

**"O' A.J.
just wants
to race!"**

**the most
controversial
driver on
anybody's circuit
is Texan A. J. Foyt
—a determined,
skilled young man**

BY BILL LIBBY

ALICE BIXLER PHOTO

A J. FOYT seems to be driven by devils. His is almost a storybook success story. He is young and handsome, brave and strong, sensitive and intelligent. He has a beautiful wife, three fine children, passionate fans—women as well as men. He has achieved a certain amount of national fame, has a great deal of money, fancy homes and fancy cars. He is a champion in his profession and if he's not the best, he's very close to being the best race driver in the world. He should be happy, perhaps even content. But he doesn't seem to be.

As do most of us, he wears a mask. He is a good-natured Texan with a soft drawl, a ready smile and a quick laugh; friendly to his fellows, apparently immune to pain. He is these things, too, for the mask is part of him, but he is also more. Beneath the mask he is an intense and moody young man—vain, ambitious, yet so

touched by the tragedies of the sport that he resists close friendships.

Race drivers are a family of men set apart from other men, a family with a deep sense of togetherness and loyalty. But Foyt is a loner, and sometimes disloyal.

If he is the best driver in the U.S., he is not the most popular. He is a maverick, colorful and controversial. He seems unable to avoid trouble, on or off the track, and he does not hide it that he expects to win every race. He accepts victory trophies as his due, with a poker face. No matter how much he wins, he wants to win more. And when he loses, he is a very bad loser.

At 29, Anthony Joseph Foyt has been marked for success, and also by success. He suffers scars.

Only Scotland's superb Jimmy Clark of the European Grand Prix circuit and Indiana's reliable Rodger Ward on

Foyt's own United States Auto Club circuit rank with him. All three must be rated with the greatest drivers, European or U.S., road or track, of all time. All three must be considered strong contenders in the richest and best-attended race in the world, the Indianapolis 500 this May 30.

Clark is 28. After finishing second to Graham Hill in 1962, he swept ahead of him in record fashion last year to become at 27 the youngest man ever to win the Grand Prix world championship. Additionally, he set U.S. racing on its tail as he paced a rear-engine, lightweight Grand Prix car assault that narrowly missed winning at Indianapolis, did win one major U.S. race, a 200-miler at Milwaukee, and smashed several track records along the way.

Foyt is 29. He won the 500 in 1961 and was third behind Parnelli Jones and Clark and just ahead of Ward last



AS ONE OF the most proficient drivers in the race business, A. J. Foyt is undeterred by any type of track or event. Here he powers his Championship class car in a sod-spraying broadside around a dirt-track oval.

OI' A.J.

year. He was the only driver Clark did not lap in that Milwaukee race and he beat Clark at Trenton in a similar race. He surpassed Dan Gurney in another Grand Prix car in all three races.

Foyt won the U.S. National title in 1960, 1961 and last year to become only the fifth driver ever to win that crown three times. This year, he may become the first ever to win it a fourth time. In 1961 he was, at 26, the youngest man ever to win both the 500 and U.S. titles in the same season.

Clark, Foyt and Jones have been driving about 10 years each, 4-5 years in the big leagues. Ward is 43 and has been driving twice as long as the other three.

Ward won both the 500 and U.S. national titles in both 1959 and 1962. In companion years he ran second, third and fourth to achieve the greatest 5-year record in 500 history. In those five years, he has won more USAC championship races, 18, than any other driver, giving him a record career total of 25.

Foyt, who had won no such races until four years ago, has since then outpointed Ward 17 wins to 14 and was catching up to Ward, until last year, when each won five of the 12 races held. Jones at Indianapolis and Clark at Milwaukee won the other two. Jones has won only three, including the 500, in his career.

In addition to the dozen or so championship car races held on one-mile or longer tracks at 100 miles or more, USAC also sponsors title competition in midget, sprint and stock cars. Foyt finished second in both the sprint and stock car classes last year to complete an unprecedented demonstration of endurance and all-around skill.

Foyt has been averaging 50 races a year, big races and small, for big purses and small ones, on good tracks and bad ones. Last year, he drove 53 races, this year he may drive more. Only Jones among his major rivals drives about as many.

Foyt even invaded the sports car ranks to win the 250-mile Nassau Trophy Road Race in Bermuda, a notable achievement, if not one as formidable as Clark winning both Grand Prix and USAC championship races.

Put most simply, Foyt won more major races than any driver on earth, probably more than any driver has ever won in any year.

And he has been setting a stunning group of speed records. Last May, only

Parnelli Jones' record qualifying run of 151.1 mph bettered Foyt's 150.6 trial go. Ward and Clark qualified in the 149s. In the race itself, all four, led by Jones at 143.1, bettered Ward's old race record.

In tire tests, in a new but traditional Indianapolis car, Foyt returned to the Speedway to clock 154.5, then went to Goodyear's 5-mile asphalt course near San Angelo, Texas, to set a new world's closed-course mark of 200.4 mph.

He set a record of 100.1 mph for dirt-track half-miles at Salem, Ind., during the regular season. After the season ended, he ran a record 111.8 for paved one-milers at Phoenix, then returned there with a new rear-engined, lightweight machine to establish a new mark of 114.2.

No one drives faster than Foyt, and few drive as profitably. As U.S. purses have gone up, particularly in Indianapolis, each of the 500 winners for the last three years, Foyt, Ward and Jones, has gone on to set new one-year records for race winnings. Last year, Jones earned \$178,000, including \$148,000 at Indianapolis, Foyt earned \$110,000 and Ward \$73,000.

In his long career, Ward has won more than \$600,000, more money than any race driver in world history. In the last four years, Foyt has won nearly a half-million dollars. Other than by running and winning Indian-

apolis, Grand Prix drivers obviously do not have a chance at such money. The races they run are not nearly so rich.

Foyt is an ideal driver, brave and strong as a bull, shrewd and quick as a cat. If he has a weakness it is that he does not pace himself or his cars. He gets to the front as soon as he can and stays there as long as he can. He refuses to sit on a safe lead, but will lap the field if he can. He will drive as hard for tenth place as he will for first place. He sometimes seems simply willing to drive faster than anyone else.

Jones is a charger like Foyt and even harder on his cars, but it often seems that if a race is not important or if he is out of contention for the top, he will ease up.

Ward gets the most from good cars. He seldom leads early, usually takes a conservative position and waits to move up when the front-runners burn out.

Ward drives for the best team, Bob Wilke's rich Leader-Card outfit, and has the best car-builder and mechanic in the U.S., A. J. Watson, on his side. He has had the good fortune to drive potential winners more often than any rival in recent years and the good skill to make the most of it.

Jones drives for a top owner, J. C. Agajanian, and a top mechanic, Johnny Pouelson. They have somehow not been able to put together solid machines for other events, but the car they have put on the track at Indianapolis the last three years has clearly been much the fastest, if not the most durable entry there.

Foyt has had a variety of car owners, but currently drives for Sheraton-Thompson which is staking him in a manner that should enable him to start off even or nearly even with his foes. After a brief split, he has reunited with a fine mechanic, George Bignotti.

One rival says, "Foyt gets more out of his cars than anyone else could; if

he had Ward's cars, he'd never lose." But another says, "Foyt's the best driver, but he pushes too hard, takes too many chances, and doesn't take care of his equipment."

Jones says, "No one, just no one wants to win as badly as Foyt." Ward says, "If anyone wants to win more than I do, it's Foyt. If he gets into more scrapes on a race-track than I do, it's because he puts himself in places on the track I won't put myself—places few drivers will go. He'll do anything to win."

When Foyt loses, he does not hesitate to blame others for accidents or defeats he considers to be unjustified. In 1962, Foyt lost the 500 because a member of his pit crew forgot to tighten a wheel, and lost the national title because of a series of mechanical breakdowns and accidents. His father, a former driver, always works with his crews and at one point A. J. complained, "The only man I can trust in the pits is my own father."

He changed cars and car owners three times, had that split with his long-time aide Bignotti, then invited him back.

Bignotti, reluctant to discuss the friction, merely said, "Foyt and I had some arguments. They're forgotten now."

Foyt said, "Bignotti wasn't wrong. It's just that we wanted to do things differently and argued so much I thought we should call it quits. But, after we cooled off, we decided we could still help each other. . . . I don't ask anything of a car that it wasn't meant to do. If I didn't work on a car and it wasn't set up properly, that's not my fault. My job is to win races and I've proven I know my job by winning a lot of them. I've learned the hard way what can and what can't be done. Maybe I can just do things others can't do."

Foyt, Ward and Jones are all being built new rear-engine, lightweight cars this year and will switch from the traditional, front-engine heavyweights if

the experimental models prove as good as they hope. Jones could go back to last year's winner, but it's five years old now and it usually takes a brand new car to win the big one. Aside from the lightweight, Watson is building Ward a new heavyweight for the fourth straight year, so, as usual, Rodger will have good equipment, whichever one he chooses to drive.

Last year, Watson, an independent sort who reserves the right to build cars for some outsiders, built Foyt a new heavyweight, but it was not quite ready at Indianapolis. Later, it was ready, and Foyt has run some of his record tests in it. Foyt also had an Offenhauser rear-engine lightweight built for him by Joe Huffaker of British Motors Corporation in San Francisco and he set a record in it the first time he drove it.

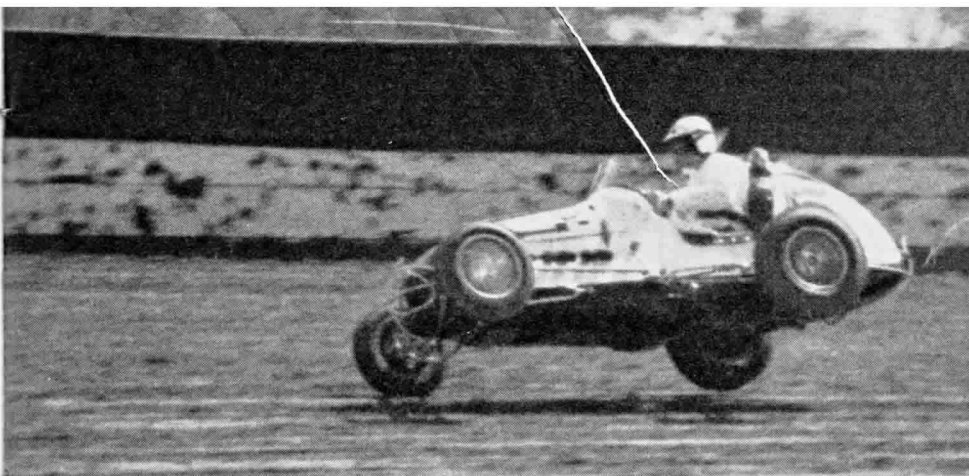
The two A. J.s, Foyt and Watson, are close friends. Foyt has in the past been invited to join Watson in the powerful Leader-Card family, but he will not join Watson because he will not join Ward. While Jones is on friendly terms with both Foyt and Ward, there is no question about there being a feud between the other two.

Ward says, "I was the champion when Foyt was breaking in and he had his sights set on me. When he won the title from me, then lost it back, it hurt him. Pride is very important to a race driver and Foyt is very proud. He's young and impetuous. He's hot-tempered and often does things and says things without thinking. But, underneath, he's a real nice kid and I like him."

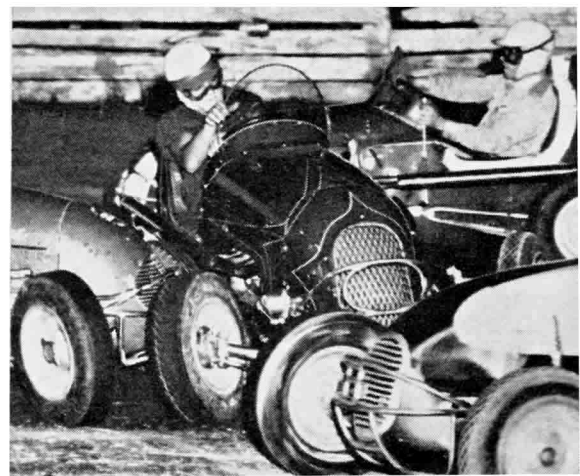
"We don't hate each other," Foyt says. "We're polite to one another. We just don't have much to say to each other. I respect him. Why do we have to be friends? We're out there trying to knock each other off the track and we can't all be friends. He's been on top for quite a few years. Maybe I figure it's my turn."

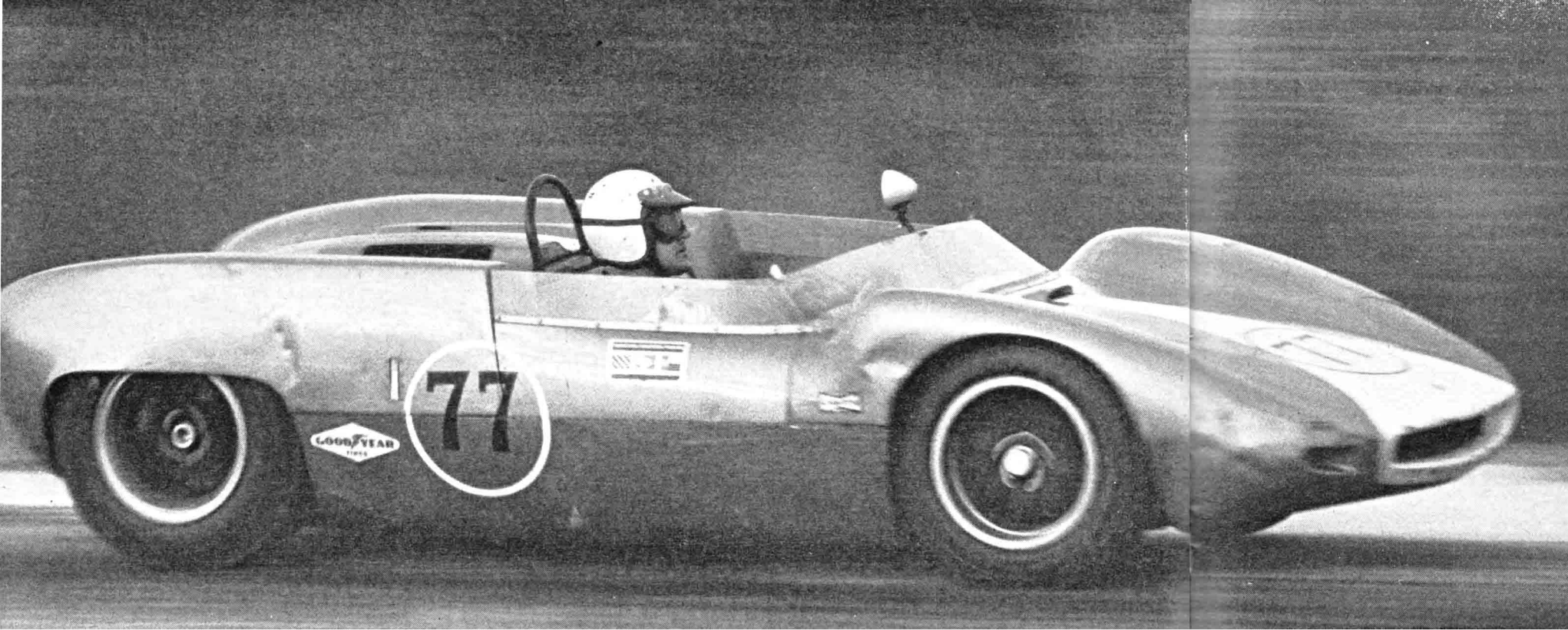
Race driving is a hard business and few are able to make a good living at

FOYT PUSHES hard, sometimes presses his luck to the limit, as here in an airborne attitude.



THE WAY TO learn is the hard way and A. J. here is caught in his first crash.





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When Banks received other reports conflicting with Nicholson's version, he temporarily reinstated Foyt. And when White did not appear at the hearing and when witnesses testified they had seen no blows struck, the reinstatement stuck. Foyt disregarded suggestions he challenge Sonny Liston, and resumed driving on his usual peaceful level.

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ful thing there ever was," Foyt recalls. At six, Tony was driving it at 50 mph between races at a Houston track. At 17, he was racing motorcycles. At 18, he was racing midgets and stock cars. "I won about everything there was to win," he recalls. "If I lost, it was because my car broke down."

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He was on his way, although that hair-raising ride began a history of hard luck that has hounded him there. The following year, he was the fastest and closest tenth-place finisher in history. The next year, 1960, he lost his chance with a broken clutch. However, he won four of the last six races on the USAC championship schedule—100-milers on state fairgrounds dirt tracks in the midwest and far west—and won his first national title.

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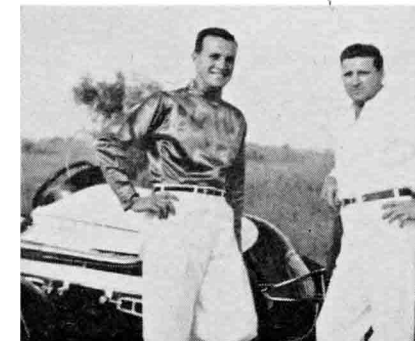
FAMILY ALBUM



YOUNG TONY showed true Texas heritage in early photograph.



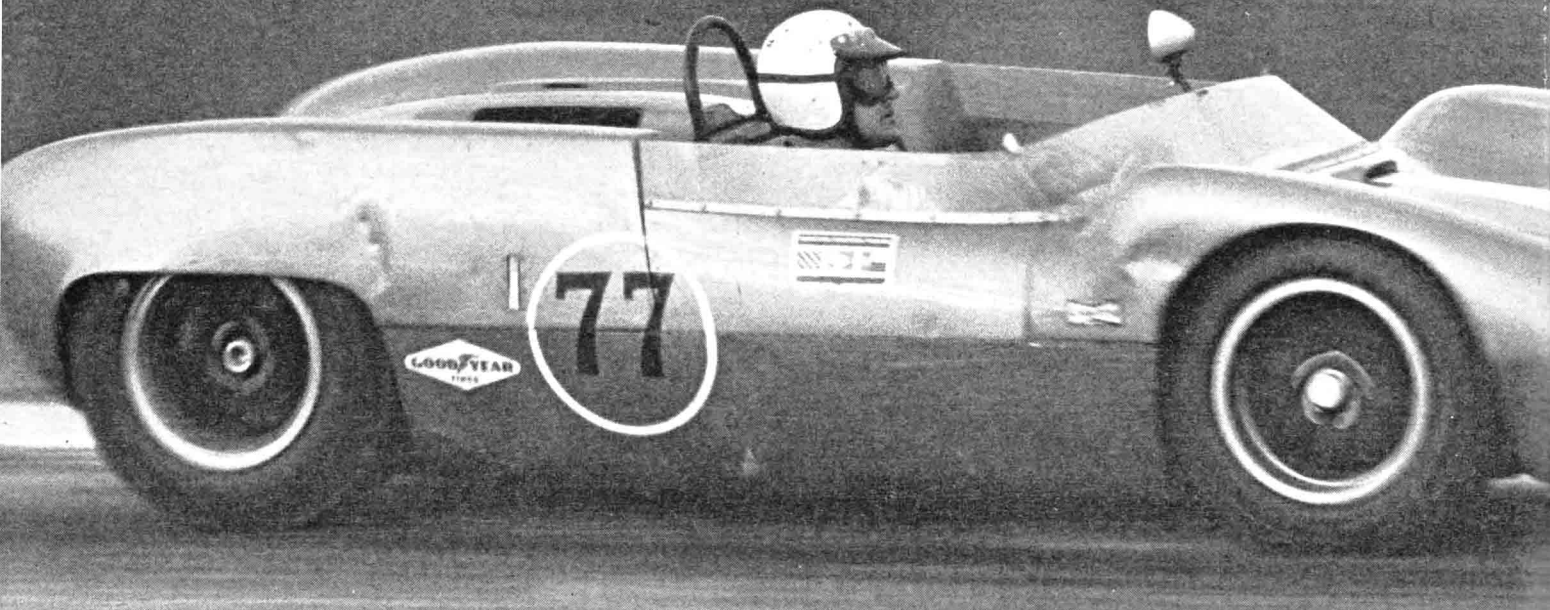
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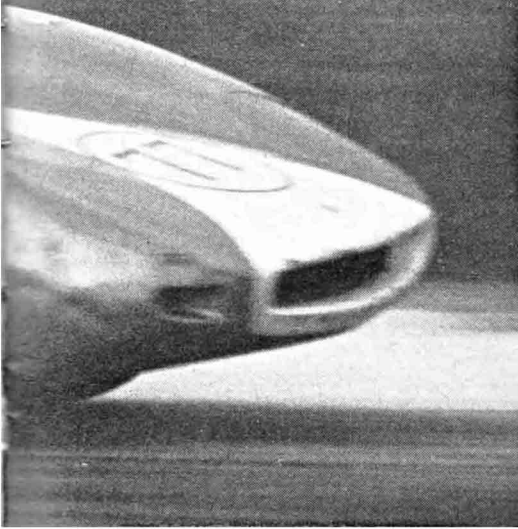
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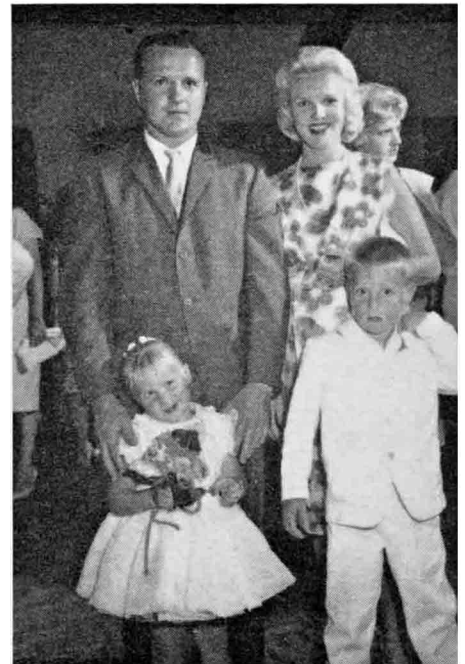
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32 CAR LIFE

Ol' A.J.

will drive them whenever he is free. He will also drive some sports car races in the Chevrolet-powered Scarab he drove to victory in Bermuda, a car owned by John Mecom of Houston.

"If you're a racing driver, you drive," Foyt says. "It is the only way to keep sharp. You drive the big ones and the little ones. Some purses are less than others, but it all adds up. Some tracks are harder than others, but it wasn't meant to be a soft sport. Some races are more important than others, but a race is a race and I love them all. I've never been afraid. If you're afraid, you shouldn't drive. If something is gonna' happen, it's gonna' happen. If you get to worrying about it, you might as well quit."

If he doesn't worry about danger, he does consider it. "If you can drive well, without panic, you've got a chance. It's dangerous if you make mistakes. I try not to make mistakes," he explains. "But it comes down to luck. When you flip one of those heavy sons of guns on your head at high speed, it's either your time or it isn't. Hell, you keep racing, you're gonna' get it. I know that. But I'm not gonna' worry about it. I love it too much. I don't fear death. I don't think about it."

Despite which, he has become almost a loner since three of his best friends, Jimmy Reece, Jerry Unser and Tony Bettenhausen, died in crashes. He is nail-hard and able to join in the macabre laughter of these men, trapped by fate and fancy in their unique existence, but he appreciates life and resents death, and he will not again make friends he will have to forget.

"Why lie?" he asks. "We pretend we accept what happens, but it's all pretending. You see someone lying there, you know it could be you. You see him and you remember the good times you had together. Maybe he has a wife and kids. You get sick. You want to throw your helmet away and run. But, you stick around. Who knows why? It's your life, that's all. But it hurts like Hell."

By the time he had hit the top, the movie-handsome, 6-ft., 190-lb. Tony Foyt, the darling of the feminine camp followers, had married Lucy Zarr, a beautiful blonde teen-ager to whom he had been introduced by mutual high school friends in Houston. He is now 29, she is 25, and they have the three

children, a 3-bedroom home in Houston, a summer lake house, a chicken ranch, a boat, a couple of cars, investments in oil and a sizeable bank balance. Whereas he once laughed off thoughts of retiring to such pleasant pastures, he now for the first time says things like, "I'm getting a little old to be banging around the country in those crates. Maybe one of these days I will quit and enjoy life a little."

If he does quit, it will not be because he's had enough of racing, but because the pressures of his passion are altering him and turning him hard. He is no longer comfortable on the track. Everyone is after him to run every race. He is expected to win every race. He is the one everyone wants to beat. His friends have become his enemies. He wants to win too much. He suffers losing too hard.

At home in Houston, lovely Lucy has been as admirably honest about their problems as Tony always is: "I don't ask Tony to quit," she says. "I knew he was a race driver when I married him. My family knew. But if they minded, they didn't say. They love Tony. We all do. We have confidence in him. But we worry, of course. This is what he wants to do, so we let him do it. But it is a difficult life.

"Jerry, the baby, is too young. Terry, who is five, went to one race, wants to go to them all. She knows what he's doing. She wants to be the first to know how he made out. She's very proud of him. Tony Jr., who's seven, is proud of his daddy, too, but he doesn't want to go to the races like he did when he was younger. He stopped driving the quarter-midget we bought him. He knows enough to be afraid for his daddy and he wants him to quit. I know that hurts Tony. He tries to explain it to the boy, but it doesn't help."

There is really no reason for him to be scratching around, hungry as a rookie, except that auto racing is in his blood and he has a chance to become the greatest race driver in the world, possibly for all time, and such a chance does not come to every man, and is not going to be taken lightly by such a proud man as A. J. Foyt.

"I'm still young," he says. "I'm at my best. With half a break, I can beat anyone. I've got too much going for me. I don't want to quit yet."

So on Memorial Day at Indianapolis and on 50 other days at 50 other tracks, A. J. Foyt will put on his red-and-white flame-proof coveralls, his crash helmet and his goggles, he will tie a red bandana cowboy-style around his face, lower himself into the snug cockpit of a gaudily-painted racer, and he will challenge the fastest drivers in history in an effort to become the best his profession has ever known. ■