

ONE COULD HOPE it was a prelude of things to come. The Riverside 500 was a blend of the best from two racing worlds, a homogenization that opened the eyes of all who witnessed the event. Thundering stock cars, with gaping side exhausts and roaring engines, stampeded around the Riverside, Calif., sports car circuit in a 6-hour show of just how far Detroit has progressed in the past 10 years.

The super/stock sedans, first of the 1963½ models to appear in battle, proved to more than a few sports car enthusiasts that American cars—when well prepared—were indeed roadworthy. The days of the “Detroit iron” label and the flat-out-and-bank-left limitation have passed into limbo. But for the hard-core stocker fan, the race was also a convincing demonstration of just what a driver with finesse could extract from his mount. It was, for all the world to see, a potential index to the talents of drivers from diverse backgrounds (though predominantly from stock car circuits).

And yet, there were a few disturbing elements which need to be polished before such stock car road races can hope to equal either of the separate parts in spectator appeal and support. One such irritant was the use of the pace car to forcibly slow the race and bunch the pack when the yellow caution flag went out. Indeed, this practice reduced the finish of this \$66,245 spectacle to an almost ridiculous anticlimax after a late lap accident. The pace car crossed the finish line first—ahead of winner Dan Gurney and the bumper-to-bumper parade of 20 other finishers, all loafing along at a mere 40 mph. Spectators, it seems, paid their \$5 apiece to see two parade circuits and only 184 laps of racing.

Not that the finish-line farce diminished in any way the businesslike win scored by Gurney, the sports car-nurtured local son who handled a Holman-Moody-prepared fastback Ford as if it were another Porsche. With flawless driving precision and complete mastery of machine, Gurney controlled the race from Lap 43 to the finish. He had been favored to win the \$14,400 jackpot after qualifying fastest (1:37.67 or 99.4 mph) over the truncated 2.7-mi. course laid out for the stock cars.

For Gurney, whose consistent driving never changed while others faltered near the end of the 6-hour grind, it was a long-sought goal. Although he probably knows the Riverside Raceway better than any other driver, he had never before won a major race at the course. He averaged 84.96 mph to win the race, including pace car-enforced slowdowns at six different points during the race, and was leading second-

place A. J. Foyt in a 1963 Pontiac by 36 sec. when the pace car again ran interference for the final four laps.

Foyt, 1961 winner at the Indianapolis 500 and twice USAC national champion, was in the same lap with Gurney at the finish but third-place Troy Ruttman, notable Indy competitor who was driving a 1963½ fastback Mercury, was a complete lap behind. NASCAR, which sanctioned the race with FIA, saw its first driver across the line when Glenn “Fireball” Roberts took fourth place after driving the final 50 laps without his lower three gears.

It was a great show for the 427-cu. in. Ford, but Pontiac was still in strong contention. Mercury demonstrated surprising performance throughout the race, with either Ruttman or Californian Parnelli Jones among the leaders until the latter retired with transmission troubles. Their two mounts had been painstakingly prepared by Bill Stroppe. Another 1963 Mercury—a notchback Monterey—was driven by Danny Letner of Downey, Calif., from a 28th position start to ninth overall.

Another 7-liter '63½ Ford which led the pack for a bit was driven by Fred Lorenzen of Elmhurst, Ill., who bumped a guard rail and lost three laps while the bent bumper was cut away to permit a tire change. Still making up time, he worked back up to fifth when his engine blew in Lap 157.

Pontiacs started strong, with hopes still high after USAC Champion Paul Goldsmith's pole qualifying performance during practice led a parade of Pontiacs into the first seven starting spots. Foyt had started in second spot and Roberts third. NASCAR champ Joe Weatherly, however, stormed along in fifth position but went only two laps before losing his transmission. A new one was installed in 20 min., but the loss of a dozen laps was too much for even Weatherly's determined driving. Len Sutton, who had held fourth position at the start, dropped a valve and was out in Lap 49. Goldsmith himself moved into the lead for an early three laps, but lost it to Jones' Mercury and then threw a rod in the 59th lap.

Bobby Johns of Miami, Fla., who started midway in the field, finished in fifth with his '63 Pontiac and Jim Pardue of N. Wilkesboro, N.C., finished eighth after a sixth-place start.

Dodge, with Billy Wade of Houston, Tex., aboard, finished in seventh place after touring 180 laps with tactical caution and consistency. But teammate Dave Pearson of Whitney, S.C., who had been running with him, went out during the 113th lap. Plymouth didn't fare as well. Richard Petty, NASCAR's No. 2 driver who drove the only automatic transmission-equipped car in the race, left the fray in Lap 27 with his transmission fluid boiled out. Jim



NASCAR



TRIES THE TWIST

VERSATILE DAN GURNEY, sports car tutored veteran of Riverside, leads at Turn 6.

And a Native Dancer Steals the Show

BY GENE BOOTH

Paschal of High Point, N.C., kept the second Plymouth circuiting until Lap 81 when he skidded over the Turn 9 bank after his brakes locked.

The Gurney Ford, which Holman-Moody pit crewmen acclaimed as the “best-prepared car” ever to come from their speed-magic shop, rumbled around the circuit faultlessly. Only during the last 20 laps did the engine note begin to suggest a hint of strain. It was here, however, that Gurney was definitely pressing home and in fact

was shortening his lap time each trip around. Gurney made five fuel stops and picked up a new right rear tire on one pit visit. At his final pit stop, Gurney took on 20 gal. of gas in 24 sec., then roared back onto the track into Foyt's slipstream as the Pontiac took the lead. But two laps later Gurney had reclaimed the lead and Foyt was in the pits himself for fuel and two tires.

Skepticism about the cars' ability to hang together, widespread before race

day, proved unfounded. The major problem was in transmissions—most cars were fitted with the Borg-Warner 4-speed unit—which couldn't quite take the torque of the 427-in. powerplants. Tire wear problems, which had been expected to plague the race, failed to materialize. Both Firestone and Goodyear expected a good test of their newly developed road racing tires, but ended up supplying old-standby stocker tires instead. The oval-track rubber gave surprisingly longer

tread life and just as good cornering adhesion, while fairly cool weather helped limit the heat build-up.

Drivers used their brakes sparingly, and this, along with the pace car's slow-down procession to cool things off, helped eliminate problems in this area.

It isn't possible to compare lap speeds of the stock cars with established sports car marks because of the altered circuit. But knowledgeable observers estimated 10-sec. faster lap times would have been recorded by

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sports cars because of their lower weight, greater agility and better brakes. On the back 1.1-mi. straight, speeds near 150 mph were clocked where the top sports car time (Chaparral) is 180 mph.

Despite rather sketchy pre-race promotion and two previous failures in running the stockers at Riverside, the 500 was a qualified success. The sponsor of the show, millionaire-publisher (not ours) Robert Petersen, was ap-

parently satisfied with the "official" gate of 52,500 spectators. The crowd was particularly impressive since stock car racing has had less appeal in that part of the country. If NASCAR's strongarm crowd control measures imposed impossible restrictions even on working newsmen, then it is only NASCAR that will suffer.

Indications are that the Riverside 500 will become an annual, first-of-the-season event. Certainly the cars, the driving, the prize money and the paying customers were impressive. With all that going for it, can there be any doubt but that it should? But, next day, strange things happened in Detroit. (See Outlook, p. 8.) ■

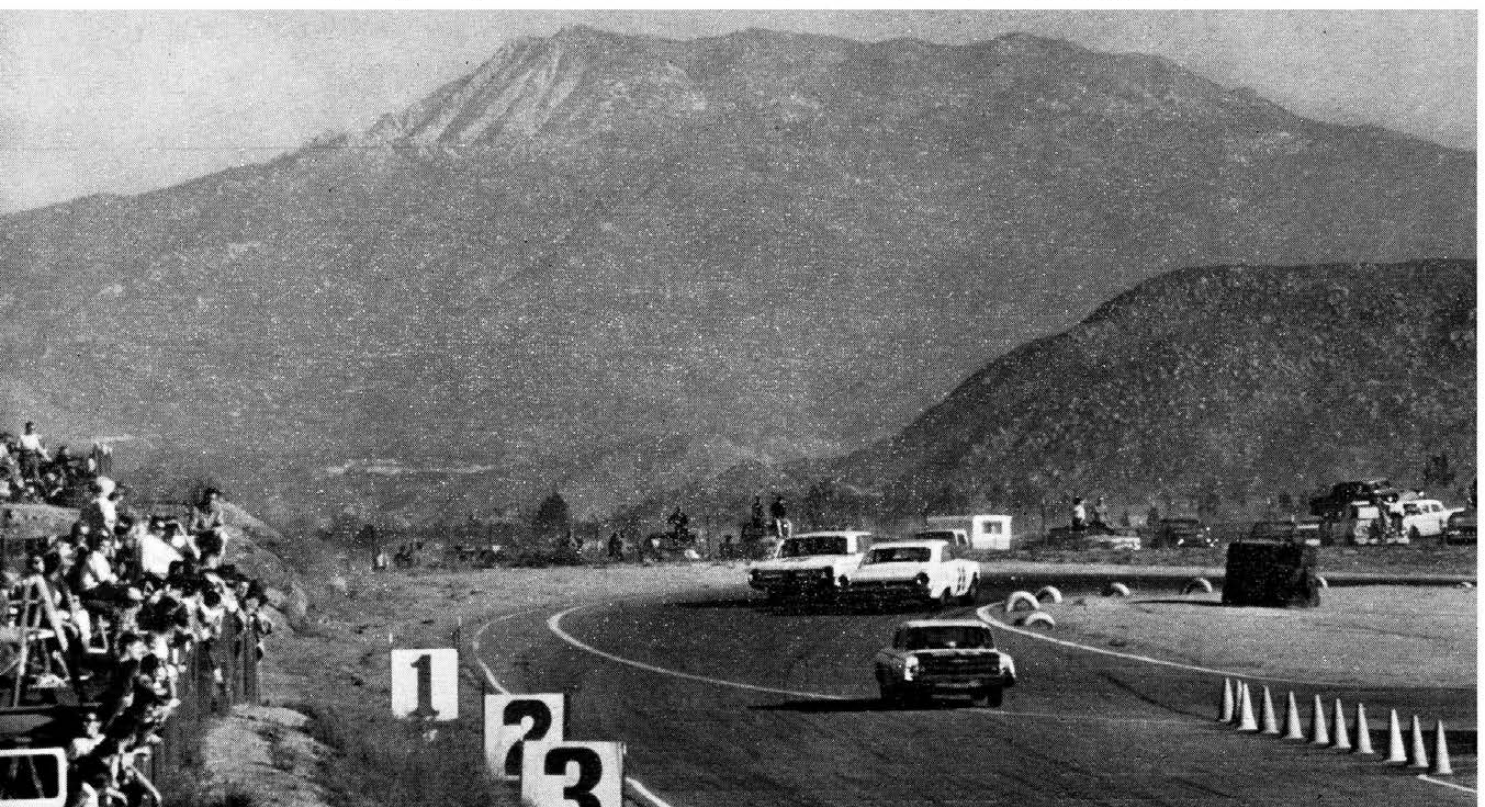
GLENN "FIREBALL" ROBERTS made best showing of NASCAR drivers, placed fourth in Pontiac.



EARLY LEADER Parnelli Jones had to retire his "fastback" Mercury with transmission troubles.



MAKING UP TIME after pit stop, Gurney blasts past earlier model Ford on inside of turn into the back straight. Action was on NASCAR "shortcut."



FINAL STANDINGS

Place	Driver	Car	Laps	Prize
1.	Dan Gurney, Costa Mesa, Calif.	'63 Ford	185	\$14,400
2.	A. J. Foyt, Houston, Tex.	'63 Pont.	185	6570
3.	Troy Ruttman, Dearborn, Mich.	'63 Merc.	184	3980
4.	Glenn "Fireball" Roberts, Daytona Beach, Fla.	'63 Pont.	184	2630
5.	Bobby Johns, Miami, Fla.	'63 Pont.	182	1750
6.	Ned Jarrett, Conover, N.C.	'63 Ford	181	1225
7.	Billy Wade, Houston, Tex.	'63 Dodge	180	1850
8.	Jim Pardue, N. Wilkesboro, N.C.	'62 Pont.	179	1050
9.	Danny Letner, Downey, Calif.	'63 Merc.	179	950
10.	Joe Ruttman, Dearborn, Mich.	'62 Merc.	176	850

Winner's average: 84.96 mph. Time of race: 5:53:20