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500 (Continued)

("That one stretch will tear the seat out of the best pair of pants you can buy," one Speedway driver warns.) And you'll feel the speed. "If a giant grabbed you by the shoulders and shook you till you thought your eyes would pop out—that's the way you'd feel if you drove four laps in the 500," another driver says. "You push the throttle and the skin flattens on your face. You're pushed back against the seat. Your kidneys—the pain, you just have to cry."

But what really bothers you is the car. If it holds together, you may win; if it doesn't, you may die. The owners have invested anywhere from \$10,000 to \$100,000 in it, and mechanics have gone over it with stethoscopes and X rays to track down any flaws. For in the final analysis, it's skill, not money alone, that builds a winning car. During the depression, Cliff Durant, son of the General Motors tycoon, spent \$100,000 on a car in an effort to win the 500. It started twice but never finished the race. Disgusted, Durant sold the car to Harry Hartz for \$5,000. Hartz tinkered with it a bit, hired a driver to pilot it, and watched it win the first time he entered it.



BY THE END of 10 laps, some of the tension is easing out of you. You begin to see details, perhaps even your family in the grandstand. On your left is the huge infield with more than 100,000 persons. Along the homestretch on your left are the pits. The six men in your pit can change all your tires, refill your car's oil system, and give you new gloves, goggles, and a drink of water—all in 40 seconds.

Their judgment as well as their work is vital—even on little things. Once a pit man handed Shaw a glass milk bottle filled with water as he was about to pull out of the pit and back onto the track. Shaw drank some of the water, dumped the rest over his head, then found he had no place to put the bottle. He couldn't throw it out of the car for fear of injuring somebody with shattered glass; he couldn't keep it in the car. In the moments that he hesitated, trying to figure out what to do, the engine of his slowly moving car died and he lost the race because of the time consumed in starting it again. "From that day," he said later, "I never permitted a glass container of any kind in my pit."

As the miles roll up, you begin thinking: why are you in this race, anyway? Is it worth it? Is it worth the deafness that'll hang on for two days afterward, or the near-coma of fatigue that may cut you off from the world for hours after the race, or the constant brush with death?

There is the money, of course. Last year the winning car won \$103,844. The owner of the car got this; the car, not the driver, wins the race in the official view of the Speedway. The owner can pay you anything you've agreed on; usually it's around 40 percent of the total. (A few drivers, like Shaw, owned and drove their cars, thus taking home the whole prize.) There's still big money in the race even if you don't finish first. The late Bill Vukovich won \$18,000 even though he finished 17th in 1952. In the last few years, even the last-place car has been winning around \$2,500.

Beyond the money are the intangibles. One is the latent satisfaction of taking part in a significant automotive experiment. High-octane gasoline, heat-resisting lubricants, superchargers, four-wheel brakes—all these are among automotive developments first tested in the 500. In fact, the Speedway was originally opened, back in 1909, as an automobile testing ground.

In the first 500-mile Memorial Day Race, in 1911, an ingenious driver named Ray Harroun developed one of the most common of all automotive accessories. To lighten his car, Harroun wanted to race without a mechanic beside him in the cockpit. Other drivers protested; they insisted that without a mechanic to spot traffic, particularly cars coming up behind him, Harroun would be a menace. Race officials were about to oust Harroun from the race when he came up with an idea that they doubtfully accepted. He promptly went on to win the race with the help of that idea—the first rear-view mirror in a car.

But the biggest thing is deep and inexplicable—something that drives men to Herculean efforts to win. Take the case of Ralph DePalma. Back in 1912, he was leading the 500 by 20 miles with only three laps to go when a connecting rod in his engine snapped. He fidgeted and fussed and managed to nudge the car a few yards nearer the finish line. Then, in a frenzied effort to retain the lead, he leaped out of the cockpit and, with his mechanic, started pushing the car around the track. They finished one lap before Joe

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