



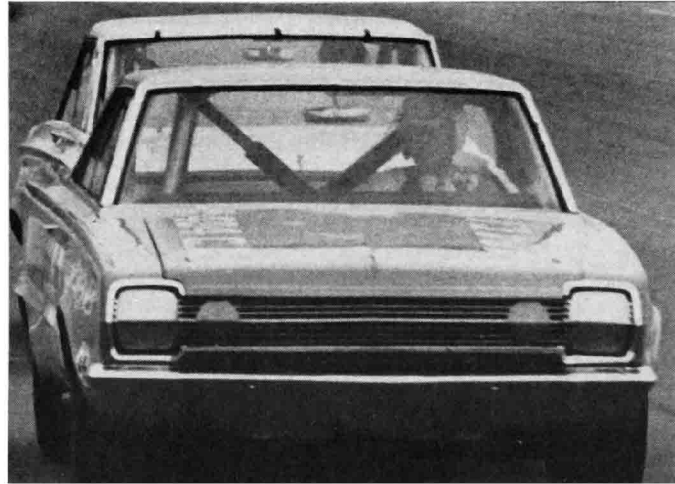
As usual, there were hassles at Daytona this year—over everything from bogus streamlining to tires that threw chunks in the air like confetti. But through it all, Richard Petty and his dazzling blue Plymouth stood apart, a winning combination almost from the opening day of practice.

The Daytona 500: Almost a Runaway for Richard

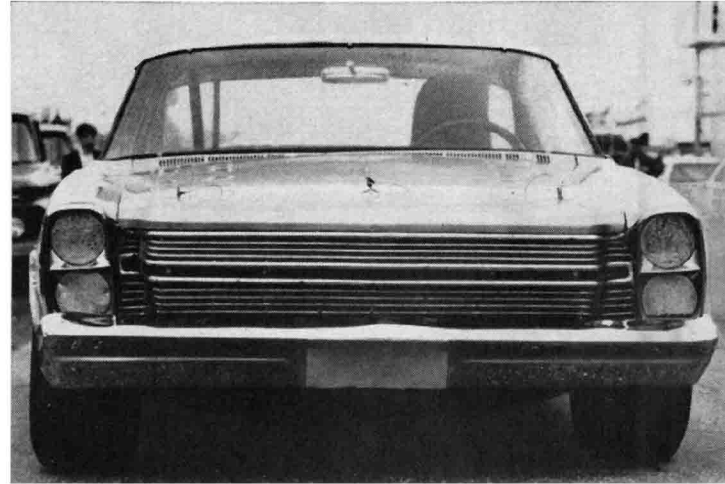
BY BROCK YATES

When Richard Petty isn't buckled into the seat of his father's bright blue Plymouth stock car, he smiles a lot and talks pleasantly in a Carolina drawl so thick you could stir it with a spoon. He is a genuinely kind and unassuming young man, and the stock car fans from Roanoke to Charlotte love him like no other race driver. Uniquely, he is also held in great esteem by his NASCAR competitors, who seem to bear him no grudge even though he consistently drives faster than they do. They also respect his father, Lee, and his brother, Maurice, the two next most important members of the great Randleman, North Carolina, Petty clan. Lee is a former Grand National stock car driver—one of the two or three all-time best—and Maurice is the chief mechanic on the Plymouths Richard drives. He tried racing himself for awhile, but gave it up several years ago and now seems perfectly content to make his brother's cars go farther and faster than anybody else's. And Maurice does this effectively, while ol' Lee acts as the convivial boss of the whole shootin' match.

Can this mean that nice guys do win? Yes, apparently, though the Pettys effectively substitute hours of work and careful planning for any generic nastiness that might be necessary in an equation for victory. When the Pettys arrive at a race, they are always ready to unload their tough-looking number 43 Plymouth from its transporter and hit competitive speeds after maybe 15 minutes of practice. They have learned the lesson of proper preparation, and no other race in their long, victory-packed career is a better example than the 8th annual Daytona 500, run recently around the precipitous macadam banks of Bill France's great



Petty's car surprised everybody with its clean bodywork.



Ford lights below bumper indicate how absurd streamlining got.



Goldsmith ran 178 mph in practice, broke a U-joint in the race.



swampland monument to high speed commerce.

Richard and Lee and Maurice were among the first to arrive at Daytona when practice opened several weeks prior to the race, and they looked ready to run 500 miles on a moment's notice. The car they brought along was the result of lengthy pondering over the NASCAR Grand National rules, and it took advantage of some obvious loopholes in the regulations regarding streamlining. The Plymouth's windshield was canted back slightly and its entire front fender and hood sections were sloped down to present a more aerodynamic shape to the 180-mph Daytona air currents. Prevented from defending their 1964 Daytona victory in 1965 due to a hassle between Chrysler Corporation and Bill France over the legality of the famous Hemi engines, the Pettys returned this year with an iron-clad resolve to make up for lost time. The truce between Chrysler and France resulted in a set of compromise terms that forced intermediate-sized cars like the Plymouth Belvederes and the Dodge Chargers to race with 405 cubic inch engines. Because they were running larger-wheelbase Galaxies, the new rules permitted the Fords to compete with 427 cubic inch engines, and this 22-cubic-inch handicap had the Pettys so concerned that they turned to aerodynamics for more speed.

Their solution to the problem, and the imitators it spawned, caused the first of several flaps that swirled around Lee and Richard during the Daytona 500, but they kept smiling through it all, oblivious to the foot-stamping and the teeth-gnashing that was going on. Conflict comes naturally to the Daytona International Speedway and it is difficult to recall a 500-miler in which bickering didn't mar the proceedings. This year the troubles involved first the streamlining and finally, tires, but these were only momentary distractions for Richard and Lee and Maurice as they picked up their second win in as many tries, averaging a record-breaking 160 mph along the way.

The conflict that superseded all others at Daytona took place between the Ford Motor Company and the Chrysler Corporation and was carried on with superficial, big-business sportsmanship and good will. These two giants are both aware that most of the promotional ammunition to be collected from stock car racing comes at the Daytona 500. Officials of both companies candidly admit that they would not trade a victory at Daytona for wins in all of the other major NASCAR events, and this means that millions are expended annually to get this checkered flag. Last year, Ford had the place to itself, thanks to the Chrysler ban, and won a race that offered about as much prestige as Italy's Ethiopian campaign.

Ford returned this year knowing full well that their three-year-old 427 V-8, even with its displacement advantage, would be hard-pressed to keep up with the power-packed 405 Hemis. "We're at the end of the development cycle with our engine, while Chrysler is just beginning theirs with the 405 Hemi," lamented a Ford man prior to the race. "But we're all hoping that the smaller Hemis will be down on reliability because they'll have to rev 'em higher." That was the first of many disappointments for the Ford forces, because the de-stroked Hemis ran with the speed and dependability of Japanese trains. As it turned out, the Fords had to wind to 7200 rpm while the Hemis were loafing along at 6800. "The 405 Hemi is just as powerful as the old 426 version, though it is down slightly on torque," said a Chrysler representative shortly before the race. "But hell, Daytona is a track that demands raw horsepower, so who needs torque?"

DAYTONA 500 CONTINUED

Richard Petty didn't need much, apparently, because he began bustling around the big oval at over 175 mph almost from the moment he hit the track for practice. The other big Chrysler guns were driving cars prepared by the highly respected Nichols Engineering operation, but because boss Ray Nichols hadn't gotten the word about the cute stuff that could be done with streamlining, Plymouth drivers Paul Goldsmith and Jim Hurtubise weren't immediately competitive. Added to Nichols' initial woes were some engine valve train problems that finally forced Ray to pack up his cars during the second week of practice and head back to Griffith, Indiana for some major updating.

As practice began to get serious, only one Ford was getting around Daytona in impressive fashion, and that was a bronze, droop-nose vehicle driven by Dick Hutcherson. Like Petty's, it had received extensive custom work on the front end, which was paying off with speeds over 175 mph. Because maybe 98% of all racing engineering, both here and abroad, operates on the monkey-see, monkey-do principle, the Petty and Hutcherson streamlining efforts sent everybody back to

the garage to saw and hack on the noses and windshields of their automobiles.

Some of the cars reappeared looking more suitable for a run at the Land Speed Record than for competition in the Daytona 500, so ol' Bill France decided to put his foot down about streamlining. France, who sometimes promulgates and supersedes more rules in a given week than the Postal Department does in ten years, came out four-square in favor of *stock* cars by ruling that bodywork could *only* be lowered four inches below the original Detroit dimensions. Thus reassured that Bill France wasn't going to let anyone tamper with the rules, the entrants redoubled their efforts toward extracting speed by more conventional means.

Meanwhile the Nichols cars had returned from Indiana and Paul Goldsmith found the speed he had been seeking. Deciding there was no time left to set up his 1966 Plymouth, Paul discarded it in favor of the 1965 machine that had carried him to third place in the Riverside 500, and suddenly found himself unwinding laps at 177 mph. Jim Hurtubise, who had only run Daytona once before, was almost as fast, and, except



Top: One of the soft compound Goodyears that shed its tread. Flying chunks of rubber from tires of this type broke windshields of Panch (middle) and Turner (bottom).

Chrysler Corp. racing honcho Ronnie Householder knew he had the fastest cars, but worried throughout the race that tire problems and unforeseen mechanical troubles might nullify their great speed.



for Hutcherson, the Ford camp was plunged into gloom. The two Wood Brothers' cars, driven by veterans Marvin Panch and Curtis Turner, were running in the low 170s, as was the Holman and Moody machine of star Fred Lorenzen, and the Banjo Matthews-entered car piloted by sensational young Cale Yarborough.

Two Holley Farms cars owned by good old boy Junior Johnson were going slower every day, and the garage area crowd was openly relishing the heavyweight match they figured would erupt between Johnson and his super-star driver, A.J. Foyt. Foyt rejected two of Junior's cars as too slow before settling for a Ford Jack Bowsher had driven to victory in the ARCA 250-miler a week before. Foyt went little faster in his third machine while relations between himself and his boss got downright surly. "Maybe we oughta quit worryin' about switchin' cars an' start switchin' drivers," drawled a Johnson man late in the week, but Foyt and Johnson somehow managed to keep their tempers and A.J. did drive in the race—though in complete obscurity until the car broke on the 46th lap.

While the rather boxy Plymouths were shattering

Ford Motor Company's Leo Beebe had little to smile about during the Daytona 500, especially after three of his best cars were knocked out by one of the strangest flukes in auto racing history.



records, the mechanically similar but slipperier-shaped Dodge Chargers were having trouble reaching competitive speeds. Most pre-race speculation centered on how much quicker the fastback Chargers would be than the rest of the field, but it soon became apparent that simply too many handling mysteries had to be solved before they would be contenders. The three Charger drivers, David Pearson, Lee Roy Yarborough and Sam McQuagg, were convinced that the tails of the cars were lifting in the corners—which caused a great rash of tongue-wagging around the pits—until Dodge engineers traced the entire problem to the suspensions. It was finally decided that too much simple but time-consuming development work remained to be done on the Chargers and all three were fitted with "cruising" gears for the race to provide better gas mileage and reliability. "They aren't going to win this one, but I hate to think about how fast they'll have 'em going by the time we get back here for the 'Firecracker 400'," moaned a Ford official.

The pair of 100-mile qualifying races that were run two days before the 500 turned out much as expected, with the Hemis tromping the field. Goldsmith, who the day before had cranked off three consecutive laps at over 177 mph, followed by one at an unprecedented 178 mph, won the first race. Earl Balmer, driving a 1965 Dodge, took the other. Both men pulled the old Daytona trick of "sling-shooting" off the fourth turn on the final lap and blasting past the helpless leader in a swirl of turbulent air. Goldsmith was able to turn his trick with none other than Richard Petty, while Balmer nipped Hutcherson, who crunched the wall during the maneuver and finished third behind Jim Hurtubise.

This left one day for everybody to establish some sort of strategy for winning, and it was obvious that the Ford drivers—excepting Hutcherson—would try to run a steady, fuel-conserving pace and pray fervently that the Plymouths would blow up or waste too much time in the pits. Aside from an awful, almost unbelievable twist of fate, this tactic might have worked, because men like Turner, Panch, Yarborough and Lorenzen drove beautifully disciplined races and might well have finished better.

The great tire debacle, which changed the entire complexion of the race and almost cost Petty his victory, began during practice when some minor chunking (throwing sections of tread at high speed) developed on the soft-compound Goodyear tires. Petty had qualified for the pole position on Firestone tires, but switched to Goodyears for the race, claiming that they gave him better handling in a wider selection of grooves. The Goodyear people were privately apprehensive about the possibility of their new tires chunking (they had been introduced with less testing than hoped for), but they counted on caution flags and the continuation of Daytona's cool, damp weather on race day to aid tire wear. Lest there be any misunderstanding, one of the biggest rivalries in sports exists between the Goodyear and Firestone tire companies, and there was widespread head-shaking and eye-rolling in the Firestone camp about what was going to happen to the men on Goodyears. They were absolutely correct in predicting the Goodyears would chunk, but not one Firestone man in his wildest, most paranoid nightmares, ever dreamed that the Goodyear troubles might cost Firestone its chance of winning!

On the 11th lap Jarrett changed a pair of Goodyears. The word passed down pit row like a Hollywood rumor: Jarrett's tires had chunked! A few moments later, Darel

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DAYTONA (Cont. from page 79)

Dieringer brought his ancient but active 1964 Mercury in with the same problem and the battle for the lead suddenly assumed tremendous significance. Petty and Goldsmith were out in front, alternating the lead at a furious 175-mph pace, while Jim Hurtubise was holding off Dick Hutcherson, a short distance behind. Goldsmith, Petty and Hurtubise were on Goodyears and Hutcherson was on the slower but longer-wearing, harder compound Firestone tires.

Tough Ronnie Householder, the ex-midget racing champion who now runs the nuts-and-bolts end of the Chrysler racing program, immediately realized the potential danger in the situation: if his Plymouths had to make one or two extra stops for tires, their extra speed would be nullified in the face of the steady-paced Fords. At the same time, Leo Beebe, the patrician FoMoCo racing boss, began to see hope building for his boys. Panch, Turner, Yarborough and Lorenzen were all in the front echelon—and they too were running Firestones.

Beebe's first trauma occurred on the 38th lap. Dick Hutcherson came roaring down the pit lane and stopped with an ugly web of cracks spread across his windshield. His crew made a quick attempt at slapping some tape across the rupture, but a NASCAR official called them off and thumbed the car out of the race. Hutcherson was justifiably angry, because his windshield had been smashed by a flying chunk of rubber from Jim Hurtubise's left rear tire. Beebe stoically lit a long, expensive cigar. Hutcherson's departure was a grievous blow to the Ford campaign. The fastest of the entire FoMoCo team, Hutcherson was fully prepared to run the race at a 172-173 mph average—a speed, as it turned out, that would have put him in the thick of the battle at the end. But the day wasn't entirely lost for Ford: at that point Richard Petty got the signal from his crew to come in.

Petty stopped and Maurice and Lee and the rest of the crew leaped over the wall to yank off a smoking set of Goodyears with gaping holes chewed in the treads. By the time he got back into traffic, Richard was over a lap behind. Elsewhere along the pits, panic set in and a number of drivers, including A.J. Foyt, changed from Goodyear to Firestone on the spot. Petty's powerful Hemi quickly brought him back into contention, and while normal stops for gasoline and tires jumbled the

order somewhat, Goldsmith, Hurtubise and Richard managed to maintain command for much of the early running. However, Marvin Panch and Cale Yarborough were within easy striking distance of the three leaders.

Back in the Speedway garage area, the Firestone and Goodyear crews were working like demons—the Goodyear men hustling to change the new tires for a proved, harder compound version, while their rivals gleefully yanked Goodyears off the spare wheels of various cars and replaced them with Firestones. One of the crew chiefs who sent a set of wheels to the Firestone garage was Lee Petty, who had decided that too much was at stake to maintain blind loyalty to Goodyear. Four mounted Firestones actually arrived in the Petty pit and were set for installation on Richard's next stop when the Goodyear men appeared with a set of their harder tires. The Petty family composure broke down briefly while Maurice and his father argued about which brand to use, but the Goodyear forces prevailed and Richard went on to finish the race with their tires. The harder compound cut about three mph off his top speed, but the 172- and 173-mph laps he was turning were still sufficient to hold the remaining Fords at bay.

On the 119th lap, Panch arrived at his pit with his windshield looking as if somebody had heaved a brick at it. As in the case of Hutcherson, NASCAR officials ruled the car unsafe for competition and Marvin was through for the afternoon. Flying rubber had done it and again the culprit was Hurtubise. "It happened some time ago," said Panch, "and at first it wasn't too bad. Then the vibration and air pressure made it worse and there wasn't anything I could do."

Three laps later, Curtis Turner, who was Panch's teammate with the Wood Brothers, rumbled to a stop and squeezed his big frame through the window. His windshield was smashed too!

"H't it was Hurtubise," drawled Curtis. "He got me an' Marvin an' Hutcherson with the rubber flyin' off his tars." The Ford people were going up the wall. Three cars—three good cars, running like clockwork, knocked out like ten-pins by one guy. A Plymouth guy at that! The Firestone representatives felt equally jinxed, because now only Cale Yarborough had a chance of winning with their brand, though Hurtubise did them a small favor—and added a final twist of irony to the tread-throwing incident—by

changing to Firestones for the final stages of the race!

As it was, Hurtubise paid for his mischief. Though he ran as fast as anybody on the track, the chunking tires and the ensuing change of brands cost him so much time in the pits that he could finish no higher than sixth. The tire problem also dropped Goldsmith out of contention. After making several stops, the Nichols crew shod his Plymouth with harder compound Goodyears, but Paul complained that they ruined the handling and still another time-consuming switch was made to Firestones. It was all for naught anyway, because the car broke a U-joint late in the race and Goldsmith tumbled all the way to 18th in the final standings.

As the race spun into its final laps, an ominous black rain cloud rolled over the track. Richard Petty was running comfortably in front of Cale Yarborough, who in turn led steady, but slow-running Lorenzen and Pearson. The whole affair had become a procession when the rain began to fall six laps from the finish. The NASCAR people let the boys fly blind—minus rain tires or windshield wipers—for two more circuits before waving the yellow flag. This, for all intents, ended the race. They splashed through the downpour for another two laps and then the race was called, five miles early.

An empty gas tank forced Lorenzen to stop moments before the end, letting David Pearson into third place, but otherwise the Daytona 495 ended with a minimum of thrills. Had Cale Yarborough not lost a full lap earlier in the race by overshooting his pit during a routine stop, the end might have been extremely thrilling—and possibly more satisfying to the Ford group. But as it was, how could a Ford man expect anything better on such a foul, rotten-luck day? (They probably should have been thankful that the Goodyear balloon hadn't fallen out of the sky on top of Yarborough and Lorenzen.)

Despite all of the silly switches and tricks of fate, one ringing fact remained after the sound and the fury died down; the Pettys came to the race with a superior organization and a superior car and they simply overpowered their opponents. Bad luck helped beat the Fords, but in the final analysis, the thing that did them in was a big, loose-limbed kid from North Carolina and his family's ol' blue Plymouth. And for Ronnie Householder and the men at Chrysler, that's all that really mattered. c/o