

Racers rev up for Eugene drag strip plan

By KRISTINE SNIPES
Of the Emerald

Two souped-up street cars line up, engines revved, tires smoking. The starting signals flicker, light up and then whoom — the cars go to 130 mph in 10 seconds for a race that is over in 12 seconds.

This scene will soon take place in Eugene if a proposed county-sponsored drag strip is approved, according to Jim Baker, spokesperson for the Willamette Valley Drag Racers Association.

The drag strip would be part of the Short Mountain Special Events Park, which would include a 600-yard rifle range, mud and sand drag strips, a motorcycle track, camping facilities and "one of the most beautiful go-cart tracks anywhere," said Baker.

The park's proposed 500-acre site is the Goshen land fill. Baker estimates the park will bring in \$531,600 in its first year, based on figures from the National Hot Rod



Graphic by Tom Ettel

Association and receipts from a past Eugene drag strip.

"We have received nothing but support from all the county commissioners, and we expect to have the plan approved on June 9, 1979. The park should be ready for use in 18 months," said Baker.

The proposal is being pushed by many off-road vehicle associations, rifle organizations and law enforcement agencies because of its multi-faceted nature. The facilities would be available for driver training by high schools and police.

But the 4,000 foot drag strip is the park's main attraction, Baker said.

Asked what kind of person invests as much as \$20,000 in a car that races only one-fourth mile and more than doubles standard highway speed in less time than it

takes to lose your lunch, Baker said: "lots of people."

"Drag strip racing is a fun, exciting sport with a spectator participation that almost exceeds football and soccer," he said at a meeting of drag strip racers Friday.

"We enjoy it" — "it's a hobby" — "it's crazy" offered some of the racers.

They uniformly denied that the inherent danger of drag strip racing was part of its attraction.

"Anybody who is scared his car will explode doesn't belong on a drag strip," said Kathy Kalina, wife of a racer. "The worst thing you can say about a racer is that he's afraid of his car."

"For sure," agreed another racer, who declines to give her name because, "If my Dad found out I'd rolled my car he'd have a fit."

"The first wreck I was in I was a little scared because my car caught on fire," she said, "but in the two wrecks since then I haven't been."

"Last time, when I rolled my car, I just switched the gas off, turned the motor off, rolled the window up and crawled out."

The danger is minimal, drivers said, because cars have to go through a safety inspection and must have shoulder harnesses and roll bars.

Drag strip racing is a family pastime now, said Jim Nordness, a drag strip racer from Woodburn. "The old stereotype of a bunch of good old boys drinking beer and tearing up the road just doesn't fit any more."

Today, he said, about one-third of the racers are women, there is little alcohol at meets and none at all in the pits, and in the Northwest, at least, there is very little gambling.

Surprisingly few drag strip racers are professional mechanics. Racers come from all ranks, including sports writers, nuclear engineers, housewives, and loggers.

"This park would get high school kids to stop racing on the streets, and to learn to race safely," said Baker.

The park proposal is now in the designing stage. A meeting of interested persons will be held Wednesday, November 14, 7:30 p.m. in Harris Hall.

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