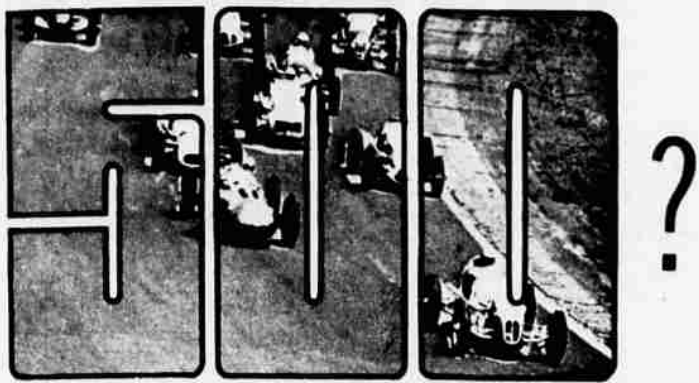




The Indianapolis Speedway classic will be run again next Friday; here's how it would feel if you were one of the drivers

by William Barry Furlong
Art by Don Neske

"GENTLEMEN, start your engines!"

At that signal, the angry snarl of 33 powerful engines bursts into a mighty thunderclap that echoes across America. As the sun climbs toward its noon-day zenith, the eyes of the nation turn toward Indianapolis and the 2½-mile "brickyard" where 33 men risk their lives in the 500-mile Memorial Day Race.

Here is one of the most popular and significant sporting events in the nation, one that has an almost mystical hold on the public. For the men who drive in this classic take a little bit of each of us with them—the dreamer in each of us as we see ourself, grimy and grease-smeared, careening toward glory or death.

How would you do in the Indianapolis 500? You're a good driver—at least you think you are—but how would you fare in this toughest of all races?

"Any man with good eyesight and normal reaction time can drive a racing car down a straightaway," said the late Wilbur Shaw, a three-time winner of the 500. "Almost all of the art of racing on tracks—and it's really more of an art than a technique—is wrapped up in making a turn."

There are 800 turns in the 500-mile race, and you'll lose if you drop much below 120 m.p.h. on any of them. For seconds count in this race: Pat Flaherty won by 21 seconds in 1956, Sam Hanks won by 20 seconds last year, and Shaw won by 2.16 seconds in 1937. If you lose only one second on every lap, you'll finish three minutes and 20 seconds—almost seven miles—behind the leader.

That means you can't ease back on the throttle too much. You go into a turn at 165-170 m.p.h.—faster if you dare—and cut back to 120. Then you gun back to 165—and all this in a quarter of a mile. You do this four times in each lap, for the Speedway is not an oval but a rectangle with four turns and four straightaways (two are 3,300 feet long, two are 660 feet long).

You get quite an education in the first 10 miles of the race. You learn that you rarely use your brake, no matter how fast you go into a turn. "Your control is in your steering wheel and your throttle," Shaw said. "You steer with your throttle." Just by easing back on the throttle, you can slow the car so much that you won't—you shouldn't—need your brake. One mistake, though, and you're dead.

At first you wonder how anybody can keep from making a mistake. In the first few laps, a great cloud of dust rises over big patches of the course. The dust, from the thousands of passenger cars that crossed the Speedway to get to the infield parking area, will disappear after a few laps but you'll be so busy concentrating on the other race cars that you won't see a thing.

You'll feel, though—right down to the marrow of your bones. After turning most of a lap on asphalt, you'll hit the short brick section on the homestretch and your bones will shake as if they were pebbles in a gourd.

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