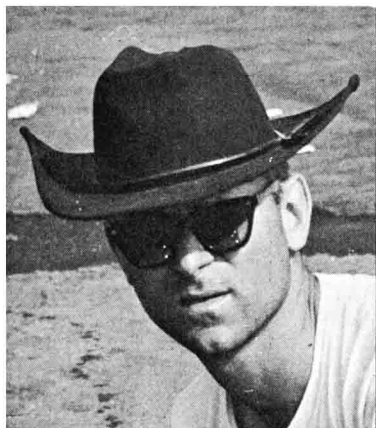


PERSONALITY PROFILE:

meet mr. nitro gasser



BY DALE RAFFA

WHAT DOES it take to be a drag racing champion today?

Well, one of the hottest combinations in the gas ranks right now consists of a little Nitro, a chemical engineer, a driver-education instructor, a late-model Dodge hemi engine and a Stuckey chassis. Mix 'em all together and you have the current gas dragster top dog, Mr. Jim Minnick and Company. As for his potent brew here's a more understandable breakdown. The Nitro does not come from a Commercial Solvents can, it's the name of our hero's hometown in West Virginia, and the driver-education instructor is his attractive wife, Gloria, who doubles as pit crew and booking agent. As far as the chemical engineer bit, that's what Minnick does for a living five days a week. The 426-cubic-inch Dodge hemi and 117-inch Rod Stuckey chassis make up the physical components of the team which currently holds the NHRA AA/GD elapsed time record and Top Gas honors at the recent Summernationals.

Minnick is running without the benefit of a "wallet," or as he puts it, "There's nobody footing any of the

bills except my wife, she's the one who pays for the car through her job. However, the car is now self-supporting." Thus Minnick's choice of the 426 hemi for power is unusual as he has chosen this route entirely on his own. Dodge Division of Chrysler Corporation is not playing "Daddy Warbucks" to Minnick, which means that there's a super-large bundle of Minnick "greenies" tied up in this sleek screamer.

In fact, he had to sort of sneak in the back door as he started out with a Chrysler Marine hemi before finally latching on to his present Dodge mill. However, Minnick sees the Dodge hemi as being the coming thing. He recognized the obvious plus-features of the new hemi over the older one. Things like a beefier lower end, a stronger block, weight-saving aluminum cylinder heads, a better port layout, better valve angles and higher rev characteristics attracted Minnick. He felt that when all the bugs were finally worked out of the relatively new engine, it would be far superior to the old-style hemi which for years has been considered the ultimate horsepower-making

Do-it-yourselfer Jim Minnick joins the Dodge Rebellion and proves that good guys do finish first

“We don't have a wallet—our car's self-supporting”

plant on the drag circuit.

Certainly few can question Minnick's reasoning in view of what he has accomplished during last year's drag season. Part of Jim's success should be credited to the Ramchargers, who started the new hemi ball rolling with their 200-mph fueler. “They helped me a good bit during the earlier stages,” stated Jim. “The engine is considerably different from the early hemi and they gave me a lot of information on ignition and

cam timing, bearing choices and some assorted small things that helped us to the point where we could start tuning for maximum power output.

They also gave us some information on increasing the engine's lifespan so we wouldn't go broke replacing expensive pieces.”

One thing that Minnick can never be accused of is being lazy! Not only does he maintain a full racing schedule with his sleek gas dragster

(as both driver and “boss wrench”), and hold down a full-time position with Roberts Chemical in Nitro, but he also owns a speed shop.

“I have a boy who takes care of the shop during the day and I put in some time at night,” explained Jim. “We sell speed equipment, build street and strip engines and modify heads for local racers. We try and use what we've learned to put some money back in our pockets instead of watching it all go out. It gets pretty hectic at times, but you know you can't move ahead if you don't give it all you got.”

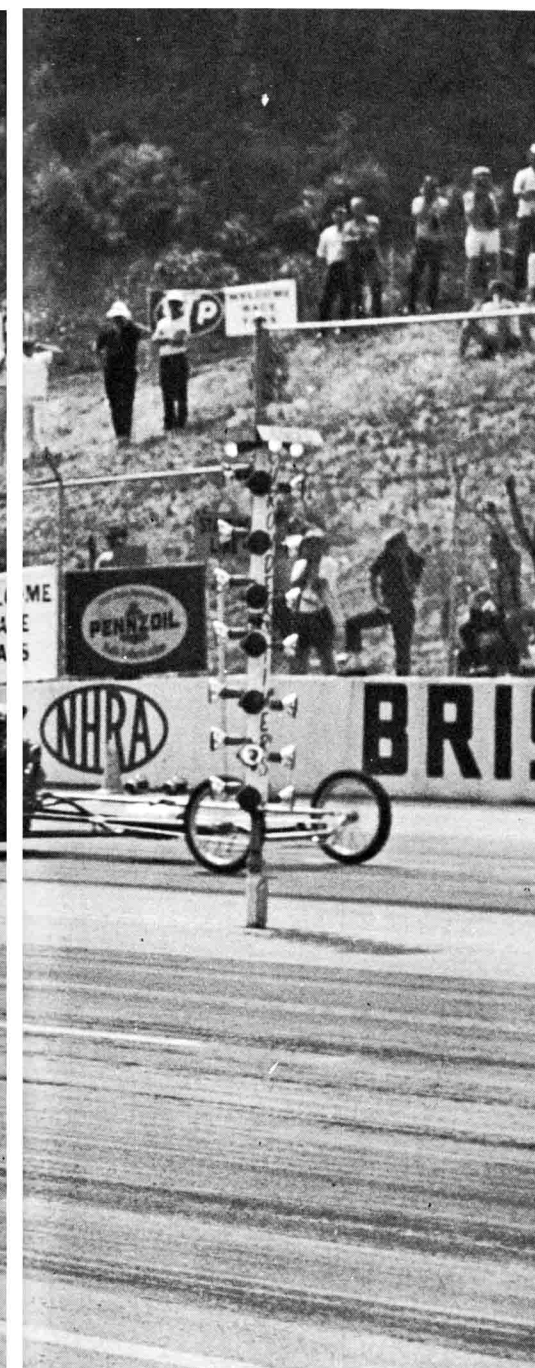
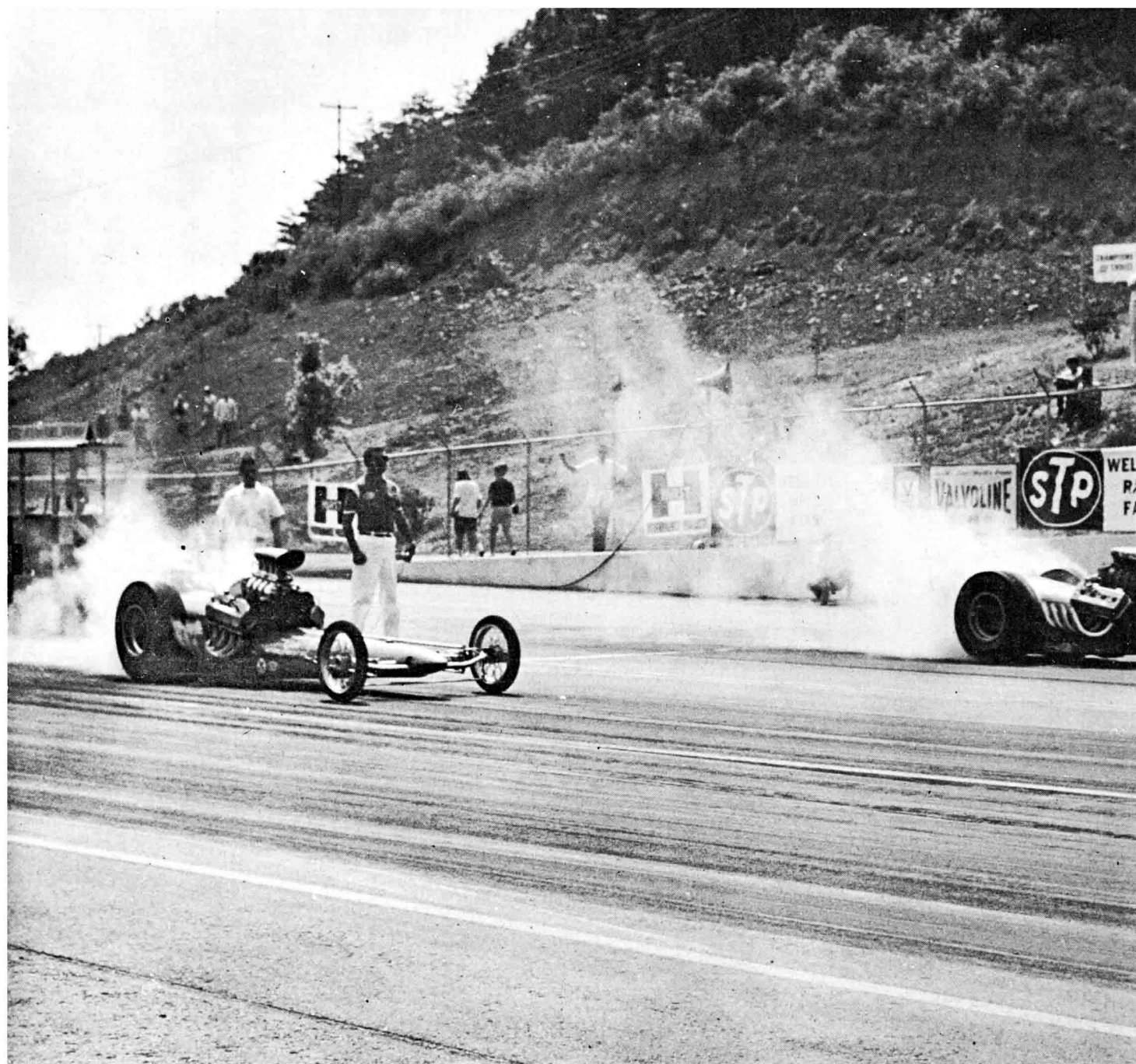
With Minnick's unusual combination of occupation, hometown name and competition class, both his patience and sense of humor have been given a workout over the years. “We got an awful lot of kidding about the car being called the Nitro Gasser, admitted Jim, and more than just a few uncalled for fuel checks. And if you're wondering, there really is a Nitro, West Virginia—it's a suburb of Charleston.”

As is the case with most overnight successes, Minnick raced for years before he leaped into the limelight with his big win at the first NHRA World Points Championships at Tulsa, Oklahoma in 1965.

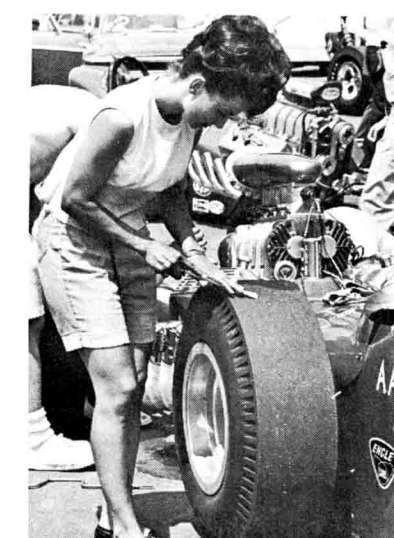
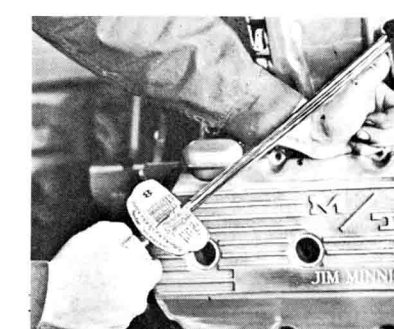
“Unfortunately, we didn't race at tracks where we would get good ink from our past wins,” commented Minnick. “We picked up top gold at the Mid-Season All-Star gas blast at Detroit Dragway. And back a couple of years ago when ‘Gentleman Joe’ Schubeck and Gordon ‘Collecting’ Collett were one and three on the Drag News Mr. Eliminator list, we put both of them on their trailers to win a big meet at Dunkirk, New York—and that was a popular strip in those days. We also finished runner-up at the AHRA Nationals at Green Valley, Texas, two years ago.”

Although one can trace the 29-year-old West Virginian's racing career back to his Model A high school days, his first real year of racing was 1960 when he campaigned a C/ Dragster powered by an unblown Olds. “We ran through several rails with the Olds and moved up through the classes to 1964. Then we realized that a wedge-chambered engine couldn't do the job and we joined the Dodge Rebellion in 1965.”

The “Nitro Gasser's” best times are on display (Continued on page 75)



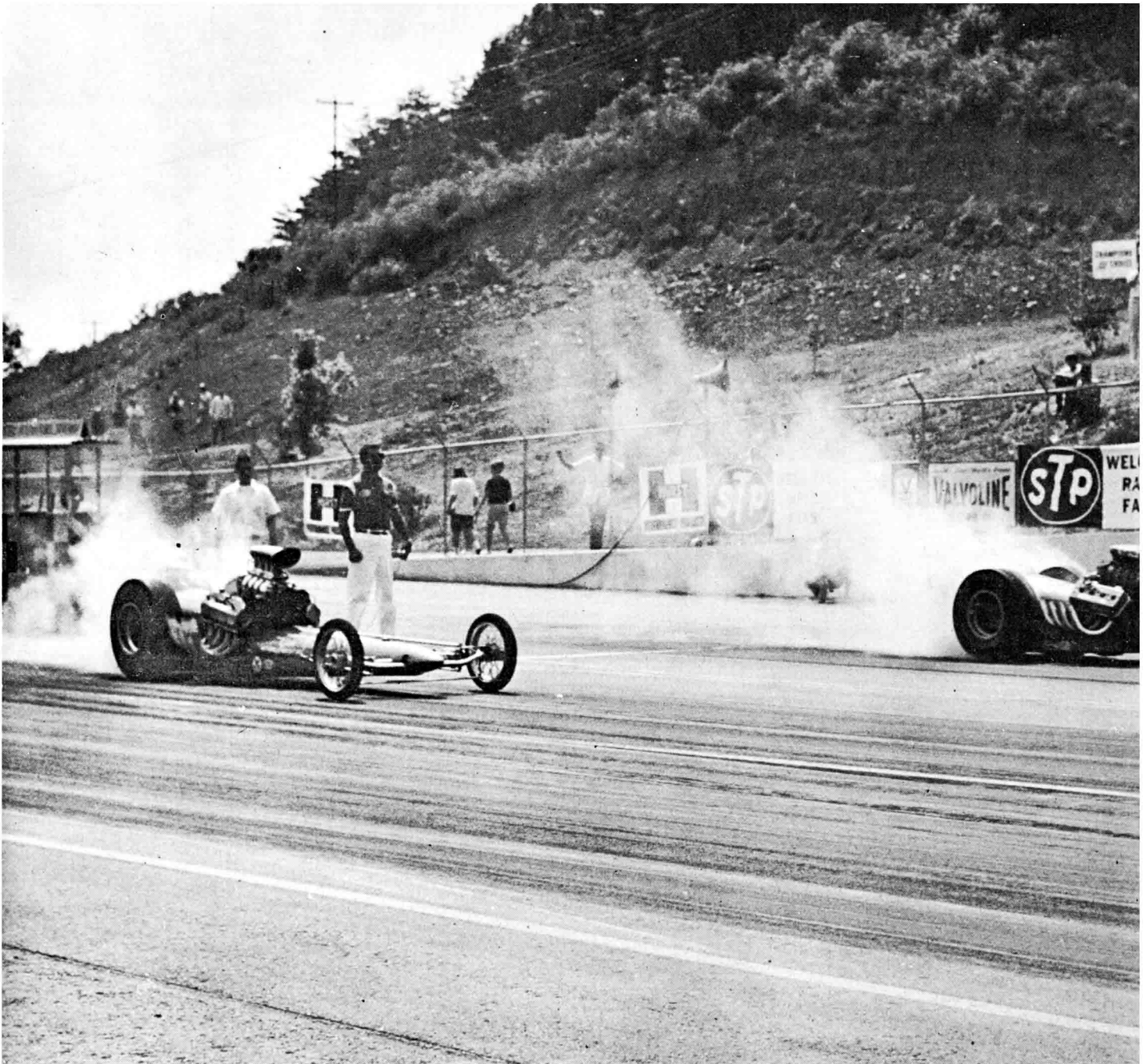
Left, gasser king Minnick on his way to the Springnationals crown at Bristol. Below, Minnick and crew, Jim and wife Gloria, do most of trackside prep work. Gloria also handles bookings and phones at the Minnick speed emporium. Jim builds engines, twists wrenches and triples as senior pilot. Late model hemi powerplant is blown, injected, displaces 426 inches. Spare engine carries same goodies plus “long-arm” crank.



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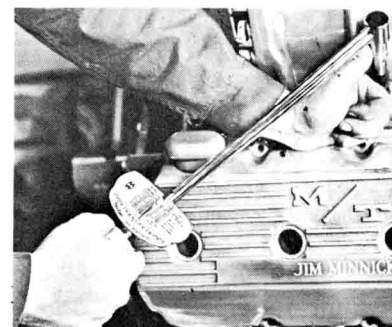
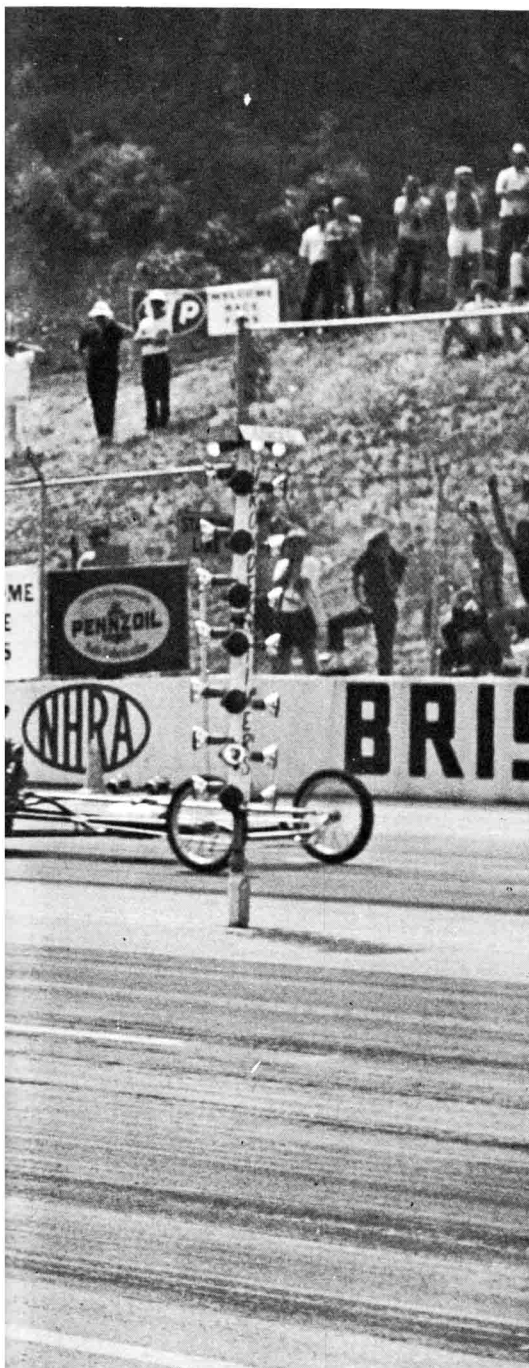
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much earlier. The figures will vary with the cam and carburetion used.

Milt Chornack is now working out a special version of a Bobcat package to include all of these changes, and Ace Wilson's Hot Tigers should be the terror of the strips when he gets through with them.

MINNICK continued

for all to see as Jim is the current NHRA AA/GD record holder with a low elapsed time of 8.07 seconds and a best top end of 189.80 mph. However, Minnick has run his hemihonker up to 196 mph using his little engine for power. The so-called *little* engine checks out at stock cubes and while posting the top mph figure, its best et trails at 8.26 seconds. The big engine boasts a half-inch "long-arm" assembly and checks out at 497 "big ones."

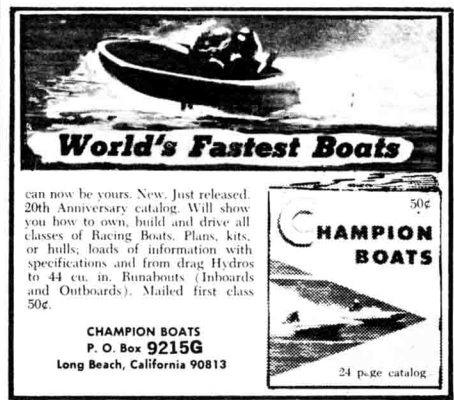
The Minnick pit crew consists of Jim and his wife, Gloria. Larry Simpson pitches in with prep work during the summer months and Harold Hutton helps with some of the machine work in Nitro. In addition to knowing her way around the pits and providing assistance, Gloria is Jim's good luck charm. He has only gone to the track

without her twice and it was on the first of these occasions that Minnick joined the "upside down" club.

NHRA points competition (which determines who gets to go to Tulsa for the big one) occupies almost one-third of Minnick's racing schedule. The remainder is split almost equally between match races and "big-bucks" meets. Jim races only once per week (except for the big meets, of course) and usually tries to stay within a 12-hour driving radius of Charleston. However, he has made some exceptions to the self-imposed 600-mile limit for championship meets.

Because of the way the "Nitro Gasser" has come along financially, Gloria has given up her position as driver-education instructor in favor of handling the books and the phones for both the speed shop and the dragster.

Even though he has the record at 8.07, Minnick is not completely satisfied. Earlier in the year he declared that he wanted to get the class record with an unheard of 7-second run. Most "in" racers and spectators are making book in Minnick's favor and I'm sure it won't be long before some of the top competitors in this class start switching to new Dodge hemi power.



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