



BY L. D. WORTHINGTON

THE CHRISTMAS TREE AT POMONA

the '64
NHRA Winternationals

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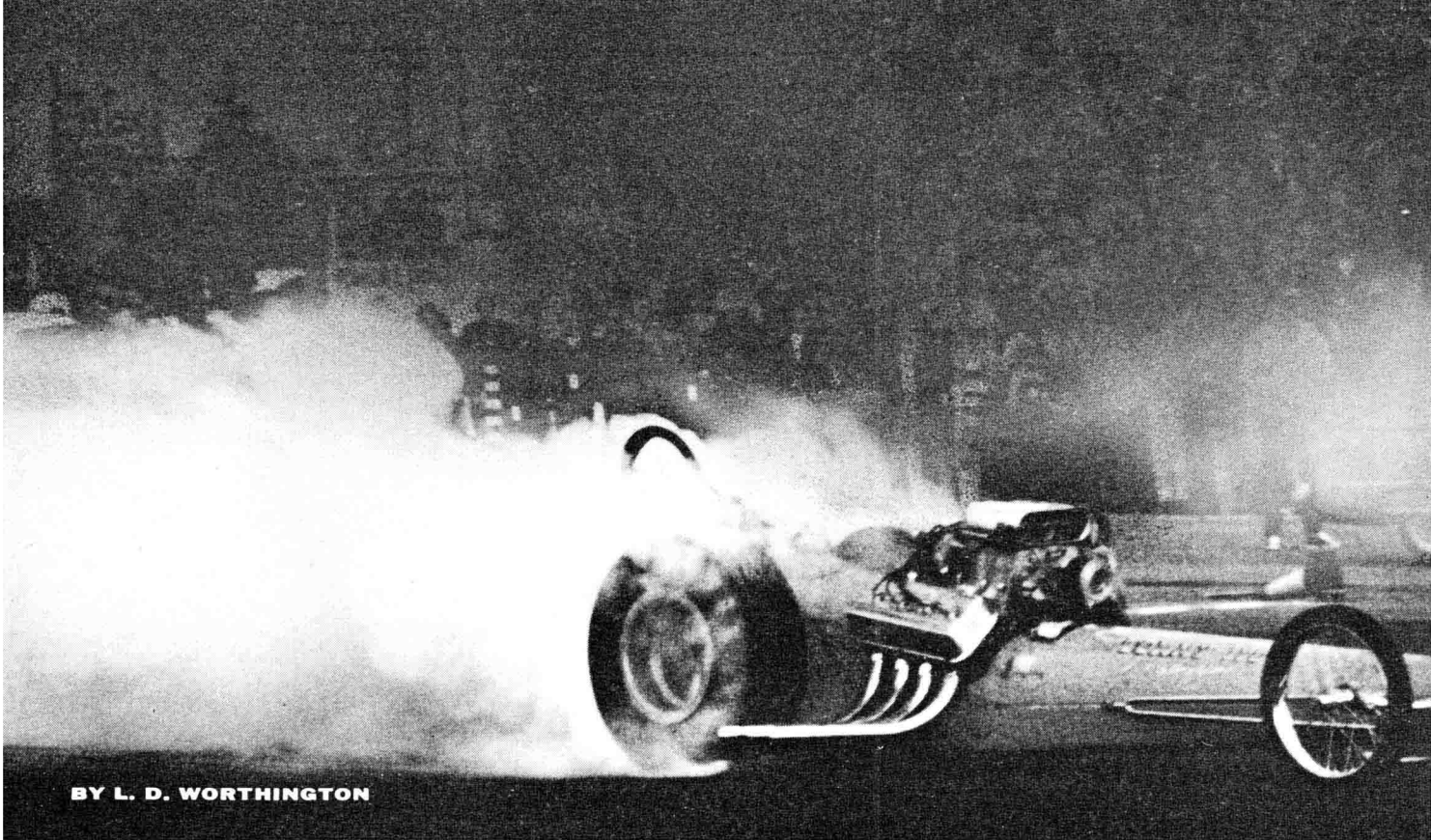
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The consistency of the runs made by Grove, and some other drivers with MOPAR equipment, was the final straw. The Ford Thunderbolts were faster. These lightweight Fairlanes had been running in the mid-11s and faster all weekend, but they had also run in the low 12s between the faster runs. When the Chrysler cars came down to a certain mark, they were able to maintain it. This consistency obviously was due to the automatic transmission in the Dodges and Plymouths, one that Ford hasn't yet been able to match.

Contributing to many competitors' starting problem was the Christmas Tree starting system. The tree has four vertical rows of lights. The top five are amber, the sixth is green and the bottom one is red. The tree is placed on the center-line of the drag strip, with two of the rows facing the competition lanes. The other two rows of lights face the opposite direction so spectators can watch the count down as each lower light flicks on. The starter flips a switch and the top amber light illuminates, then the count-down starts and the starter then has no control over the action. Each amber light is on about a half-second, taking about 2.5 sec. for the green light to come on at the bottom. If a competitor jumps the lights, the impulse skips the green light and the red light comes on below the green. This indicates a



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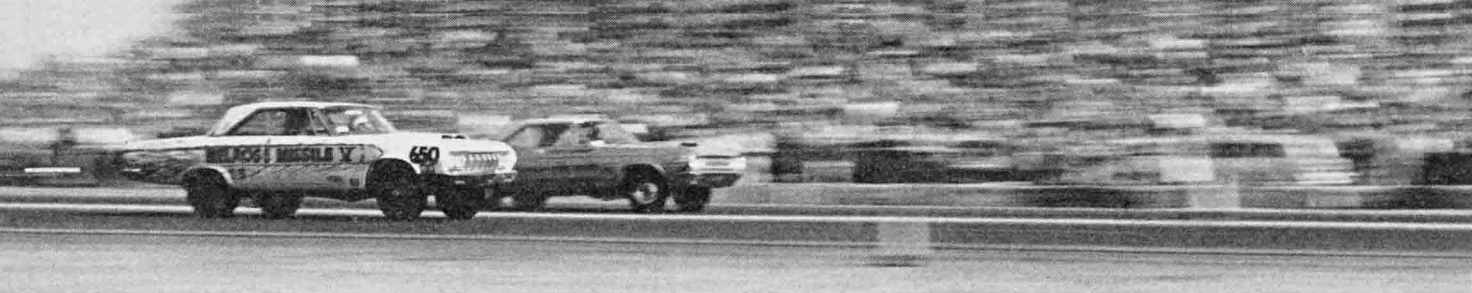
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MELROSE MISSILE, driven by Tom Grove, lost out in Super Stock (stick) category but had transmission switched to automatic, came back to win Top Stock Eliminator title.

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foul and the driver is then disqualified.

This system is generally recognized by the drivers as a fair starting procedure. Theoretically, it gives both drivers an equal chance to anticipate the green light. The problem is that most of the competitors only see the Christmas Tree at national-level events, and each time they need a certain period for adjusting to this system. A driver who can read the tree accurately can gain a car length or more out of the "hole." Thompson and Grove won this way and several other races were won by the slower of the two competing cars.

The foul light, however, will not come on if the lowest yellow light is going out. So, the winning drivers were going when the bottom amber light went out and not when the green light came on. Some of the drivers were using different kinds of counts, starting when the top amber light came on. They would count down aloud and go without waiting for the green light. It is not enough to have the faster car. To win a hotly contested class, a car must have a driver adept at reading those lights on the Christmas tree.

Two other eliminators were crowned at the Winternationals, Street Eliminator and Competition Eliminator. The division was made on the basis of whether the cars had fenders or not. An adjustment was made in the starting lights so that the countdown did not start at the same moment for the two lanes. The differential between the two starting times was the difference

in the record e.t. for the two classes of cars. The closer the class winner was to his class's record, the better his chances were. It was very popular with the crowd because it was easier to follow than the old complex system.

In the Street Eliminator category, Ron Root, of Pomona, and Norm Armstrong, of San Diego, paired off for the final run. Root was running an E Modified Production Dodge Dart and turned 14.24 sec. at 97.50 mph; Armstrong had a B Gas Coupe/Sedan Willys, Chevrolet-powered, and had turned 11.56 sec. at 120 mph. The advantage that the little Dart was given at the line was too much for the charging Willys, and Root was named Street Eliminator.

The Competition Eliminator final run brought up Charlie Smith from Oklahoma City in a Chevrolet-powered '23 Ford, from A Altered class, against Ed Weddle, Inglewood, Calif., running a Chevrolet-powered '32 Bantam, in B Altered. Smith turned a 9.73 sec. at 149.00 mph to catch Weddle before the finish line. Weddle turned a 10.77 sec. at 127.11 mph.

The staggered start and the use of established records for the differential in time keeps drivers from sand-bagging down into an eliminator slot they think they can win. And, when a big gas sedan sets off after a little modified production car, trying to make up 2 or 3-sec. disadvantage—it's a crowd-stander.

Traction was a problem at Pomona. Don Garlits was never able to get tires

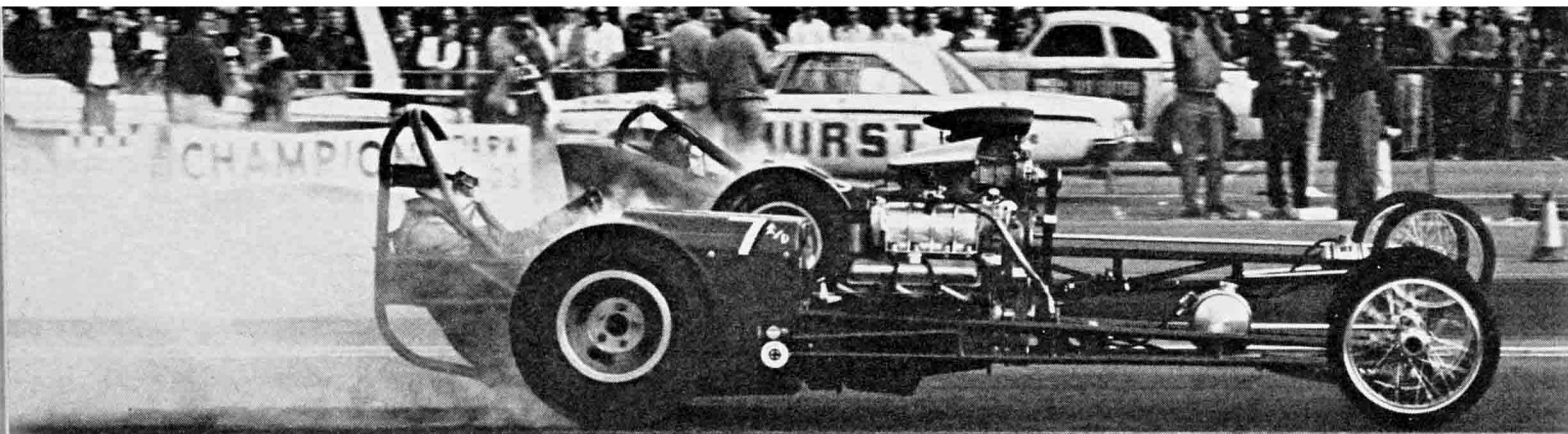
that would bite on the crumbly surface. For two days he detuned, attempting to get traction off the line. On Friday, in his first runs, he lit up his tires at the line and smoked them for some 200 yards.

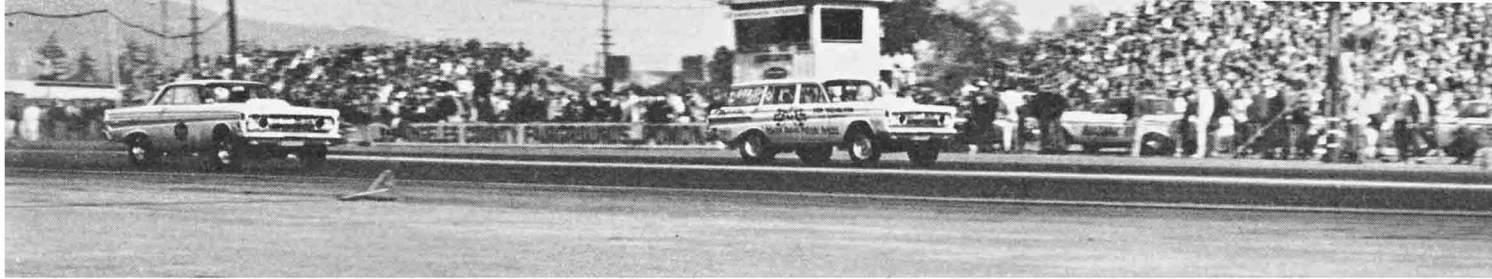
Garlits never got down below an 8.20 sec. e.t., which wasn't good enough to qualify for Fuel Eliminator. During elimination runs for AA Fuel Dragster, his wheels broke loose so badly that he could not hold his line. He thought his opponent had him "cold turkey" so he shut it down and coasted off the side of the strip. What Don didn't know was that his opponent had jumped the starting light and had been disqualified. Don was also disqualified for leaving the track, so he lost his last chance at the Fuel Eliminator runs on Sunday. He made one demonstration run on Sunday and lost a blower belt. After seeing the first two days of the meet, it could not have been any other way. It just wasn't Garlits' weekend.

Art Malone, the other man from Florida, had much the same kind of meet. Friday night his engine popped back into the manifold the blower is mounted on and blew the supercharger off the manifold. The unit tilted to the front, so Art got the blast back at him. The required protective mask and clothing saved him from being burned, but he spent the rest of the weekend sorting out the car. He made several runs on Sunday, but only for tuning and the crowd.

The Mercury Comets, the only entries in A Factory Experimental, could not seem to get a grip at Pomona either. After running Friday and Saturday at the 'nationals, they ran at another Southern California strip on Saturday night to see if it was the strip

DANNY ONGAIS (foreground) put down Mickey Thompson's hemi-head Ford to win top gas eliminator, after losing to Thompson in the AA/D class run-offs.





SIGNS OF THE FUTURE were these 427-cu. in. powered Comets in Factory Experimental class. Ronnie Sox drove hardtop like one at left to Eliminator, hit 11.49 sec. e.t., 123.45 mph.

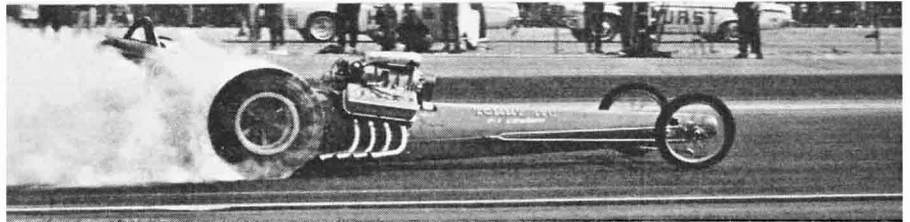
or the cars. They turned 0.3-0.4 sec. faster than on any one of the three days at Pomona.

The Comets, capable of turning in the low 11s at above 125 mph, are lighter than the Fairlane Thunderbolts and have more of their weight near the rear wheels. With more work and development, they could be down in the 10s by mid-year, when these cars will be classified as Super Stock. One of the drivers said they were coming off the line on the better surfaces at above 5500 rpm (one Comet did a wheel-stand coming off the line at 6000 rpm). NHRA may have to freeze the wheelbase in Factory Experimental, or this trend will produce a 500-bhp Cortina.

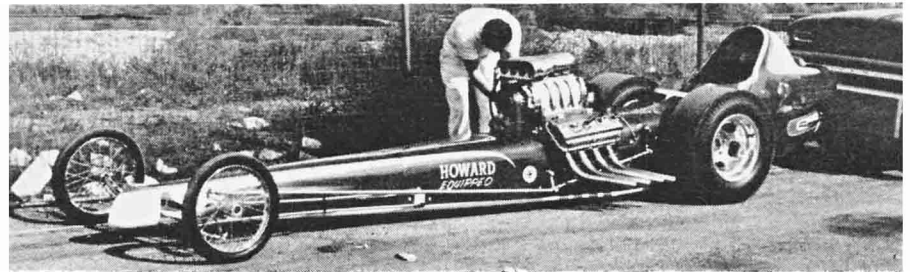
It was almost common to see altered coupes/sedans, and some of the supercharged gas coupes/sedans, do wheel-stands coming off the line. In the sedans, the stick-hydro cars were skidding the little 13-in. front wheels up to the starting line from the ready line. These small tires and wheels have so little traction that when the hydros are dropped in gear and the driver eases the car up to the starting lights, one foot on the gas and the other on the brake, the front tires will slide forward, even though locked in position. The problem of steering coupes and sedans that are approaching 150 mph (one A Gas Supercharged Willys turned 150 mph with a 30-40 mph tail wind) is not made any easier by these small tires. Now that the front-end jacking has been stopped and the cars stand relatively level, a minimum wheel size of 15 in. and minimum tread width of 4-5 in. should be required—at least for cars that are as unstable at high speed as the high-sitting, full-bodied ones.

A new class structure has been set up by NHRA for 1964 called Modified Production. This class is designed to fill the gap between stockers and the Gas Coupes/Sedans. Competition has been so competitive in Gas Coupes that none of these cars really qualify as street machines. Also, cars that had been Factory Experimental, but are beyond the "age limit," now drop into Modified Production.

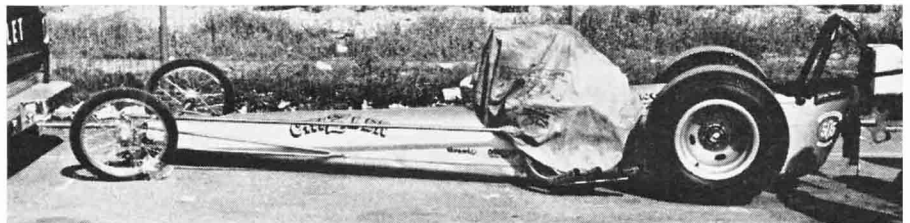
The new class requires that no more than three 2-barrel or two 4-barrel carburetors be used and no fuel injections are allowed. No roll bars are required for steel-topped cars, and full up-



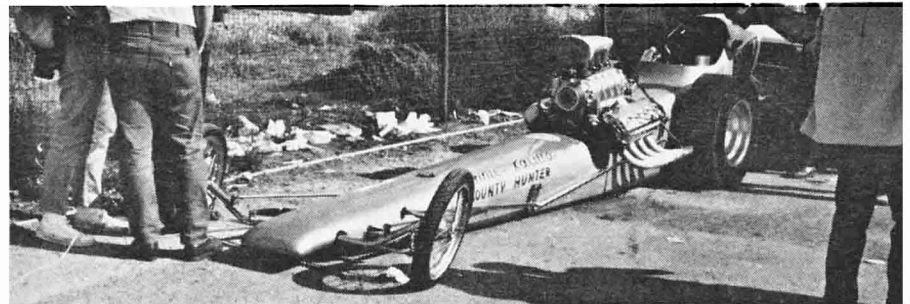
SHAPE OF THE PRESENT is typified by this current trend in fuel-fired dragsters. Tommy Ivo's supercharged-Chrysler-powered rail is one of the shorter ones!



WARD AND WAYRE'S "Longshot" dragster (also Chrysler-powered) won the award for the best appearing car and crew but was eliminated in fueler class runs.

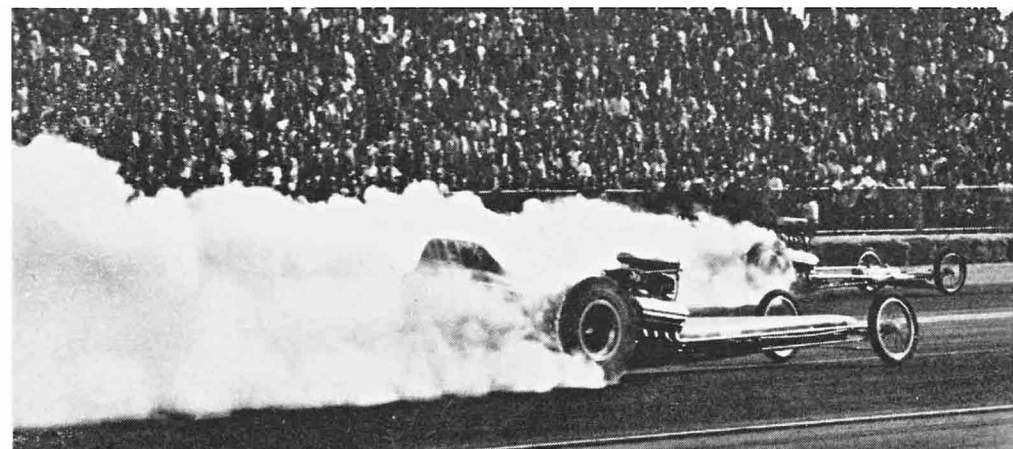


CHRIS KARASINES' "Chizler" is another long-fellow of same ilk. Karasines lost to Ivo in one of the final rounds although he logged 7.86 sec., 192.70 mph earlier.



ONE OF THE originators of the super-long wheelbase, Connie Kalitta ran in fuel class, was disqualified when he jumped the starting light.

JEEP HAMPSHIRE turned the low elapsed time of the meet at 7.85 sec. and had the second fastest time at 195.22 mph. Following the fueler format, it is blown-Chrysler powered.





FAIRLANE THUNDERBOLTS cut into Chrysler domination of Super Stock, gave Gas Ronda (on left) stick division victory. Power is by 427-cu. in. Ford.



STREET ELIMINATOR Ron Root used much-modified Dodge Dart and handicap system to good advantage.

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holstery is required. The cars cannot be push-started and they must have bumpers front and rear. Several more conditions help maintain it as primarily a street class. It is a class for cars that look stock on the outside. According to the participation at Pomona it is going to be a very popular classification.

As one of the fellows said in the pits, when asked about the new class he was running in. "It's a class for the fellows who have been running cheater stock."

Jess Van Deventer, of National City, Calif., set a new record in A Gas

Dragster and was on his way to a class win on Sunday when he blew a head gasket and scrambled the blower. Jess, like a lot of other drivers of Chevrolet-powered equipment, was tired of being beaten by high torque/low rpm machines, that ran high gear only in A Gas Dragster. Jess worked out a solution, using a rod to connect his clutch and shift lever, to reduce the time it takes him to shift.

When Jess pulls up to the starting line, he pushes in the clutch and then pulls the shift lever into first gear. When he gets the green light, and lets out on the clutch, this positions the

rod for the next throw. When he reaches his shift point, he does not touch the shift lever but pops the clutch in and out and the rod pulls the shift lever into the second speed of the 2-speed box. The shift is so quick that it sounds as though he is only feathering the throttle to correct his line. Jess feels he has gained 0.15 sec. in shift time and is able to hold a better line because he does not take his hand off the wheel to reach for the shift lever. He broke the old record by 0.09 sec.

He got the idea from seeing pre-selector transmissions that once were used in road racing. He doesn't feel that he has it all worked out yet and thinks he may be able to improve it. This idea, or similar ones, could make quite a difference for the smaller-engined classes that must use 2-speed

AHRA in Arizona

WHILE NO ONE was "caught in the pass" and the Cavalry remained tight and secure at the post, a few of the Hot Shoe Drag Indians were caught in the hole and left at the post during American Hot Rod Association's 4th Annual Winternationals at Bee-Line Dragway near Scottsdale, Ariz.

Bee Line, situated on the Salt River Indian Reservation, is an excellent plant and has great potential for a better one.

An announced crowd of some 48,000 attended the 3-day event and was treated to a wide variety of wild and woolly drag racing.

Illuminated by fluorescent stripes, a Hollywood searchlight and a number of flame-belching gas and fuel dragsters, the meet ended late Sunday night with Bob Sullivan, Kansas City, Mo.,

with the Top Eliminator title hardware

Sullivan won after a number of the faithful proceeded to break machinery on the line, midway down the strip and at the far end.

Despite the predominance of hot and competition car entries, the promoters, strip operators and associations generally agree that the stock cars usually provide the greatest interest to the paid spectators.

AHRA's meet proved the point again.

One untoward incident marred the competitive flavor of the 4th Annual. The Lincoln-Mercury group arrived early and, with Don Nicholson running a Comet station wagon (109 in. wheelbase) with a 427-cu. in. Ford engine, some fantastic practice runs were made. The Comet ran in the low 11-sec. bracket and above 125 mph.

Late, rather early in fact, on Saturday morning, a dispute over classification prompted the Mercs to get mad, pick up their jacks and marbles, and go home to NHRA.

Two stock eliminator titles are offered by AHRA, Top Stock Eliminator and Mr. Stock Eliminator. The former was the hit of the show and does give an aura of excitement to drag racing that is usually felt only by the true enthusiast or the competitor.

Top Stock Eliminator is won after the top car has run against all kinds of stock cars under a unique handicap system.

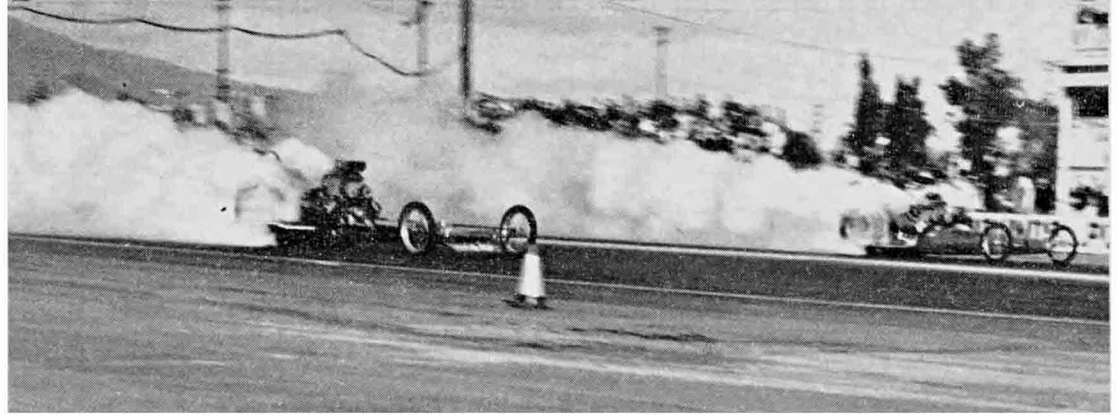
Dave Strickler, York, Pa., won the event in a 1964 Dodge with a winning elapsed time of 11.97 sec. at 119.80 mph.

More important than speed or elapsed time, though, was the method of winning.

Starting in 1961, Jim Tice, president of AHRA, and Kerry Clark, National Tech and Event director, set up the handicap procedure. Its basis, that of compiling Elapsed Times of all stock classes and then opposing them to a



WHAT A transmission under this lever!



FUELER FINALE pitted Jack Williams (left) against Tommy Ivo. After battling icy roads to fix a broken engine and return to Pomona, Williams wasn't about to be beaten. He won at 8.16 sec., 193.12 mph.

transmissions instead of 3-speed units.

Each year the gas machines go faster. This year the displacement of many of the faster gas machines was close to 500 cu. in. The 390/427 blocks with 0.5-in. stroker crankshaft and a slight over-bore come up well above 470 in. The fuel dragsters already have more power than they can put to the ground, so most of them have stayed around 400 cu. in. The gassers do not have this problem and from the talk around the pits, a 500-530 cu. in. single-engined gas dragster will be running for the Nationals at Indianapolis.

There was only one multi-engine entry at Pomona, the "Freight Train" driven by John Peters. The car won the '63 Winternationals and was still competitive. It qualified to run in Gas Eliminator, but was never as fast as

the single-engined cars. With 500 cu. in. available from a single engine, the weight of an extra engine for 600-700 cu. in. total cannot be justified.

The fuelers will probably have to break with the slingshot, rigid rear axle, 2-wheel drive format before they can take advantage of the cubic displacements available. With Detroit taking an avid interest in racing of all kinds, perhaps someone there will pick up the tab for the development of a 4-wheel drive, 480-cu. in., 1300-1500 bhp fuel dragster.

The rigid rear axle, big slicks combination leaves no room for improvement except in tires and weight distribution. If a chassis could be developed that would hold 1500 bhp and transmit it to the track with little slippage, 200-mph runs would be as common as today's 170-mph dashes.

The minimum weight imposed on a 480-cu. in. AA Fuel Dragster would be only 1300 lb. according to current NHRA rules.

Next year, G-suits!

TOP ELIMINATORS

FUEL—Crossley-Williams Swan, Bakersfield, Calif., Chrysler dragster, 8.16 sec., 193.12 mph.
 GAS—Danny Ongais, Carlsbad, Calif., Chevrolet dragster, 8.39, 178.52.
 COMPETITION—Charlie Smith, Oklahoma City, Okla., Chevrolet-Ford, 9.73, 149.00.
 STREET—Ron Root, Pomona, Calif., Dodge Dart, 14.24, 97.50.
 FACTORY STOCK—Ronnie Sox, Mercury Comet, Burlington, N.C., 11.49, 123.45.
 STOCK—Tom Grove, Oakland, Calif., Plymouth, 11.63, 124.13.

"per foot handicap," would make the Santa Anita horse handicapper's methods seem mild by comparison.

While the "number of feet handicap" will vary from year to year and season to season, the system remains constant.

When a stock car enters and is classified, it is given a handicap number. After it has run its class and won, it is then eligible to compete for Top Stock Eliminator.

For this title alone some 38 classes are involved. At Scottsdale, more than 200 cars had a chance for it.

What it does is to give the slower, older and independent dragger a chance to become the big hauncho.

The handicap numbers run from Zero (the fastest stockers) through Six. A No. 1 handicap allows a start of 30 ft. ahead of the line; No. 2, 60 ft. and thereafter in 30-ft. increments. As it turned out, the "eliminator runners" gained or gave as much as 180 ft.

Hardest work was performed by the starter as it was necessary for him to line 'em up, then run down the strip in front of the lead car for a flag start.

Next in line for "hardest worker" is

the winning car. The runs are rapid fire and catching the slower car is a problem.

While this system does nothing for the esthetic drag racer, it makes drag racing a race. Spectators view the

scene as a Class A cowboy picture in reverse. The fast guy wears the black hat and the slow guy the white hat. But, regardless of the winner, the crowd hoots and hollers and carries on.
 —W. W. JACKSON

