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Remember When: Racing in Western Pennsylvania forty years ago

As we look back to racing forty years ago we remember some very special drivers and I hope you enjoy the travel back in time.

It was the Labor Day weekend of 1968; Blackie Watt and Bob Wearing continued to set all kinds of records on the local dirt tracks as the season moved into the final weeks. Both drivers had an excellent Labor Day weekend. Blackie raised his total win record to 28 with Bob close behind at 25. The weekend started out for both drivers with a 100 Lap Invitational at Schmucker's where Blackie took the victory and Bob ended up a disappointing sixth after his crew changed tires prior to the race after Wearing had already set fast time.

On Thursday, Wearing won a 50 lapper at Mercer while Blackie took a first and second during a double feature program at North Hills. On Friday, Blackie took the victory at Marion Center while Wearing, driving Herb Scott's Eight Ball finished second at Lernerville. Saturday, Wearing took the win at Schmucker's while Watt finished fourth. Sunday found both drivers at Clearfield for a 100 lap invitational Wearing took another big victory while Watt failed to finish due to mechanical problems. Monday it was back to Lernerville and another Wearing victory. Blackie finished second in a good weekend for both drivers.

Ralph Quarterston's four straight wins at Lernerville, coupled with Lou Blaney's problems with his new car saw Quarterston move well ahead in Sprint victories 33 to 10. Bill Banick was on a hot streak. On Aug. 27th he raced with URC at Hamburg, N.Y. finishing second in both of the twin features and being declared overall winner. The following night he won at Mercer and then finished off the weekend with a victory at Tri-City Speedway.

The big news at Sharon Speedway was that Clate Husted winning his first feature on a paved track. Clate, a veteran of many years in the sport, is considered one of the smoothest drivers around, but prior to Sharon's opener back in May he had never run an asphalt track. From the first night on, Husted had been making a big impression on the Sharon fans and also on everyone pit-side. Running a small-block" engine in his Bob Shoff owned No. 23 Chevelle Clate had continually run well and it was just a matter of time before he put everything together and came up with that first asphalt win. The date was August 29, 1968. Husted started in fifth position and took the lead on the eighth lap...from there he went on to lead the remaining distance, holding off Sharon's biggest winners Mihalic and Colella, despite a restart on the sixteenth lap. Clate's victory gives him the distinction of being the only Late Model driver in the area to have won features on both dirt and asphalt.

Tom Colella's two straight victories on August 15th and 23rd made him the top winner so far this season with six victories. Carl DeBeradin, Phil Ladigo, Bill Bums, Frank Gerbert, Rich Grygo, Cal Stambaugh, Bill Morrison and George Potter rounded out the top ten in the final point standings.

There was a lot of activity at Lernerville Speedway. First there was a Langhorne Qualifier for the Late Models on August 20th then on Sept. 3rd there was the Williams Grove Open qualifier for the Sprints. Wearing won the Langhorne qualifier but it was not as easy a victory as many may have expected. Teammate Herb Scott and Dick Swartzlander kept the pressure on the Evans City driver most of the way with a good close duel for second place until Swartzlander suffered overheating problems in the Larry Peters Chevelle and had to drop back and settle for third. At the end of 50 laps it was Wearing the winner of the silver bowl presented by Al Gerber with Scott taking a strong second ahead of Swartzlander, Art McDonald, Frank Choura, Bucky Ogle, Dick Gill, Gary Balough, Lou Gentile and Harley Chuba.

Both Ralph Quarterston and Gary Balough picked up nice trophies for their wins on Sept. 3rd. Quarterston added another victory to his long list by copping the Williams Grove Qualifier over Dick Bailey, Ted Wise, Bill Banick and Frank Raiti.

The Sportsman coupes got their shot at the trophies and some extra money during the Labor Day show. Johnny Axe proved he is always hard to beat when the big money is on the line. Most of the race it looked like another Ralph Quarterston victory as Ralph started on the pole and was in command almost the entire distance. Even though he held the tad he couldn't put much distance between himself and his rivals Carl Murdick and Axe. Late in the event Quarterston began to experience brake problems with the No. 66 coupe. Axe had moved by Murdick and on the 33rd lap he forged into the lead and onto victory. Quarterston managed to hold off Murdick for second while Vic George, making a rare appearance at Lernerville, came all the way up from eighteenth starting spot in the straight-up start race to claim the fourth place honors. Rounding out the top ten were Sam Coiwell, Ken Rossey, Dave Stewart, Bert Stanley, Bob Axe and Jim Faas.

Quarterston's double championship was a first in the track's four year history. The point season ended on Sept. 6th and Ralph had won four straight in the Sprint Division and finished with over a 100 point lead over last year's champ Frank Raiti, Buddy Cochran, Bill Banick, Dick Swartzlander, Ted Wise, Lou Blaney, Chuck Engstrom. Herb Buck and Jack West.

In the Sportsman division Axe really got hot during the final weeks winning three out of four of the final point races. Despite his hot streak he still ended the point season fourth behind Quarterston, Murdick and Brown. Younger brother Bob finished the season in 5th place ahead of Yip Robinson. Frank "Doc" Harmon, Gene Fenton, Bill Thompson and Jim Faas.

Bobby Allen one of the hottest drivers on the Central Pennsylvania Circuit made his third visit of the season to Western Pa pay off in a big way by winning the "Centennial 100" for Sprints at Tri-City Speedway. Ted Wise saved face for the local area drivers during the time trials by gaining

the pole position with a 20.98 clocking. Behind Ted were four of the Central Circuit Young Lions, Steve Smith, Kenny Weld, Allen and Lee Osborne. Next in line were four of Western Pa's best, Buddy Cochran, Bill Banick, Ralph Quarterson and Dick Bailey.

Weld took the dash with Ed Murphy, Chuck Engstrom and Lou Blaney winning the heats. Allen started the 100 lapper in fourth spot and passed Smith for the lead on the twelfth lap. Buddy Cochran was second with Dick Bailey third over Blaney, Banick, Dick Swartzlander, Jerry Matus, Jack Sodeman Jim Willett and Wise.

With the exception of the rain there really wasn't anything to report at Schmucker's Speedway. Late summer thunder showers washed out the show both August 21st and 27th, leaving only three of the five scheduled shows to run. The two regular shows that were run both saw Bob Wearing take the Late Model feature with the September 1st 100 lap invitational going to Blackie Watt. Counting all the regular Saturday night programs plus the three Invitational races Blackie scored eight times and Wearing seven.

I hope you enjoy the opportunity to "Remember When".