

Warm weather, super traction and stiff competition were the three things that might best be used to sum the Second Annual NHRA Springnationals at Bristol.

It was four days of "gettin' with it" for drag racing visitors to the hills of Tennessee.

# BIG DIXIE DIGS

BY HOWARD PENNINGTON



THE HILLS OF TENNESSEE hadn't seen such action and excitement since the days of Daniel Boone and Davy Crocket. That's the quickest way to sum up the NHRA Springnationals at Bristol Dragway. The Bristol race plant is so great it's unreal. It has to be the finest strip ever built. And the meet that NHRA put on was as good as its setting. It wasn't the biggest meet ever held. (The NHRA Nationals hold that title.) But it had to be one of the best ever.

Some 500 cars were entered in competition. Connie Kalitta summed it up when he was asked about the AA/FD field. "It isn't the biggest I've ever seen," he said, "but it's all good iron." And that was true of just about every car in every class. No matter where you looked, you could hardly find a scruffy machine.

And the field of Top Gas contenders was Super Boss. There was Gordon "Collecting" Collett, and Nationals winner Hirata-Hobbs. World Points Champion Jim Minnick. The Peters-Tuller Roeckner and Dick Vest. Tom Larkin "Freight Train." Ron Colson, Dale qualified with a low gas e.t. of 8.223! There were 26 AA/GD machines in all, just about every good runner in the country.

Top Fuel had 22 in contention, including the Ramchargers, Sneaky Pete Robinson, Chuck Griffith, Danny Ongais, Tom Hoover, Ron Hampshire, Chuck Kurzawa, Val LaPorte, Jimmy Nix and Kalitta, to name a few.

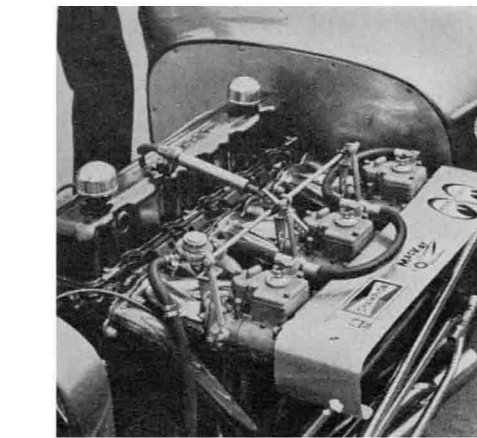
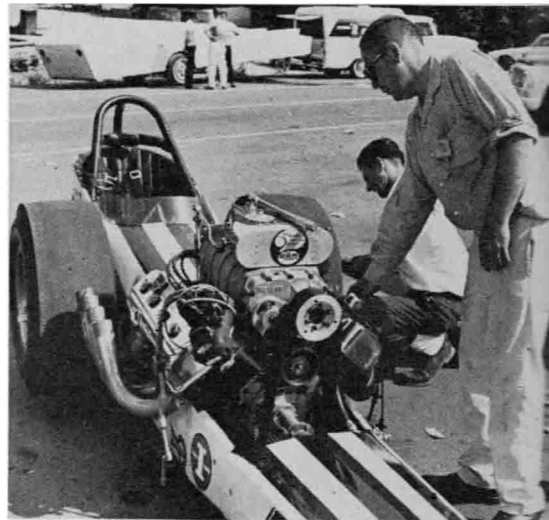
During qualification runs on Friday, Robinson posted a low e.t. of 7.442! Joe Schubeck, sitting in the Ramchargers rail for the very first time, turned a 7.481 at 214.78 mph! It was best speed of the day. On Friday, 973 runs were made as everybody adjusted to the strip and got ready for what was to come on Saturday.

First round of AA/FD class on Saturday saw some real surprises and upsets, as drivers fought for the right to sit out the action on Sunday and make one Banzai run for Top Fuel Eliminator. Chuck Griffith downed Robinson as Pete couldn't sneak by the red light. Tom Hoover beat the Ramchargers, even though Schubeck turned a better e.t. of 7.61 to Hoover's 7.66.

Biggest excitement of the first round came when Jimmy Nix rolled up to face Canada's Scott Wilson. Wilson was sitting on the bump spot with an e.t. of 8.049, while Nix hadn't qualified for the quick 16 to run for Top Fuel. If Nix lost, he was out. If he bettered Wilson's e.t., the Canadian would be out unless he beat Nix with a much stronger e.t. Nix dumped in the whole can and blazed to a 7.59 e.t., third strongest so far. Wilson was out.

When the second round of AA/FD was over, still left were Hoover, Fred Farndon, Ray Marsh, Chuck Griffith and Nix. Third round saw Nix get Farndon via the red light, and Griffith get Marsh with a hole shot while Hoover got the bye.

When the fourth round rolled around,



Above — "Six in a row" GMC power fitted with exotic Weber side draft carb system provided power for a class win in D/A for Kay Sissell. Car hails from Rosemead, Calif., hit 11.06 e.t., 136.81 mph speed.

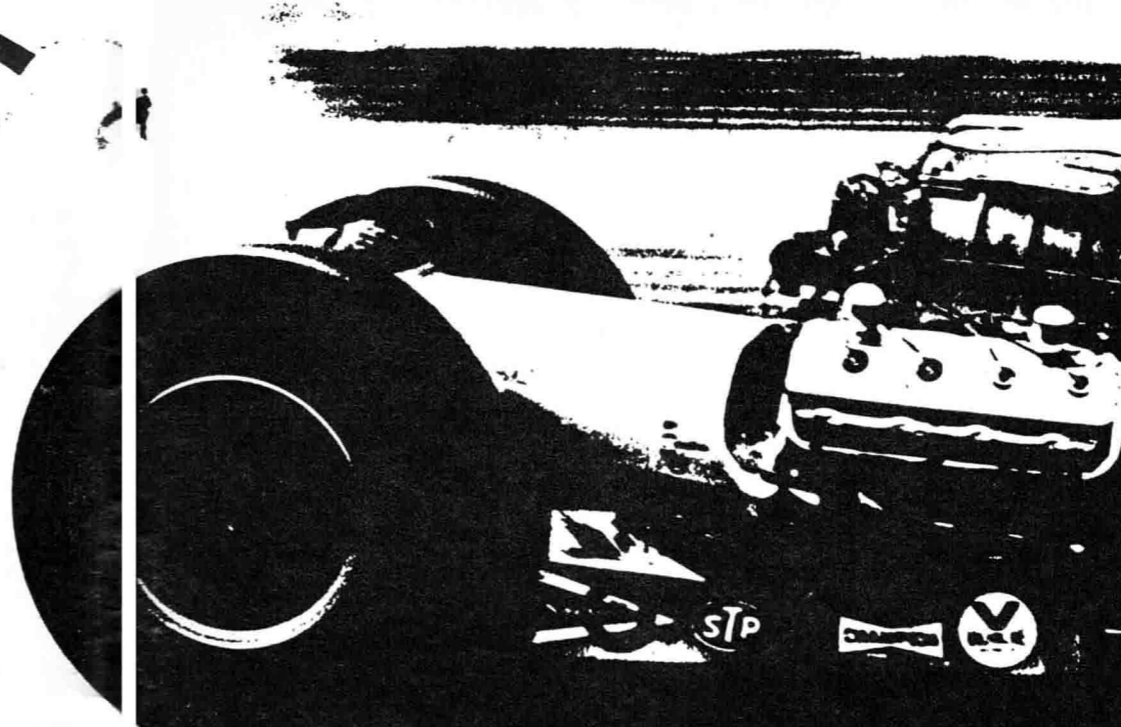
Above left — "Motor Maestro" Dan Knapp of the Ramchargers checks out potent 426 hemi which chugged to top speed of meet with a 214.78 mph reading. "Gentleman Joe" Schubeck handled the driving chores.

Top right — Final go for the Top Stock bucks featured a semi-upset as Jere Stahl in his hemi powered A/S Plymouth got to Mike Schmitt's potent 427 powered Ford, last year's Bristol stock champion.

Middle right — "Smilin' Jimmy" lives up to his name as he collects the Top Fuel goodies from Miss Springnationals, Linda Cole. Nix won class eliminations on Sat. after not being able to qualify in low 16.

Left — Would you believe 3 class wins and an eliminator title in the same meet? Arlen Vanke (left) explains what his combination was to Russ Ciphers of RC Industries for multiple stock car victories.

Right — Rear mounted "spoiler" type fin on Ed Skelton's wild Mustang was just one of but several innovations displayed at meet. Idea of fin is to make machine stable at speed while improving control.



Griffith singled. Nix faced Hoover and put him away with the quickest run ever seen in the Southland. A 7.38 e.t. at 213.28 mph. And Smiling Jimmy hadn't even been able to qualify on Friday!

In the meantime, action was hot in all classes. In the third round of AA/GD, Collett got Minnick, Dick Vest beat Don Powell and Dale Roeckner trailed Ron Colson. Roeckner got the bye next round and Dick Vest faced Collett. The two Ohioans got off clean, and Vest shut down Collett by .01 second turning 8.40!

The wild fuel funny cars in CC/FD commanded a lot of attention. Don Gay, in his beautiful new Jay Howell-built GTO, trailed Darrell Droke's glass Mustang on the first round and went on to win the class with a 9.33 e.t. against Bob Keough Jr.

Another wild class was the new A/XS class, for unblown funny cars. Tom Grove in a Mustang turned an unreal 8.81 e.t. on the next to last round and then faced Ronnie Sox for the final. It was Grove all the way.

World Points Champion Virgil Cates won C/A class. Jack Ditmars, often a Nationals winner, won B/A. George Montgomery won two classes, BB/A and A/GS giving himself plenty to do on Sunday.

Last year's Bristol Street Eliminator, T. J. Cunningham, lost C/SR to Jan L. Riedel on the trophy run.

There was great action in the stock classes with 30 hot machines in C/S. Final winner was Arlen Vanke, who incidentally grabbed three stock awards.

In A/S, Jere Stahl downed 13 other cars for class, and Arlen Vanke also won in A/SA.

When it was time for the AA/GD final, Dick Vest won the sitout spot when Roeckner couldn't fire. And Jimmy Nix became hero of the day when he beat Griffith and won AA/FD class, plus squatter's rights on Sunday after almost not qualifying for the Top Fuel field. It was a day of tremendous action, and plenty more was coming up on Sunday!

First round of Top Fuel started out with one of the upsets that was to add much action and excitement to this great event. Joe Schubeck, driving the Ramchargers Dodge rail, came up against Chuck Kurzawa in the Goulet-Smith "Probe." "Gentleman Joe" Schubeck recorded the better e.t. and speed (7.829 and 208.80) ... once he got started. Kurzawa put a hole shot on him and took the run! Connie Kalitta downed Dave Babler with a strong run. Then Tom Hoover came up against an "unknown", R. L. Peyton of Daytona Beach, Fla. Peyton trailed Hoover with a 7.546! Ongais got Fred Forkner. Bob Vodnik downed Chuck Griffith. Ronnie Hampshire fouled against Julius Hughes. Then more surprises! Pete Robinson faced Ray Marsh—and again

(continued on following page)

# BRISTOL INTERNATIONAL SPEEDWAY

Robinson redlighted! The big eye also trailered Val LaPorte in his run against Canada's Fred Farndon, ending Round One.

In Round Two, Ongais beat Farndon 7.748 to 7.800. Then came another start-ling run. It was Connie Kalitta against Ray Marsh. Kalitta didn't repeat fellow Ford driver Robinson's mistake of red-lighting against Marsh. Kalitta waited for the green. And waited and waited! Then he unleashed a tremendous 7.522 run at 200.44 mph! But Marsh's 7.877, combined with his long-gone lead, was enough to down the Bounty Hunter. Bob Vodnik lost his fire on the line, giving the win to Hughes, and R. L. Peyton drew the single pass.

Round Three saw the last of the "big name" drivers go down as Hughes got Ongais who left too early. Ray Marsh took the win over Peyton, setting the stage for the showdown as to who would face the smile of Jimmy Nix. But problems developed! Hughes blew his clutch on the run, and Marsh had broken a rear end. Round Four could have seen Hughes just roll across the line to take the win, but he would have been unable to race Nix. Instead, Hughes shared the honors with Marsh. In a great piece of sportsmanship, Hughes gave Marsh time to fix things and race Nix. (Hughes didn't have the parts to repair his own rail, thus eliminating Marsh.)

In the big final for Top Fuel, it was the fans' favorite, Jimmy Nix, all the way. Nix won the crown in true championship style, blasting through to 213.28 mph in just 7.463 seconds!

Top Gas had more than its share of surprises and upsets, too! Tom Larkin fouled against World Points Champion Jim Minnick. Hirata-Hobbs got Don Powell with a strong 8.28. Eugene Gahm redlighted against the Freight Train. Bill Webb put a hole shot on Kenny Crane for the win. Dale Roeckner beat Ron Colson. Then Gordon Collett faced Mark Pieri. Now hear this! Your winner—Pieri! With an 8.31 against Collecting Collett's 8.51! Watch this guy Pieri. Bill Smith dumped Dale Harris and Bob Keith shut down Jim Brock to end the round.

In Round Two, Goob Tuller fouled his Freight Train against Roeckner. Bill Smith in the Otie's Automotive rail beat Minnick with a strong 8.33 blast. Mark Pieri got Webb, and Phil Hobbs trailered Keith with a powerful 8.25.

Round Three featured another upset

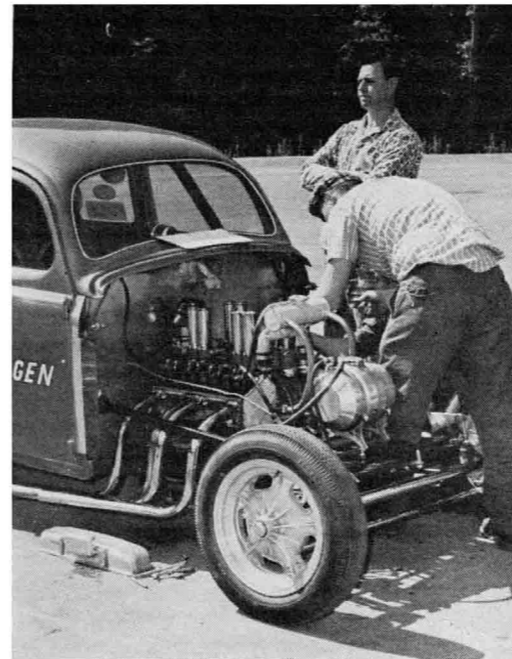
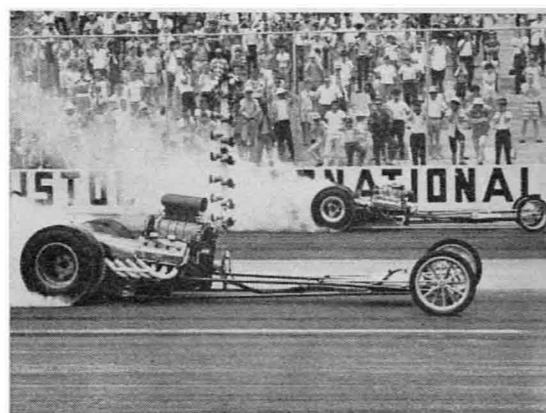
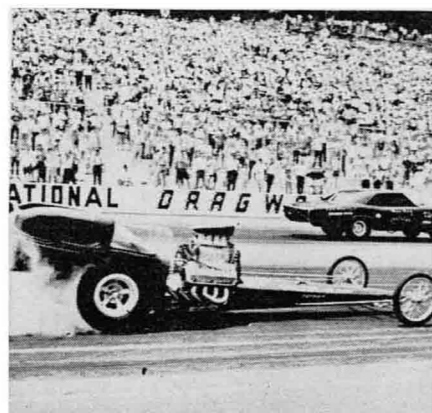
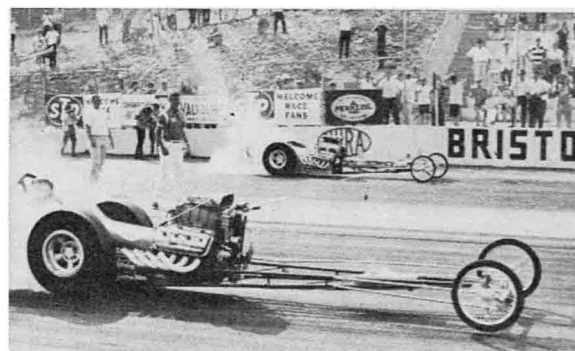
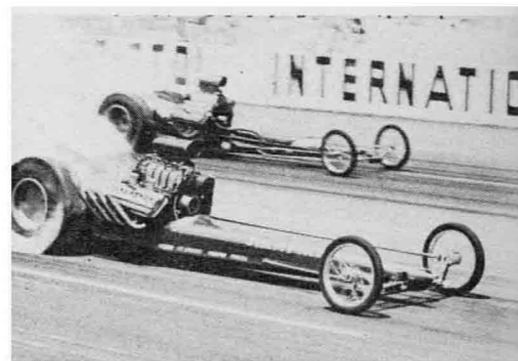
as Phil Hobbs faced Mark Pieri and fouled! Dale Roeckner pulled a hole shot on Bill Smith, winning with a slower 8.37 to Smith's 8.30.

Round Four was just one run, but a big one to see whether Roeckner or Pieri would face Dick Vest for the big marbles. And Mark Pieri, who has just started competing at major meets, continued his winning ways with a powerful 8.25 second blast at 187.88 mph. Roeckner only managed 8.50 at 181.98; a long way from his performance in earlier rounds.

In the final, Pieri fouled and Vest was a sure winner. But there was one more obstacle. The scales. And a matter of weight caused Dick Vest to be disqualified. NHRA Officials declared Mark Pieri to be Top Gas Eliminator. It was a title he truly earned, beating such boss competition as Gordon Collett, defending Springnationals champion, and Nationals winner Phil Hobbs in the powerful Kenny Hirata machine.

Super Eliminator was a small field, but a tough one. George Montgomery had both his blown A/Gasser and a blown BB/A machine. Don Gay was there with his wild and beautiful Infinity II funny GTO. Montgomery fouled with his gasser in Round One. The same round saw Don Gay bow to Al Bergler in the Gratiot Auto Supply AA/Coupe. In the Second Round, Montgomery couldn't fire the BB/Altered against Bergler. And in this final, Bergler, often a class winner at the Nationals, downed Steve Frase in Lee Halleberg's AA/MSP to become Super Eliminator.

Competition Eliminator brought 14 class winners into contention. Ted Kra-



Fastest and quickest Volkswagen at Bristol was property of Gene Mori. Injected Chevy powered "bug" delighted fans with runs against more standard size coupes and roadsters. Car lost in elim.

Top left — Don Gay won the tough CC/FD class mainly made up of blown match racers, with his fuel burning, fiberglass bodied GTO. Pick up next month's CC for a full feature on this "Texas Tiger."

Middle left — Mike Schmitt in his B/FX Galaxie, bested all comers to claim the title of Street Eliminator. In the final round, he cranked 11.85 e.t. to beat Al Joniec in the speedy "Batcar" Mustang.

Left — This type of tactics a Top Elim. makes. Jimmy Nix applied hole shots like this to more than one unsuspecting competitor on his way to fuel dragster crown. Below 7.50 e.t.'s also helped cause.

Photos by Bob D'Olivo, NHRA



Jack Chrisman with his Kendall Oil sponsored GT-1 Comet set Bristol fans on their ear with the fastest time ever recorded by an exhibition car, 181.88 mph. Jack used his direct drive unit rather than automatic trans, made just a single run.

Far left — Al Bergler got left at the line in the opening round of Super Eliminator and lost race against Don Gay, but came back to take bracket. Gay cut a torrid 9.10 e.t. with GTO and was disqualified for going too quick. Al ran 9.00 e.t.'s.

Left — Julius Hughes (foreground) lost a clutch on semi-final Top Fuel round. Instead of going to the line and pushing the car by hand to the finish, (which he could have done) he allowed extra time for Ray Marsh to fix his car and make final race.

mer in D/GD downed the wild "Screamer" B/A of Jack Ditmars. World Champion Virgil Cates dropped the D/FD of Stan Lomelino. Edgin and Colwell's C/GD downed the A/D of John Burke. The D/A of Kay Sissel beat the B/D of Dean Jarvis. Dan Slitten, in a B/FD eliminated B/C champ Ted Schaefer via a red light. The A/FD of Ben Diener did the job on Joe Law's A/C, turning 8.36. If the fans had a favorite in this bracket — and they did — it was Tom Grove. The Southland is funny-car country, and Grove's glass A/XS Mustang out of Oakland, Calif., is their kind of car. Grove trailered A/A winner Wally Lynn with a 9.22 storming run.

And Grove continued to storm through the ranks. In Round Two the A/FD of Ben Diener lost against Grove to the redlight, while Dan Slitten downed Ted Kramer. In Round Three Grove's wild Mustang ran 8.83 to trailer Sissel while Dan Slitten dropped Virgil Cates. That made Grove against Slitten for the big run. Slitten redlighted, but Grove stormed to a powerful 8.79 at 162.16, making it a clean win as Slitten posted exactly the same e.t. of 8.83 that he had in winning the previous round. Grove drove the Mustang with the big Ford overhead cammer right into the winner's circle with the cheers of thousands ringing in his ears.

Street Eliminator was the big bracket with 27 class winners. And there were some powerful names and cars. Joe Lunati, Jan Riedel, Lee Smith, Al Joniec in the Mustang "Batcar." Ferd Napfel, Bill Coon, Mike Schmitt, Carlo Volpe, to name a few. When round three paired off the second round winners, Al Joniec

Far left — Top Gas final saw Mark Pieri catch the foul light against Dick Vest and still win. Vest was disqualified on a weight technicality thus handing crown over to Pieri and partner Gary Nehring.

Middle left — Topping off his Bristol weekend in grand style was Arlen Vanke as he went away with the Junior Stock title in Bill Abraham's '66 GTO. 12.89 e.t. and 104.04 mph was "Tin Indian's" war cry.

Below — Tom Grove and his wild, speedy match race Mustang made several runs in the 8 second bracket while wasting all comers in Comp. Eliminator. Here, he wins as Dan Slitten Chev dragster fouls out.



downed the C/XS Plymouth of Lee Smith. Ferd Napfel beat the G/G of Bill Adams. Bill Coons' A/MSP got the E/XS Dodge of Tom Sneden, with Mike Schmitt getting the single in his big B/FX Ford. Round Four saw Schmitt get Coon who fouled, and "The Batcar" of Joniec batted down Ferd Napfel's Storming Bull. That made it Ford against Mustang for the final and the crowd went wild as they had been cheering both cars. Schmitt got the handicap head start, and Joniec couldn't quite catch the strong-running Schmitt who turned 11.85.

The Junior Stock field was reduced to 13 via disqualifications and other mishaps. B/S winner Wiley Cossey, Jr. Stock Eliminator at the Winternationals, suffered a broken windshield Saturday and couldn't compete. Arlen Vanke, who won C/S with his Tin Indian Pontiac, dominated the field. In Round Three he dropped William Spanakos in the "Monster Mash" Chevy. Bill Abraham, in the B/SA '63 Plymouth, was unable to make the final run, and the crown went to Vanke, winner of the biggest class at the meet in his Pontiac.

And that brings Top Stock, always a crowd pleaser. Seventeen cars made the first round. Jere Stahl, in a '66 Plymouth street hemi, defeated Mary Ann Foss in her S/SA Plymouth. World Champ Joe Smith's Plymouth got Bob Spears' Ford. Arlen Vanke, driving an A/SA '63 Dodge beat Sam Carroll and Bill Jenkins in his crowd-pleasing Chevy II trailered Ken Heinemann.

Round Two saw Jenkins dump Vanke, Smith get John Alrey, Stahl beat Alvert Olster, and Mike Schmitt, driving his famous white Desert Motors Ford, beat the S/SA of Hank McAleenan, while Ed Miller singled. Third Round saw Joe Smith get Jenkins, Jere Stahl single, and Mike Schmitt down Ed Miller. The crowd went wild. Would Schmitt win two Eliminator brackets? Schmitt drew the single in the next round, and Stahl trailered Joe Smith who red lighted. That brought Stahl against Schmitt who had already won one big title, and the crowd howled in excitement. The lights clicked down.

And Stahl shut down Schmitt with a powerful 11.80 run at 119.20 mph, while Schmitt turned a 12.15, way off the record he holds for class at 11.66. Your Top Stock Eliminator—Jere Stahl who total tuned himself a big victory.

And that's the story of Bristol '66 — the greatest meet ever staged in the Southland. If you missed this one, start saving for next year. Both the Bristol strip and the Bristol competition is Super-Super Boss. A great place for a great race, and the NHRA crew, headed by Jack Hart, staging director Bob Daniels, and starter Buster Couch, deserve a valley-full of credit. Come on down you all, ya' hear?