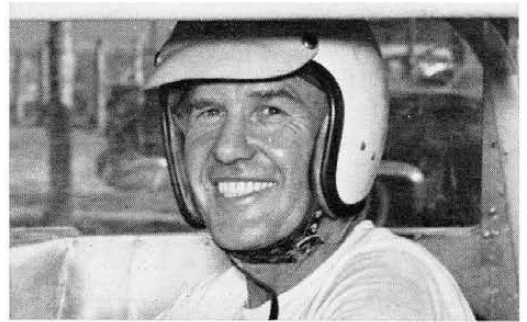
"For example, my Ford will hit around 154. The Pontiacs are getting about 158. If I stay about 10 car lengths behind one I can get 158, too. If I go right on up against him—say just a few inches off his bumper—it will speed us both up to about 161 mph. The closer together we run, the faster we will go.

"I'm trying to learn all I can about drafting. The guy who learns the air, how the wind tunnels work, and uses his head, will run away with it."

As it turned out, Lorenzen's prediction almost came true. Fireball Roberts won the "Big One" with a sizzling 152.529, but Richard Petty, driving a slower Plymouth, drafted Fireball so



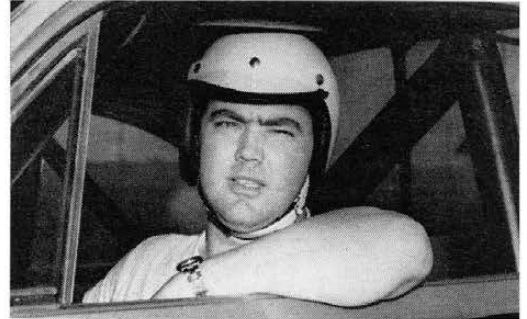
MARVIN PANCH was '61 Champ.



BROAD GRIN from Lee Petty after inaugural win.



ROBERTS WON 1962 event.



DARK-HORSE winner, Junior Johnson took '60 race.

expertly that his 2nd place finish was only 27 sec. behind.

But, drafting or not, it was Fireball's day. He led 144 of the 200 laps in a personal triumph over a jinx that had plagued him at Daytona (his home town) ever since the "Big D" opened. In the 500 of 1959 he was knocked out by a faulty fuel pump on the 140th lap after leading for the first 100. In 1960 he was an early contender when a fouled distributor forced him out on the 41st lap. Then, in 1961, with victory in his hands, his crankshaft broke just 32 miles from a win.

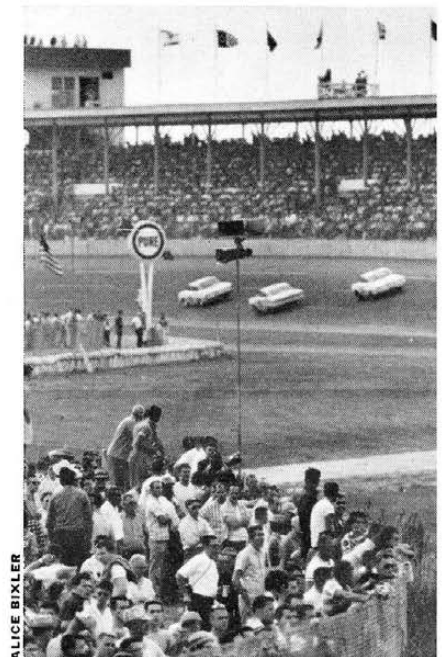
To Roberts, his victory was a dream come true. "I'm so happy I can't really believe it happened. I just didn't know if I would make it. I really sweated out these last 10 laps." An estimated crowd of 75,000 had sweated it out with him.

One of those present, Sports Editor Bernard Kahn, described the "Big One" aptly when he wrote: "Call it stock car's greatest attraction, a day of auto madness, hysteria, or pure dare-deviltry; call it what you like, but for speed, skill, and just plain gutty driving, the Daytona 500 is speeddom's most exciting challenge." ■

SPARSE CROWD AT oceanside oval contrasts with more recent mobs of speed fans.



STANDING ROOM only for infield spectators.



ALICE BIXLER