

Cannonball? Wasn't he an old geezer who drove trucks? Or is it me who's the old geezer? What's all this Cannonball number anyway?

Apparently it's a race for Funny Cars over a mile — four times down the quarter — and it's won on aggregate. Fastest over a mile takes the glory, see?

Held amid the full panoply of a weekend meeting, it was the best weather the Pod had seen this year. Roy must have changed his witch-doctor.

With the big race scheduled on Sunday afternoon, and minimum time allowed between rounds, and a 'race or replace' rule applying to the event, no wonder the floppers were anxiously warming up on Saturday. In fact they were so warm that Gladiator put two rods out through the block very early on. Several people swore blind that Bootsie kept the wellie in anyway...

In between flopper practice runs there was a full race meeting trying to happen, and jolly interesting it was too. The new-bodied Rough Diamond is as tough as the old one, but we must confess to a sneaking regard for Topolinos; after his excursion into the Armco last year known loony Keith Potter reappeared with the The Devil, fiercer and faster than ever, in white glassfibre though, bearing the legend '14 for a paint job'. What is the boy on about? Kason's ill-fated Top reappeared as Anarchy, and went better than we ever saw it, although we didn't have much chance last year... And we see the Gasser is still as ridiculous as ever. Any car which is as unpredictable as this one (or is it AI?) has got to stay a favourite with crowds everywhere, although we're not so sure about the marshals. Keeps them on their toes, though. Missed the Christmas Tree... just.

Rough Diamond was doing low tens, Anarchy high tens, Jean Tidswell's got the measure of the T, doing nines, Bootsie was rebuilding his engine, Potter was managing some hairy tens, Strip-teaser still bounces like a bastard but does 11 or 12 anyway, and Stardust only just missed the barrier. The ex-Priddle dragster, renamed The Hitman, and piloted by Tony Boden, did a 6.96/204 FTD while Prid looked on approvingly. His new Waterman engine is here, and he's done some trick stuff with his new rearend; so trick he won't even talk to Riswick about it. Definite fives when it's finished, and just you remember who told you.

But then we had the disasters. By five o'clock we'd had everything except an air crash, no thanks to Spencer Flack, who apparently has never heard of the CAA rules about low flying. Seems he was looking for the wheel chocks the Scorpion team stole from his Hunter. At 400mph and about 40 feet he's got no chance. No chance at all.

But Hounddog started the day badly by splitting an oil pipe during its burnout and dropping the slimy stuff all over the spectator lane. Nutty Bill Sherratt tried to race his very tough new Cannonball flopper on it under the race or replace rule, but the marshals wouldn't let him, despite a creditable (and straight) burnout. Roy Phelps and Stu Bradbury had a 50 quid argument about

A Funny Thing Happened...

all that on the startline before an amused and entertained crowd; I think Roy won (he tends to) but it was a minor incident which was later to have far-reaching and drastic effects on the final result of the weekend, which is a pity. But that, as they say, is drag racing.

Anders Hasselstrom was the only foreigner present, running well with the Red Baron (7.45) but then Wild Bill brought Cannonball out for a run. Rumoured to be the ex-Prudhomme Army car, it was certainly very strong, having done some very tough trial runs at the Run What You Brung the previous weekend. Sadly, it did a rod after the burnout, adding plenty more oil to the several pints dropped by Hounddog, and the Cannonball team joined the Gladiator wrenches in the pits for an overnight rebuild.

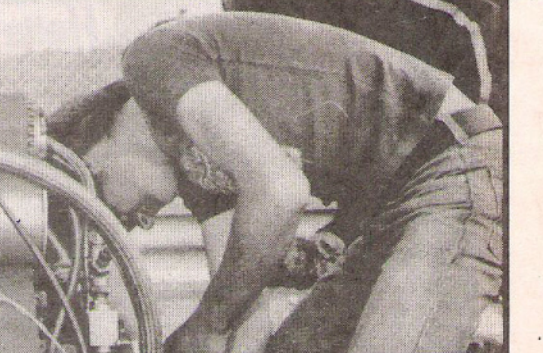
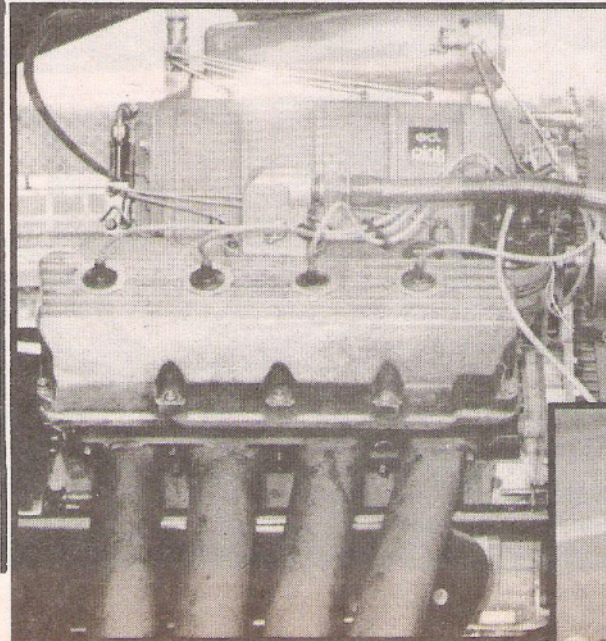
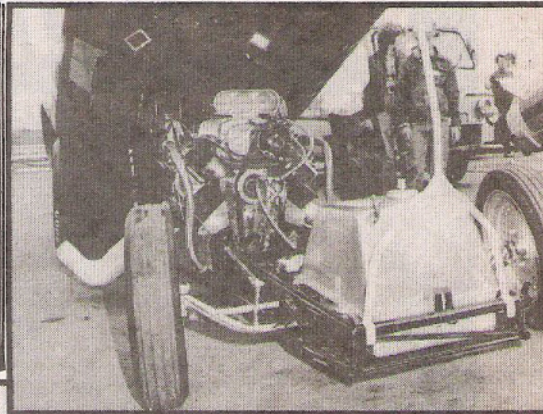
Owen had another go in Hounddog, and things really started to get rough. After a good burnout

Hounddog reversed smartly back up the strip, swerved viciously to one side and reversed into a collection of parked cars. The brake caliper decided to revolve with the disc, it seems, breaking loose from its mounting and depriving Owen of the benefit of brakes. Naturally enough he grabbed the fuel shutoff to stop the engine, but it came off in his hand. Swiftly he pulled the plug on the mag, but the switch had gone U/S. With absolutely no means of stopping, Owen was now travelling backwards at some speed in the specific direction of the waiting Scorpion jet car. Unable even to get out of reverse, since the car was rolling, Owen chose the parked cars behind the startline. He didn't do much damage at all really, although the back end of Hounddog was quite severely cracked up. Some people say he should have hit the jet...

Scorpion managed 7.88/197 on the doom-laden track. Jim Read

seemed to blow the bottom out of Le Patron before he reached the traps at the end of the strip. John Whitmore broke on the line. Brian Hazelton lifted the despondency, whipping Thunderbird to 7.21 over Gerry Andrews' 7.40/181 and a massive wobble, but with the boot well in.

We retired for the evening, praying for better omens and a drink, also indulging in the all-time Pod favourite activity — speculation. Was Cannonball the Army car? Colin Filsell's new flopper was the old Gladiator. Willsheer claimed to have seen H&H Racing stickers on Rain City Warrior. Was that a new-nosed Snowman? What was wrong with Mopar Miss (13.39/78)? Is Keith Potter insane? What does '14 for a paint job' mean? And how does Potter know? Would the Gasser get the Christmas Tree good and proper on Sunday? Would the Ant Hill Mob live up to their looks and get the Topolino on



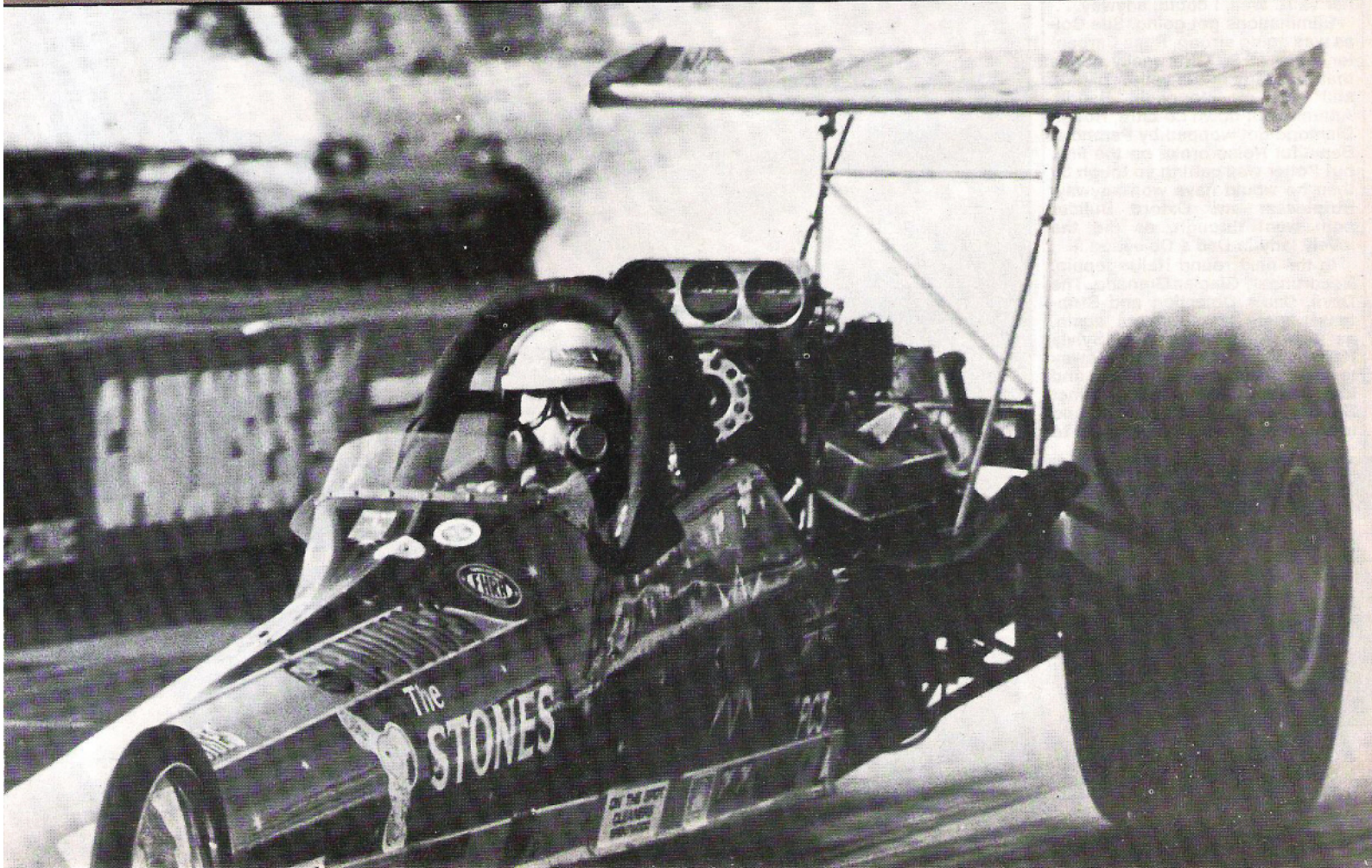
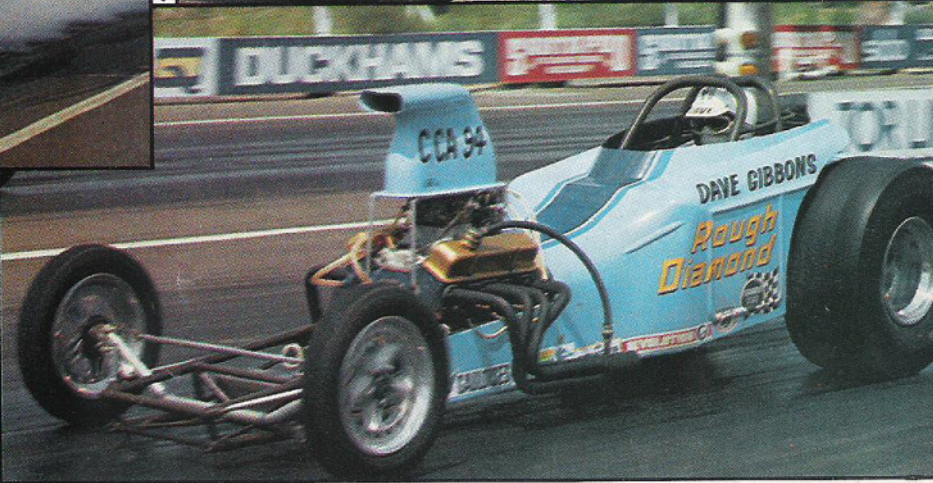
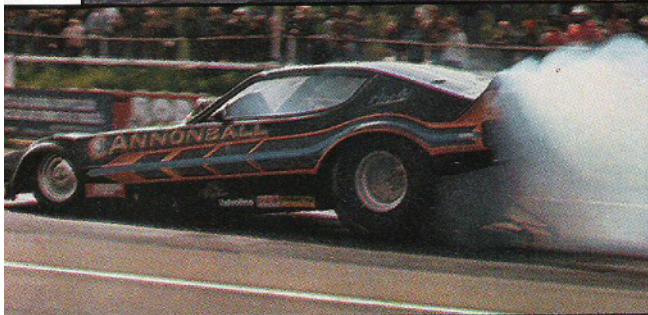
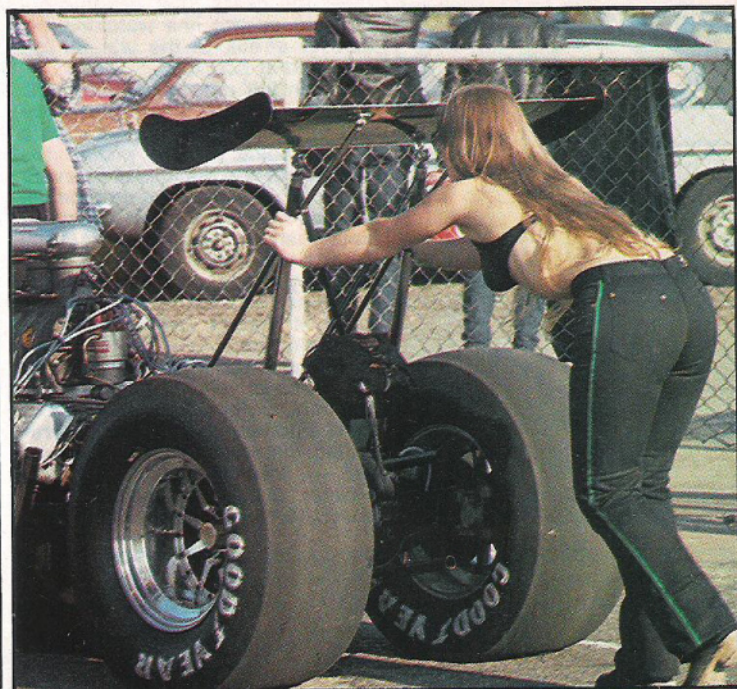


would be. Even the old SuzuperBike (once irreverently known as the SnoozuperBike in certain offices around Link House) seemed to be doing well.

By 11 o'clock both Hounddog and Cannonball had run and were ready; although Hounddog still bore the scars and Cannonball came up the pit lane with a mechanic nestled in the curve of the headers frantically screwing in the plugs. Even John Whitmore was running again. Just. Everything was set for the big race. Then silly John (with the Judge GTO) brought his pit crew up to the line. She was called Alison, and she was dressed by the St Trinian's outfitters. Also she was more interesting than anything else that had happened so far that day. And if you lay down on

song? Who thought up the name for Penetration?

Sunday was the day to find out. In front of the season's biggest crowd all the problems seemed to be over. Despite a serious attempt at climbing the barrier Gladiator was as strong as ever, having been finished shortly before 3am. Cannonball still wasn't ready, but it

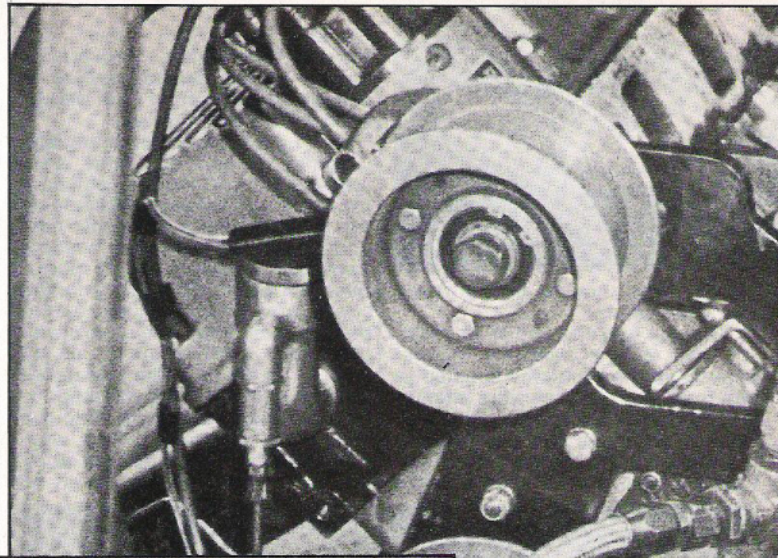




clear the gears after her burnout and sat on the line watching the Gasser streak to the win in Top Modified at 7.24/132.

Which left only the Cannonball. Pairings for the first round were out of the hat and thereafter on a 1/2/3/4 basis. Alison picked the names out and got kissed by every driver in the race for her pains. Herridge behaved in an unspeakable fashion, and was the only person who made her blush. Also the only driver who was smiling. And since he'd drawn Hounddog we knew it wasn't because of the upcoming race...

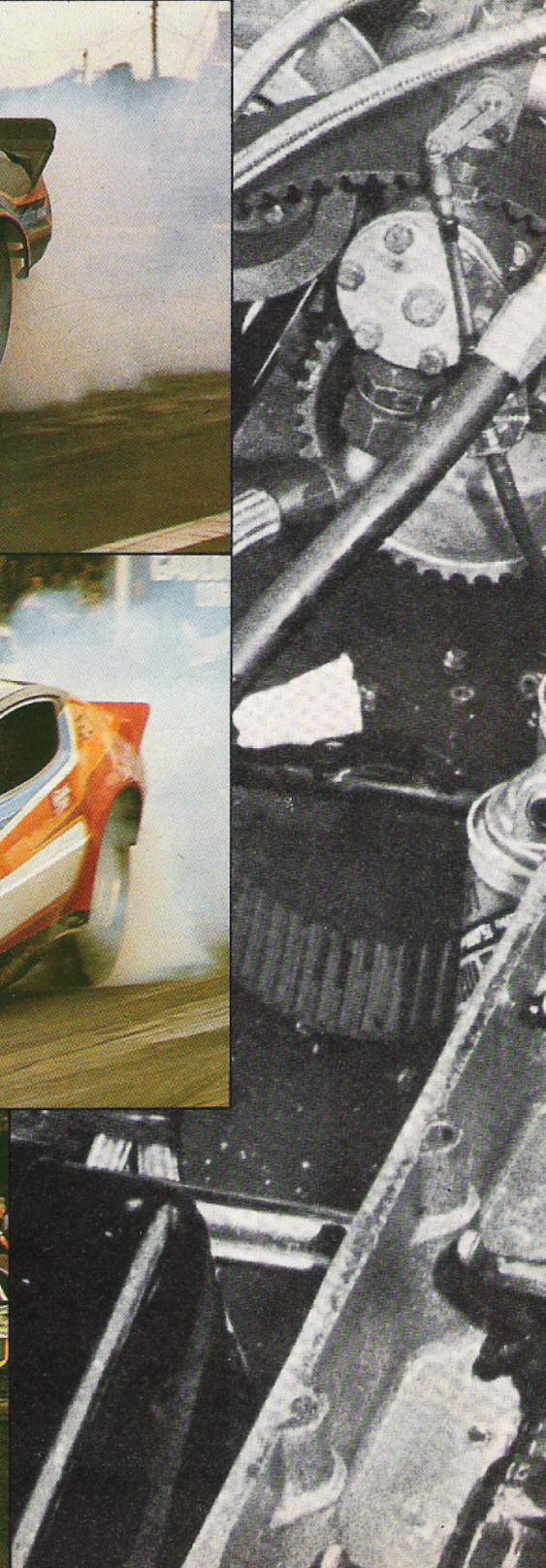
He and Owen managed 7.04 and 7.07 respectively, both just over 200mph. Colin Filsell had, by a form of lottery open to the general public, chosen a name for his new car — Satan's Sledge. Running against Anders Hasselstrom he pulled 10.75 against the Scandina-

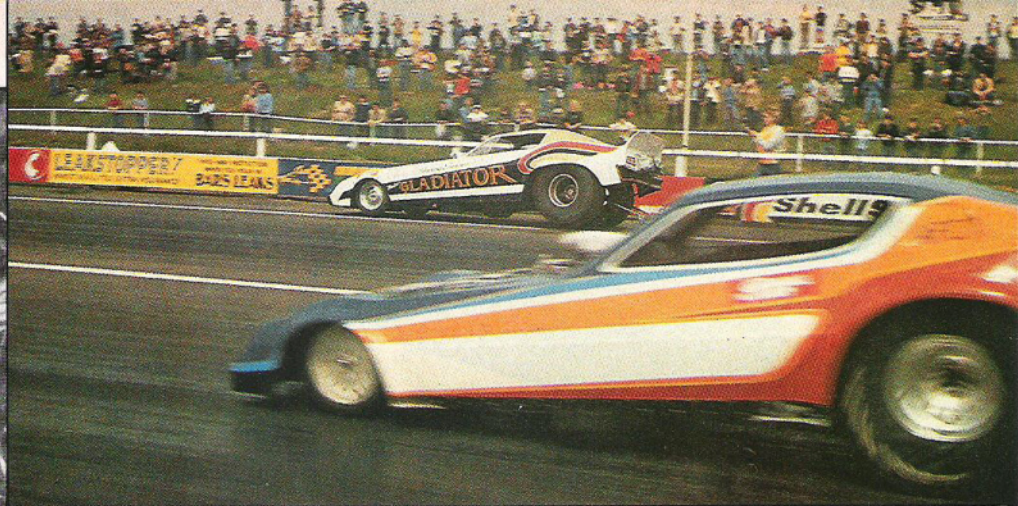
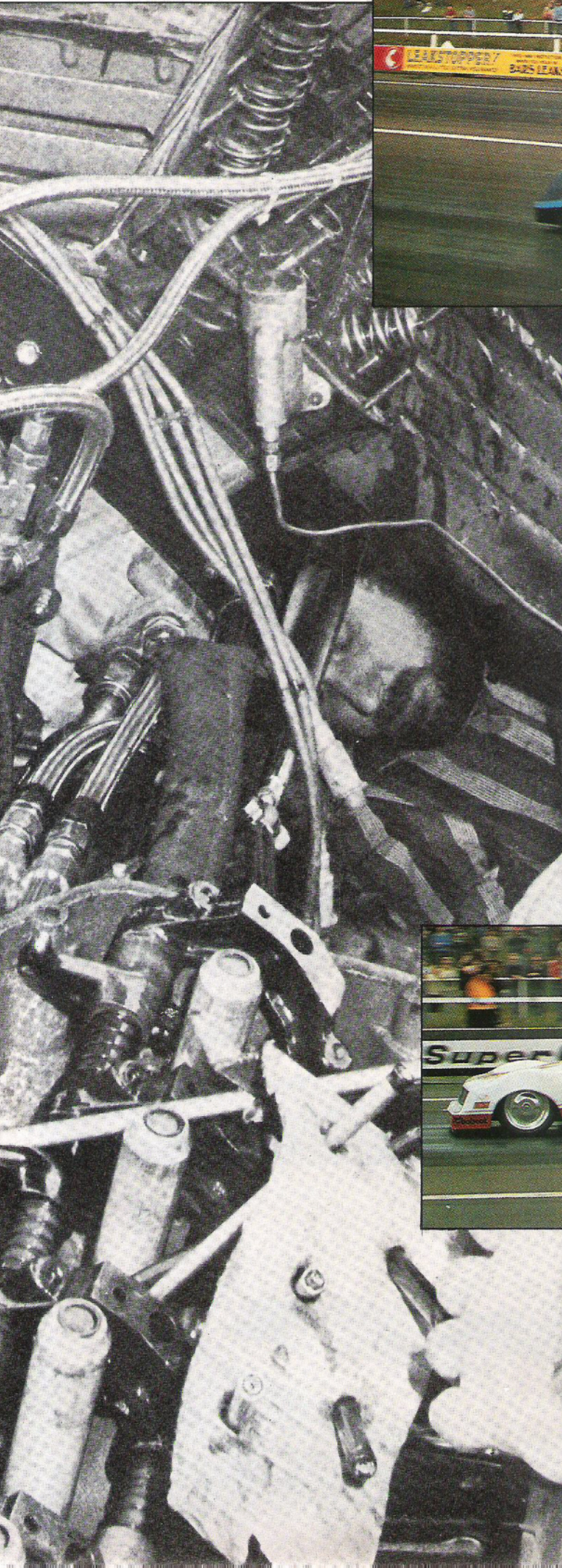


the ground you could see right up her skirt. Well, I could, anyway...

Eliminations got going. Sue Coles was going strong, Russ Carpenter, slow at 8.77 (he really needs that nice lady in the yellow bikini), still saw off Moonlight Bandit, Anarchy put down Lo-Litre, Rough Diamond got wopped by Paranoia, Beautiful Noise broke on the line, but Potter was getting so tough by then he would have won anyway. Strip-teaser and Oxford Builder both went through, as did the lovely lady in Dad's Objection II.

In the next round Hellzapoppin, Roadrunner, Glacier Grenade, The Devil, Dad's Objection and Strip-teaser were all survivors again, as were Al O'Connor and Sylvia Hauser. Russ put The Devil away to meet Sue Coles in his final and lost. Dad's Objection redlit against Strip-teaser and lost her final, and in an unusual muff, Sylvia forgot to





vian's 10.54, shutting down at half-strip. Dave Stone squeezed off 7.25 against Rain City Warrior (7.59) and the northern Mr Sherratt ran a very fierce 6.88 against Paul Manders' 8.75.

Eight floppers whipped down the strip in less than five minutes. It was an exhilarating blast of noise and action which left the spectators on their feet and even the media groupies on the startline more than averagely impressed. We loved it, actually, but there's always been something about the sight and the sound and the smell of a flopper which is special. It's the ultimate entertainment in motorsport and the most exciting spectacle available in civilised society. If we were Romans we'd be watching lions eat up Mary Whitehouse and similar, but we're not. Shame, really. But the advent of the Funnies started a smile on the face of one lady that I haven't seen the like of for months... And friend Gary, a first-time spectator, had already been much impressed by the modified cars. When the first lot of floppers went down I though we'd have to chain him up.

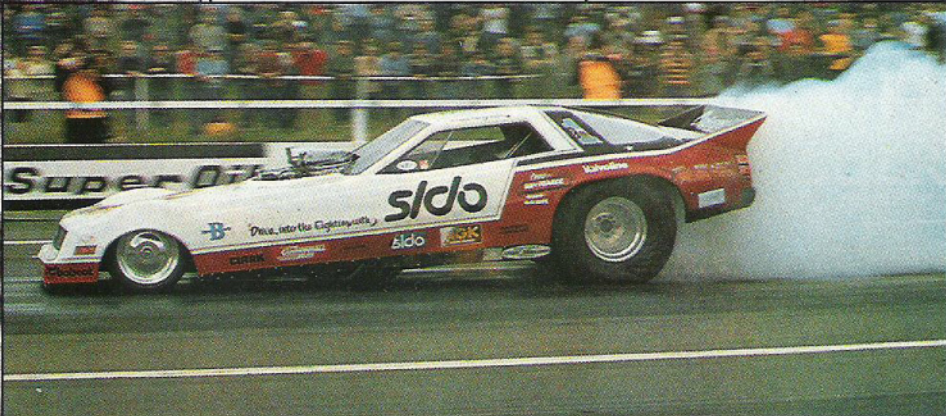
The second round saw Gladiator and Cannonball run together for the first time. Bootsie clicked off a smooth 6.73/216 against Bill Sherratt's much-slowed 7.08/202, and the times will tell you how well

as the big jet ran a winning (and best ever) 8.15/209 against the flopper's 8.93/162.

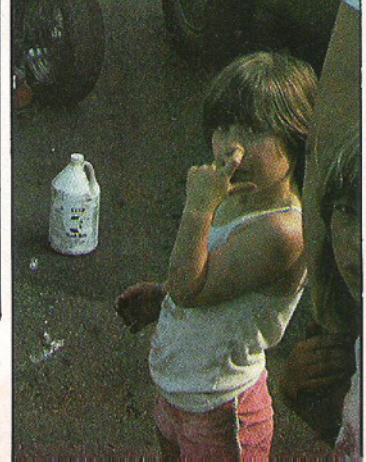
We'd reached the halfway point, and it was Bootsie out front with an aggregate of 13.5, Bill Sherratt second at 13.76 and Hounddog third at 13.9. The way the mile works allows drivers a bad run, allows the cars to go off song and allows them to make it up later; remember that Hounddog's fastest time was 6.96 against Cannonball's 6.88, while its slowest was 7.04 against 7.08, but still Sherratt came out ahead. It's more complicated than you think, also much more relevant. Read on.

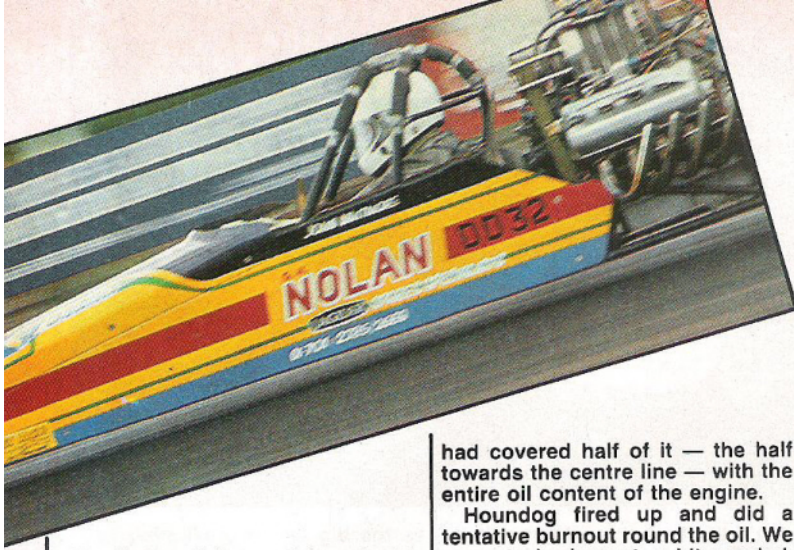
The third round saw only five out of the original eight still surviving, and the fastest pair ran together again — which makes for exciting races. Bootsie's 6.46 just pipped newcomer Sherratt's amazing 6.47; he's really fallen on his feet in the hot seat, has Bill. Paul Manders, after a small fire in the exhaust department had been successfully extinguished following his burnout (now I know why they call it that), ran 11.34 against Hounddog.

Owen slammed home a 6.56/212, going like crazy for a place in the two-car fourth round, while the almost impossible task of holding the Scorpion in stage for more than two seconds caused Andy



Bootsie read the lights. Owen Hayward was slightly slower at 6.96/206 against the Stones' 8.68. Haselstrom really got himself together for a 6.76/204 to beat Paul Manders, as the Time and Motion 'Stang ran a sick 9.25/131, while the Rain City Warrior shutdown in the first round had been the harbinger of bad news as it failed to appear for the second round. Just so that Colin Filsell didn't have to run alone Scorpion made a race of it, and the competitive spirit must have got into Andy Hurdle's blood





Hurdle to light a cherry in his 9.91/201 token pass alongside Satan's Sledge. But perhaps alongside is the wrong word. In front of would be more accurate, as a very sideways Colin Filsell crossed the centre line with two wheels, on his way to a not very much slower 9.39/129 700-yard run. Somewhere in the middle of the strip (in all senses of the word) he must have been going like a maniac. He may have a great future ahead of him. And beside him, and behind him, almost.

The final was Bootsie and Wild Bill, as Owen Hayward missed out by .013 of a second — bloody close racing over three-quarters of a mile. As first alternate Hounddog came to the line anyway, and a bloody good job too as it turned out. Gladiator blew the bottom straight out of the engine in the burnout and caught fire, needing the contents of two foam bottles to stop it. Running in the pit lane, it

had covered half of it — the half towards the centre line — with the entire oil content of the engine.

Hounddog fired up and did a tentative burnout round the oil. We were, to be honest, a bit worried. Well, alright, bloody terrified, if you must know. We like Owen Hayward. And the rules did say that if a car broke then the alternate would come straight on, *unless* the strip was blocked by the retiring car or made dangerous by oil or water. In our opinion it was dangerous. The fact that Owen didn't die does not prove our opinion to be false. He's an experienced driver and he went round the oil, thus preserving his life. But he couldn't race on the lane, as his lose-out 8.26 against Cannonball's 6.60 showed. And I am here to tell you that once he'd got round the oil he went down the strip like a bastard. If Nobby would let him he could run fives.

Owen's inability to race on the lane negated the whole timing of the event, in our humble opinion, and rendered the eventual result, with Cannonball the winner over Hounddog 26.73 to 28.42, null and void. The difference in time be-

tween the two cars at the end of the mile was only 1.69 seconds. The difference in time between the two cars on that one last run was 1.66, so almost all of Cannonball's winning advantage came from that one pass which Owen made on the oil. Hounddog's best time had been 6.56, its worst 7.04. If it had run as slowly as that Owen would have lost 27.2 against 26.73. But in a major final a driver of Owen's skill and experience must be expected to pull out all the stops. If he'd only equalled his previous best time that day — 6.56 — then he would have beaten Cannonball 26.72 against 26.73. And if he'd equalled his best-ever time then the win would have been even more convincing. Under the rules of the Cannonball event, as published by the organisers, Owen would have been within his rights to have refused to run on the oil. He could have waited until both lanes were

clear (which never happened on the Sunday) or he could have gone solo after Cannonball. Either way the result could have been very different. With all the respect we have for Bill Sherratt's tremendous showing over the weekend we've got to say that we think it *would* have been different.

In the end, though, drag racing's drag racing. You win, you lose, you race another day. If Gladiator hadn't let go (and you wait till you see the pictures of the damage) then we have no doubt that Bootsie would have stormed it.

Roy says that the Cannonball run will be an annual fixture from now on. And we're very glad to hear it. It provided us and the spectators with some of the fastest, closest and most exciting racing we've seen for a long time. Although Sammy Millar's back in September, he'll have to go a long way to beat the Cannonball. RN

