

Watsonville Speedway
Ocean Speedway

Santa Cruz County Fairgrounds **1960-2012**

It was a cool and foggy night. The year was 1959. Inside the "Kenny Sears and I" tavern in Watsonville, California, three friends were enjoying each others' company while drinking down cold brews. "Okie" Art Eaton and Jerry Cecil were listening to Bert Moreland describe his plan to build a racetrack on the grounds of the Santa Cruz County Fair.

The fair had existed since the 1870s. In 1941, it acquired the site on Hecker Pass Road, where it remains. When Pearl Harbor was attacked, fairground

construction, which had already begun, was delayed. But after WWII, in 1947, a half-million-dollar improvement program began and a ½-mile horse track was built.

Moreland's plan was to build a ¼-mile dirt track for cars within the horse track oval. Eaton (who had worked at the fairgrounds) and Cecil were all for the plan. So far, the only horsepower the track had seen was of the four-legged type, and the friends were ready to change that.



2000: Watsonville Speedway. *Courtesy of Rick Farren*



Santa Cruz County Fairgrounds with ¼-mile inside ½-mile.
Courtesy of University California Santa Cruz Map Room



1960: Ray Murray won the first Trophy Dash in track history.
Bob Mize Photo

In early 1960, after getting approval from the fair board, Eaton and Cecil rolled up their sleeves, dug in, and built the track, completing it in early May of 1960. Moreland, paralyzed in an accident 10 years prior, was unable to join them in the construction but oversaw the project. The first race was scheduled for May 27. It would feature "Claimers," which had made a successful debut in California during 1959.

1960

The \$99 Claiming Stock Cars were low budget, entry-level race cars. They could be purchased after the race by anybody for \$99, thus the name \$99 Claimers. Because of this rule nobody wanted to put a lot of money into their cars, which kept them affordable. There were no time trials; drivers drew their starting position according to point standings.

A full house turned out to watch the first race on what would become a trademark of Watsonville Speedway: a cool, foggy night.

Art Eaton, who goes by the name "Oakie Art," stamped his name in the record books forever as the first main-event winner at Watsonville Speedway when he won the inaugural main event in a close race with Ray Murray.

\$99 CLAIMING STOCK CAR
AUTO RACES

FRI. NITE, MAY 27 8:30 P.M.
COUNTY FAIRGROUNDS HECKER PASS ROAD
 ADULTS \$1.50 • JRS. 13-16 yrs., \$1.00
 KIDS UNDER 12—50c (under 6 FREE)

1960: Advertisement for the track's inaugural race.



1960: Ray Murray (7) paces the Claimers to the green flag for the speedway's first Trophy Dash on May 27.
Bob Mize Photo



1960: Bob Pult had the distinction of being the first driver to ever flip at Watsonville Speedway. The rollover took place during the May 27 main event.
Bob Mize Photo



1960: Art Eaton will forever be known as the driver who won the first main event in the track's history. A jubilant Eaton is hoisted up onto the shoulders of Jim Ivelich as Gene Lacey looks on during a post race celebration.

Bob Mize Photo from the Art Eaton Collection

Glenn Dickey, sports writer from the *Watsonville Register-Pajaronian* was there and reported in, making it sound like a free-for-all carnival:

If you've never seen one of these races, it's an experience. The cars resemble the bump-em cars at an amusement park. They race pell-mell around the track, bouncing merrily off each other on their way around. If there are any rules or even formal agreements about how cars can pass, as there are in other types of races, they aren't noticeable. Drivers just seem to pick out where they want to go and head for that spot by the shortest possible route. If another car is in the way—well, too bad.



1960: Bert Moreland (wheelchair) was a happy promoter during the May 27 opener. *Bob Mize Photo*



1960: Art LaCost won the 1961 and 1962 Claimer track championships and the 1967 Sportsman track championship. The titles were won on consistency more than wins, as he won only five main events at the track during his career.

Bob Mize Photo courtesy of Don Mize



1960: During this era in auto racing, kissing the trophy girl was at another level (not like the peck on the cheek of the new millennium), with some liplocks lasting a significant amount of time with mouths wide open. Dave Biondi was the recipient of this moment of passion. Biondi had two main-event wins at the track. *Bob Mize Photo courtesy of Don Mize*



1960: Bill Ercolini had a pair of main-event wins in the track's inaugural year. *Bob Mize Photo courtesy of Don Mize*



1960: Dallas Allen was a main-event winner in the Claimers. *Bob Mize Photo courtesy of Don Mize*



1960: Crash scene during the August 12 100-lap championship race. *Bob Mize Photo courtesy of Don Mize*



1960: Jim Ivelich (1) feels the heat from a pair of cars. The *Kenny Sears and I* (I stands for Ivelich) tavern was where the idea for a speedway at the Santa Cruz County Fairgrounds was born. *Bob Mize Photo courtesy of Don Mize*

Dickey went on to say:

These cars are not things of beauty forever. Significantly the constant banging doesn't harm their appearance any. That is, they are just as unsightly when they start the race as when they finish.

That was Dickey's opinion, which carried a lot of weight in 1960, but beauty is in the eye of the beholder.

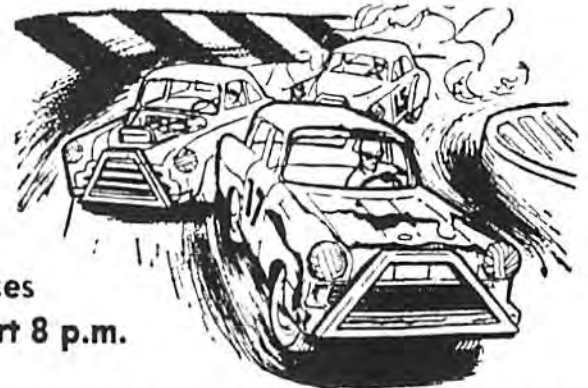
The first big race held at the speedway was a 100-lap championship race on August 12 that paid 1,000 silver dollars to the winner. In order for the winner to collect the \$1,000, he had to hand over his winning car after the race, which was then raffled off to one of the other main-event drivers who put up a \$99 claim. Lyle Edwards was the man who won and gladly gave up his car.

Eaton, who had won the first race, held the points lead into August when Hap Barber and Dick Carter overtook him. Barber won the track championship on consistency, having no main-event wins during the year. The hot driver at the end of the year was Vic Irvan who won three out of the last six races.

The big story that first year was the resounding success of the track. The first night had hosted a capacity crowd of 1,500 at the main grandstands. The crowds

\$1,000 First-Place Prize Money!

**— 100 LAP —
CHAMPIONSHIP RACE**



**Races
Start 8 p.m.**

THIS FRIDAY, AUGUST 12

COUNTY FAIR GROUNDS HECKER
PASS ROAD

Adults This Event Only—\$2.00. Juniors 13-16 years—\$1.00.
Kids under 12—50c. Under 6—Free.

1960: First big race.

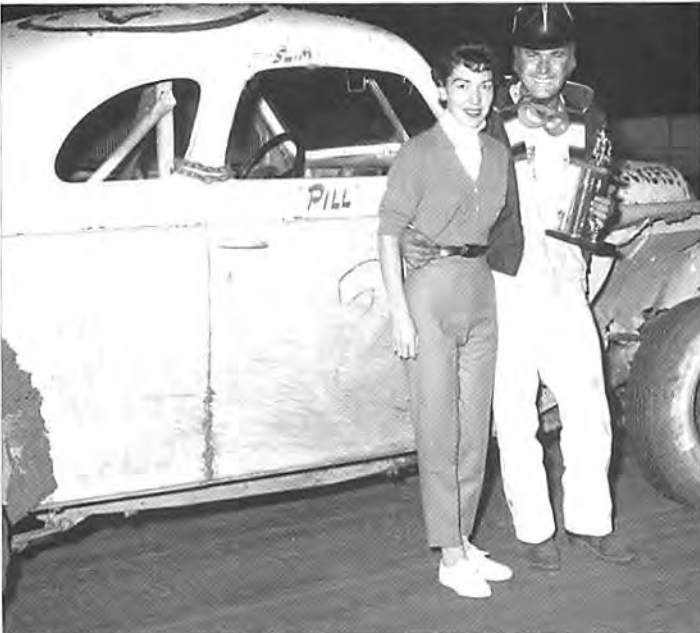
had quickly grown to the point where an additional 600 people sat in the aisles and stood along the fence. Bert Moreland had added seating to bring capacity up to 2,000, but that still wasn't enough. Most races were packed to the point of standing room. The car count grew from 20-plus cars for the opener in May to 110 by the end of July. Bert Moreland stated that the year had been "beyond my wildest dreams."



1960: Dwayne Palmer (48) was a fence pounder on this night. *Bob Mize Photo courtesy of Don Mize*



1960: Ed Jones after one of his two wins in 1960. *Mize Photo*



1960: Vic Irvan was one of the few drivers to have raced in Salinas and at both Watsonville speedways. Wife Jo joins him after one of his three wins in 1960. *Bob Mize Photo*



1960: The driver of car number 8 rejoices as the the two leading cars crash just short of the finish line. *Bob Mize Photo*



1960: Hoods flying up was a common problem in the early years of Stock Car racing. A smiling Jerry Cecil doesn't seem to mind. *Bob Mize Photo courtesy of Don Mize*



1960: Bill Orr won a main event in each of the first three years. *Bob Mize Photo courtesy of Don Mize*



1960: Mayhem in turn two at start of feature race. *Bob Mize Photo courtesy of Don Mize*

Bob Mize Photo Gallery

Nighttime color photography was rare in 1960. Watsonville Speedway's first photographer—Bob Mize—took a handful of color shots one night during the year. With over 200 Claimers signing in and no programs available, identifying some of these cars was not possible.

Courtesy of Don Mize



Ken Sarmento won main events at both Salinas Speedway and Watsonville Speedway.



Dick Carter (40) on the bumper of Dwayne Palmer (48).



Dick Carter (40) was the NASCAR 1960 State of California Claimer champion. Dick had one win at Watsonville.





1961: If you look closely you can see a dazed Tim Etchison (28) trying to climb from his car which sits precariously on top of the crushed claimer of equally stunned Ruben Reeder (61).



1960: Releasing the seat belt can be a problem. This driver struggles to exit without a neck injury.



1961: Exiting a car with a crushed roof can also be problematic, as Jim Thomsen found out.

Exiting the Car

Getting out of the car after a crash can be an adventure in itself, as these photos show.

Bob Mize Photos courtesy of Don Mize



1960: Maintaining your equilibrium can be a challenge after a rollover.



1960: Number 81 was soon to find out how hard it was going to be to get out of a car with a crushed roof.



1960: Tom Speed provided the SRO crowd some close-up excitement. Judging by the crowd's reaction, there may have been words exchanged after Speed exited his car. *Bob Mize photo*



1960: Ruben Reeder, who is shown on the previous page in the same car, digs into the dirt for photographer Bob Mize.



1960: View from the other side of turn one. *Bob Mize Photo*



1960: Leroy Boyd (800) in a precarious position as John Roberts (39) and Tim Etchison (28) slip by. *Bob Mize Photo*

3,500 See Stock Car Race Start

Anyone who thinks that last year's popularity of the \$99 claiming stock races was just a fluke should have been at the fairgrounds Friday night.

1961: Times were good.
Watsonville Register-Pajaronian



1961: Earl Becker (300), Stan McBee (65) and Pinky Cecil (67) prepare for battle. *Bob Mize Photo*

In 1961, Watsonville Speedway picked up where it had left off in 1960 by shattering the attendance record on opening night with a crowd of 3,500 (3,200 paid). Defending champion Hap Barber was away, serving his country in Europe after being called up for military service in the Army. It was Art LaCost who won the 20-lap main event over the 24 cars that started the event. Then, after its calm inaugural season, tempers started to flair during the opening night of the 1961 season. The *Pajaronian* reported:

An unscheduled fracas nearly started after the third heat race when hot-tempered Ronnie Yetter of Salinas, apparently convinced that his car had been intentionally knocked out of the race, started after Roy Pruett of Watsonville. But Yetter was restrained before he could reach Pruett.

After the race Moreland announced that 500 more bleacher seats had been ordered. It was anticipated they would be in place before the next race, and they were. In a related story, the *Pajaronian* reported that the Claiming races were the number one local sport, averaging 2,000 to 3,000 spectators a week.



1961: Typical Watsonville weather as fog rolls in at dusk. It is this weather pattern that gives Watsonville Speedway one of the best dirt-racing surfaces in the country. Cars can be seen stacking up in turn two during this June 2 heat race. *Bob Mize Photo*



1969: Cecil Irvan was one of the most accomplished Stock Car drivers of the 60s. He won six oval and ten Figure 8 main events. He also won 1969 oval and Figure 8 track championships before moving up to the Sportsman class. *Bobby Large Collection*



1969: Steve Ferguson (68) starts to execute two end-over-end flips followed by four barrel rolls. Terry Chalker (37) had front-row seats to the performance. *John Prentice Collection*



1969: Ray Mello (20m) gives a lift to (80). *Caldwell Photo from Bobby Large Collection*



1969: Lloyd Beard won the July 4th open competition race in his Super Modified. His children – Debbie and Cameron – join in on the celebration. *Courtesy of Ken Bonnema*



1969: Formation racing with Fred Vairetta (76) Roy Pruett and Mike Small (10). *Courtesy of John Prentice Collection*



1970: Steve Ferguson (68) gets a wheel nearly into the cockpit of Terry Chalker. Jay Smith (35c) up on the banking has his own problems. *Courtesy of John Prentice Collection*



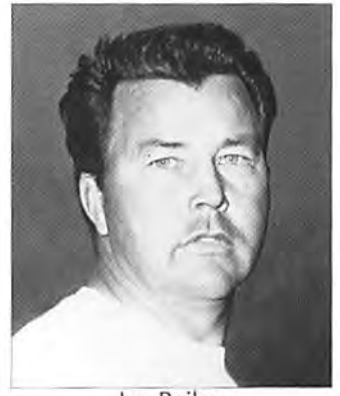
Bob Allen
Claimer/Sportsman

Gallery of Drivers

Circa 1970

Charles Caldwell Photos

Courtesy of John Prentice Collection



Joe Bailey
Sportsman



Al Balding
Stock Car/Sportsman



Butch Bishop
Sportsman



Glenn Bonnema
Sportsman



Jerry Boyd
Stock Car



Cliff Busenhart
Sportsman



Terry Chalker
Sportsman



Ron Cooper
Stock Car/Sportsman



John Cordoza
Sportsman



Tom Elliott
Stock Car



Darwin Ernst
Sportsman



Leroy Gentry
Sportsman



Ron Gravelle
Sportsman



Walt Griggs
Sportsman



Robert Harper
Stock Car



Bob Hedrick
Sportsman/Stock Car



Mike Hughes
Sportsman



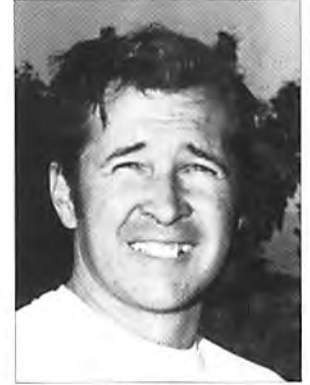
Bruce Mann
Stock Car/Sportsman



Gary Pacheco
Sportsman



Jerry Roberson
Sportsman



Mike Small
Stock Car/Sportsman



Jay Smith
Sportsman



Dave Snyder
Stock Car



Dave Tannahill
Stock Car



Roger Van Dusen
Sportsman



John Van Hooser
Stock Car



Bill White
Sportsman



Vern Willhoite
Sportsman



Ron Yetter
Claimer/Sportsman



1970: Roy Pruett in victory circle after one of his career eleven main-event wins at Watsonville. *Bobby Large Collection*



1970: Ron Yetter was one of the top Claimer/Sportsman drivers since the first year of the track, winning over a dozen main events. *Caldwell Photo from Yetter Collection*

What appeared to be one of the biggest upsets in track history happened during the 100-lap Memorial Day race held on May 29, with Sportsmans racing against Super Modifieds. Jerry Cecil became the first person to ever drive the heavier Sportsman race car to victory over the lighter Super Modifieds. At least, that's what everybody thought when they left the track that night. But one of the Super Modified drivers went crying to the officials that both Lloyd Beard (driving a Super) and Cecil (who had a race-long battle for the lead) had passed cars under the yellow flag. The officials agreed, so in mid week, both drivers were set down and Mike McCann was awarded the victory. The infraction had happened earlier in the race and had no bearing on how the cars would have finished anyway. It appeared to be a bogus call. In a 2011 interview with Cecil, he stated, "In my mind, I won the race and everybody that was there that night knows who had the fastest car."

The Sportsmans and Super Modifieds got together again on July 3 for the Firecracker 100 and Beard, in a Super Modified, and Cecil, in his Sportsman, once again had a race-long, wheel-to-wheel battle for the lead with Beard just nipping Cecil for the win. This time there was no protest. The combination shows, pitting the two classes against each other, was auto racing at its best.

The final race of the year was a 100-lap, Open Competition race. This time Jerry Cecil was not to be denied as he dominated a field of Sprint Cars, Super Modifieds and Sportsmans. This was the first time a Sportsman ever won an Open show.

Buster Tara had an exciting moment during his qualifying run on July 31. As Buster was reaching top speed approaching turn one, the clutch in his Sportsman exploded, which in turn cut his brake line. His car then shot up the ½-mile pit entrance with no way to stop. Buster had two choices, turn left into the pits (which were on the ½-mile) and take a chance of running over people, or go straight through the fence. He chose the latter. As he blew through the fence and down the steep embankment, he narrowly missed two people who had to make a hasty retreat. The car continued through the area outside the track, narrowly missing a tree and pole, before it came to a stop on the driveway that leads into the fairgrounds. He was okay once his adrenalin rush subsided.



1969: Dave Branum had 12 feature wins in the Stock Cars.
Caldwell Photo from Bobby Large Collection



1969: Al Balding (15) appears to have lost his drive shaft after a heavy impact, possibly with Ken Cox (91) whose trunk is open.
Caldwell Photo from Bobby Large Collection



1969: Howard Hatch (left) was one of the stars of early Stock Car racing at Watsonville Speedway. His credentials were fifteen wins on the oval and eight on the Figure 8. Unfortunately his heart would quit working at the track.
Caldwell Photo from Bobby Large Collection



1969: Bill Steffens had a single main-event win in the Stock Cars.
Caldwell Photo from Bobby Large Collection



1969: Ray Chalker exits after breaking wood.
Caldwell Photo from Bobby Large Collection



1969: Tom Elliott (middle) had wins on both the Oval and Figure 8. Tom was also employed by Mattish Automotive (my father's business) in the 1960s.
Caldwell Photo from Bobby Large Collection



1969: Tom Elliot (43) takes a direct hit in the X of the Figure 8 by Al Miller (41).
Caldwell Photo from Bobby Large Collection



1969: Tom Michael (100) leads Jack Dosier (38) through turns three and four during an Early Model Stock Car race.

Caldwell Photo from Bobby Large Collection

1969

It was Watsonville Speedway's 10th year. The Figure 8 was dropped for the time being. Sportsmans and Stock Cars started on the oval.

On week two, Lloyd Keldsen, Jr., was unhappy with the new yellow flag rule that limited its use during Stock Car races. He approached flagman Pinky Cecil and voiced his concern about how the new rule was being implemented. When he didn't get the answer he was looking for, he threw a punch that Pinky managed to avoid. Keldsen then continued a verbal assault as he was being dragged away by officials. Keldsen was fined \$25, suspended for two weeks, and put on three months' probation for his actions. The Keldsen clan was just getting warmed up for what would prove to be one of the biggest draws of the track and one of the most entertaining families in track history.

The Figure 8 resumed on May 31 and was won by Howard Hatch. The following week another one was scheduled, but only seven of the possible thirty Stock Cars participated, and only three of those finished. Most of the drivers refused to run the race, claiming it was too dangerous and hard on equipment. Cecil Irvan won that shortened race. The following week a new rule stating the final four transfer spots to the Stock Car main event had to come from the Figure 8 race. That did the trick, as 19 cars entered the race. Unfortunately, half of them were heavily damaged in the race.

Lonnie Williams crossed the finish line first in the June 20 Sportsman main event but was disqualified by head NASCAR official Tony Goularte because one of his tires was a bit too wide. He filed a protest, which was denied. According to the June 21st *Watsonville Pajaronian*, Lonnie told Bert Moreland, "I'll tell you what. I'll come back here next week with different tires and win this thing again—and then what will you find to take it away from me for?" Making a prophet out of himself, he did just that, winning the June 27 race.

Lloyd Beard made a triumphant return on July 4 for the 100-lap open competition race. The biggest crowd in eight years (2,600) saw Beard lead from start to finish. The two-time Watsonville champion lapped all but one of the 22 starters. Although Super Modifieds took the top three positions, it was a Sportsman that set a new track record in qualifying. Dennis Moomjean's 17.45 not only set a Sportsman record, it also beat the Super Modified and Open Competition record by more than half a second.

One of the most basic rules of working under a car is always put a jack stand under the frame or axle for safety reasons. Allan Ruseler, a mechanic tending to the Stock Car of John Brazil, Jr., did not follow the rule. He was on his back changing the transmission on Brazil's car when the car slipped off the jack. The car then fell on Ruseler's chest, knocking him unconscious. Ruseler was taken to the hospital where he spent the night with bruised ribs. He was a very lucky man.



1970: Ron Cooper, two-time winner in the Watsonville Sportsman class.



1970: Roy Large has a ton of mud to clean off his Sportsman after wheel packing or hot laps.



1970: The Irvan Family—Vic, Cecil and Ernie—combined to win well over 100 main events at the track. Cecil (above) joined brother Vic in the Sportsman division in 1970 after dominating the Stock Cars in 1969.



1970: Jay Smith in his pink car with flowers on top. Perhaps a sign of the times.



1970: Darwin Ernst, three wins in the Sportsman division.



1970: Ken Amaya, main-event winner in the Sportsman class.



1970: Alan Roquet



1970: Ron Gravelle won 13 main events and the 1971 track championship in the Sportsman class.

Car off track, through fences; driver unhurt



Buster Tara (18) was the unfortunate driver who crashed his way out onto the Fairgrounds access road. *Courtesy of John Prentice Collection*

Jerry Cecil in a WATSONVILLE SPORTSMAN
vs.
Mike McCann in a SAN JOSE SUPER MODIFIED
in a 2 out of 3 match race (winner take all)

Auto Races 8 Events plus
2 main events
& FIGURE 8 RACE

This Friday—8 p.m. Watsonville Fairgrounds
Hecker Pass Road

1970: A Match race was run after the May 29 dispute. (see story on opposite page). Mike McCann won.

The big story of 1970 was JERRY CECIL. No driver in the history of the track, past or future, had or would have a year like the one Cecil had in 1970. He won an amazing 17 out of 20 main events, and took the track championship by over 300 points from his nearest competitor. At one point Cecil had a 15 main-event win streak going until Vic Irvan snapped it. In some observers' minds, what may have been the most amazing accomplishment was that Cecil's Sportsman—which was a Modified Stock Car—had beaten the Sprint Cars and Super Modifieds in the season final.



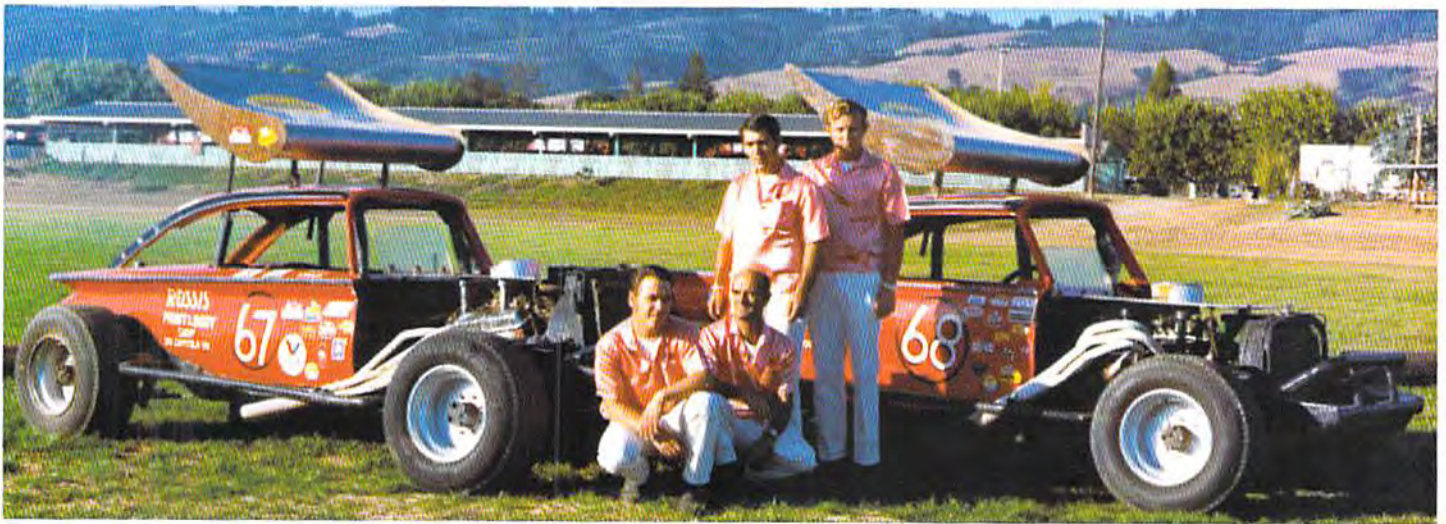
1970: Bill Mcinally gets an earfull after running into Bert Moreland's street car. *Caldwell Photo from Art Eaton Collection*



1970: USAC National Champion Joe Leonard (right) paid a visit to Watsonville Speedway on June 19 and hooked up with Art Eaton (left) and track champion Jerry Cecil. *Caldwell Photo from Bobby Large Collection*



1970: Jerry Cecil enjoys his Open Competition victory over the Super Modifieds and Sprint Cars with a couple of beehive hair-do trophy girls. Besides this big win, Jerry won three Gold Cups and racked up an amazing 73 main event wins in the Claimer/Sportsman ranks in his career at Watsonville Speedway. *Caldwell Photo from Bobby Large Collection*



1970: The well-dressed team of Charles and Steve Ferguson.



1971: Green was still a taboo color in auto racing when 16-year-old Ken Bonnema took up Stock Car racing in this car.
Ken Bonnema Collection



1970: Dick Arquette was victorious in the Open Competition Trophy Dash on September 4 driving a Super Modified.



1970: Art Eaton proudly points to his new side nerf designed to keep wheels from interlocking. Legendary motor sports writer Gary Jacob wrote this about Eaton in 1970: "Another certainty every season is "Oakie" Art Eaton will show up with the battered and bruised circle #45 car and run right up with the leaders in the main."



Ron Yetter and his team pose for the camera. (L to R) Car owner Marv Stephens, mechanic Ed Lewis, Ron, and mechanic Rich Stephens. *Yetter Collection*

All color photos on these five pages were taken by track photographer *Charles Caldwell* and are *Courtesy of the Bobby Large Collection* unless otherwise noted.



1970: Tom "the Rabbit" Abreu



1970: Joe Bailey did very well in the Sportsman class with four main-event wins before moving to Super Modifieds.



1970: George Steitz did very well in his racing career. At Watsonville he won a dozen main events and the 1976 Sportsman track championship. After a stint in the Super Modified ranks, George became a successful promoter.



1971: Walt Griggs, who had a pair of wins during his Claimer days, poses in front of the Joe Martinez Sportsman.



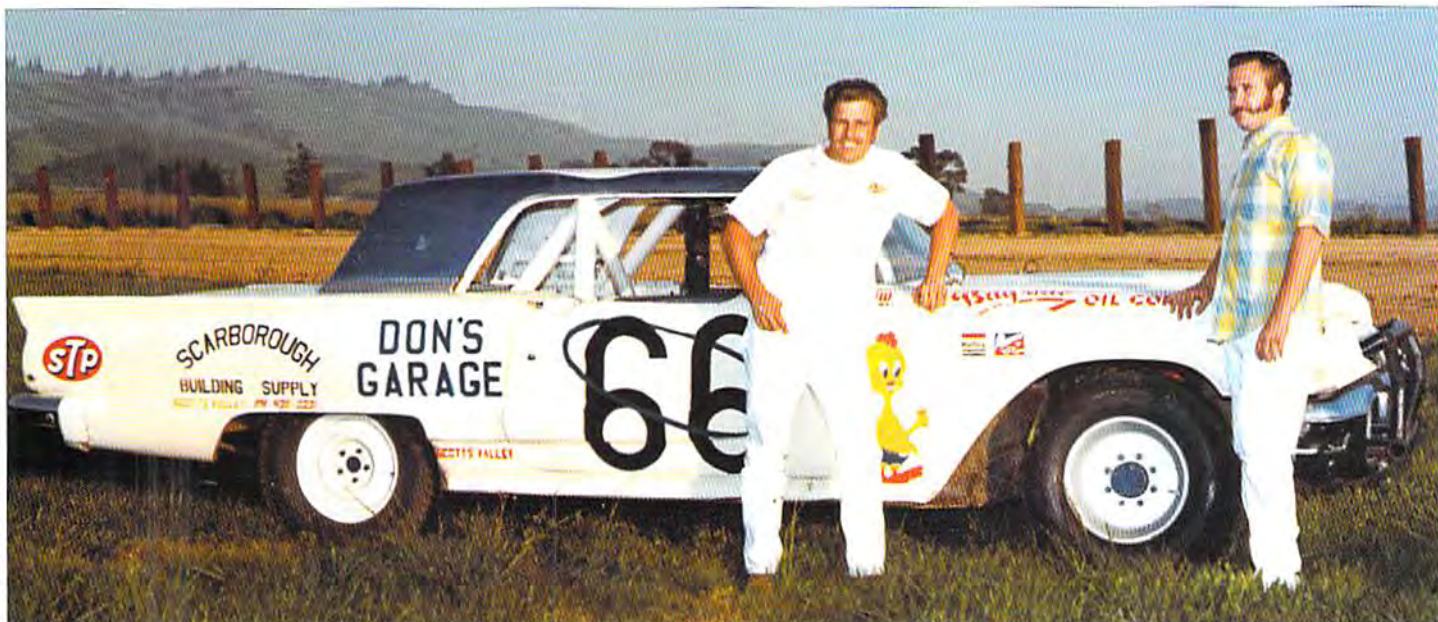
1971: Bill Orr, who won main events in 1960, 1961 and 1962, was still going strong a dozen years later.



1970: Terry Chalker won two main events in the Sportsman class at Watsonville Speedway before moving up to race Super Modifieds on the NASCAR circuit.



1970: Cliff Busenhart



1970: Tony Oliveira (left) stands in front of his nice-looking T-Bird in which he won a main event during the year. Also getting his photo taken is Tom Taylor. *Courtesy of Ken Bonnema*



1970: Steve Argon poses next to his 1956 Chevy. Steve had three feature wins. *Caldwell Photo from Bobby Large Collection*



1971: John Harper after one of his ten main-event wins in the Stock Cars. John won an equal amount on both the oval and Figure 8. Showing his versatility, John also won four Sportsman main events and the 1973 track championship in that division. *Courtesy of Ken Bonnema*



1971: Dave Tannahill (3) blows the doors off the competition on his way to the track title in Early Model Stock Cars. *Courtesy of John Prentice Collection*



1971: Early Model Stock Cars. *Courtesy of John Prentice Collection*





1970: The team of Bruce Mann (78) and John Van Hooser (10) beside their bruised and battered Stock Cars.



1971: Dave Tannahill won seven main events and the 1971 Early Model Stock Car title.



1970: John Brazil, Jr. is one of the top Stock Car drivers in track history, winning over forty Figure 8 races and twelve oval main events. John also won the 1972 Stock Car championship and the 1973 and 1980 Figure 8 championships.



1970: Lloyd Keldsen, Jr. (right) won twenty-four Figure 8 races and the 1972 track championship.



1970: Bob Walker



1971: Cliff Renosa



1970: Mike Varni



1971: Everett Edlund (17) leads Bob Cetti (74) and a host of other Super Modifieds down the front straight during the Trophy Dash on Memorial Day. Marshall Sargent and Howard Kaeding are in the last row. *Bob Mize Photo courtesy of Don Mize*



1971: Bob Zwemke (79) and Boyd Schauer (30) heading out of turn four. *Bob Mize Photo courtesy of Don Mize*



1971: Dewayne Woodward (98), Ed Hopper (54) and Jack Epperson (18). *Bob Mize Photo courtesy of Don Mize*



1971: Marshall Sargent at speed on the half mile during Memorial Day. By the end of the night he was kicked out of NASCAR for the rest of the year. *Bob Mize Photo courtesy of Don Mize*

Open Competition On the Half Mile

1971



1971: Jack Epperson (18) tailgates Tom McDonald (40). *Bob Mize Photo courtesy of Don Mize*



1971: Don Lloyd (75), Jim Hearn (33), and Terry Chalker (35) battle it out during the July 2 semi-main event. *Bob Mize Photo courtesy of Don Mize*

Veteran race driver Robinson dies at wheel of heart attack

Watsonville Register-Pajaronian

1971

The night of April 23, 1971, marked an outstanding night for Butch Keltner. He won both the Early Model Stock Car main event and the Figure 8 races. He was in a good mood after the races until NASCAR officials stopped by to inspect his car, then he lost it. He was suspended for one year for refusing inspection and "vehemently" protesting, which was the word used by an official.

After many years of trying, it appeared that Robbie Robinson, 42, had finally won a Sportsman main event on May 7. Before the start of the season, doctors had told Robbie to retire from racing because of a heart condition. Robinson said he would not retire until he won a main event, and May 7 looked like it would be the day. Robinson could taste victory as he came across the line in the 20-lap main for the start of lap 20, which should have been the white flag lap, but there was no flag. Undaunted he completed laps 21, 22 and 23, all the while wondering where the flag was. It was about this time that officials woke up and realized their mistake and alerted the flagman who waved the white flag. By now Vic Irvan had caught Robinson and then passed him on lap 24 for the win. The four-lap brain fade by officials had cost Robinson the win, but he was philosophical about it after the race. He stated that he would have retired that night if he had won, and although he was keenly disappointed, he was not bitter. He then continued to race, chasing that elusive goal.

A bizarre and tragic twist to this story took place on Friday the 13th in August. During the main event, Robinson was racing for position down the front straightaway when he suffered a major heart attack and slumped over his steering wheel. His car then veered through the infield and came to rest against the turn-one banking. Robinson was pronounced dead a very short time later.

There was a series of holiday open competition races held on the 1/2-mile oval—Memorial Day, 4th of July and Labor Day. This was the first time the half mile had been used since NARC had used it for a pair of shows six years earlier in 1965.

The series drew well, with car counts in the 60-70 range with 60 percent Sportsmans and 40 percent Super Modifieds. Howard Kaeding swept the series in his potent Super Modified, winning all three races.

The Sportsmans fared well on the big track, taking at least half of the top ten positions in each race. Dave Tannahill raced his Stock Car in the show, making it a true run-what-you-brung open-competition event. Marshall Sargent's post-race action at the beer stand during the Memorial Day event netted him a suspension for the remainder of the season.

The track had had another good year with big crowds and counts between the two divisions, which averaged about 110 during the year.



1971: Bruce Canepa (69) paces Butch Bishop (60) and Robbie Robinson (25) on June 4. The banking in the background is where Robinson's car would come to rest three months later. *Courtesy of the John Prentice Collection*

Pileup Halts Watsonville Races; Five Sent to Hospital

1972: *Racing Wheels Newspaper*

NASCAR 13 YEAR AUTO RACES

on big ½ mile track

SPORTSMAN and STOCKCAR

(10 events plus two 25 lap mains)

Sunday, March 26 — 2 p.m.

(qualifying 12 noon) Gate opens 10:30 a.m.

Adults — 3.50

Jrs. — 2.50

Children — 75c

Under 6 Free

Fairgrounds in Watsonville

Hecker Pass Road

Coming every Fri. 8 p.m. starting April 7th, auto
races and figure 8 race on ¼ mile track.

1972

The 1972 season opener was held on the half mile on March 26. It was an unlucky beginning to Watsonville Speedway's 13th season, and the day would go down in the annals of track history as its worst. The day started out great. A standing-room-only crowd of 3,500 packed themselves into the fairgrounds facility. The largest field of cars ever seen for a Sportsman/Early Model show was there with 56 Sportsman and 65 Early Models signing in.

Problems started when it took a lot longer to qualify 121 cars on the big track than anticipated. By the time qualifying ended, the track had dried out and the show was running nearly 2 hours late.

The heat races and Trophy Dashes ran without incident on what was becoming a very slippery and dusty track by now. The first sign of trouble happened in the Sportsman semi-main event when an eight-car pileup in turn four halted the race at six laps. After the semi-main, a number of drivers approached Bert Moreland and asked him to water the track, which he refused to do, stating, "The track is the best it's ever been." (The real reason for refusing was because the program was two hours behind schedule and he did not want to keep the spectators waiting through a lengthy watering process.) What happened next made front-page headlines in area newspapers the next day. The *Watsonville Register-Pajaronian* headline read: **Racetrack opening marred by 12-car wreck, near riot.** The first paragraph went on to read:

A 12-car crackup yesterday afternoon, which injured five drivers and caused a near-riot situation when fans tried to get their money back after racing was called off, marred the 1972 opening of Watsonville Speedway at the county fairgrounds.

Track conditions caused a worst-case scenario in the 25-car Sportsman main event. A very dusty track had reduced visibility to nearly zero when, on lap five, Rod Poor and Dick Rauser tangled coming out of turn four. As their cars came to a stop on the



Sportsman Trophy Dash on half mile. Bob Mize Photo



Rod Poor was one of the drivers involved with triggering the massive pileup that took out most of the field on opening day.

Caldwell Photo from Bobby Large Collection



1971: Roy Pruett (3), unknown driver (83), Boyd Schauer (30) and Lee Jackson (21) on pace lap. *Bob Mize Photo courtesy of Don Mize*



1971: Howard Kaeding won all three Open Competition races on the half mile during 1971 driving this car from the central valley. *Don Bishop Collection*



1971: Howard Kaeding after one of his three victories on the half mile. *Bob Mize Photo courtesy of Don Mize*



1971: Gary Pacheco won the July 4 Sportsman Trophy Dash and then finished second to Kaedings Super Modified in the Open Comp main event. Pacheco also had success on the half mile, winning a main event in 1970. *Bob Mize Photo*



1971: Bob Cetti hit the wall hard in the July 4 Super Modified dash, badly damaging his car. *Courtesy of Yetter Collection*

AUTO RACES **NASCAR'S BIGGEST SPORTSMAN AUTO RACE . . .**

PERMATEX 150-LAP GOLD CUP CHAMPIONSHIP

THIS FRIDAY,
AUG. 11 — 8 p.m.

Adults: \$3.00 • Juniors: \$2.50 Children: \$1.00 • Under 6: Free

FAIRGROUNDS in WATSONVILLE Hecker Pass Road,
Highway 152

Coming August 18 . . . Destruction Derby, Figure-8 and Auto Races.

26 Cars Starting . . .
PLUS, Trophy Dash, Semi-Main, Stock Car Races. On oval and figure-eight track.
PLUS, Beauty Contest!



of the show, was exiting turn two and heading down the back straight when he had a massive heart attack. His car then veered right and hit the wall. He was transported to Watsonville Community Hospital where he was dead on arrival.

The Stock Cars were upgraded to include bigger engines, posi-traction rear ends, and better handling suspensions. These changes were evident when the single-lap track record was lowered by nearly a second. John Brazil, Jr., was the class of the Stock Cars, winning the track championship with help from his seven main-event wins.

Watsonville had had another banner year at the gate. Unfortunately, though, a result of the opening-day fiasco was that the ½-mile oval was never used again.



1971: Track champion Ron Gravelle (97) races with former champion Vic Ivan (9). *Courtesy of John Prentice Collection*



1972: Bill Hall (15), Rich Klino (64) and Steve Hayes (16). Turn one. *Courtesy of John Prentice Collection*

One of the most spectacular accidents in Watsonville Speedway's history happened in 1973 during the June 15 Sportsman semi-main. Don Delward, Lou Masella and Joe Roletto were battling for the lead when all three went over the turn-one banking and flipped violently side by side. Masella was hospitalized with cuts and bruises while the other two walked away from the crash. A week after the crash, drivers were surprised when they showed up and found that speedway officials had decided to cut away the banking and flatten the track. Lap times immediately got slower.

In Late July, the entire fighting Keldsen clan was suspended. Attendance declined as a result.

Good car counts continued during the year, with 90-100 being the norm between the two divisions. Also common in the Sportsman class was the .6 second average between the fastest and slowest cars in the main event.

1974

During the off-season, Figure 8 ace Lloyd Keldsen, Jr., was shot in the back during a domestic dispute, with the bullet hitting his spine and paralyzing him for life. That didn't stop him from racing, though. Miraculously, he was back in a race car just months after the shooting, driving with hand controls.

Streaking (running naked in public places) was the fad of 1974, so why not go streaking at the racetrack? On April 19, a male stalker and his full monty ran down the front straight during the Trophy Dash presentation. By coincidence, Bert Moreland's car—with Bert driving—was waiting for the stalker at the other end to whisk him away.

The red flag flew on lap 15 during the May 24 Stock Car main. A person was shot elsewhere on the fairgrounds facility and the ambulance was needed immediately. After a long delay the race was continued and Dennis Wilson won his fourth race in six weeks.

Gary Jacob, a writer for numerous auto-racing newspapers, wrote this about the June 21 show: "The show saw the final checkered flag flying before 10:30, a Watsonville record." Apparently races had been ending very late for years. This was a time before state-mandated curfews.

WATSONVILLE Register - Pajaronian

105th Year—No. 20

Watsonville, California, Monday, March 27, 1972

12 Pages

10 Cents

Race track opening marred by 12-car wreck, near-riot

By TOM TERBS

Moreland said the charges were not true Moreland explained. Moreland said he even

The race on March 26, 1972 made front page headlines.

front straight, they nearly blocked the track. To make matters worse, they were completely obscured in a cloud of dust. Within seconds, ten more cars traveling at speeds of 80-90 mph piled into the stationary cars, creating a frightening sound that horrified those in attendance. Once the dust had settled (literally) and more ambulances called, five drivers were transported to Watsonville Community Hospital. The worst injury was a concussion sustained by Butch Bishop. Although bruised and battered, Bob Ballard, Gary Pacheco, John Harper, and Elmer Huff were treated and released. Twelve cars, which had opening day paint on them, were heavily damaged in the melee. After a long cleanup, the Early Model Stock Cars began to line up for their feature race. At that point the mechanic for Butch Bishop drove a truck and trailer across the track in front of the starter's stand, blocking the track. He then got out of the truck and took the green flag away from the starter and said there would be no more racing that day.



Joe Bailey's car received significant damage.

Courtesy of the Yetter Collection

By this time there was friction brewing between the Sportsman and Stock Car drivers. The Stock Car drivers were mad because the Sportsman drivers were preventing them from racing. The Sportsman drivers wanted to cancel the rest of the show so Moreland would have to give refunds to 3,500 people. They did not want to see Moreland make a lot of money off of the fiasco. At this point the rest of the show was cancelled. Now everybody was mad, including the spectators who were told they would get a rain check instead of a refund. The cost of this race was double that of a normal Friday night show, so people felt cheated.

An angry mob overwhelmed the ticket booth and the six security guards who were trying to protect it. At one point Bert Moreland's wife and a female employee were knocked to the ground in a fight. They then fled to the parking area where Bert was holed in his car because of his paralysis. Seven Sheriff's Deputies then showed up and restored order. People continued to mill around into the darkness, contemplating what took place on opening day 1972.

Apparently all the publicity from the opening day fiasco was a good thing for the front gate, as the track had its best opening month in history with standing-room-only crowds during the first month.

On June 23, less than a year since Robbie Robinson had a fatal heart attack during a main event, lightning struck twice in the same place. Howard Hatch—winner of 15 main events at the Speedway—was having another strong evening, winning the Figure 8 race and moving up in the Stock Car main event. Hatch, who had run all eight years that the Stock Cars had been part

Keldsen Sr., Jr. suspended



Lloyd Keldsen, Sr.



Lloyd Keldsen, Jr.

Who will the fans be able to boo now? The Keldsens are through for the season at Watsonville Speedway.

Lloyd Keldsen Jr. and Sr. last night were suspended for the remainder of the campaign after allegedly being involved in a fight behind the grandstand which left one man in the hospital.

Joe Westmoreland, 27, of Watsonville, was reported in "very satisfactory condition" this morning at Watsonville Community Hospital, where he was taken by ambulance after reportedly being involved in a scuffle with the Keldsens.

The Keldsens had been permitted to race last night only after being placed on probation the previous week to guard against any outbreaks of violence or unsportsmanlike driving.



John Brazil, Jr.

The combatants

No family in track history has been suspended more than the Keldsens. Lloyd, Sr., and his sons Lloyd, Jr., Raymond and John found themselves in hand-to-hand combat with their Figure 8 and oval track adversaries Ken Nott, John Brazil, Jr., and others on many occasions. As the above photos show, they kept things interesting for track officials.

Photos courtesy of the John Prentice and Bobby Large Collections



Ken Nott

Steitz bullies to Speedway win

1974: When the green flag waves, even nice guys can grow horns. *Racing Wheels Newspaper*

Sportsman driver Ray Seals raced to a third-place finish during the August 9 semi-main event. When the race ended, Seals suffered a massive heart attack and died. His was the third fatal heart attack in four years at the track.

The 1974 season closed with the first 100-lap Figure 8 team race. This unique race featured teams of two drivers with separate cars but the same number. One car would be on the track racing. When he was done, he would come off the track and the other would race onto it. (Kind of like tag team wrestling in the WWE.) The team of Mel Bentson and Dave Fowler won the first edition of the race on the final night of the season. On lap 60, Bentson's car was totaled in the X while leading, but he still won the race when teammate Fowler charged onto the track and maintained the lead for the team.

The driver having the best year in 1974 was Stock Car track champion Dennis Wilson. Dennis won 8 main events at Watsonville and 30 main events on the state circuit. He was also crowned state champion.



Ken Bonnema, who has raced a variety of different types of race cars, had one feature win at Watsonville in a Stock Car.

Ken Bonnema Collection

NASCAR
AUTO RACES
SPORTSMAN STOCKS FIGURE EIGHTS
FRI. NITE * 8:00 PM
Watsonville
County Fairgrounds * E. Lake St.

1975

1975

Scheduled to make his debut at Watsonville during 1975 was 16-year-old Ernie Irvan. Ernie, Son of Vic, showed up for the opening race in the Stock Cars but when officials deemed his car illegal, Papa Vic did not take the information lightly. They took the car home, changed it to race on asphalt, and well, the rest is history. That fateful decision led to victory in the Daytona 500. On the down side, it was six years before Ernie returned to the track to race.

Attendance and car counts, mainly in the Sportsman division, were down for the year.



1976

Scenes from Watsonville Speedway during America's Bicentennial Year
(Clockwise) From the grandstand; Tom Barbour (15) leads the way during hotlaps; Down the back straight they go; Turn one; The pits. *Dennis Mattish Photos*



Two years after being shot and paralyzed from the waist down, Lloyd Keldsen, Jr., steered his Chevy to a popular win in the 15-lap Figure 8 race on May 21. Proving that it wasn't a fluke, Lloyd, Jr., won three Figure 8 races during the year against the best in the business, staking a claim as the best hand-control driver in the country. Lloyd also finished a close second to Ken Nott in the final Figure 8 track standings for the year.

Lloyd Keldsen, Sr., and his sons (Jr., Raymond and John) had been rivals with Ken Nott for years and were former track champions. But that rivalry would be taken up another notch on July 30. Lloyd Keldsen, Sr., was leading the Figure 8 main event when Ken Nott spun him out. Two laps later, Lloyd's son Raymond booted Nott—who was leading the race—off the end of the track. These actions would be stored in the memory banks of all involved.

Tom Barbour was hauling his Sportsman over Pacheco Pass from Merced on July 2 when the fan belt broke

on his truck. He was stranded on the side of the road and running out of time when a race fan saw a driver in need and stopped. They hooked Barbour's trailer up to the fan's motor home. They drove to the track where Barbour finished in second place that night in the main event.

Although Watsonville Speedway had slight declines in attendance and car counts (averaging 65 cars) from previous years, the track remained the number-one Friday night track in the West.

Nott-Brazil Team Continues Fig-8 Success

Figure-8's by Gary Jacob
 Watsonville, Cal., July 3. . . The team of Ken Nott and John Brazil, Jr. continued their incredible streak of success in the 100-lap figure-8 team championship events at Watsonville Speedway, scoring a \$500 win in Tuesday's affair. The local drivers have won six of the last seven of these marathon affairs, with Nott also winning the seventh while teamed with Doug McCoun.

The wild events allow two cars to team up and take turns on the track during the century run, letting a team stay in contention while one of the cars is being repaired.

Racing Wheels Newspaper



1976: Entrance into the Santa Cruz County Fairgrounds. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



1976: No driver in the history of Watsonville Speedway has won more main events in the featured class than Vic Irvan. Vic won an amazing 95 main events in the Claimer and Sportsman classes. What adds to this accomplishment is the fact that during half of his career it was common to have fields of 50 to 100 cars in his class on any given night. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



1976: Robert Thompson at Speed. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



1976: Al Balding was a top runner in his full-bodied Camaro Sportsman car which could also race as a Stock Car under a different set of rules. Balding had an accomplished career in Watsonville, winning nine Sportsman features and nine Stock Car main events. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



1976: Greg Petrowitz has driven a variety of open-wheel cars in his career starting with this Sportsman that had a unique 1953 Ford body. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



1976: Mike Marchisio (74) lines up for introductions before the main event. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



1976: Jim Lister (6m) watches his tire sail into the night as Bob Allen (88) drives by. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



1976: Tim Williamson. *Dennis Mattish Photo*





1980: The Speedway was guaranteed a sellout when the big-winged Super Modifieds were in town. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



1980: Nick Rescino and son Nick, Jr., in victory circle after his win in the Firecracker 100. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



1980: Art McCarthy and his dad ponder the destruction of their Super Modified after a vicious flip on July 4. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



1981: Tim Green (left) and his brother-in-law Jimmy Sills in discussion before the start of the California Golden Classic main event. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



1981: Howard Kaeding was the winner of the Firecracker 100. Kaeding was also the only driver in the history of the track to win main events on both the 1/2-mile and 1/4-mile ovals. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



1980: Tim Green (21) in a Sprint Car and Mike Sargent (1) in a Super Modified battle wheel to wheel during the California Golden Classic. Green set a new track record in qualifying. Both cars broke while running up front in the main event. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



Joan Garret



Dave Byrd



Jim Pettit

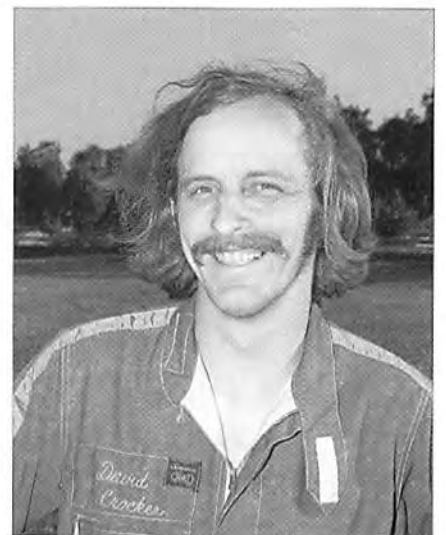
Gallery of Drivers
Circa 1980
Dennis Mattish Photos



Ray Morgan



John Keldsen



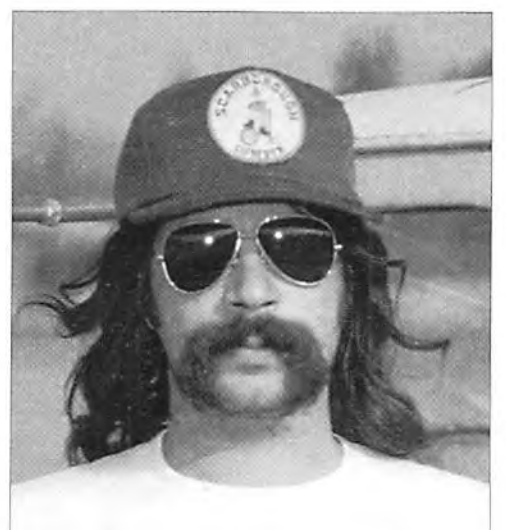
Dave Crocker



Gary Willey



Robert Miller



Ed Sans



1982: Dave Ferracane (right) receives congratulations from Winston representative Vic Watts after one of his four main-event wins in the Street Stocks. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



1982: Joe Garza won two Figure 8 main events in 1982. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



1982: Kevin Pylant's (28) hands fly off the steering wheel as Irene Duckworth (40) bulls her way by. John Tevis (50) avoids the situation. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



1982: Steve Wilson (1) and Bruce Barron (33) race for the lead during Street Stock main event. Both did well in the division, with Wilson picking up seven main event wins and Barron two. *Dennis Mattish Photo*

After heavy winter storms, track conditions resembling a battlefield after a bombing greeted the drivers on April 3. Although conditions were rough on new and reconditioned cars, the drivers still managed to put on a decent show. Ray Morgan won and was on his way to another track championship. Not to be outdone, Ray's wife Diane won every Powder Puff Derby two years running.

In the "You Could See This Coming" category, the Sportsman division struggled with car counts of about a dozen during the year. In one race they were so hard up for cars that they allowed Tres Gurney to run his winged Mini-Stock. The cars that did show were top quality and put on a good show, making Jerry Cecil work for his fourth track championship. Year 1981 proved to be the swan song for the once-mighty NASCAR Sportsman division, as NASCAR announced that it wouldn't run the division anymore.

The regular season ended with the Tim Williamson Memorial 100-lap race. This was also the third running of the Sportsman vs. Stock Cars. This time the Stock Cars were allowed to make major changes to their cars, including wide tires. The changes paid off, as the Stock Cars took the top four positions with Ralph Beck winning what would become an annual event.

For the first time in memory, both Ken Nott and the entire Keldsen clan made it through the entire season without being suspended.



1981: The three amigos. (Left to right) Jim Pettit, Larry Lundin and Robert Miller. All three won multiple track championships during their careers at different race tracks throughout California. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



1980: Leland McSpadden swept all four races of the California Golden Classic series and won the championship driving the Bailey Bros.-owned Sprint Car.

California Golden Classic 1980-1981

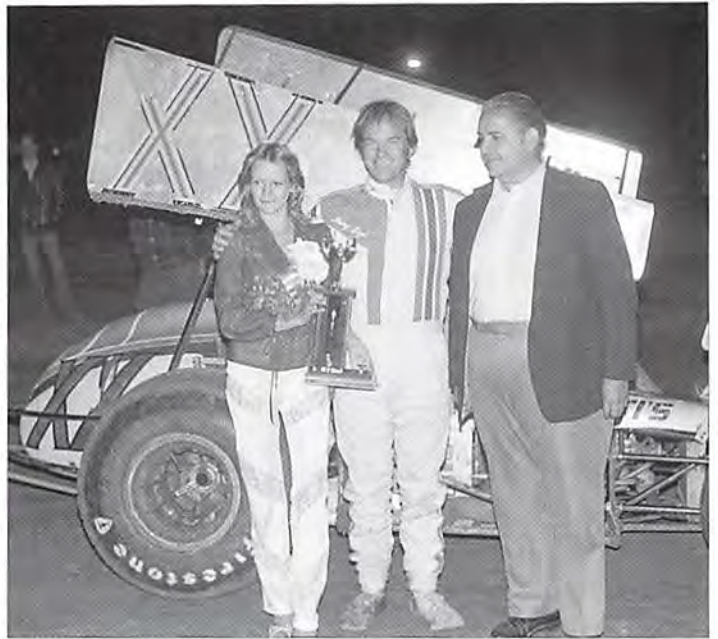
Dennis Mattish Photos



1980: Leland McSpadden (01) and Johnny Anderson (18) put on a show as the two battle for the lead of the Oct. 3 feature race. Anderson got caught up in lapped traffic on the last lap which allowed McSpadden to slip by for the win.



1981: Cheryl Glass (23) was making a name for herself as a very talented black female Sprint Car driver in 1981. Jim Aduddell (80) tries to keep up with her.



1980: Jimmy Boyd captured the Trophy Dash on October 10 driving the Brandy-Glaspey Sprint Car. He will forever be known as the driver who won the first World of Outlaw race in 1978.



1981: Mike Sargent races for the lead of the California Golden Classic with Jimmy Sills. Sargent's Super Modified finished a close second to Sills in the feature race but was slapped with a ten-position penalty for working on the car during a red flag.



1981: Track announcer Jim Burns (right) interviews Jimmy Sills after he won the main event and was crowned series champion.

1983



1983: Mike Brumit (32) and Kevin Pylant bang doors during the Street Stock main event. Pylant was the 1982 and 1983 track champion. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



1983: Sherry Cecil drives by an out-of-control car during the Figure 8 race. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



1983: Jim O'Dell (44) finds his way blocked with nowhere to go. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



1983: Close race action with Roy Large III (61), Ken Morgan (5x) and Mark Keys (26). The score card for the trio in Street Stocks is Large with 4 main event wins, Keys 8 and Morgan 15.

Dennis Mattish Photo



1983: Don McCabe climbs the rail of the Figure 8 track and Sal Seeno takes advantage to gain a position. *Dennis Mattish Photo*

The Stock Cars had a new look in 1983 with fiberglass bodies, spoilers and wider tires. The increased speed was evident. It didn't take long for the Super Stock track record that Dan Simkins had set just months earlier to fall. Dave Byrd had his best year, winning the track, state and regional championships. He pocketed a record \$38,000 during the year, a lot of money for dirt, short-track racing in 1983.

After a shaky start for the Street Stock division in 1979, the division was now averaging 40 cars per show. Kevin Pylant dominated the division, winning his second straight track championship and the state title in the process.

An all-star field of 54 drivers and cars from throughout the West participated in the Tim Williamson Memorial, the last race of the year. Dan Simkins showed his mastery of the track by winning for the second year in a row, the only two times he had raced there.



1983: Santa Maria Speedway regular Dan Simkins won the 1982 and 1983 Tim Williamson Memorial races for Late Model Stock Cars. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



1983: Dan Simkins. *Dennis Mattish Photo*

1982

The big news for 1982 was the announcement by NASCAR that Winston would raise its short track point fund to \$235,000 with the national champion getting \$25,000 and the regional champion pocketing \$10,000. With Watsonville the only track in the region running on Friday nights, this made it worthwhile for drivers to run Watsonville and either Merced or Antioch on Saturdays. This had an immediate effect on car counts, which jumped to nearly 60 a show early in the season. Even the Street Stocks were attracting high numbers of 20-30 per show.

Larry Lundin had a huge lead in the Stock Car main event on June 25 when his quick-release steering wheel fell off and he slammed head-on into the turn-four wall, nearly totaling his car. He was unhurt in the scary incident.

Mike Sargent won the Firecracker 100 on July 4. During the race, Pat Holton spun to the infield with a stuck throttle and no steering. His Super Modified then plowed into the side of the track photographer's station wagon. Two young women who were seated on top of the station wagon were thrown to the ground. Luckily they sustained only minor injuries.

The season ended with the third Tim Williamson Memorial 100. This year the race was an open competition Stock Car race. Santa Maria champion Dan Simkins brought his Super Stock to Northern California and dominated the evening, winning the main event and setting a new single-lap track record for Stock Cars.



1982: Jim Pettit's brand new Stock Car was nearly destroyed when he was helped into the tire barrier on opening day.

Dennis Mattish Photo



1982: Street Stocks idle down the front straight led by Joe Chapman (6). Following Joe are Roy Large III (61) and Irene Duckworth (40). Not sure what the flagman is doing.

Dennis Mattish Photo



1982: Otis Gleason (19) and Doug Williams (93m) at speed. Both drivers had half a dozen wins at the track. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



1982: Dewayne Blunt (98m), Robert Miller (59) and Otis Gleason race in formation. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



1982: Dewayne Blunt receives trophy from Winston representative Vic Watts after winning one of his five main events at the Watsonville oval. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



1986: The feature lineup for the Late Model Stock Cars has Region Champion Doug McCoun (54) on the pole followed by Kevin Pylant (14), Jeff Silva (57) Bill Hall (17) and Ray Johnson (58). *Dennis Mattish Photo*

Shepherd, Yannone Score Triumphs

Stock Cars and Street Stocks
Watsonville, CA, July 4...

by Gary Jacob

1986: Kenny Shepherd won main events at Watsonville before moving to NASCAR pavement racing, where he did well. In the twenty-first century he became a promoter with three tracks under his belt at this writing. *Racing Wheels Newspaper*



1986: Mike Yannone (33) drives around Randy Morkrid (46) on his way to victory in the Street Stock main event. Yannone had seven main-event wins during his racing days at Watsonville. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



1986: Rick Callihan (75) gets some bite out of his right rear while battling for the lead during a Street Stock heat race. Attendance for the Stock Car races was good during this period. *Dennis Mattish Photo*

1986

Because of the success of the Winston Racing Series, high car counts plus big purses and large crowds (all feeding off each other) were the norm rather than the exception during the year.

The Street Stock division proved to be an excellent feeder series for the Late Model Stock cars. Drivers like Kevin Pylant and Jeff Silva, who had won many main events in the Street Stocks, were now winning in the Late Models.

Although Doug McCoun didn't win the track title—that went to Ray Morgan—he did become the first driver to defend his Winston Racing Series Pacific Coast Region title. Morgan led the standings from week one all the way to the end.



1986: View of the stagger (difference in size of the two tires) on the Ray Terri Super Modified driven by Art McCarthy. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



1983: Defending NASCAR state champion Doug Williams.
Dennis Mattish Photo

1984

In one of the biggest upsets in track history, 17-year-old female driver Cheryl Mitchell won the 20-lap Street Stock main event on August 10. This was only the second time that Cheryl had qualified for the main event, and she did it against a strong 36-car field. Cheryl went down in the history books as the first woman to win a NASCAR feature race at Watsonville Speedway.

Over 40,000 fans—averaging about 1,500 a week—attended the races during the year, making Watsonville Speedway the top drawing weekly sporting event in both Santa Cruz and Monterey Counties.

1985

A standing-room-only crowd showed up on May 3 to watch 105 cars race in an Enduro race two and a half hours long. Don Peeper, who started in 85th place, won the race after completing 122 laps. Enduro racing is just as the name implies, racing over an extended period of time, in this case two and a half hours. Except for safety modifications, the cars were stock. No engine modifications were allowed, the tires had to be stock, and there could be no body modifications.

An odd occurrence happened on September 20. The Figure 8 race was run non-stop without a caution flag, a first.

Doug McCoun had a season for the ages in 1985. Doug brought national attention to the Northern California NASCAR Stock Car division by winning 28 main events and claiming the NASCAR Winston Racing Series national championship, NASCAR's national title of weekly short-track racing. The title, endorsements and wins were worth \$50,000.



1983: Multi-time champions Ed Sans, Jr. (1) and Ray Morgan (20) had many duels like this. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



1984: Ken Nott is one of the most decorated drivers in track history with 93 main event wins and four championships.

Dennis Mattish Photo



1984: Scott Simas won five feature races during 1984 and 1985.

Dennis Mattish Photo



1984: Kim Beard (35) leads Jeff Silva (57) during the Street Stock main event. Kim won three main events in 1984 and the Street Stock track championship. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



1986: Rick Hirst won the NARC Trophy Dash. The legendary Work 'N Woody push truck is in the background.
Dennis Mattish Photo



1986: NARC Sprint Car action: Ronnie Day hits the tractor tire that this photographer is using as a shield as Brent Kaeding (69) gets ready to flip. Rick Hirst (18) then runs into Kaeding's overturned car (below). Dennis Mattish Photos



1987: (Right) Except for the 4th of July race which featured fireworks, the NASCAR Super Modifieds from San Jose Speedway always drew the largest crowds of the year.
Watsonville Register-Pajaronian



1986: The first NARC Sprint Car race held at Watsonville since 1965 was October 4. San Jose regular Scott Luhdorff was the winner. Dennis Mattish Photo



1986: Paul Dias (28) or Tim O'Connell (93) fight for the same piece of real estate during NASCAR Super Modified action.
Dennis Mattish Photo



1986: Ernie Rose (81) slumps forward in his seat as Roger Curl (85) and Paul Dias (28) make contact in their Super Modifieds. Dennis Mattish Photo

Super modifieds rule Speedway

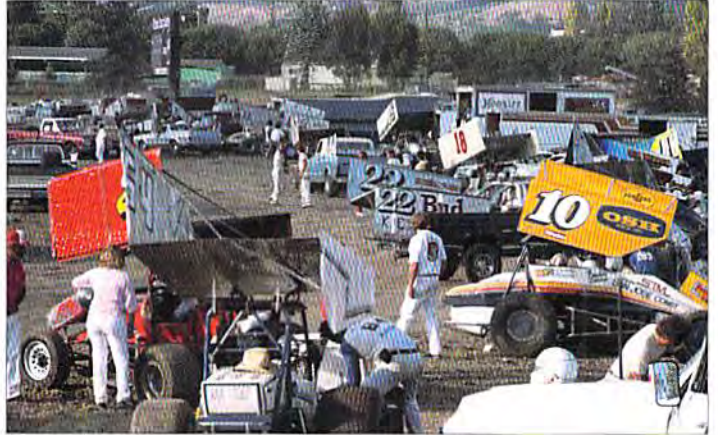
By ANDY BLAKE

The second largest crowd of the season turned out last night to witness the Super Modified

Watsonville Speedway



1986: Super Modified pace lap for the dash. Dave Thompson (18), Jim Perry, Jr. (15) Mike Sargent (7) and Ernie Rose (81).
Dennis Mattish Photo



1986: The pits during a Super Modified show.
Dennis Mattish Photo



1986: Ollie Hazelton (74) and Ernie Rose (81) mix it up.
Dennis Mattish Photo



1986: Nick Rescino (3) works the steering wheel while in pursuit of John Lott (08) and Jim Perry, Jr. (15). *Dennis Mattish Photo*



1986: "Driver" Dave Thompson at speed. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



1986: NASCAR Super Modifieds held three races at Watsonville in 1986. Ernie Rose won one of them. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



1987: Ed Sans won 35 Late Model main events and the 1987 and 1988 track championships. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



1987: Bobby Hogge's Late Model catches air between Kevin Pylant (14) and Robert Sanchez (8). *Dennis Mattish Photo*



1987: Todd Souza after Late Model win. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



1987: Robert Miller (15) leads Jim Pettit (6) and Ed Sans, Jr. (1) during a Late Model Stock Car feature. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



1987: John Mills(49) leads the charge over Jim Colendich (10) and Jeff McCoun (54) in the Street Stocks. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



1987: Bobby Roesner was the Trophy Dash winner in Street Stocks on this night. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



1987: Jim Colendich had a feature win in the Street Stocks.



1987: Lloyd Antonetti won 20 Street Stock main events. *Dennis Mattish Photo*

1987

It was a milestone night for the Nott family on April 10. Ken Nott, Sr., won his 83rd Figure-8 race and Ken, Jr., won his first Street Stock main event.

On August 7, Lloyd Antonetti was leading the Street Stock main event when he took the white flag for the last lap. Unfortunately for Lloyd, he thought it was the checkered flag and slowed down. It was fortunate for Charlie Lozier, who sped by and took the checkered flag for the win. That nearly cost Antonetti the title, but on the final night of the year he won the main event and clinched his first Street Stock crown.

Because of the small field, the August 21 Enduro race was called off after a lap-27 crash. You can hardly call 27 laps an endurance race.

A major topic of conversation during the year was the subject of sandbagging (qualifying slow so the driver can start up front in the main event). Because of the handicap system that was in place, there were times when it was to a driver's advantage to sandbag, and they did.



(Above & below) During the mid-1980s there was a dirt track in the lower bowl behind the Speedway. The track was built for air-cooled and water-cooled Micro Midgets from the South County Micro Midget Association. *Ken Bonnema Photos*



1987: Merced driver Mark Keys. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



1987: Kevin Pylant dominated the Street Stock division in 1982 and 1983, winning the championships and 13 main events. Kevin then moved up to Late Models and won the 1985 championship and nine main events. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



1987: Skipper Klimcheck won four main events in the Late Model Stock Cars. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



1987: Tim Balding won main events in Late Model Stock Cars before switching divisions. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



1989: Bob Dickey (22) and Bob McGraw (2) race three deep during the Street Stock main event. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



1989: Bobby Large (61), Bobby Scott (56) and Mike Brumit (32) race three abreast during Street Stock action. Large was the 1990 Street Stock champion. *Courtesy of Bobby Large*



1989: The above three photos show Bob McGraw (2) losing a wheel on his Street Stock and digging in, which was bad enough, but then Paul Larsen (21) came along and helped him flip some more. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



1989: Doug Snodgrass (85) helps Henry Leyenberger (83) into the wall during a Figure 8 race. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



1989: Henry Leyenberger (83) is about to drill Bob Dickey (22) at the X during the Figure 8 race. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



1990: Announcer John Trussler interviews Steve Hendren while track Public Relations person Kevin Whitenack looks on. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



1989: Jim Gillespie after one of his amazing 103 Figure 8 victories. Jim was also the 1988, 1989, 1995, 1998, 2001 and 2004 Figure 8 champion. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



1987: Due to popular demand from its viewers, KRUZ-TV of Santa Cruz televised all Friday night races during the year. In this photo John Keldsen is interviewed by TV crew during a break in the action. *Dennis Mattish Photo*

1988

A very scary moment happened during a heat race on April 1. The Late Model Stock Car being driven by Don Hoffman managed to scale the back straightaway wall at a high rate of speed and then race through the pits out of control, striking Bill Hendren. Luckily, Hendren escaped with only cuts and bruises.

On April 8, Ed Sans and Jeff Silva were battling for the lead of the Late Model main event when a lapped car took out the pair. Robert Miller took advantage of the situation and sped by for his first main-event win. Sans and Silva would continue to battle for the track championship, which would not be decided until the final night of the season. Sans successfully defended his track title and also won the NASCAR State and regional titles.

The Enduro class, which was originally drawing fields of over 100 cars, was now all but dead. Two months into the season, the Enduro class was renamed Chargers and the distance was reduced to 30 laps. Car counts averaged about a dozen. Because of lack of interest, the class was discontinued at the end of the season. Enduro racing was like a shooting star, brilliant at first, but fast to burn out.



1988: Lloyd Antonetti, 1987 and 1989 Street Stock track champion.



1987: Carlos Jimenez (31) and Brian Betz (80) make contact while Jesse James Apodaca (10) takes the high line.

Dennis Mattish Photo



1987: "Hey Dad, what's up?" That's what Fred Heinly, Jr. (18) must be thinking as his father Fred Heinly, Sr. (81) climbs the rail during a Figure 8 race. Jim Gillespie (47) looks to gain a position. The Heinlys combined to win nine figure 8 races. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



1987: Mud flies as Ken Nott (96) bounces off a car during the figure 8 race. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



1988: Anthony Gomez (67) finds himself in a pickle as Wally Kennedy (24) knocks on his door. Carl Lollar (27) drives by on the outside. Gomez had one main-event win at the track.

Dennis Mattish Photo



1987: Bob Scott (56) leads Jim Colendich (10) and Mike Yannone (33) during the Street Stock main event. Scott won six main events in Street Stocks before moving up to the next level.

Dennis Mattish Photo

Watsonville Speedway
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1980

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1982

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WATSONVILLE FAIRGROUNDS 25th YEAR 1984-85

LATE MODEL FIGURE 8 STREET STOCK

1985

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 Late Model • Street Stock • Figure 8 • Destruction Derby • Enduro

Winston Racing Series **Coors**

DOUG MCCOUN 1985 NATIONAL CHAMPION CAR

1987



1989: The NASCAR Super Modifieds, which by now had evolved into Sprint Cars, made their last appearance in 1989. Scott Luthorff (11x) won three out of the four races run that year. Mark Chaves (5) would set the one-lap track record three times in 1990. Dave Thompson (18) and Tom Henry (17) make up the back row. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



1989: Tate Edwards (16) gets his rear end rearranged after running into a spun-out Earl Stanton. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



1989: Track photographer Jim O'Dell snaps a photo of Greg McGregor after his win in a Street Stock race. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



1990: Late Model Stock Car racing at its best. Jim Pettit II (front) broad slides through the turn with Jim Gillespie breathing down his tail pipe. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



1989: Greg McGregor at speed in his Street Stock. Greg won 4 main events on the oval and 20 on the Figure 8 course to go along with his 1990 Figure 8 championship. *Dennis Mattish Photo*

to the hospital for observation. Problem was, the ambulance never returned to the track and there wasn't another one available in the area. After much delay and discussion, it was decided to cancel the rest of the program. Race fans were fully refunded the price of admission.

Two weeks later Mark Chaves became the first driver to ever turn a lap in the 12s, with a qualifying lap of 12.868. His race would be the last hurrah for the Super Modifieds. From this point forward, the Super Modifieds essentially evolved into a full-fledged Sprint Car.

Bobby Large dominated the Street Stocks in 1990, winning a record 14 main events and the track title.

1991

A new class of car burst onto the scene in 1991. After having a trial run in 1990, Grand American Modifieds were here to stay. Like any new division, car counts started out small but continued to grow during the year, averaging about 15 cars per show. Most of the drivers continued to work the bugs out of their cars during the year.

It was obvious the drivers were trying to get the feel of how the cars handled. There were some sloppy races with many spins. That would improve as time went by, eventually making Grand American Modifieds one of the most popular classes in the country.

There's an unwritten rule among drivers that goes something like this: it's not breaking the rules unless you get caught. The disqualification of race winners after post race inspections was becoming more common. Many wins were being taken away. Some of those committing skullduggery during 1991 were: Greg McGregor, Mike Calhoun, Carlos Jimenez, Ray Keldsen, and Jim Gillespie (who got caught twice). This disqualification trend would continue for a few more years.

The Keldsens continued to wow the crowds. They won a lot of races and championships. They also got into a lot of controversy and fights, which resulted in penalties and suspensions.

When Scott Busby won the Grand American Modified race on July 20, Raymond Keldsen claimed his engine.

Busby was not happy, and told NASCAR officials that Keldsen had been racing with an illegal engine. NASCAR investigated and agreed with Busby. Keldsen was stripped of his points that night and refused the claim.

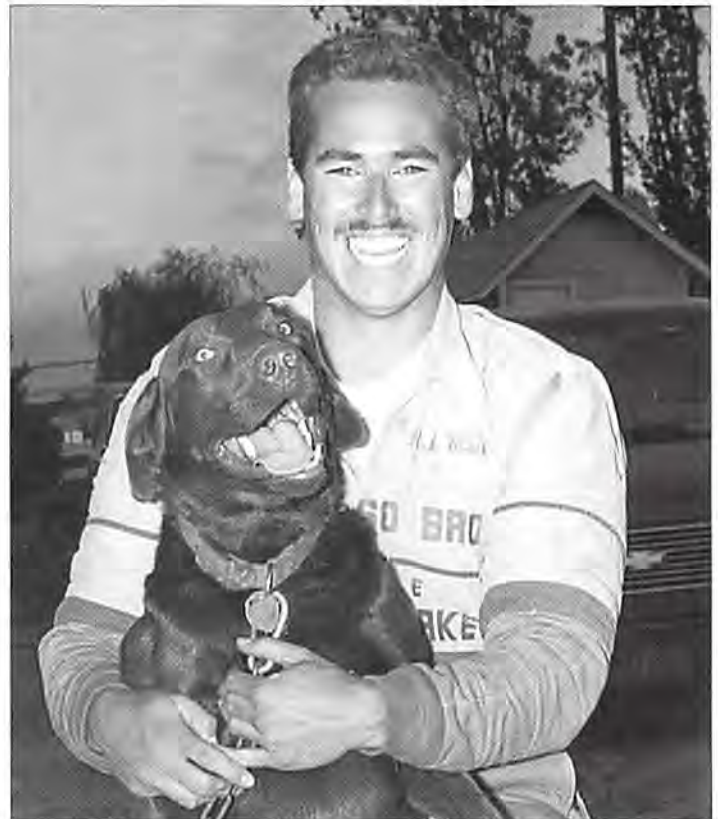
A week later, John Keldsen (Raymond's brother) was involved in an altercation on the track that spilled over into the pits. He was suspended for the rest of the year.

The San Jose Sprint Cars had a three-race series when their track was shut down for the Santa Clara County Fair. The July 27 race, which was won by Scott Luhdorff, was marred by some wicked crashes that sent three drivers to the hospital. C.J. Stubbles, who broke his back, sustained the most serious injury.



1991: Mike Brumit on his way to winning the first Grand American Modified main event.

Dennis Mattish Photo



1991: Rick Martin needed comforting from his best friend Max after he flipped his Sprint Car during qualifying (right).

Dennis Mattish Photo

1989

The season got off to an exciting start when the opening night Late Model Stock Car main event finished in a near dead heat between Bobby Hogge III, Jeff Silva and Doug McCoun. Hogge was awarded the win. The opening night crowd was announced as 2,600 and special guests were Watsonville Mayor Betty Murphy—who waved the first green flag—and local supervisors and fair board members.

Chief Steward Roy Large was a hard-nose, take-no-nonsense type of official. He needed to be in order to be effective with the wide range of personalities and rough characters he had to deal with.

On May 19 Jim Pettit forced his way into the lead by knocking the leader out of the way on the final lap of the Late Model main event. Because the incident happened in front of this writer/photographer, Roy Large came over and asked me what had happened. I candidly told him what happened, and to my surprise he shouted into his radio, "Set Pettit down," which they did, by five positions. As a member of the media, that made me feel uncomfortable, so I made sure that was the first and last time I was ever involved in an official decision.

On June 30 Mike Brumit was in the lead on the last lap of the Street Stock main event when Lloyd Antonetti drilled him in turn two, triggering a massive pile-up that took out the top three cars. Antonetti finished the lap for what he thought was the win, but Large disqualified him for rough driving. John Foisey was the beneficiary as he picked up his first main-event win. Of course, Large received a lot of grief from drivers after these kinds of decisions, but he always held his ground.

In 1989, track attendance had matched the already-established all-time high of approximately 40,000. It had been one of the most successful seasons ever at Watsonville.

On October 17, about a month after the final race, the San Andreas Fault fractured and sent an enormous jolt through the Bay Area. The epicenter was in the Loma Prieta mountain range just a few miles from the racetrack. The track felt the full force of the shake. The result was significant damage to the turn-four grandstands. That winter, county inspectors condemned the stands. They would need to be torn down and rebuilt.



1989: Chief Steward Roy Large.

Dennis Mattish Photo



1989: Head Official Roy Large had to step in and settle a dispute between Jeff Silva (left) and Ken Haskell after the Late Model Stock Car main event. *Dennis Mattish Photo*

1990

The stands were replaced in time for the 1990 season opener, but they were smaller. A standing-room-only crowd showed up and some had to stand five deep in front of the stands to get a view. Crowds would continue to be big during the year, with fans finding that they needed to arrive early to get good seats.

During the off-season, new track promoter Rick Farren had the track reconfigured with higher banking and slightly longer straights. It wouldn't take long for records to fall on the new track. True to form, most of the speed records in the book were broken during the year.

On July 30, Mark Chaves turned the fastest lap in track history when he toured the oval in 13.140 seconds. That same day, during the third Super Sprint (cross between a Super Modified and Sprint Car) heat race, Joey Santos flipped his car off the end of the track and was knocked unconscious. He was then transported

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1991



Bobby Large: 1981 and 1990 Street Stock Champion. Bobby won 25 Street Stock main events before moving up to the Late Models in 1991.



1992: Tim Stratmeyer (38) power slides while racing with Troy Shirk (52a), Bart Reid (12a) and Louis Davis (4).

Dennis Mattish Photo

1992

The season commenced with Watsonville Mayor Oscar Rios waving the green flag for the third straight year to kick the season off. Watsonville Speedway had been blessed with the backing of the local government. Attendance was steady throughout the season, with average attendance hovering at 1,950 (the same number as those present at the opening race).

Biggest Change for the Year: Figure 8 racing dropped from a weekly race to a monthly race.

June 12: A night of history for Tony Keldsen. Like grandfather, like father, like son. Tony became the first third-generation Watsonville driver to win a race at the Watsonville Speedway. He did it in the Street Stocks.

The return of Watsonville veteran and Daytona 500 winner Ernie Irvan was the big attraction for the year. Although Irvan was a pavement specialist, at the conclusion of a session signing autographs, he participated in a match race against the top five Watsonville drivers. He was driving Jeff Silva's car because Jeff had broken his arm. Ernie finished a respectable third in the race. He was racing against track stars Steve Hendren, Robert Miller, Ed Sans, Bobby Large and Bobby Scott.

The driver of the year was Steve Hendren in the Late Models. Steve started the year with five wins in a row. When he finished the year, he had 11. He had the best season of any Stock Car driver, but even with all those wins it wasn't enough to win the track championship.



1993: Vance Beltran (32) leaves the scene of an accident involving Dennis Schlundt (2). Dennis Mattish Photo



1993: Shawn DeForest (72a) and Bobby Scott (56).

Dennis Mattish Photo



1991: Howard Ferguson (43) in a tight battle during NASCAR Sprint Car action. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



1991: Scott Luhdorff (11x) had to hold off the challenges of Tom Henry (87) to win the July 27 NASCAR Sprint Car main event. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



1991: Rick Martin (44) tore up his Sprint Car during qualifying. *Dennis Mattish Photos*



1991: Randi Turner acknowledges the crowd after scoring a clean sweep (broom) during the August 3 NASCAR Sprint Car races. *Dennis Mattish Photo*

NASCAR Sprint Cars Northern Auto Racing Club Golden State Challenge

1991-1993

Dennis Mattish Photos



1992: Wild shot featuring Ken Bowman (right) and Mario Bringetto. They ended up flipping a side-by-side duet.



1992: Tim Green (14) and Steve Kent (11) had many battles like this in their illustrious Sprint Car careers.



1992: Pat Rose (22) races with Brent Kaeding (69) during the NARC/GSC show. Sprint Cars have the wildest front wheel movement of any race car, as this photo shows.



1992: Danny Olmstead (11d) wheelies away .



1991: Terry McCarl won the Klauers Pick-n-Pull Fast Time award on August 10. He also won the NASCAR Sprint Car main event later that night. A few years later McCarl would be winning races on the tough World of Outlaws circuit. San Jose Speedway was shut down on this night because of the County Fair so the show moved to Watsonville Speedway.



1992: Keith Nafzger T-bones a spinning Joey Santos while somebody appears to be flipping to the left.

Track Championship wasn't decided until the final night, when Ed Sans, Bobby Scott and Hendren were all within five points of each other before the start of the main. After five delays because of power outages, the Tim Williamson 50 (the main event) was raced. Only four points separated the top three in the closest three-way point battle in the history of the Speedway. Scott's 0 wins to Hendren's 11 proves that consistency is sometimes more important than wins. Scott won the championship by default when none of the three contenders had finished the race. Scott's was the last car to break down.

The heartwarming story of the year took place on August 28. Female Cystic Fibrosis patient Kimberly Myers won her first career main event in the Street Stocks before a large cheering crowd. Myers had set fast time twice earlier in the year and had been knocking on the door for her first win before this very popular victory.



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1992



1992: An all-star lineup of Late Model Stock Car drivers posing for the camera. (L to R) Steve Hendren, Bobby Scott, Robert Miller and Ed Sans were the top four in the final points standings for 1992. *Dennis Mattish Photo*

Woman almost makes history at speedway, but disqualified

1993: See story on right.

1993



1993: Scott Busby ruled Grand American Modifieds in 1992 and 1993, winning the track championship both years. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



1993: Bobby Scott won the 1992 Late Model Stock Car track championship. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



1993: Although Steve Hendren did not win a track championship, he did win a lot of main events in a short period of time, 26 in all. *Dennis Mattish Photo*

Because the track had been struggling with curfew—sometimes ending near midnight—qualifying was eliminated at the start of the year. Finishing order in the heat races would determine the drivers' starting positions in the main event and the B-main.

On April 9 a very rare occurrence happened at the speedway: four cars crossed the finish line together in a near-photo finish to conclude the Street Stock main event. Kurt Slama edged out Ricky Sanders, Bob Hansen and Joel Hannagan for the win.

Disqualifications and suspensions were rampant in 1993. During the week leading up to the May 7 race, the engine in Kimberly Myers' Street Stock was rebuilt, with the shaving of the heads part of the process. The refreshed engine performed flawlessly and she won her second main event that night. The crowd gave her a rousing standing ovation in the victory lane and everybody went home happy.

Two hours after the races, officials Tim Goulart, Henry Leyenberger and Carl Lollar disqualified Kim because the compression ratio was slightly over the limit, the result of shaving the heads. Not only did they take away her points, but they also suspended her for a week.

Blood pressure was up during the June 11 race. Steve Hendren emerged from his race car trembling with anger, not because he finished second to Robert Miller but because for the sixth week in a row the track had been one groove, which made it impossible to pass, not to mention it was also rough. He stated that if things didn't improve he would quit the track. Track officials got the message and things improved.



1993: Fan favorite Kimberly Myers (65 Roses) finds her groove occupied by a road boulder while racing with George Penney (68) during the Street Stock main event. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



1992: Brent Kaeding (center) dominated Sprint Car racing at Watsonville Speedway during most of the 1990s. Darrell Hanes-tad (left) and Steve Kent challenged him on May 16 to no avail during a NARC/GSC show.



1992: Jason Statler won his first NASCAR Sprint Car main event on August 8.



1993: Chuck Miller (holding child), John Brazzillo (to his right) and team celebrate his NASCAR Sprint Car win on August 7.



1993: Tom Henry (17t) and Howard Kaeding (69) battle for position during the NASCAR Sprint Car races. Henry held the overall track qualifying record on two separate occasions.



1993: Jim Fernandes (01) is about to go for a wild ride after being tagged.



1993: Jason Statler (00) nearly gets a wheel into Eric Rosi (4r). Rosi made it by and won the race.



1993: Eric Rosi won the NASCAR Sprint Car race on August 14.

No speedway disqualifications for 1st time this season

1994



1994: (L to R) Steve Hendren, Kenny Nott and Dave Byrd before the start of a NASCAR Grand American Modified main event. Because the track dropped Late Model Stock Cars from its weekly schedule, most of the drivers switched to Modifieds. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



1994: Kimberly Myers (65 Roses) and Shawn DeForest (72) mixed it up when the Late Model Stock Cars made an appearance on June 24. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



1994: Kurt Slama spending quality time with his daughter after winning a Trophy Dash. Kurt won 20 main events in the Street Stocks and was the defending track champion when this photo was taken. *Dennis Mattish Photo*

Because Late Model Stock Car counts were shrinking and their costs were on the rise, the class was dropped from the schedule completely. The Grand American Modifieds were elevated to the top class at Watsonville Speedway, and they were also the featured division for the NASCAR regional points.

Needless to say, there were some bad feelings about this development from some of the Late Model drivers. The decision did not seem to make sense to them, especially because the division had always drawn big crowds. That point was driven home when attendance dropped dramatically during the first half of the year. Scrambling to increase attendance, the Late Models were added to the June 24 programs. A capacity crowd greeted them, proving the track may have made a mistake in dismissing them. When the crowd was asked if they were there to see the Late Models, there was thunderous applause.

Jim Gillespie had a rare double on May 20, accomplishing what had not been accomplished in five years. He won both the Street Stock main event and Figure 8 race.

On June 17, Dan Wagner led the last 18 laps to claim the Street Stock main event. When he did not report to tech inspection immediately after the race, he was disqualified. His team argued that he didn't make it directly there because he was attacked by crewmen from other teams, which had actually been the case. NASCAR officials reversed their decision and awarded him the win.



1994: Kurt Slama (13) gets slammed by Chris Araujo (45) during Street Stock races. Araujo had recovered from burns he suffered in 1993. *Dennis Mattish Photo*

Driver Araujo badly burned at Watsonville Speedway

The Modified main event was even more heated. Paul Meeks was told to put his car on the trailer and go home after making contact with a couple of drivers and then waving one of his fingers at them while the race was still in progress. After the checkered flag was thrown, Meeks attacked one of Bart Reid's crewmen, earning Meeks a suspension.

One week later (June 18) Carlos Jimenez picked up his first Street Stock win of the year when he ran race leader Kimberly Myers off the end of the track with one lap to go. Needless to say, the fans did not warmly receive his victory lane celebration. Kimberly was well respected, and her fans remained loyal.

On June 25, Chris Araujo was filling up his Street Stock with gas when static electricity caused a sudden burst of flames to engulf him. He ran from the scene on fire, where others quickly brought him to the ground and put out the fire. He was taken to the local hospital and then transported to the Santa Clara Valley Medical Center burn unit. It was the worst fire in track history. He remained in the hospital for a month undergoing skin grafts. Amazingly, he was back in his race car two months later.

Jeff Silva won the Late Model Stock Car July 30 race after forcing his way past Ed Sans. Sans took exception to Silva's tactics and vented his feelings during the victory lane celebration, when he then hopped in his car and spun his wheels, showering everyone with dirt and rocks. He was suspended.

Two weeks later, Silva once again bullied his way through the pack, causing hard feelings. Back in the pits a brawl broke out between the crews of Vance Beltran and Silva. Fists and feet were flying and one official was punched to the ground. One crewman had his NASCAR license yanked for charging with a baseball bat. Luckily he was restrained before he could use it.

Kurt Slama won the final Street Stock points race of the year and finished in a first-place tie with friendly rival Don Silva. Slama was awarded the track title based on most victories (10). This was the first time a championship had been decided by a tiebreaker.



1993: Jeff Silva in victory lane with his son Nick, a future racer in his own right. Jeff won the 1990 and 1991 Late Model Stock Car track championship. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



1993: John Riley won both Northern Stars Mini-Sprint races held at the track during 1993.

Dennis Mattish Photo



1993: Ted Harrison won more Northern Stars Mini-Sprint main events at Watsonville than any other driver.

Dennis Mattish Photo

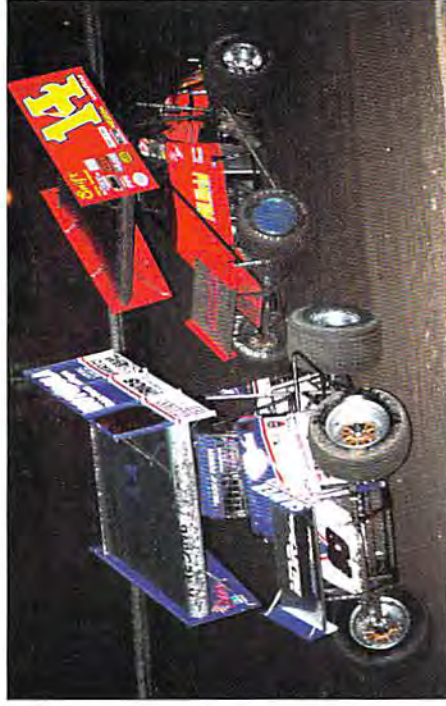
Northern Auto Racing Club Golden State Challenge

1994-1996

Dennis Mattish Photos



1994: Bobby Gerould interviews Brent Kaeding after Brent won another NARC/GSC main event and series championship on September 24. Kevin Pylant (up on wing) gets into the spirit with a can of beer. Gerould would follow in his dad's (Gary's) footsteps and become an accomplished television announcer.



1995: Tim Green (14) pressures Brent Kaeding (69) during the NARC main event.



1996: Top three drivers for the July 26 NARC main event were (l to r) Kevin Pylant, Brent Kaeding (winner) and Tim Green.



1995: Steve Kent won the NARC/GSC main event on September 29.



1996: Bob Walker (98) gets his wheels up while racing with Ronnie Day. Bob's son Tyler Walker would become a force in Sprint Cars a few years later.

Drivers upset over track conditions at speedway

By BOB PUTNEY

During the week leading up to the July 9 race, speedway management brought in 10 truckloads of clay. Two things went wrong with this strategy: the clay separated from the original surface and dried up, and, worse yet, it was full of rocks that bombarded the drivers. Especially hard hit were the Modified drivers who complained that their knuckles were taking a severe beating, giving the phrase "white knuckle driving" a new meaning.

Bobby Hogge III was the first driver to refuse an engine claim—which came from Lonnie Lacy—on his Modified. The engine had just been specifically built for an upcoming race in Texas and Bobby was giving it a shakedown run before heading out of state. His NASCAR penalty included loss of all 1994 points, a \$1,000 fine and a 30-day suspension. OUCH!

Fighting wasn't just for the Stock Car crowd; the Sprint Car people showed they could also lose their cool. On August 6 Mark Chaves was black flagged because of the two-spin rule (ejected for causing two yellows). Mark and his dad, famed engine builder Arnold Chaves, thought the first spin was caused by another driver. They took exception to Mark's being the recipient of the black flag. They voiced their opinion in a loud manner to Chief Steward Jake Flohr. The verbal onslaught escalated into an all-out brouhaha with Jake being punched to the ground and then finding himself at the bottom of a dog pile as a melee ensued around him. Once again fines and suspensions were handed out.



1994: John Buccellato (24) drives his Grand American Modified over the front end of Bobby Hogge III (22).

Dennis Mattish Photo



1994: Don Silva (right) won the Street Stock track championship in 1994. Pete Lewis makes the presentation.

Dennis Mattish Photo



1994: Ray Morgan has four Stock Car track championships and over forty main-event wins to his credit at Watsonville.

Dennis Mattish Photo



1994: The April 1 opener featured a wedding with Stock Car driver Ken Jepsen and new bride Kim. *Dennis Mattish Photo*

Byrd flying high at Watsonville Speedway

1995: Dave Byrd has one of those names that editors like to get creative with when writing headlines.

Watsonville Register-Pajaronian



1995: Dave Byrd (7) stalks Bobby Hogge IV (2). Byrd was the 1995 Modified track champion. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



1995: Bobby Hogge IV (2) climbs the side of Kenny Nott's (96) Grand American Modified. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



1995: Gathering of the Hogge clan. Bobby Hogge IV (third from left) won in the Modifieds while his dad Bobby Hogge III (third from right) won in the Late Model Stock Cars. Family member Joe Bailey is on the far left. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



1996: Kenny Nott was the NASCAR Grand American Modified champion for the 1996 season. *Dennis Mattish Photo*

1995

Kimberly Myers, the track's most accomplished female driver, continued to shine as she moved up into the faster and sleeker Late Model Stock Cars. On August 18, TV crews were on hand to film her evening activities. She didn't disappoint, as she went out and set fast time over a stellar field of the best Late Model drivers. She was leading her heat race when her car broke down, ending her night.

It continued to be a big night for the girls, as the Street Stocks featured a first. Shelley Pelphey won the third heat race, and Cindy Clark finished second in a field of ten cars. This was the first time that women had ever finished first and second at the track. The film crew had their story.

An incredible turn of events took place during the Tim Williamson Memorial race, which happened to be the last Modified race of the year. All Scott Busby had to do to win the track championship was start the race. He did better than that, leading the race for what appeared to be an easy victory with just one lap to go. After taking the white flag and with the championship in the bag, Busby screwed up and hit the infield corner tire. His car then careened across the track where he collided with Dave Byrd who had been running in second place. As Bobby Hogge IV and others zipped by, both cars gathered themselves up and limped to the checkered flag. Certain that he was out of the top four positions, and knowing he had the points to win the championship, Busby went to his pit stall. NASCAR rules state that the top four finishing cars must immediately report to tech inspection after the main event. To Busby's surprise, he was posted as finishing in fourth place. He was disqualified for not reporting and stripped of all of his points for the race. Dave Byrd, who had followed him across the finish line, picked up just enough points to win the championship.

The following week Mike Cecil and his good friend Joe Antonetti, both sons of Watsonville champions, were in a Street Stock points race, which mocked the Modifieds' points battle the week before. Both drivers fought the whole race, with Cecil just edging out Antonetti for the win and championship.

Sprint Car Racing Association

1995

Dennis Mattish Photos



Rip Williams



Scott Nail



Tim Green



Lee Yetter



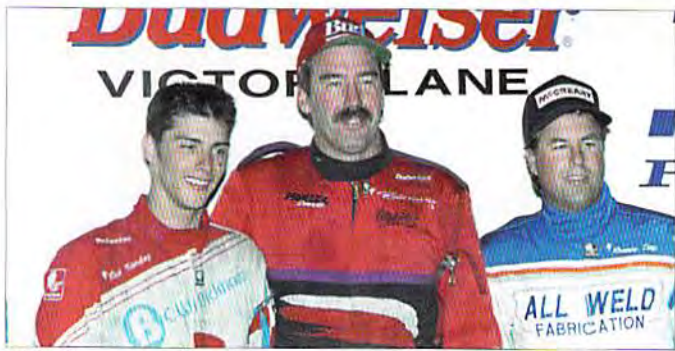
Ron Shuman



Cory Kruseman



1995: Tim Green flips out during the SCRA main event. Rickie Gaunt (113) sneaks by on the inside.



1997: Brent Kaeding (center) shares the podium with his son Bud (left) and Ronnie Day after winning the August 2 NARC "Fog Burner Nationals."

Northern Auto Racing Club

1997-1999

Dennis Mattish Photos



1998: Gary Willey (76) and Jason Lund (8L) hammer down (as TV announcer Bobby Gerould would say) out of turn two.



1998: Bud Kaeding (29) and Randy Hannagan (1x). Hannagan won two out of the three Sprint Car races during the year.



1998: Todd Bammer (18) and Randy Tiner (83) battle for the lead during the August 1 NARC "Fog Burner Nationals." Tiner eventually worked his way by for the victory.



1998: Randy Tiner (83) and Ronnie Day (88w) were two of the fastest drivers. Tiner won the main event on this night.



1997: (Above and right) Brad Furr goes for a high flyer during the "Fog Burner Nationals."

Keldsen Captures 100th Win

Street Stocks, Figure 8
Watsonville, CA, Aug. 30...Closing the Watsonville

by Gary Jacob



1996: This is about as wild as a paint job can get. And this pose is a creative way to get the sponsors noticed.

John Meyer-Top Dawg Racing Photo



1996: Dale Nelson (31) hits the infield tractor tire a ton during a Figure 8 race.

John Meyer-Top Dawg Racing Photo

1996

Defending Street Stock Champion Mike Cecil had been given devastating news in the form of a medical diagnosis of cancer. He missed several weeks of racing when he had an operation. During that time, drivers and fans contributed thousands of dollars to help with medical costs. The doctors felt that Mike would never race again, but he proved them wrong and was back in the car for a late season run, winning five main events and finishing in third place. It was thought that Mike had been cured.

John Keldsen reached a milestone on the final night when he won his 100th Figure 8 race.

A new class was born in the form of the American Stock Car division, bringing the number of classes racing on a weekly basis to four. Ken Jepsen dominated the new class, winning 12 features and the championship.

Car counts per show for the year hovered around: Modifieds, 13; Street Stocks, 34; Figure 8s, 10; and American Stocks, 7. Only the Street Stocks were pulling their weight.



1997: Watsonville Speedway promoter Rick Farren (left) was honored by NASCAR president Bill France, Jr., at the National banquet. *Courtesy of Rick Farren*



1996: NASCAR officials Carl Johnson (left) and Davey Munoz. *John Meyer-Top Dawg Racing Photo*



NASCAR Chief Steward Marco Bertozzi manages the pit meeting while Bill Hoffman writes the lineups on the pit board. *John Meyer-Top Dawg Racing Photo*



NASCAR officials having fun after the races. (L to R) Debbie Goulart, Carl Lollar, Andy Blake, Joyce Bertozzi, Tim Goulart and Charmaine Griffin. *Courtesy of Rick Farren*

1997

A capacity crowd and record 30 Grand American Modifieds checked in for the opener on April 4. Bobby Hogge IV won the main event and set a new track record in qualifying. This was a prelude to the season that Hogge would have. He would dominate the class, winning 14 of 21 main events, the track Championship and the NASCAR Winston Racing Series Pacific Coast Regional title. The Motor Sports Press Association also named him Driver of the Year.

Somber emotions reached an all-time high during the year. In May, popular Stock Car driver Kimberly Myers, 28 years of age, had a bad reaction to medication that doctors had prescribed to her to help combat cystic fibrosis. The medication completely destroyed her immunity system and as a result, she passed away on July 16. One of the most emotional moments in track history took place two days later when there was a memorial lap run in her honor. There wasn't a dry eye in the house as everybody in the pits came out and lined the track and people stood in the grandstands in her memory.



Kimberly Myers was awarded the "Maxwell House Real Heroes of NASCAR" for her talent as a race car driver and her community service as a spokesperson for cystic fibrosis, a disease that would ultimately be responsible for ending her life at the age of 28.
Courtesy of Rick Farren

Accident Halts Watsonville Show

Grand Am Mod, St Stk, American Stk, Figure 8
by Gary Jacob
Watsonville, CA, Aug. 8...

1997: *Racing Wheels Newspaper*

A fierce backstretch accident brought an early halt to the racing activities on August 8. On lap 12 of the Grand American Modified main event, Merced point leader Kevin Schroeder crashed into the backstretch wall exiting turn two. Kevin barrel-rolled down the straight many times. Dave Byrd, who had nowhere to go, then hit Kevin's flipping car very hard in the roll cage. Kevin was cut out of his car and airlifted to San Jose Hospital in critical condition with serious head injuries and a broken jaw. The decision was then made to cancel the rest of the program, which consisted of Modified and Street Stock main events. Schroeder would remain in critical condition for another week before starting his road to recovery, which he did over time.

Mike Cecil had a relapse of his cancer during the year and he fought it vigorously, even flying cross-country on many occasions for treatment. Mike continued to race and to do well during the year in the Modifieds. On July 3 he won the Trophy Dash, and a very emotional trophy presentation followed. Two weeks later he was one of four drivers participating in the memorial lap for Kimberly Myers. This was one of the last times he would step into a race car. His cancer had started to take control. On September 17, Mike lost his gallant battle with the disease. A moment of silence in Mike's honor was observed during the last race of the year on September 20.

These three events overshadowed what would normally be deemed a very successful season.



1997: Mike Cecil lost his battle with cancer on September 17. A race called the "Mike Cecil 100" has been run in his honor on an annual basis since 1998. *John Meyer-Top Dawg Photo*



1998: Traditional four-abreast "Salute to the Fans" parade lap.



1998: Jeff Mauldin found himself on the wrong side of the fence.



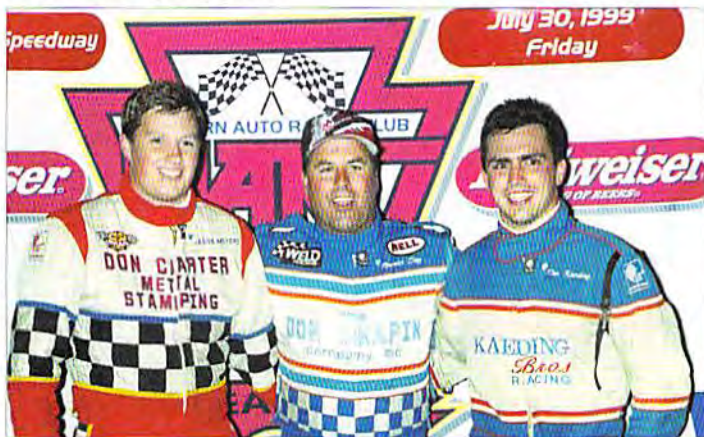
1998: Tim Kaeding (10) works the cushion while Greg Yannazzo (76) and Ronnie Day search for moisture.



1999: Ronnie Day (88), Brent Kaeding (2m) and Peter Murphy (40) race in tight quarters.



1998: Randy Hannagan won the Watsonville stage of NARC Speedweek. Speedweek was a series of seven races held at six tracks in seven days.



1999: Ronnie Day (center) won the July 30 NARC race over future WoO stars Jason Meyers (left) and Tim Kaeding.

The weather phenomenon El Niño paid a visit in 1998 and caused the cancellation of four of the first five events. A race was finally squeezed in on April 24, but track conditions were terrible. That didn't matter to Jeff Priddy, who was driving a race car for the very first time in his life. His debut race was the American Stock main event, and he won.

In the first four weeks, Ken Nott, Jr., blew as many engines and was contemplating parking his Modified for the year, but it was only a thought and he continued racing.

There was an unusual claim on August 14. Ever since the track had opened there were claiming rules in certain divisions to help keep costs down. Chad Chadwick didn't normally run Watsonville, but when his pro chassis sponsors made the trip from the East to watch him, he made an exception. Fred Lind saw an opportunity to claim the special shocks that Chadwick was trying out, so he came up with the \$100 for the pair and Chadwick had to hand them over after the races. The penalty for refusing a shock claim is just as severe as refusing an engine claim.

It is understandable why drivers would get upset with each other because of the claiming rule. Steve Bisordi, Jr., missed most of 1999 for refusing claims.

Melissa Fuhrman found a way of avoiding a claim when she caught wind that someone was going to claim her engine. During the American Stock main event on July 2, Melissa was battling for a top-three spot on the white flag lap. Coming out of turn four and with the checkered flag in sight, she dramatically slowed down so she lost just enough positions to avoid claim.

It had been unusually quiet on the Keldsen clan front for the past few years, but brawling ways die hard. On June 26, John Keldsen had just taken second in the Figure 8 race when Tony Oliveira spun him out and took the position. After the checkered flag, the cars of John Keldsen and brother Richard Keldsen attacked the car of Olivera. The ensuing brawl caused all three drivers to be disqualified and suspended.

The season ended on October 2 and 3 with the George Steitz-promoted West Coast Nationals. The Nationals were two-day, open competitions for Grand American/IMCA Modifieds, Street Stocks and American Stocks. The big winners were Brian Cass, David Soito, Jr., and Steve Bisordi, Jr., respectively.



1999: An old police car was used as a push vehicle and pace car. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



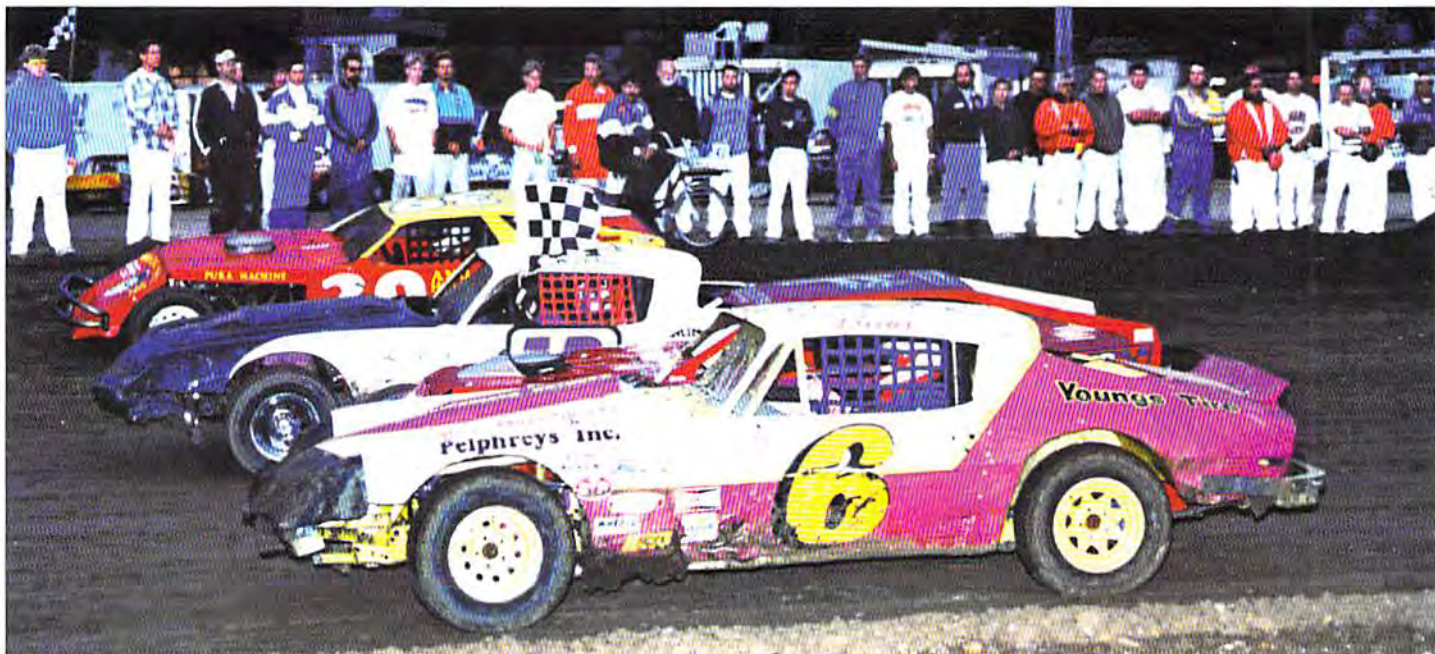
1999: Dave Byrd (7) sits on the pole for the July 31 NASCAR Grand American Modified main event. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



1999: Mike Franco, Jr. (22) and Robert Marsh (8a). *Dennis Mattish Photo*



1999: Jim DiGiovanni (75) drills a spinning Bobby Hogge IV (2) while Bobby Hogge III (111) and Dennis Pelphrey (46) take evasive action. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



1997: The pits emptied out as fellow drivers, owners and crewmen came to the edge of the track to pay their respects to Kimberly Myers who passed away on July 16. (From pole) Shelley Pelphrey (6), Mike Cecil, Cindy Clark and Ron Parker take the final checkered flag for Kimberly during a memorial lap. Two months later Mike Cecil would also be honored upon his passing.

John Meyer-Top Dawg Racing Photo



1997: Memorial decal that was displayed on race cars.



1997: One lap before green. Steve Wallace (25), Ken Gregg (07), Ron Parker (39) and Ben Roland (8). *Dennis Mattish Photo*



1997: Chuck Harrell (15) has the inside line. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



1997: Jeff Decker (84), Dennis Furia (77) and Steve Wallace (25) race for position in the Grand American Modifieds.

Dennis Mattish Photo



1997: Jerry Movrich (92) and Ben Roland (8) trade rubber while Ray Morgan (20) rides the cushion. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



1999



1999: Young fans get their programs autographed by local racing legends Vic Irvan (left) and his son, Daytona 500 winner, Ernie. The autograph session was part of the "Race of Champions" night held on June 26. Dennis Mattish Photo

The highlight of the year took place on June 25 when NASCAR Winston Cup stars Ken Schrader, Jeff Bodine, Kenny Wallace and Ernie Irvan participated in two 12-lap races driving Modifieds. Schrader, who spent most of his early career racing dirt, won both events. A large portion of the SRO crowd showed up early for the autograph session that preceded the races. The event also brought out the drivers, the numbers of which packed the pits and were records for a three-division regular show: 36 Modifieds, 35 Street Stocks and 31 American Stocks.

During the Modified main event on July 9, the checkered flag was thrown a few laps early to make time for a destruction derby. This ticked off Bobby Hogge IV. Bobby was battling Joe Antonetti for the lead of the main, and he felt he could have won the race and the precious points it would have brought in his quest for the NASCAR regional title.

The Street Stock world was pleasantly shocked when it was announced that an unheard of \$5,000-to-win, \$15,000 open competition Street Stock race called the Street Stock Super Nationals was to be held on September 24 and 25. Street Stock main-event winnings average about \$100-\$150. As far as the pay went, winning this race would be like winning 35 main events.

Over 75 cars from tracks throughout California were in the pits for the two-day show. On Friday there was a race for all the champions from different tracks. Bakersfield champion Kevin Collier won that race, thus earning the title Champion of Champions. Doug Hagio, who had been racing Modifieds, jumped into a specially built open comp Street Stock and won the \$5,000 first- place money.

That was the only time the event was held at Watsonville Speedway.

\$5,000 to WIN!

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Pre-Employment Background Screening
presents the 1st Annual West Coast

Street Stock Super Nationals

Sept 24th, 25th
Friday Qualifying, Saturday All Mains
--Santa Cruz County Fairgrounds--
Near the World Famous Boardwalk
on the "Cool" Pacific Coast! Come
and enjoy our 75° Avg temp in Sept!

\$15,000
Guaranteed Purses!

REAL STREET STOCKS ONLY

SAVE \$\$\$ - Overnight Parking/Camping OK - \$10/Car/Nite - FREE Sat Crew Breakfast!
Rough Driving, 2 Spin, All Racing Rules Enforced - Rain Date: Sunday
B-Main/C-Main 1st Non-Transfer \$500-\$300 - Complete Paydown & Tech Rules

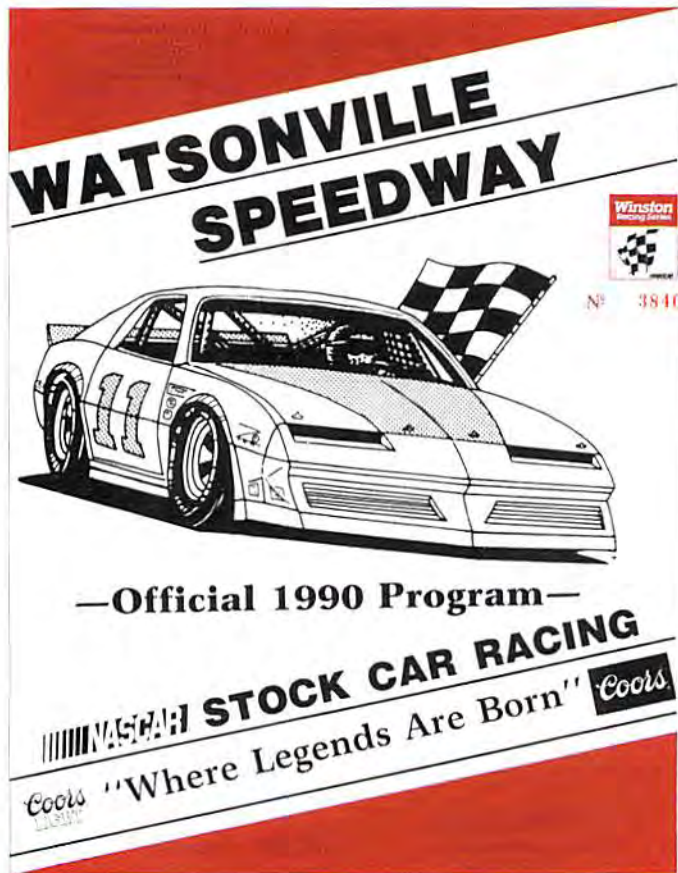
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Race of Champions! Call to see if you qualify for Friday's Invitational
or to Pre-Register (831)462-6101

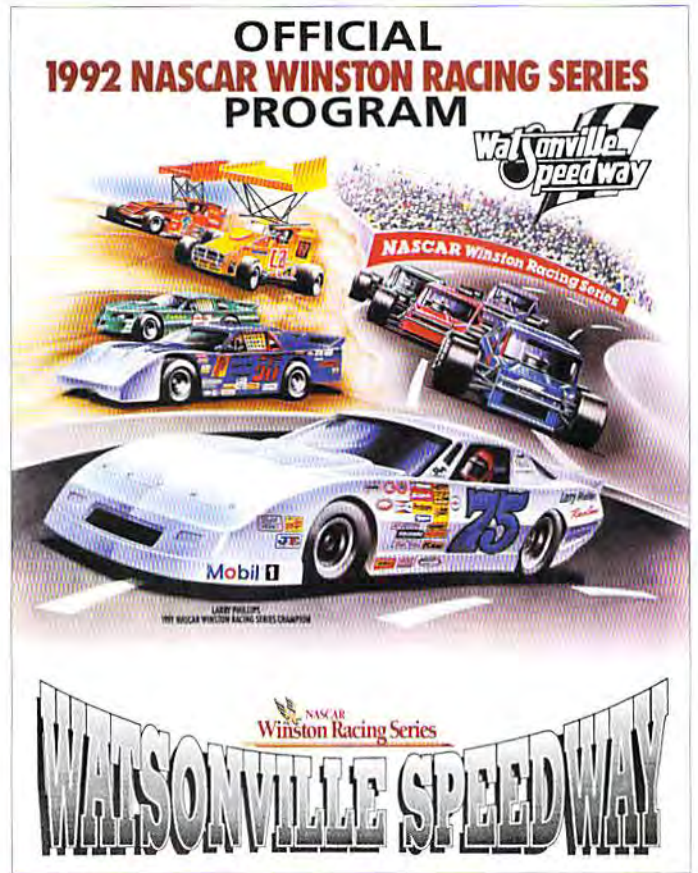
Don't Leave Town, Street Stocks, Dirt Track Nationals Oct 1&2 @ San Jose

P.O. Box 1217
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Watsonville Speedway
NASCAR
1/4 Mile Clay Oval

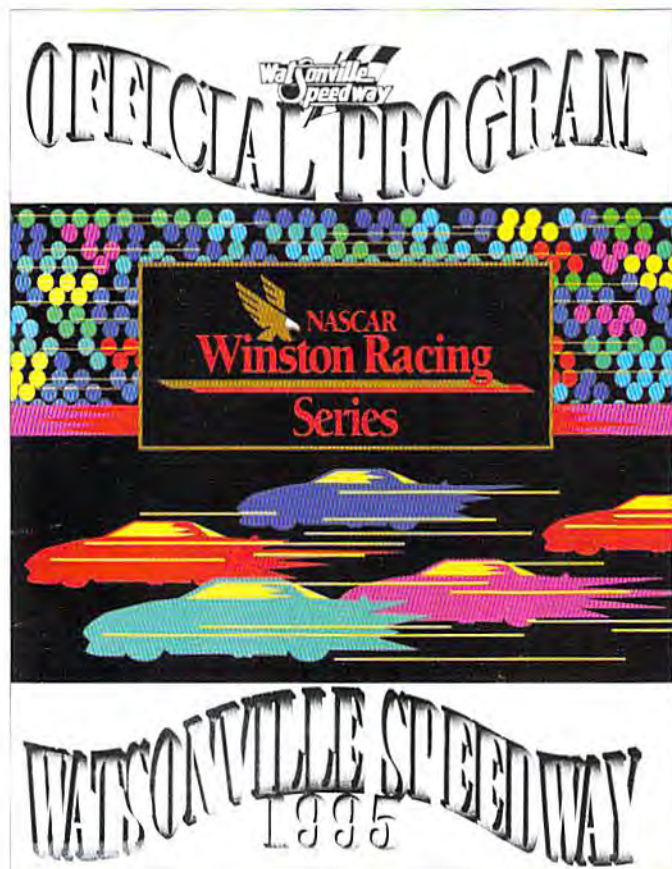


1990

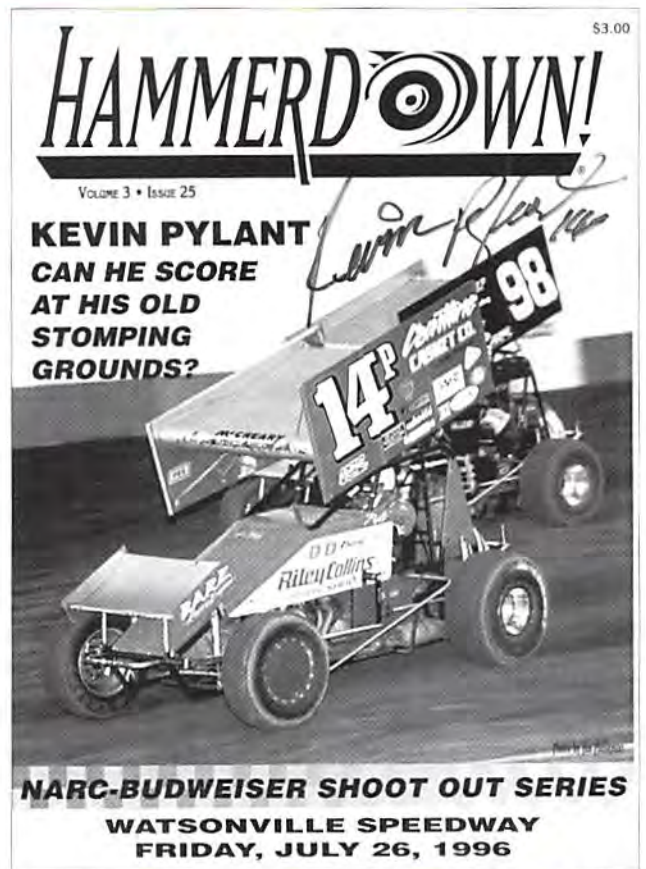


1992

Programs of the 1990s



1995



1996

2000

A most unusual development took place on June 9. Chuck Harrell was disqualified from an exciting photo-finish win in the Street Stock main event when he stormed into the pits to confront Lynn Darton rather than go to the tech area.

Harrell had paced the entire race but had gotten hung up behind Darton, who was limping slowly around the track on the last lap with a flat tire. This allowed George Penny to pull up alongside Harrell for the photo finish. Harrell assumed he had lost and went to give Darton a piece of his mind. He was shocked to find he had won the race but was disqualified for not showing up at tech inspection.

The closing of San Jose Speedway in 1999 proved to be a boon for Watsonville Speedway, as the three biggest events in track history were San Jose transplants. The biggest of those events was the appearance of the World of Outlaws on September 9. The WoO, a national touring Sprint Car series, brought the best dirt track drivers in the world to the Santa Cruz County Fairgrounds. The event was so big that plans were made to increase seating capacity to 5,000 by adding stands in turns three and four. Those plans fell through when approval was not obtained.

On race day a standing-room-only crowd was in attendance to witness one of the best shows ever at the track. Perhaps the biggest story of the day was Mark Kinser turning a blazing lap during qualifying and becoming the only driver to ever turn a 10-second lap on the Watsonville oval. By comparison, the first recorded track record was over 22 seconds (in 1963). Joey Saldana took home the biggest main-event-win payout in Watsonville's history: \$10,000.

The next transplanted event was the 9th annual George Steitz/Rick Farren-promoted Dirt Track Nationals held on October 6 and 7. An average-sized crowd saw 125 Modifieds, Street and American Stocks put on an entertaining show. The Modifieds were the featured attraction, and Dave Byrd won that main event. Karl Nolan dominated the Street Stocks on both nights, while Steve Remde was the fastest American Stock.



2000: Joey Saldana won the first World of Outlaw race at Watsonville. This was the most prestigious race to ever take place at the Santa Cruz County Fairgrounds. Amanda Drake was the trophy girl for the event.

Dennis Mattish Photo



2001: Andy Hillenburg was the big winner during the second visit by the World of Outlaws. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



1999: A sellout crowd greeted the "Race of Champions" featuring (l to r) Ernie Irvan, Vic Irvan, Geoffrey Bodine, Ken Schrader and Kenny Wallace. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



2000: The second NASCAR "Race of Champions" had (l to r) Sterling Marlin, Mike Skinner, John Prentice (track sponsor from Ocean Chevrolet), Jimmy Spencer and Vic Irvan racing on the dirt. Skinner drove Eric Jacobson's Modified to victory in both exhibition races. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



2000: The Life Flight helicopter takes off with Tyrene Cordish after she was run over in the pits during the first night of the Trophy Cup. (See story on right.) *Dennis Mattish Photo*



2000: Rob Johnson (03) mangled his Sprint Car during his visit to Watsonville Speedway. *Dennis Mattish Photo*

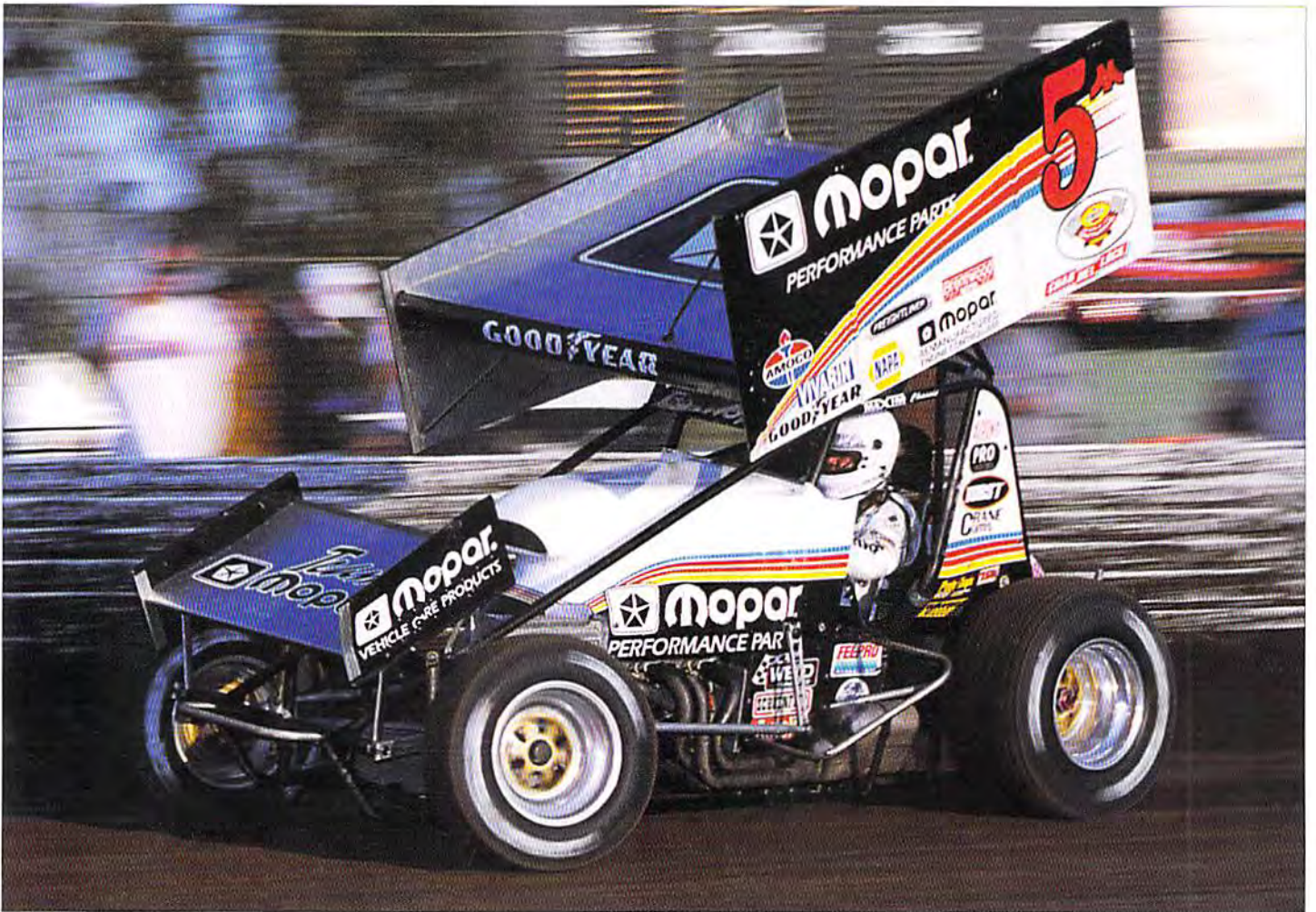
The event that closed out the season on October 20 and 21 was the \$80,000 7th annual Trophy Cup—not only the biggest purse ever offered at Watsonville but also the richest 360 Sprint Car race in the world. The event got off to a very frightening start on Friday night. Keith Day had just won his heat race and was entering his pit area when his throttle stuck. Keith then tried to spin the car to stall it but in the process struck Ty Cordish. Cordish went to the ground and in a surreal moment, got sucked under the spinning tires. She then shot out the back of the car and tumbled across the pits. The accident seemed bad enough that they airlifted her across the mountains to San Jose Medical Center. Amazingly, the worst injuries she received were a broken finger, contusions, a body bruising and some stitches on her forehead.

Things continued to get weird the following night as a very strong windstorm kicked up and turned the pits into a dust bowl, knocking out the power for an hour. When the races resumed, the wind had turned the track into a dry, slick surface that resembled pavement.

Andy Forsberg emerged the winner that night, but the overall Trophy Cup winner was Tommy Tarlton. For some reason this was the only time the Trophy Cup was held at Watsonville Speedway.



2000: Andy Forsberg won the Friday night main event during the Trophy Cup. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



2000: Mark Kinser on the throttle during the fastest lap ever turned on the Watsonville oval. This was the only lap in the history of the track to get into the 10-second range. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



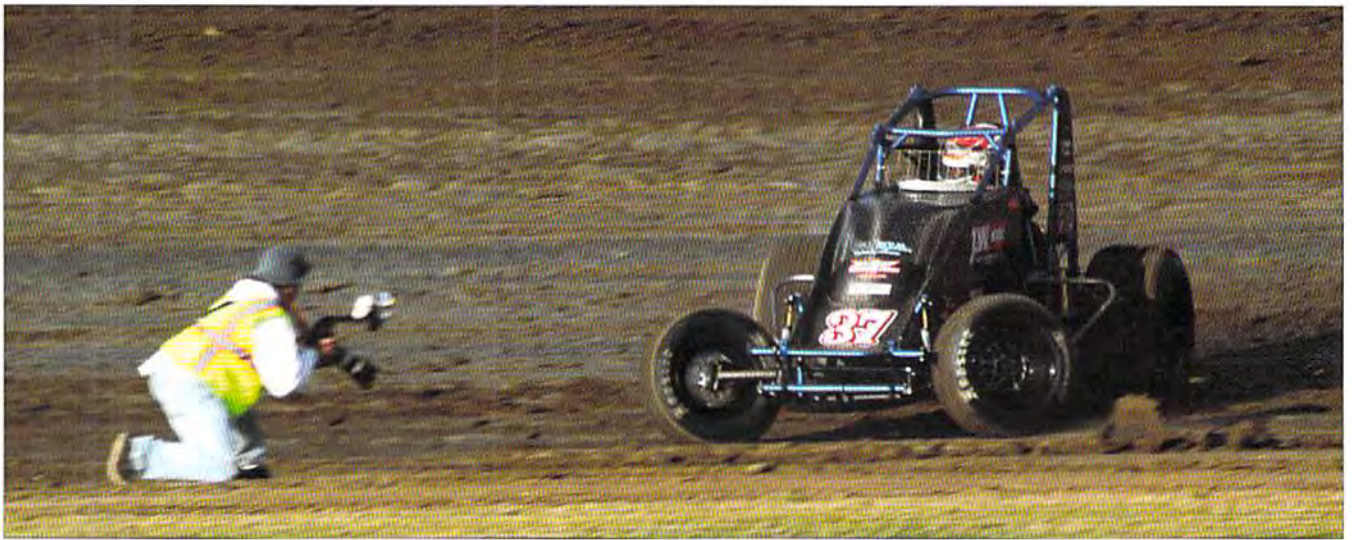
2000: Lap one, turn two pile-up during the WoO feature race. Randy Hannagan (1x), Mike Faria (4) and Daryn Pittman (3) all ended up on their heads. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



2000: Two of the best: Sammy Swindell (1) and Mark Kinser (5m).



2000: Kevin Pylant (14p) on two wheels. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



2012: Steve Lafond of "Tear-Off Heaven Photos" gets down in the trenches to get that perfect photograph of a Sprint Car backing it in. It can get real hairy, as a car in this position will sometimes shoot straight into the infield. *Wags Photo*



1971: The track's second photographer, Charles Caldwell, went to extreme measures to get the perfect shot, even if it was risky. Not sure what he would have done if a car hit his perch like it did for Fred Adams on opposite page. *Courtesy of John Prentice Collection.*



1961: It is an uneasy feeling when a photographer makes direct eye contact with a driver—as Bob Mize did with Art Eaton in this photo—as the driver comes bearing down on the photographer. The rule of thumb for photographers is do not run, let the driver steer around you. Of course, if the car has front end damage, then run for your life. *Bob Mize photo courtesy of Don Mize*



1961: Another photographer's rule of thumb is never turn your back on the cars. The fearless Bob Mize did not always follow this rule, as can be seen in this photograph of cars passing just inches away while he films a flip in turn two. *Bob Mize photo*



2000: Trophy Cup founder Dave Pusateri presented the Make-A-Wish Foundation with a \$22,222 check. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



2000: Traffic was heavy when the starter was about to wave the green flag during this race on Trophy Cup weekend. (Left to right) Bob Maiwald (7), Kyle Schild (16), Steve Tiner (83) and John Giggin (20). *Dennis Mattish Photo*



2000: Tommy Tarlton (21) had to fight off the challenges of Roger Crocket (11) in order to win the 7th annual Trophy Cup. The track had so much rubber on it, it was like racing on pavement. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



2000: Tommy Tarlton was the overall winner of the 7th annual Trophy Cup for 360 Sprint Cars. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



2000: Mike Brumit (middle) won the Hard Charger Award and Trophy Dash in the Grand American Modifieds on this night. NASCAR Chief Steward Tim Goulart makes the presentation. I have to admit, I am impressed with the tongue on the Trophy Girl (reaches the bottom of her chin). *Dennis Mattish Photo*



2000: Sully, the sidekick for Lamont and Tonelli on KSJO radio, was a passenger in the American Stock Car driven by Toby Van Langen (5w). An ambulance was standing by just in case.

Dennis Mattish Photo



2000: American Stock Car Driver Melanie Penney joins her husband George in victory lane after he won the Street Stock main event. *Dennis Mattish Photo*

Great Scott: Santa Cruz native wins second title

Gregg wins Street Stock championship; Ray captures American Stock; Gillespie takes figure-8

By TONY KARIS

2001

Because of curfew problems in the past, Watsonville Speedway placed strict time limits on all events in 2001. The limits were enforced to the letter, cutting many races short. Also to save time, the only class to qualify was the Modifieds. Everybody else qualified for the main through heat races.

Chief Steward Joe Amadeo took the unusual step of announcing over the PA system penalties, disqualifications, fines and suspensions as they happened. This was to keep the crowd informed, but on the down side, it acted as an irritant to the fans whose favorite driver had just been penalized. Fans did not take the news quietly.

During the American Stock main event on August 10, ex-San Francisco 49er Sam Kennedy was going for a three-peat championship in the American Stocks when his temper got the best of him. Steve Bisordi, Jr., and Chris Juhl were playing bumper cars. Bisordi ended up in the wall while Juhl finished in second place. Bisordi gathered himself up and raced around the track where he caught up with Juhl and crashed into his car. Bisordi was disqualified, fined and suspended. During the victory ceremony, where the top three drivers await interviews on the front straight, Sam Kennedy approached Juhl and started arguing with him. Kennedy shoved Juhl hard. Kennedy, who was the points leader at the time, was also disqualified (loss of points for race), fined and suspended. With only a couple of races to go, the points he lost cost him the championship.

Rookie Street Stock driver John Prentice won his first main event on June 15 after only six weeks of racing. Then on October 6 he was disqualified and stripped of a race win for rough driving in the American Stocks.

Cool weather, fog and prime dirt from the bottom of the Pajaro River just a few miles away all contribute to Watsonville Speedway having the best racing surface around.

2002

Race cars are always in the state of evolution, and the same is true for Street Stocks. Gone were the old body styles, which were 99 percent Camaro. They now sported fiberglass Late Model Stock Car bodies. Along with other rule changes to make them faster, the cars were now called Limited Late Model Stock Cars.

Bobby Scott stamped himself as one of the all-time great Watsonville drivers when he won his third straight NASCAR Grand American Modified championship. The Santa Cruz driver was the only person in track history to three-peat in the track's featured class.

The World of Outlaws made their third appearance on September 3. Brad Furr, a local driver who hails from Pleasanton, California, dominated the A Feature, winning his second WoO race of the year.



2002: Local driver Brad Furr picked up the biggest win of his young career when he won the WoO A-Feature race. Dennis Mattish Photo



Fred Adams had the scare of his life when American Stock Car driver Melissa Fuhrman crashed into his stand and knocked him off. Fred landed hard onto the hood of her car, narrowly missing a clip that holds the hood on. The only injury was to the camera, which you can see by the right front wheel of the car. NASCAR official John Moniz hurries to the scene of the accident. *Courtesy of Fred Adams*

Perils of Track Photography



1981: Running shoes are recommended. They can come in handy on a moment's notice, as this author demonstrates when Joe Garza (57) loses control. I have pulled muscles while fleeing cars on a cold night.

Courtesy of Speedway Photos



2011: The digital age has presented a whole other set of distractions, as a photographer can now get instant results and then check the photo he has just taken so he can adjust focus and other settings if necessary. Track Photographer Joe Martinez caught Yours Truly in an embarrassing situation, as I miss the shot of Nick Ringo, Jr. (82) bouncing along in the background. *Courtesy of L&J Photography*



2002: Steve Lombardo of LaSheefs Racing Photos has his sights set on the back straight while a hapless Sprint Car flies off the turn-four banking. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



2003: IMCA Modifieds line up for qualifying. *Dennis Mattish Photo*

2003



2003: Mark Cooper won the Street Stock main event on August 15. Mark won 22 main events between 2001 and 2006. *Dennis Mattish Photo*

More isn't always better. When the track started, there was one class of car that averaged nearly 100 cars per show. By the late 60's there were two classes with about 50 cars each per show. There were always full fields for the semi-main events, and the best drivers were in the main events. In fact, it was an accomplishment just to make the main event. Fast-forward to the 2000's and you have about eight classes with some averaging about ten cars or less per show.

On one night during 2003, the Mini-Stocks had a two-car main event. Only the American Stocks and Dwarf cars were fielding full fields for the main events that year, and even then there was no semi-main event. From a promoter's point of view, scheduling many classes makes money at the back gate (pit entrance), but small fields of cars in the pits equals small crowds in the stands, and the crowds were starting to get smaller.

The Golden State Challenge Sprint Cars paid a visit on May 17. It was a bitterly cold night with temperatures in the 40's, but action was hot on the track and the full house was entertained. Jason Meyers (future WoO champion) and Brent Kaeding (king of California Sprint Cars) were battling wheel to wheel during the main event when, on the last lap, they tangled and took each other out. The crowd rose to their feet as Dennis Moore slipped by the pair for the win.



Orval Burke after a Trophy Dash win in the Grand American Modifieds. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



2003: Tim Balding (16), Joe Antonetti (66) and Tom Bottini (8) are some of the Modifieds involved in this turn-three collision. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



2002: "The Greatest Show on Dirt." The World of Outlaws on parade before a packed house. (Below) WoO B-Main *Mattish Photos*



2002: Two of the most decorated WoO drivers in history, Steve Kinser (11) and Donny Schatz (15), battle it out on the Watsonville oval. *Dennis Mattish Photo*

2004

Watsonville had always been a NASCAR track but with its featured division, the Grand American Modified, having car counts hovering at about a dozen per show, Promoter Rick Farren decided to take action. He brought in the International Motor Contest Association (IMCA) sanction. Immediately, drivers who did not normally race Watsonville said they would be there on Friday nights racing for the IMCA championship. The move paid immediate dividends, as car counts doubled for the first few weeks.

When asked why he switched sanctions, this is what Farren said to me:

“The decision to switch from a NASCAR Sanction to an IMCA sanction was fueled by two major factors. First, without a full compliment of NASCAR divisions, the insurance and sanction fee requirements to maintain the NASCAR sanction was becoming cost prohibitive and the membership totals from Watsonville had fallen below NASCAR’s sanction underwriting requirements. Second, more dirt tracks in the Western States were becoming IMCA Sanctioned, which meant Watsonville could welcome more traveling teams on Friday nights and our competitors could chase IMCA points at other Saturday night IMCA tracks in Northern and Central California. In addition our IMCA Modifieds were able to compete in large post season IMCA Regional and Invitational events.”

Street Stocks, now called Super Stocks, were back on the schedule and were classified the premier division in the chase for the rich NASCAR weekly racing series points awards.



2004: The banking seemed higher when this photo of Mike Salazar (29) and Steve Noack (6) was taken. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



2001: The full midgets from BCRA only raced at Watsonville 12 times. The last year was 2004. Scott Hatton (10), Shain Matthews (2), John Sarale (2) and Greg Nelson (17). *Dennis Mattish Photo*



2004: Bill Foland took one of the hardest hits of his life when he was forced into the wall during a BCRA heat race. A black eye was his worst injury. Floyd Alvis (18) takes evasive action. *Dennis Mattish Photo*

The first USAC-sanctioned race in Watsonville history saw Josh Lakatos pass Bobby Michnowicz on the bottom of turn three on the last lap to win the 25-lap USAC Ford Focus Midget main event on May 7.

The most gruesome accident the track ever witnessed took place during the BCRA Midget portion of the show on June 25. Driving a Midget for the first time, rookie driver Robert Haugh lost control of his car and flipped wildly in front of the grandstands during hot laps. Unfortunately for Haugh, his arm restraints were not properly adjusted so his arms were fully extended out of the roll cage during the flips. During one of the end-over-end flips his arm got caught between the track and the roll cage. It was all but severed just below the elbow. The program was held up for over an hour so they could airlift Haugh to the hospital where they reattached the limb.



2004: Robert Haugh’s accident (see story above).



2003: Bobby Scott was leading the IMCA Modified main event when he went charging into turn three and lost a right rear tire. His car then dug in and he executed a few side rolls. The tire can be seen catching back up to his car in the last photo.
Dennis Mattish Photos



2003: Dutch Prentice straps his son John into Dwarf Car for the final race of the year. "Be patient," Dutch advised. John was, gaining the points lead and championship that night.
Prentice Collection



2003: Rick Fowzer tries the unconventional way to get by Wayne Williams during a heat race on May 17. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



2003: Brent Kaeding approaches Jason Meyers after a last-lap tangle in the May 17 GSC main event. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



2003: Dennis Moore flexes his muscle after winning the Golden State Challenge main event on May 17. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



2002: Larry Brown – 2002 Winner



2002 Jim Christian – 2002 Winner



2002: Dallen McKenney



2002: Terry Tarditi – 1996 Winner



2004 Nick Foster, Jr.



2002: Ken Molica



2004: Chase Barber



2004: Matt Streeter – 2004 Winner

**USAC Ford Focus
2005-2011**
Dennis Mattish Photos



2005: Audra Sasselli – 1 win



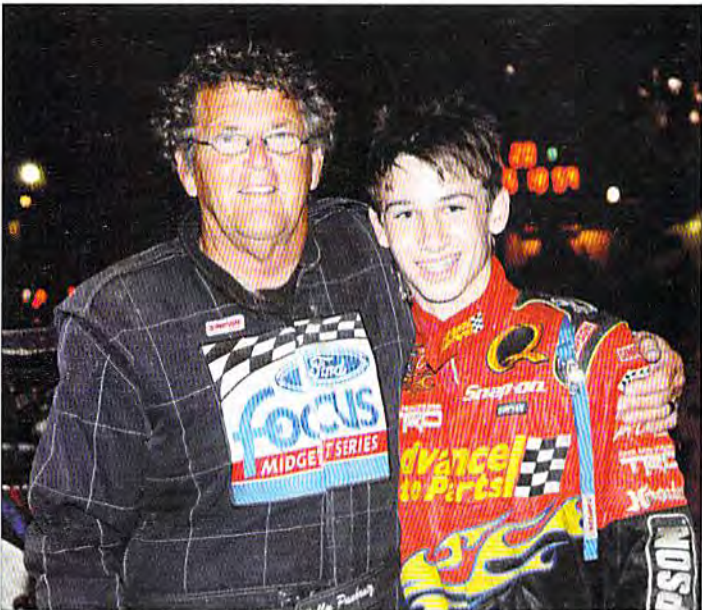
2005: Jenna Frazier



2005: Alex Harris – 2 wins



2005: Robbie Whitchurch – 1 win



2011: Wally Pankratz (left) – 1 win
Jared Blondel – 2 wins



2011: Trevor Hunt – 1 win



2009: Carter Train – 2 wins



2010: Tommy Laliberte – 4 wins



2010: Adam Kaeding – 4 wins



2011: Evan Bonnema – 1 win



2010: Mark Chaves, Jr. – 4 wins



2011: Austin Liggett – 2 wins



2010: Ryan Bernal – 14 wins
2008 & 2010 Champion



2011: Jim Christian – 12 wins
2011 Champion



2001: Greg Nelson

BCRA Midgets
2001-2004
Dennis Mattish Photos



2001: Floyd Alvis – 1988 Winner



2001: Thomas Meseraull – 2001 Winner



2001: Chuck Gurney, Jr.



2002: Travis Berryhill



2002: John Haugh



2010: Kurt Nelson



2010: Stu Cornick



2010: Wayne Katen



2011: Tim Kaeding - 15 wins



2011: James Bondurant



2011: Rico Abreu



2004: Jim Perry, Jr. – 1 win
Won first-ever-at-Watsonville Wingless Sprint Car race



2005: David Goodwill



2008: Willie Butterick



2008: Devon Ostheimer – 2 wins

Wingless Sprints
2004-2012
Dennis Mattish Photos



2005: Sal Mannina – 1 win



2005: Steve Pemberton – 8 wins
2006 Champion



2008: Billy Aton – 9 wins
2009 Champion



2008: Justin Sanders – 2 wins



2008: Tyler Walker – 4 wins



2008: Sean Becker – 1 win



2009: Kyle Hirst



2009: Bud Kaeding – 10 wins



2009: Kyle Larson – 5 wins



2010: Alissa Geving



2010: Nick Rescino, Jr.



2010: Matt Sargent



2010: Ken Fredenburg



2010: Evan Suggs – 2 wins
One-lap track record – 2009 and 2011



2010: Craig Smith



2003: Nick Ringo, Jr.



2004: Jim Skinner



2005: Shain Matthews



2005: Garrett Ishii



2006: Robert Ballou – 1 win



2006: Scott Hall



2007: Burt Foland, Jr.



2007: Mike Henry – 2 wins



2007: Keith Day



2008: Jason Statler – 5 wins



2008: Mark Workentine



2008: Jason Meyers – 1 win



2001: Peter Murphy
One-lap track Record – 1999



2001: Orval Burke



2001: Sammy Swindell–WoO



2001: Andy Hillenburg–WoO
2001 Winner



2001: Steve Osbourn



2001: Steve Kinser–WoO
2008 Winner



2001: Danny Lasoski–WoO



2001: Kasey Kahne–NASCAR Cup



2002: Brian Coelho



2002: Daniel Hood – 1 win



2003: Brent Kaeding – 27 wins
2007 & 2008 Champion



2003: Chris D'Arcy



1993: Pat Rose



1993: Ken Bowman



1993: Jerry Bonnema



1998: Todd Bammer



1998: Paul McMahan



2000: Tim Shaffer-WoO



2000: Greg Hodnett–WoO



2000: Donny Schatz–WoO



2000: Stevie Smith–WoO



2000: Tim Barci



2000: Tommy Tarlton – 22 wins
2009 & 2010 Champion
One-lap track record – 2008



2000: Dean Nelson



2011



2011: Travis Cook



2012: John Wear



2012: Anthony Barket (59)
Danny Wagoner (11d)



2012: Spanky Grenert (12n)
Jermey Blackshere (01n)
Camron Diatte (75b)



2012: Camron Diatte - 7 wins



1991: Terry McCarl – 1 win

Sprint Cars 1990-2012

Dennis Mattish Photos



1993: Jim Richardson



1993: Mark Zieske



1993: Greg DeCaires



1993: Jeff Fiscus



1993: Blake Robertson



2010: Ryan Diatte (57b), John Prentice (55b), Greg Richardson (10b), Unknown Driver (46), Greg Hodapp (7b), Robert Mesloh (13b) and Dan Youngblood (05b).



2010: Gilbert Toste – 20 wins
2009 Champion



2010



2010: John Wear – 18 wins



2010: Shawn Jones – 6 wins
2011 Champion



2010: Ryan Diatte – 16 wins
2010 Champion



2010: Mark Biscardi – 2 wins



2010: Shawn Jones (24b)
John Prentice (55b)



2011: Dan Youngblood



2011: Robert Mesiah



2011: Dan Zuger



2011: Terre Rothweiler – 4wins
2012 Champion



2011: Dean Pires

What is a Dwarf Car?
 Custom-built, scaled-down replicas of 1928-1948 American-manufactured coupes and sedans that were the first stock cars used in racing.



2002: Jeff Mendes



2002: Ty Schmidt



2003: Ryan Ameln – 4 wins



2003: Mark Tillinger



2003: Gene Pires, Jr. – 1 win



2003: Gilbert Toste – 20 wins
 2009 Champion



2003: Martin Whittingham



2006: Dave Penny (68)
 Al Ghorso (111)



2006: Todd Damron – 4 wins
2005 Champion



2006: Matt Sargent (right) – 6 wins
2006 Champion
Davey Munoz makes presentation.



2006: Dave Mosier (23) – 4 wins
Brian Tillinger (75) – 1 win



2006: Ricardo Rivera (24) – 6 wins
Tommy Astone III (5t)
Dave Mosier (23b) – 4 wins



2009: Greg Richardson (10b)
Josh Pires (747b)



2009: John White (3b)
Walt Harper (21b)



2009: Alan Heeney (34)
John Prentice (55)



2010: Adriane deSousa clinches title and becomes first woman in speedway history to win a track championship.



2011: Charlie Chesleigh (5), Charles Irwin (41), and Katie Briggs (89)



2011: Mike Shapiro – 1 win



2012: Dan Downey (56) – 1 win
Alex Harper (57m)



2012: Charles Irwin (41) – 1 win
Robert Huckaby, Jr. (88) – 2 wins



2012: Dan McCabe – 7 wins



2012: Jimmy Corwin



1995: Charlie Correia – 2 wins
 Won first Dwarf Car main event at Watsonville on July 29.



2002: Howard Ferguson – 5 wins
 2004 Champion



2002: Al Ghorso – 3 wins

Dwarf Cars
 1995-2012
 Dennis Mattish Photos



2001: Stan Silva (65) – 4 wins
 Ken Hendricks (66)



2001: Frank Munroe



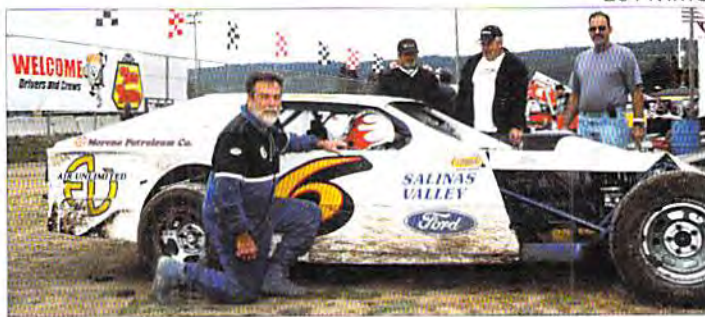
2002: Mark Chaves – 10 wins



2002: John Prentice – 9 wins
 2003 Champion



2011: IMCA Modified



2011: Tony Oliveira



2012: Matt Sargent (7)
Austin Burke (25) – 3 wins

IMCA Sport Mods 2012

Dennis Mattish Photos



2012: Adriane deSousa



2012: Cliff Lindgren



2012: Matt Sotomayor 10 wins



2010: Adriane deSousa – 9 wins
2010 & 2011 Champion



2010: Bryan Davis (33)
Joey Batts (B1)
Drew Williams (01) – 6 wins



2011: Al Sotomayor – 7 wins
2009 Champion



2011: Charlie Roper (71) – 2 wins
Andy Laveren (99) 4 wins

Four Bangers
2010 -2012
Dennis Mattish Photos



2010: Adriane deSousa (22)
Paul Thorburn (73) – 1 win



2010: Morgan Yodz (187)
Joey "Batts" Bataglia (B1)



2011: Who are these people?



2012: Evan Bonnema



2006: Andy Obertello – 5 wins



2006: Brian Cass – 16 wins
2011 Champion



2006: Clay Daly – 6 wins



2006: Alex Stanford – 2 wins



2007: Tommy Laliberte – 2 wins



2007: Ed Jacobs



2008: Kyle Camperud



2010: Cody Burke – 8 wins



2010: Rick Rogers



2010: Kenny Nott – 41 wins
1996, 2004, 2007, 2009 & 2010 Champion
One-lap track record – 1996



2010: John Digiovanni



2011: Brad Pounds



2010: Jerry Movrich – 4 wins



2011: Raymond Keldsen – 1 win



2011: Paul Stone – 4 wins



2011: Jim Pettit – 43 wins
One-lap track record – 1998
2012 Champion



2012: Bobby Hogge IV – 63 wins
1997, 1998, 1999 & 2003 Champion
One-lap track record – 1997, 1999 & 2011



2011: Robby Sawyer



2012: Nick DeCarlo – 4 wins



2012: Anthony Copeland



1999: Fred Lind



2000: Todd Hermosillo – 2 wins



2000: Phil Holley



2000: Ed Jacobs



2001: Jeff Decker – 2 wins



2001: Steve Pemberton – 5 wins



2003: Randy McDaniel – 2 wins



2003: Charlie Campbell



2003: Jeff Buckner – 1 win



2004: Mark Sargent



2004: Bill Saltzman – 2 wins



2004: Johnny Baptista



2004: Jim DiGiovanni – 1 win



2005: Chuck Harrell – 3 wins



2006: Tim Balding – 16 wins
2006 Champion



2006: Kellen Chadwick – 4 wins



2006: Garrett Steitz – 2 wins
2005 Champion



2006: Lisa Riordan



2006: T.J. Etchinson



2011: Kyle Wilson (39), Sean Markley, Jr. (24) and Norm Ayers (51)



2011: Cliff Lindgren (61), Nick Silva (56), Tony Oliveira (71), Chuck Templeton (90) and Wally Kennedy (130)



2011: Billy Nelson – 22 wins
2007 & 2010 Champion



2011: Jill Merlin



2011: Wally Kennedy (130) and Matt Kile (44).



2011: Paul Thorburn



2012: Jeanne Canepa



2012: Norm Ayers (51) – 9 wins – one-lap track record 2007
Tony Oliveira (8) – 5 wins



1991: John Riparetti



1992: Tim Stratmeyer – 3 wins



1992: Troy Shirk – 5 wins



1994: Jim DiGiovanni – 1 win



1994: Richard Walsh



1994: Scott Busby – 43 wins
1992 & 1993 Champion
One-lap track record – 1991, 1992, & 1994



1998: Richard Camperud



1999: Jeff Botelho – 3 wins



1999: Todd Souza – 6 wins

Grand American Modified
IMCA Modified
1991-2012
Dennis Mattish Photos



1992: Don Silva – 7 wins
1994 Champion



1993: Darrell Hughes – 8 wins



1993: Kurt Slama – 20 wins
1993 Champion



1993: Ken Pelphey – 1 win



1993: Joel Hannagan – 4 wins
One-lap track record – 1993



1995: Shelley Pelphey



1995: Joe Antonetti – 12 wins



1995: Ricky Sanders – 11 wins
1996 Champion



1995: John Harville – 2 wins



1999: David Soito, Jr. (17) – 12 wins – 1998 Champion
Tim Clark (52) – 17 wins – 1999 Champion



2001: Scott Fuhrman – 9 wins



2001: Jeff Buckner – 1 win



2002: Raymond Keldsen, Jr.



2002: Patrick Sandoval

American Stocks 2010-2012

Dennis Mattish Photos



2010: Wally Kennedy – 10 wins
2009 Champion



2010: Matt Sotomayor – 11 wins



2011: Sean Markley, Jr.



2011: Matt Kile – 8 wins
2012 Champion



2007: Ray Martin



2007: Jeff Decker – 23 wins
2007 & 2009 Champion
One-lap track record – 2008



2009: Joel Hannagan



2011: Bobby Hogge IV – 19 wins
2008 Champion
One-lap track record – 2008



2011: Mike Meazzell – 3 wins



2011: Danny Scott – 2 wins



2011: A.J. Kirkpatrick



2011: Matt Micheli



2012: Phil Priddy – 8 wins



2012: Clay Daly – 16 wins
2011 & 2012 Champion
One-lap track record – 2011



1990: David Keldsen



1990: John Keldsen 2 wins
Figure 8 – 125 wins
1979, 1982, 1986, 1987, 1996, 1997 & 2003 Champion



1991: Bart Reid – 7 wins
1991 Champion



1990: Troy Shirk – 7 wins



1991: Tony Gomez – 1 win

Street Stocks 1990-2005

Dennis Mattish Photos



1990: Ron Parker - 16 wins
1992 Champion



1991: Fred Lind – Figure 8 – 7 wins



1992: Mike Cecil – 16 wins
1995 Champion



1992: Carlos Jimenez – 8 wins
One-lap track record – 1991 and 1995



1992: Bobby Hogge III – 37 wins
One-lap track record – 1984 and 1988



1992: Robert Miller – 18 wins
1993 Champion



1992: Mitch Enos



1992: Bobby Scott – 16 wins
1992 & 2010 Champion



1992: Doug McCoun – 66 wins
1982 & 1984 Champion
1985 National Champion
One-lap track record – 1983



1992: Bobby Large – 1 win



1992: Lloyd Antonetti – 3 wins
One-lap track record – 1990



1992: Guy Pacheco



1993: Bert Elworthy



1992: Steve Hendren (29), Jeff Silva (57), Bobby Scott (56) and Bobby Large (61)



1995: Ken Haskell – 6 wins



1995: Larry Damitz – 3 wins



2005: Richard Papenhausen – 1 win



2005: Steve Drake – 2 wins



2005: Mike Johnson – 1 win



2005: Jeremy Petrell – 1 win



2005: John Harville – 1 win
One-lap track record – 2003



2006: Ken Gregg – 12 wins



2006: Jeff Mead



2007: Eric Van Hooser – 2 wins



1999: Mike Mezell – Street Stock/American Stock – 3 wins
1997 Champion



2000: Rick Ray – American Stock – 4 wins
2001 Champion



2000: Rod Herrick – American Stock – 13 wins



2000: Kim Gillespie – Figure 8/American Stock – 2 wins



1999: Jeff Priddy – American Stock – 3 wins



2000: Steve Remde – American Stock – 8 wins



2000: George Penney – Street Stock – 7 wins



2001: John Prentice – Street Stock – 1 win



2000: Bill Sorg – American Stock – 7 wins

Late Model Stock Car 1989 - 2012

Dennis Mattish Photos



1989: Ken Morgan



1989: Tim Ragsdale



1990: Ed Sans – 35 wins
1987 & 1988 Champion
One-lap track record – 1986, 1987 and 1991



1990: Jeff Silva – 28 wins
1990 & 1991 Champion
One-lap track record – 1990



1991: Dave Byrd – 26 wins
1983 Champion

Author's Note
All photos from this point on are by class of car and in chronological order by year. Total wins and championships in that class are listed. See Appendix for dates of wins. Win totals are as of August 2012.



1989: Steve Hendren – 26 wins
One-lap track record – 1989 and 1994



1990: Jim Gillespie



1990: Tracy Webster



1992: Ken Gregg – 11 wins

John Meyer Photo Gallery

John Meyer of "Top Dawg Racing Photos" was the track photographer from 1996–2006. John's talent for portraits of drivers posing with their shiny, undamaged cars on opening day of each year makes his photos stand apart from the rest. John is a personal friend of mine, and he opened up his photo albums for this book. The next three pages feature his opening-day photo shoots.



1997: Mike Finlen—Figure 8 – 14 wins
1999 Champion



1996: Mike Cecil – Street Stock – 16 wins
1995 Champion



1998: Cindy Clark – Street Stock



1996: Amy Mead – American Stock – 2 wins
One-lap track record 1996



1998: Ken Jepsen – American Stock – 14 wins
1996 Champion
One-lap track record 1996



1998: Mike Brumit – Modified – 16 wins
1991 Champion



1998: Jimmy Bowman – American Stock – 6 wins
1998 Champion



1999: Sam Kennedy – American Stock – 40 wins
1999, 2000, 2002, 2003, 2004 & 2005 Champion



1999: Doug Snodgrass – Figure 8 – 24 wins
2000 & 2002 Champion



1998: David Soito – Street Stock – 12 wins
1998 Champion
One-lap track record 1998 & 1999



1998: Doug Hagio – Street Stock – 34 wins –
1997 Champion
One-lap track record – 1997



1999: Rickey Sanders – Street Stock – 11 wins
1996 Champion



1999: J. J. Keldsen – American Stock – 1 win



1999: Danny Scott – Street Stock/American Stock – 10 wins



1999: Rich Barbaccia – American Stock – 9 wins



2000: Dennis Pelphrey – Street Stock – 40 wins
2000, 2002, 2003, 2004 & 2005 Champion
One-lap track record – 1997



2000: Jennifer Rood – American Stock – 4 wins



2011: Rico Abreu, the world's fastest little person. It only took Rico one year to claim his first win in the 410 King of the West Sprint Car series. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



2011: Rico Abreu (89) passes Chase Johnson (24) during the Civil War vs. Ocean Sprints. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



2011: Rico Abreu (89), Danielle Simpson (6up) and Eli Deshaies (7) slip and slide three abreast during King of the West heat race. The great thing about Ocean Speedway is once the sun goes down and the fog comes in, so does the track (meaning the moisture rises to the top). *Dennis Mattish Photo*



2011: Peter Lawrence (87) clears the wall while Colton Slack (17) is about to join him in a wild Wingless Sprint Car flight. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



2011: A racers' reunion was held during the Johnny Key Classic. Tony (center) and Anthony Goularte, with the help of John Prentice, are the driving forces behind this annual event. Kenny Takeuchi (second from right) was the master of ceremonies. *Mattish Photo*



2011: Evan Suggs won the July 2 King of the West 410 Sprint Car race. Suggs also broke the single-lap track record in a 360 Sprint Car three weeks later. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



2011: Big chunks of mud fly as Orval Burke flips high off the track. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



2012: Ryan Bernal has been moving up through the ranks and has now added a USAC 410 Sprint Car main-event win to his resume. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



2012: Shauna Hogg (5) and Kyle Hurst (14) in the USAC 410 Sprint Car main event. The 410 designates the size of the engine in cubic inches. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



2012: A king-sized dirt clod intrudes into the cockpit of Frank Guerrini after his flip in the USAC Midget main event. He was okay. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



2012: Tony Hunt (56), who is the master of USAC Sprint Car pavement racing, took to the dirt in a USAC series that combines the two surfaces. Here he races with Ryan Bernal (73), the 2010 track champion in Wingless Sprint Cars.

Dennis Mattish Photo



2012: On his way to winning the first-ever-in-Watsonville USAC Midget race, Cory Kruseman (73) passes Shane Golobic (26) on July 6. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



2012: Danny Ebberts (5) puts a wheel on Randi Pankratz (8) during USAC Midget action. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



2012: Every dirt track has a water truck. Operating the Ocean Speedway truck is Tom Sagmiller. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



2012: A track cannot operate without a crew. On duty the night of the July 6 USAC show was (left to right) Mike Mead, Keith Trusso, head official Mike Andretta, Kyle Camperud, Terry Stephens and Ruben Guzman. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



2011: Bobby Hogge IV won the Pat Pettit Shootout for Modifieds on September 30. This was the biggest Modified race in years and was supported by drivers from throughout the West. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



2011: Kellen Chadwick (83) and Jim Pettit (03) power their nice-looking Modifieds through the turn during the Pat Pettit Shootout. The race was named in honor of Jim's mother who had passed away. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



2011: It is only fitting that the top three drivers in the American Stocks would also be spotted racing three abreast for the lead of their main event. Matt Kile (44), Matt Sotomayor (63) and Nick Silva (56s) put on a show for the fans. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



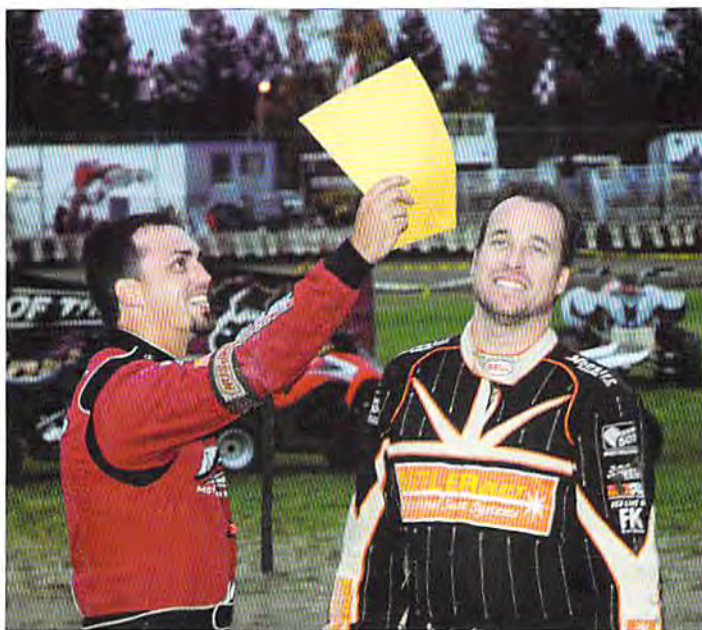
2011: Matt Kile, a major contributor to Chapter 1 in this book, has half a dozen wins in the American Stocks at this writing. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



2011: Nick Silva emerged victorious from the above-stated battle, and he did not hide the fact that he was elated about the win. It was performances like this that won him the American Stock Car championship in 2011. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



2012: Charlie Hunter picked up his first American Stock win during the 2012 opening race. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



2011: Tim Kaeding (left) and Jonathan Allard play psychic to figure out what their draw will be for the King of the West 410 Sprint Car Series main event. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



2011: Nick Green takes checkered flag on a memorial lap for Dennis Arnold. Arnold was a Hardtop driver, photographer and contributor to this book and its predecessor, *History of San Jose Auto Racing 1903 - 2007*. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



2011: Alissa Geving about to go out onto the track for her qualifying session in the Sprint Cars. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



2011: Jeremy Chisum (8) smashes into the front end of Jerry Bonnema. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



2011: The second generation of the most famous push truck, the Work'N Woody. Eric Malies (behind the wheel) carries on the tradition started by his parents, Art and Carol. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



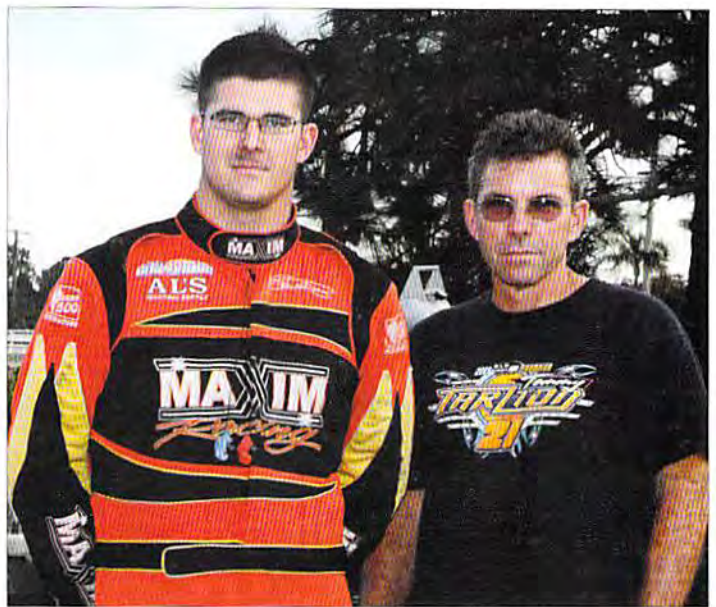
2011: With two races left in the season, this flip ended up costing Tommy Tarlton the Sprint Car title. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



2011: Ronnie Day won the 51st annual Johnny Key Classic.



2010: Cory Eliason (00) and Matt Sargent (14) in an awkward moment. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



2010: The father-son team of Adam (left) and Joel Kaeding. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



2010: Mike Spencer (50) put the famous Ron Chaffin Sprint Car through the paces during the annual visit by USAC/CRA. He would win two events in 2012. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



2010: Adam Kaeding (3) and Tommy Laliberte (10) battle for the lead of the Wingless Sprint Car main event. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



2010: Tommy Laliberte (12) took huge a dump during the USAC/CRA show. He was okay. *Dennis Mattish Photos*

What does president and general manager of news channel 8 have to say about Max Kelley? [CLICK HERE TO WATCH!](#)

2011

SAVE OUR SPEEDWAY!

I SUPPORT OCEAN SPEEDWAY!



2011: "Save Our Speedway" was the rally cry during the year as Max Kelley became the biggest threat in Speedway history.



2011: Ocean Speedway is a family-oriented track, and the driving force behind that is promoter John Prentice (left) holding his daughter Kayla and his wife Darlene (right) holding their son James. On this night Howard Kaeding (center) was honored.



2011: Vintage Super Modifieds from the Okiebowl Hardtop Association were on hand for the 50th Johnny Key Classic.



2011: The Agricultural History building makes a nice background for the American Stock Car lineup. *Dennis Mattish Photos*

The 51st edition of the Johnny Key Classic for Sprint Cars was one of the strangest in the history of the Johnny Key Classics. The day started normally enough with the racers' reunion put on by Anthony Goularte and John Prentice. Many in attendance had raced in the Key Classic, some even in the first running held in 1954.

During qualifying, Brent Kaeding had major problems with his car and slammed into the turn-one wall at full speed. The impact tossed his car straight up into the air and knocked Brent unconscious for nearly five minutes. Besides the head concussion, Brent broke his leg. Once the pre-race festivities concluded, the weirdness continued.

On lap eight of the Key Classic, Orval Burke, Jr., could be seen pulling into the infield with what appeared to be a routine mechanical breakdown. Once stopped though, Burke, engulfed in flames, hastily exited his car, threw himself to the ground and started rolling around while the track fire crew ran to his aid with fire extinguishers and put out the fire. Burke walked away with second-degree burns.

While all of this was going on, a heavy fog was rolling in and putting an eerie ambience to the event. Stranger yet was when the green was dropped, the high-powered Sprint Cars with their wings would shoo the fog away somewhat. As is normal in the Key race, the battle for the lead was intense, and this year involved a three-car duel between Kyle Larson, Tommy Tarlton and Tim Kaeding. With just a few laps to go, there was a collision between Kaeding and Larson, which also collected Tarlton as well as a couple of other cars that flipped. Once the race restarted with six laps to go, the new race for the lead was between Justin Sanders and Ronnie Day. Day would prevail and win his second Key Classic. The win also helped Day lock up his first track championship.

The future of auto racing in Watsonville is not certain. In the beginning of the new millennium, Max Kelley moved a classic Victorian house to a location behind the Santa Cruz County Fairgrounds. He then started to complain that the activities at the fairgrounds were a nuisance to him. He then formed a group to oppose the Fairgrounds and hired a lawyer. In June, that group of activists, led by Kelley, filed a lawsuit against the Fairgrounds over concerns about noise, pollution and the smell that the rodeo



2010: There was a racers' reunion on Johnny Key night. (Left to right) Mike Sargent, Tony Goularte, Nick Rescino, John Prentice, Jamie Hood, Howard Kaeding, Johnny Lomanto, Johnny Key and Chuck Miller. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



2010: Kyle Larson (99) and Jonathan Allard (0) can't race any closer than this. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



2010: Simply known as the engine change (see story left).



2010: Matt Sargent took a vicious flip into the back straightaway catch fence. *Dennis Mattish Photos*



2010: Bud Kaeding won a pair of main events in the Ocean Sprints during the year. Brian Matherly is on Bud's left. *Dennis Mattish Photo*

2010: (Left) Tim Kaeding (holding trophy) won the Johnny Key Classic. To his right are his mom Joanne, promoter John Prentice and Dennis Roth (the owner of the car). *Dennis Mattish Photo*



2010: Andy Gregg (53) and Anthony Simone.
Dennis Mattish Photo



2010: Brian Cass has 17 Modified main-event wins and the 2011 track championship. Dennis Mattish Photo



2010: Late Model Stock Car driver Eric Van Hooser (left) and track announcer Tony Karis. Besides announcing, Karis has had his own radio program and has been a writer for both the Santa Cruz Sentinel and Watsonville Register-Pajaronian. Dennis Mattish Photo



2010: Jerry Movrich after one of his Modified main-event wins.
Dennis Mattish Photo



2010: A jet Dragster incinerates a car after the races.
Dennis Mattish Photo



2010: Fifty years after "Oakie" Art Eaton won the very first main event in track history, he was still racing on the track he helped build. And he still has the same number, 13. Go back to the beginning of this chapter to see a huge contrast in cars.
Dennis Mattish Photo

OCEAN SPEEDWAY

Fair attendees watch Decker make history

By TONY KARIS

FOR THE REGISTER-PAJARONIAN

Visitors to the Santa Cruz County Fair filled the stands of Ocean Speedway Saturday and Sunday afternoons to watch five of the speedway's seven regular divisions battle on the quarter-mile clay oval.

Those who watched Saturday also got to witness a historic feat. Morgan Hill's Jeff Decker became the first driver in the track's history to record an undefeated season.

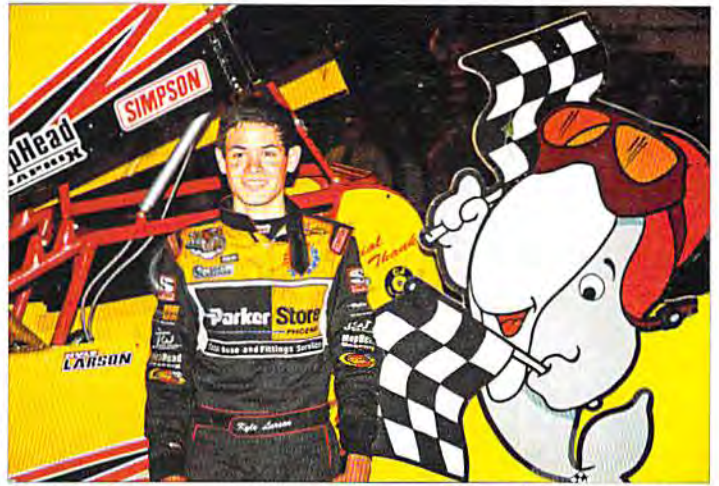


Jeff Decker recorded a perfect season in 2009. He won all nine Late Model Stock Car features. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



2009: "Cowboy" Craig Smith (39) and a host of others put the peddle to the metal. *Dennis Mattish Photo*

2009: (Right) The father-son duo of Brent (69) and Bud (29) Kaeding. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



2009: Sixteen-year-old Kyle Larson won his first Sprint Car main event on May 29 and he did it against a strong Golden State Challenge 410 Sprint Car field. *Dennis Mattish Photo*

Larson takes win in duel between Civil War, GLR Investment series

By TONY KARIS

FOR THE REGISTER PAJARONIAN



2009: Kyle Larson (83) leads the charge out of turn four with Evan Suggs (33) and Bud Kaeding (29) in hot pursuit. In 2011, Larson would be the hottest driver in the country. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



The track reached its milestone 50th anniversary during May, making Watsonville/Ocean Speedway one of the very few tracks in the state with such longevity. Once again the Sprint Cars had a new series sponsor. This time it was Dennis Wuolett and his Taco Bravo chain of restaurants.

After breaking her back a few years earlier, Christine Root didn't think she would ever race again. Not only did she return to racing, but the 62-year-old grandma won the opening night Micro-600 main event. Don't let the name "Micro" fool you—the speedy little cars are the second-fastest cars to race on the Watsonville oval, turning laps in the 12-second range. Only the powerful Sprint Cars are faster. Christine would win the first two Micro main events before ironically losing to the youngest driver, 14-year old Tanner Burke, on the third race.

Once again the annual Johnny Key Classic was an event to behold. A fierce duel between young-gun Kyle Larson and WoO driver Tim Kaeding highlighted the event.

An amazing feat involving Tim's dad took place during the mandatory stoppage at lap 25. During what is essentially a long pit stop, Brent Kaeding, his crew and a host of others performed a complete engine change on the front straightaway in less than 30 minutes, perhaps the first time this had ever happened.

Tim won the race and became the fourth different Kaeding to win the prestigious event. Tim's grandfather Howard won it four times, his dad Brent two times and brother Bud once.

For the first time in the 50-year history of the track, a woman claimed the track championship. Adriane deSousa clinched the championship on the last night of the season with a victory in the Four Banger (4-cylinder, front wheel drive car) main event. This was no easy feat; Four Bangers usually had the most cars of any division.



2010: Jerry Movrich (92) and Randy Brown (16b) get ready for hot laps. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



2010: Anne Mattish (my wife) worked the table when my first book, *History of San Jose Auto Racing 1903-2007*, made its debut appearance at Ocean Speedway. *Dennis Mattish Photo*

Racers driving revenue

Participation up, but attendance down this year at Watsonville Ocean Speedway

By DAVID CARKHUFF

OF THE REGISTER-PAJARONIAN

It's the pits trying to figure out income trends at the Ocean Speedway. Public attendance is down this year but racer participation has increased, according to John Prentice, promoter for Ocean Speedway.

From March through June 13, the Ocean Speedway has recorded an 11.2 percent drop in attendance over the



Prentice

"We're down. We're definitely down, which is ironic because the front side of the grandstands is down, but the back side is up considerably."

— John Prentice, race promoter.

2008: The great recession hit all racetracks hard but fortunately for Ocean speedway the racers were in full support of the track. *Watsonville Register-Pajaronian*



2008: Tommy Laliberte had a pair of IMCA Modified main event wins during the year. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



2008: Eli Mendoza (32) and Jeff Mead (16). *Dennis Mattish Photo*



2008: Jerry Movrich (92) smokes his fellow IMCA drivers Kenny Nott (96), Cody Burke (20) and Jeff Mead (16). *Dennis Mattish Photo*



2008: Bill Aton won 10 main events and the 2009 track championship in Wingless Sprint Cars. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



2008: Tyler Walker won two GSC races and the 360 Civil War race for Sprint Cars at Ocean Speedway in 2008. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



2009: Second-generation driver Michael Dalton (19) leads Jeff Mead (16) through turn four during an IMCA Modified race. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



2009: Wingless Sprint Cars head into turn three. David Press is being followed by Dustin Baxter (25) and Mark Chaves, Jr. (5). *Dennis Mattish Photo*



2009: Tyler Walker (24) and Jonathan Allard (0) battle for the lead of a GSC main event. *Dennis Mattish Photo*

A new rule was implemented for the season called the "one-and-done" rule. Each driver was allowed a cumulative total of five yellow flags, but after that, if a driver brought out one more yellow, he was parked for the night. This helped speed up the shows and was appreciated by everybody but the person who was parked.

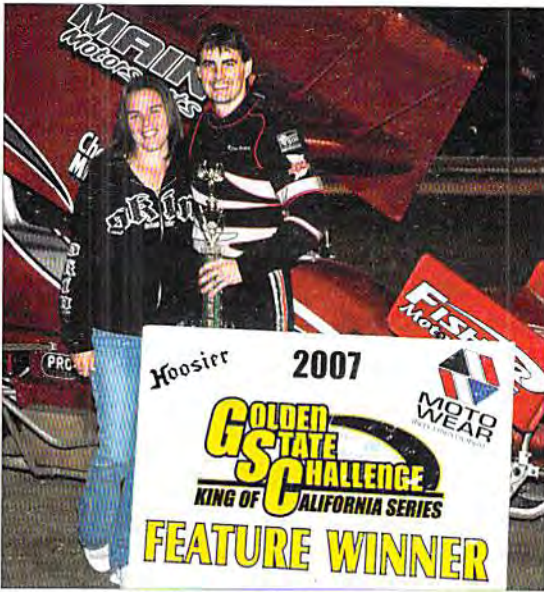
Chris Luck and his GLR Investment firm took over the sponsorship of the Ocean Speedway Sprint Car series, which ran 12 races during this, the "year of the youngsters," in the high-powered Sprint Cars. Justin Sanders, who had won just about every race in the Micro-600 two years earlier when he was fourteen, won his first Sprint Car race on May 8 at the tender age of 16. Not to be outdone, Kyle Larson beat the best of the West in the GSC 410 Sprint Cars on May 29. He was also 16 and headed for stardom in the racing world. Rick Wright won his first Ocean Sprint Car main event on June 5 at the ripe old age of 18. Not to be overlooked was female driver Taylor Ferns winning the USAC Ford Focus junior main event at the age of 13 on July 10.

On August 24 Gilbert Toste tried to pass track promoter John Prentice for the lead in the Dwarf Car main event. Instead he ran into John and spun him out. Toste was then disqualified from the race and sent packing while Prentice restarted at the back of the pack. Moral of the story—don't spin out the guy in charge of the track.

Jeff Decker set a record at Ocean Speedway that may never be equaled, winning every race in the Late Model Stock Car division, one of the featured divisions. His nine victories were very impressive, especially with drivers like Kenny Nott and Bobby Scott racing in the class. This was Decker's third championship in four years.

Kenny Nott also won his third IMCA title in six years (and fifth in ten).

Ocean Speedway ranked at the top of the list of having one of the strongest groups of Sprint Car drivers in the country, a ranking that still holds as of the time of this writing.



2007: Sean Becker won the May 4 GSC race.
Dennis Mattish Photos

Racers put on show for S.C. County Fair crowd

By RON O'DELL
SENTINEL CORRESPONDENT

2007: Santa Cruz Sentinel



2007: Jason Botsford had a rough qualifying session during a Golden State Challenge event. Dennis Mattish Photos



2007: Rick Wright, Jr., first bicycles, then unicycles and finally goes belly up. Dennis Mattish Photos



2008: Steve Kinser—the King of the Outlaws—won his 550th WoO A-Feature race during the Outlaws' visit to Ocean Speedway on October 17. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



2008: Steve Kinser (11) and Jac Haudenschild (R19) put on a show for the capacity crowd who turned out to see the World of Outlaws. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



2008: Shane Golobic's first Sprint Car win was a big one. He beat the best in the West on April 12 with a victory in the Golden State Challenge 410 Sprint Car series. To his right is car owner Joe Von Schrittz. *Dennis Mattish Photo*

On May 22, one of the worst wildfires in bay area history ignited in the Santa Cruz Mountains, just a few miles from the Santa Cruz County Fairgrounds. The Summit Fire, as it was called, burned out of control for five days before being contained. Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger declared a state of emergency and took control of the fairgrounds a day after the May 23 race, using it as a staging center for firefighters. The following week drivers walked through the grandstands, helmets in hand, taking contributions from fans to benefit the Santa Cruz County Horseman's Association and Animal Services. Although no human lives were lost during the inferno, it was a different story for animals.

The World of Outlaws—greatest show on dirt—returned after a six-year absence. The King of the Outlaws, Steve Kinser, added Ocean Speedway to his long list of conquests dating back over 30 years. Kinser picked up his 550th Outlaw victory in front of a full house, but not after having to fight off the challenges from Jac Haudenschild.

The Dwarf Car Nationals competition held on the weekend of October 25 was made to order for Halloween. Friday night's first round had the worst Dwarf Car crash ever at the track. John Wear was running fourth in the "C" main when attempting an outside pass in turn four. Contact was made with another car, causing Wear to slam into the front straight wall. His car then flipped violently down the front straightaway and burst into flames. The crowd gasped as Track Official Tom Sagmiller ran to assist Wear and was nearly run over by an oncoming car. At the last second, Sagmiller leaped into the air as the car of Daniel Weger passed under. Speedway official Keith Trusso also ran to Wear's aid and helped Sagmiller pull Wear out of the flaming car.

On Saturday night the fog rolled in and got so thick they had to cancel the show until Sunday. Gilbert Toste emerged as the overall winner of the Nationals.

The collapse in the economy had an effect on racetracks everywhere, and Ocean Speedway was no different. The strange thing about it was the grandstands were sparsely occupied, but the pits had an abundance of cars and people. A lot of that had to do with Sprint Cars averaging 30 cars per show, the most in California.

Legendary race car driver Al Pombo won the track's first open competition race on September 15, 1967. On March 25, 1978, his son Davey Pombo won the first Super Modified race. Nearly 40 years after his grandfather won, and 30 years since his dad triumphed, David Pombo won the Sprint Car Racing Association (SCRA) main event on July 7, 2006. The Pombos joined the Hogges, Kaedings and the Keldsens as the only three-generation families to win feature events at the track.

Besides the annual 4th of July fireworks shows, which always sold out, the July 15 Golden State Challenge Sprint Car race was the first sellout in ten years. A few days before the race, John Prentice ran a sizable ad in the *San Jose Mercury News* advertising the event. Not by coincidence, ex-San Jose Speedway fans who made the trek over the mountains were a big part of the crowd that night. That did not go unnoticed, as Sprint Cars would become a featured division.

Dave Penny drove his Dwarf Car into the front straight wall at full speed on August 19, resulting in a painful broken back.



2006: Steve Pemberton dominated the first two years of Wingless Sprint Car racing, winning 8 out of 14 main events. Dave Munoz makes the presentation. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



2006: Kenny Nott (96) and Garrett Steitz (7) in a close IMCA Modified race. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



2006: Garrett Steitz (right) won back-to-back IMCA Modified main events in May. Darlene Prentice makes the presentation with the help of Rick Albarran. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



2006: Bobby Scott (56) and Kellen Chadwick (83) during the Western Dirt Late Model Tour main event. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



2007: Tim Clark, Jr. (54) and Tony Oliveira (6) split the spinning American Stock Car of Valerie Davis (76). Clark Jr. had a great year—winning five main events. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



2007: Clay Daly (96), Robert Marsh (22) and Kenny Nott (96). *Dennis Mattish Photo*



2007: Joshua Davis (74), Charlie Mostek (53) and American Stock Car track champion Billy Nelson II (11) race in formation. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



2007: Brad Furr (2), Keith Day (22) and Joey Madera (23) tangle during Golden State Challenge race. *Dennis Mattish Photos*

The 1960s and 1970s formed the Claimer/Sportsman era; the 1980s and 1990s were the Stock Car/Grand American Modified era. With new management, another changing of the guard took place as the Sprint Cars became the featured division and fan favorite.

Three featured divisions were the highlight of the 2007 schedule: the IMCA Modified, Ocean Late Models, and (for the first time) the popular 360-cubic-inch Sprint Cars. Rick Wright of Wright One Construction Company had approached John Prentice with a plan to sponsor a 10-race series for the Sprint Cars, offering \$85,000 in prize money. A hesitant Prentice agreed. (Years later Prentice would say this was one of the best things that could have happened for the track.) Being dropped from the schedule were the Super Stocks (formerly Street Stocks).

Hard driving led to a generous and unusual gesture on May 4. During the third American Stock Car heat race, Wally Kennedy stuffed Billy Nelson into the crash wall while battling for position. The impact destroyed Nelson's car, ending his night, he thought. As a result of his action, Ocean Speedway officials told Wally to trailer his car and take it home, but Wally had a better idea. Perhaps remorseful, Wally handed over his car to Nelson for the main event. Nelson took advantage and drove to a second-place finish, which in the end, helped him earn enough points to win the track championship.

What was at one time the biggest short-track event on the west coast, the Johnny Key Classic was revived after a seven-year absence. After running for 47 years in San Jose, the race found a new home in Watsonville, and that seemed fitting because Key was from Salinas, a town only a few miles away. It is also noted that Key won races at the original Watsonville track just down the road on the beach. And just like the 47 previous Key races, this one was played before a full house. Jason Statler won the race, but not after feeling pressure from track champion Brent Kaeding.

Ocean Speedway was headed in the right direction during the year, with car counts averaging 100 and crowd sizes up, but then the unforeseen happened: the great recession.

Statler wins revived Key Memorial
Despite pressure from Kaeding, San Jose driver leads every lap

2007: *Watsonville Register-Pajaronian*



2006

John Prentice emerged from the long, drawn-out bidding process as the new promoter of the track. John was familiar with Watsonville Speedway, as he had won many Street Stock and Dwarf Car main events and a Dwarf Car track championship there. John immediately rolled up his sleeves and went to work, using 200 gallons of paint to spruce up the place. He installed a new scoreboard, new seating and crash walls in the turns. The crash walls drew mixed reviews. The most notable change was the renaming of the track to Ocean Speedway.

During a June 9 post-race inspection, five-time American Stock champion Sam Kennedy, whose car had just been disqualified, proceeded to curse at officials. The new management at the track was striving for a more family-oriented atmosphere and found no place for that kind of verbal assault; as a result, they suspended Kennedy for one month, put him on probation for the rest of the year and wanted an apology. Kennedy had other plans; he quit the track and hasn't been back since.



John Prentice (right) took on the monumental task of promoting the fairgrounds' track. There to lend a helping hand as Senior Maintenance Manager of the facility was his father Dutch. *Prentice Collection*



2006: New name, new logo and new paint. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



2006: David Press (41) and Craig Smith (90) race for the lead of a Wingless Sprint Car main event. Both drivers had wins at the Speedway. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



2006: Albert Pombo (3) moves under Jeff Fiscus (13) on his way to victory in the SCRA main event. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



2006: Four-abreast parade lap for the June 4 Golden State Challenge race. Race winner Robert Ballou (12) is on the pole. Others on the front row are Lawrence Edlund (15), Jim Skinner (73) and Jonathan Allard (0). The person up in the window of the Agricultural History building has a good view of the action. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



2006: Craig Stidham (3) gets a wheel into Jerry Bonnema's (58) roll cage. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



2006: Robert Ballou Won the June 2 Golden State Challenge race. Not long after this win, Ballou headed East to better his career, and that he did. Darlene Prentice (wife of John the promoter) made the presentation. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



2006: (Left) Sprint Cars accordion while coming in for the green flag. Mark Workentine (6), Stephen Allard (10), Jerry Bonnema (58) and Craig Smith (72) were the drivers of the cars involved. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



2005

Although there were seven classes of cars running at Watsonville, the Super Stocks (formerly Street Stocks) were the only NASCAR-sanctioned division. What used to be an exclusively NASCAR track was now at the end of the road for that sanction. In my interview with Rick Farren, he explained why:

“NASCAR Sanction requires all membership revenue from the sale of NASCAR track licenses be retained by NASCAR. The move away from that 100 percent was driven by a financial need to improve the Speedway’s bottom line. To that end, as new divisions were added to the lineup, i.e. Wingless Sprints, Dwarf Cars and Four Bangers, we brought those divisions in under a ‘Watsonville Speedway membership license,’ retained the membership fees and removed them from under the NASCAR-sanctioned divisions at the Speedway. This was an evolutionary process, which in time left us with one NASCAR Division, the Super Stocks.”

IMCA was having its own troubles at the track. By year’s end, they were only averaging ten cars per show. To be fair, all tracks in the west were struggling with car counts for weekly shows.

During the last week of August, long-time track promoter Rick Farren canceled the remainder of his contract with the Santa Cruz County Fairgrounds. His final show under his supervision was September 2. Rick cited family commitments and business obligations as the reasons, but after spending nearly 25 years in the business, he had had enough. The fair board now had to scramble to find a replacement so plans could be made for 2006. The year ended with doubt whether there would be a 2006 season.



2004: Jim DiGiovanni (75x) drives over the front of Jeff Buckner (44) during a Grand American Modified race. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



2005: Joe Antonetti (66), Alex Stanford (98) and Todd Hermosillo race three abreast in the IMCA Modifieds. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



2005: “The Big One.” If this crash happened during a NASCAR Cup race on a Super Speedway, it would be called “The Big One.” Eleven cars piled up on the back straight during the opening lap of the IMCA main event on May 20. Some of the cars involved were: Joe Antonetti (66), Robert Marsh (22m), Bobby Hogge IV (2), Don Breeden (22), Bob Williamson (19), Brad Pounds (1), Garrett Steitz (7), Troy Stone (4), Tim Clark (69) and Todd Hermosillo (3). *Dennis Mattish Photos*

Farren steps down as promoter

Fair board's replacement hiring process urgent due to scheduling concerns for next year

By TONY KARIS
FOR THE REGISTER PAJARONIAN

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Watsonville Register-Pajaronian



2005: Stu Cornick won three Super Stock main events during the year. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



2005: Western Dirt Late Model Tour visited Watsonville Speedway on May 5. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



2005: Steve Drake (11x) and Ron Bartels (12) in action. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



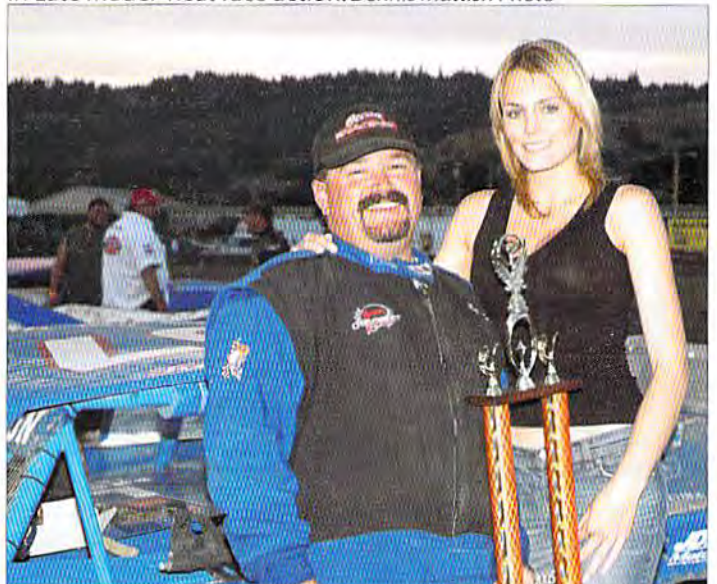
2005: Derick Nance (5n) holds the inside line while A.J. Kirkpatrick (12k) tries the topside. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



2005: Eric Jacobson (5wp) and A.J. Kirkpatrick (12k) side by side in Late Model heat race action. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



2005: This K-9 was sitting on the back straightaway grandstands intently watching the race cars go by. Somebody said his master was in one of the cars. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



2005: Ken Gregg has nearly 20 Street Stock and Late Model Stock Car feature wins at Watsonville. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



2012: Alexander Mead (16), Brian Beck (71), Ashely Schnorf (76) and Tomas Bray (23)



2011: Nicolette Addiego



2011: Koen Shaw – 1 win



2012: Alexander Mead – 3 wins
2012 Champion



2012: Tomas Bray

Mayor's Proclamation

City Of Watsonville

California

WATSONVILLE SPEEDWAY

WHEREAS, the Watsonville Speedway is a NASCAR sanctioned track in the Pacific Coast Region; and

WHEREAS, the Pacific Coast Regional Champion has been a Watsonville Speedway competitor for eight years out of nine; and

WHEREAS, the Watsonville Speedway features three divisions of racing: Late Model Stocks, Street Stocks, and Figure 8; and

WHEREAS, the racing and special events attract competitors and fans from as far away as Los Angeles and Sacramento with average attendance over 1,600 per event; and

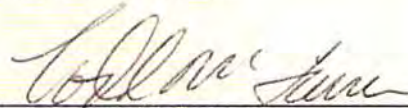
WHEREAS, NASCAR auto racing has been hosted by the Santa Cruz County Fairgrounds for 31 seasons; and

WHEREAS, in the 1990 season a total of 189 different drivers competed at the Watsonville Speedway taking home \$110,000 in prize money; and

WHEREAS, the three division champions for the 1990 racing season were: Late Model Stock, Jeff Silva-Aptos, Street Stock, Bobby Large-Watsonville, and Figure 8, Greg McGregor-Ben Comand;

NOW, THEREFORE, I, TODD McFARREN, Mayor of the City of Watsonville, in the State of California, do hereby congratulate the Watsonville Speedway for providing NASCAR racing entertainment and competition for 31 successful seasons, and encourage all residents of the City of Watsonville and the entire Pajaro Valley to support the work and efforts of the entire team at the Watsonville Speedway.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and caused the Seal of the City of Watsonville to be affixed this tenth day of October, nineteen hundred and ninety.



Todd McFarren





2011: Jr. USAC Ford Focus Midgets
Austin Blair (4k), Parker Colton (64), Katylynn Lee (12k) and Trevor Hunt (8)

Micro 600
2009-2012
Dennis Mattish Photos



2011: Tyson Davis (3d) Tomas Bray (23), Christine Root (10), Angel Cappas (a24) and Kyle Bryan (34b)



2009: Bryce Trumpp (10) – 4 wins
Tomas Bray (23)



2010: Tomas Bray (23)
Orval Zane Burke, Jr. (ob1)



2010: Orval Zane Burke, Jr. – 10 wins
2009 and 2010 Champion



2010: Tanner Burke – 2 wins



2010: Christine Root – 12 wins



2010: Dean Dealy



2010: Tomas Bray – 15 wins
2011 Champion



2011: Tyson Davis

Watsonville Speedway

NASCAR
Weekly Racing
Series



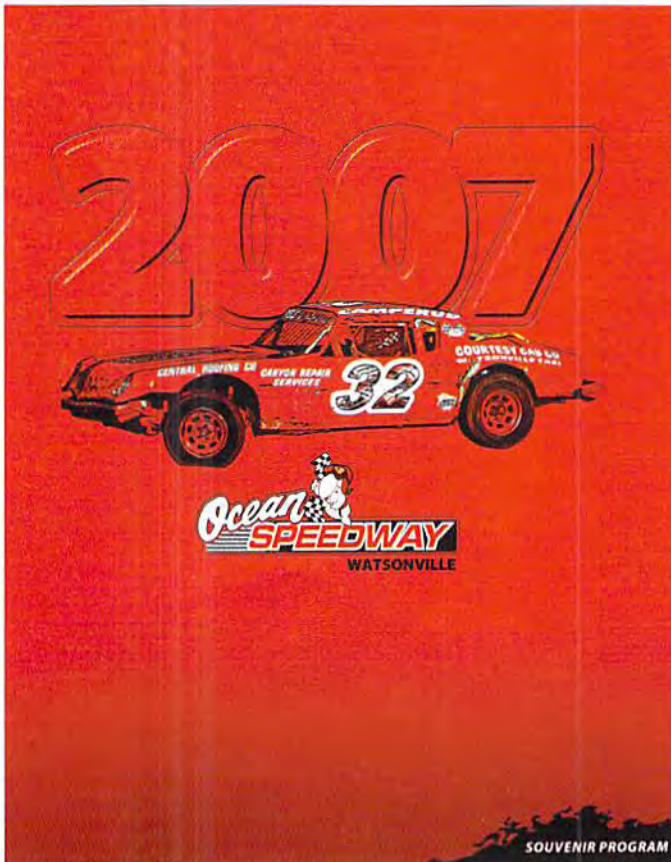
2000
Souvenir Program



NASCAR WEEKLY RACING SERIES PRESENTED BY DODGE

2003
Souvenir Program

Programs of the 2000s



*Gallery
of
Cars & Drivers*



2012: USAC Sprint Cars made four appearances during the year.
Dennis Mattish Photo



2012: Nick Silva (56s) moved up to the IMCA Modifieds after winning the American Stock title in 2011. Nick DeCarlo (17) won the prior (July 7) IMCA main event. Dennis Mattish Photo



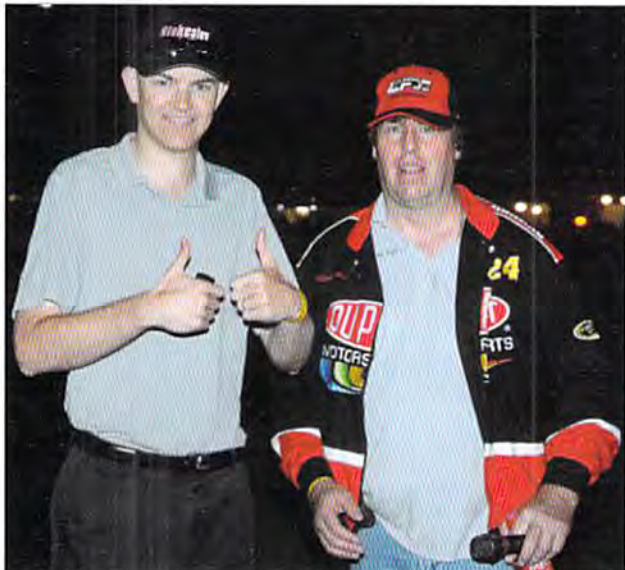
2012: Cody Burke demonstrates the workings of a well-tuned setup on an IMCA Modified. Dennis Mattish Photo



2012: Dominic Scelzi—16-year old son of legendary Drag Racer Gary Scelzi— was quick to win his first main event at Ocean Speedway. That happened on August 17. Dennis Mattish Photo



2012: Vintage cars had an exhibition race during Johnny Key Classic night. It may seem farfetched, but there was a time when open competition races had a scenario with Stock Cars and open-wheel cars in the same race. It was called run-what-you-brung. Happened 40 years earlier on the half mile. Dennis Mattish Photo



2012: Announcers Steven Blakesley (left) and "Outback" Andy Foster during a break in the action.
Dennis Mattish Photo



2012: Tony Gualda had the honor of carrying our nation's flag during the playing of the National Anthem on Johnny Key Classic night. This was Tony's debut night on the Watsonville oval and he won his race in the Micro 600s.
Dennis Mattish Photo



2012: Drivers line up for a group photo prior to the start of the 52nd Annual Johnny Key Classic. They are: (In order of finish) Tommy Tarlton, Rico Abreu, Bud Kaeding, Shane Golobic, Peter Murphy, Dominic Scelzi, Evan Suggs, Kurt Nelson, Jon Maiwald, DJ Netto, Caron Macedo, Ryan Rusconi, Tim Kaeding, Brent Kaeding, Craig Smith, Craig Stidham, Ronnie Day, Steven Tiner, Brad Furr, Mike Henry, Justin Sanders, Andy Ferris and Nick Green. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



2012: Packed to the rafters. The biggest crowd in years turned out for the 52nd running of the Johnny Key Classic. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



2012: Rico Abreu (89), one of the hottest drivers in the country during the year, returned to California and Ocean Speedway to race in the Key Classic. Tommy Tarlton (21) and Rico put on a show for the fans as they raced wheel to wheel for the win. Rico finished second to Tarlton. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



2012: The 51st and 52nd annual Key Classic was not kind to Brent Kaeding (climbing from his car). Brent, who has more Sprint Car main event wins at Watsonville than any other driver, had his bell rung for the second year in a row in turn one. "Outback" Andy Foster (left) was on the scene to interview Craig Stidham who's car is below Brent's. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



2012: Tommy Tarlton (second from left) pocketed \$10K for his victory in the Key Classic, one of the biggest short track races in the west. *Dennis Mattish Photo*

was creating. It wasn't just auto racing that the group wanted to stop, but also the flea market and the annual rodeo, which was a charity event for the Sheriff's Department. Essentially their action would shut down the fairgrounds and put an institution out of business. Of course, the common sense response pointed out by the local newspapers and TV stations to this desire is why would a person move next to a facility like a county fairground if you cannot tolerate its activities? As this book was going to press, the issues had not been resolved and the case was headed for court.

To make matters worse, Governor Jerry Brown cut off all funding to fairgrounds in the state of California because of the fiscal crisis caused by the great recession.

Ocean Speedway is not the first racetrack to have to fight for its existence. In 2000, Mark Rivard built a house next to Altamont Speedway near Tracy, California. A short time later he became obsessed with shutting down the racetrack. He succeeded in getting local government to refuse the track permits for operation. The track has not run a race since 2008. In an ironic twist, Mark started holding motorcycle races on his property until somebody got killed. He then vacated his house.

In 1996, Santa Clara County Supervisor Bianca Alvarado stated that auto racing at San Jose Speedway was an undesirable use for the Santa Clara County Fairgrounds. She was instrumental in ridding the Fairgrounds of the detestable sport. The last race was held in 1999. Not long after that, the Fairgrounds started having financial difficulties, and they have been in fiscal crisis ever since.

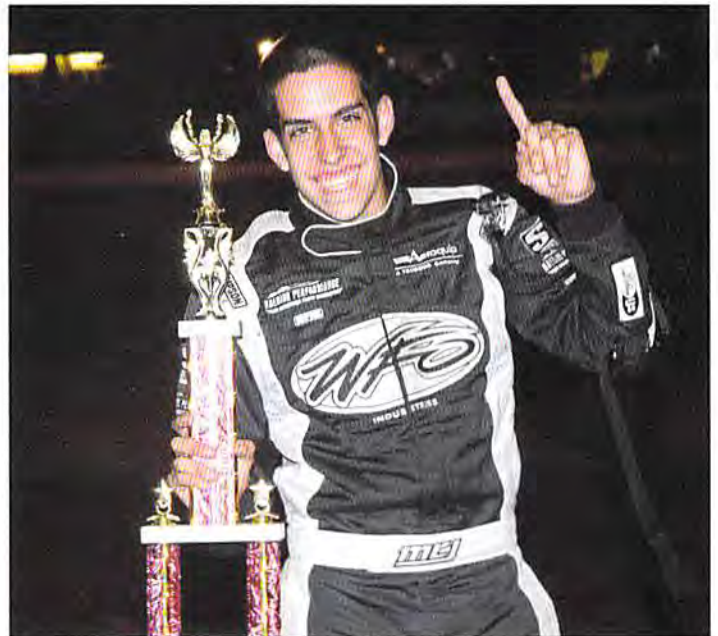
Barring the outcome of the Max Kelley situation (previous page) and budget woes the Santa Cruz County Fairgrounds faces, John Prentice has a signed lease good through 2019. Let's hope Ocean Speedway can celebrate its 100th anniversary on May 27, 2060.



2011: Mud packing. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



2011: A sound barrier was added to turn four to try and appease the neighbors. The Wingless Sprint Cars of Jason Toft (27) and Adam Christian (12) race by it. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



2011: Mark Chaves, Jr., was a happy winner in the Wingless Sprint Cars after winning his first main event on April 29. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



2011: Flying tires are always a danger. Fortunately this one returned to earth safely. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



2011: Nick DeCarlo won three IMCA Modified Feature races during the year. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



2010: Junior Dawson (28), Andy Obertello (29) and Jr. Harper (8) work all three grooves in the IMCA modifieds. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



2011: Cody Burke after one of his many wins in IMCA Modifieds. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



2010: Just like his dad before him, Michael Dalton has also won main events at Watsonville. His father Bob Dalton did it in the Sportsman division and Michael has done it in IMCA Modifieds. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



2011: Brandon Leonard won in the Four Bangers before moving up to IMCA Modifieds in 2010. *Dennis Mattish Photo*



2012: Matt Sotomayor has the distinction of winning the first Sport Modified (offshoot of an IMCA Modified) main event. Matt was no stranger to the track, having won the 2009 Four Banger championship and coming in second place in the 2010 and 2011 American Stock points standing. *Dennis Mattish Photo*