

SANTA POD

Priddle wins spectacular funny car duel from Herridge

With the biggest entry ever of drag racing vehicles in this country, that Hot Car sponsored meeting at Santa Pod had plenty of action, with perfect weather for the Sunday qualifying session.

In Top Fuel the entry was limited to three cars, with Dennis Priddle the star name not in attendance following his disastrous Black-bush engine failure. A spare motor is being readied for the car, which should be running this weekend at Long Marston.

Clive Skilton, Allan Herridge and Mike Hutcherson in their usual mounts provided the action then, with Allan Herridge in particular living things up. His first run in the Raceway car now fitted with the bigger 470 cubic inch Don Garlits motor ended with a wheelstand that he carried for some 50 yards before shutting down and crossing lanes.

A later attempt with some ballast strapped to the front was better, but this time the car got out of shape at the top end and he coasted through to an 8.2 s. Clive Skilton ran with Mike Hutcherson in possibly one of his last outings in the front engine car, soon to be replaced with a rear engine version, and ran a 7.3 s with the clutch slipping a little too much at the top. After adjusting this he came out for a second run at 6.9 s 216 mph to lead the class easily.

During the week Clive had tried the Castrol funny car at Silverstone in an attempt at tracing its handling problems, but after rolling the car, luckily without the body fitted, confessed that he was no nearer a solution, but suggested that a more conventional front engine car might be a good idea. Clive escaped unhurt but the car was badly damaged, though it apparently will be rebuilt for some limited use. This left Dennis Priddle to wave the home flag with his STP Avenger which he qualified with an 8.0 s run.

The Owen Haywood driven funny car suffered a blower belt failure on its first run, and a drive shaft breakage on a very strong looking second run, the sudden increase in revs snapping the belt again, so he recorded no times of note on Sunday. Allan Herridge in the other American car had a new motor after the recent failure in the shape of an Ed Pink built 480 cubic inch funny car engine that arrived complete and ready to run right down to oil in the sump! A new Lenco two speed and reverser and third member for the axle was supposed to handle the colossal power output of what is without doubt the most powerful racing engine in Europe, but the reverser disintegrated before the car had even run during the burn-out and stage. A new one bought from the "London Heavy" Pro Stock was fitted and in the late afternoon, with all eyes on the car, Allan rocketed to a 7.11 s/204 mph pass, and emerged even more determined to crack the six second barrier the following day.

Of the four big altereds, Stones car was absent with its new axle delayed by Customs at Heathrow, Hall's wasn't entered, and neither Elson nor Rodgers made runs on Sunday. In Senior, Dave Page led as usual with a 9.8 s in the Fiat/Chev, but when he came out to improve on this later the car broke away under him, possibly on some water dropped earlier, and spun into the fence and rolled over. Emerging almost immediately to loud applause, Page was unhurt, but needless to say, the frame and body were written off, and superficial damage done to the engine and gearbox. A sad end to a popular car.

Dick Shape, who had been alongside for

this run in his Pontiac A35 had shut off as Page lost it, and returned later to record a good 11.5 s after pulling a little "wheelie" for the first time.

In the Pro Stock class interest again centred on whether Gary Goggin could match the big Dodge Pro Stock, now with London in place of Brooklyn "Heavy." Colin's first run was a 9.8 s at 140 mph, with Gary at 10.5 s and still looking for an improvement. His next run was a 10.3 s, at which point he decided that the rear suspension was too stiff on his Camaro and was keeping his times down. Colin meanwhile ran a best ever 9.58 s to emphasise his superiority. Peter Crane made two runs, the best of which was an 11.1 s in his Camaro, not as fast he had hoped, but a record in itself for the car, which has rarely done two runs without something breaking. During the day Mustapha Errol, who if he hasn't owned nearly every American car to run at the strip, is well on the way to it, bought the chassis for Crane, who is switching to another class shortly.

Roz Prior continued to improve with her Top Dragster with a fine 8.4 s run, just behind Gerry Andrews' 8.2 s in the Stones rail. Dave Stone qualified their third car in lieu of DLT with a best ever 11.8 s for the Escort Chev. When Dave Lee Travis arrived on Monday he ran his first ever qualifying run at a respectable 12.5 s to get himself into the elimination.

Action on Monday was so fast and furious as the meeting worked towards the finals that it is difficult to know which run stands out above the others, but if any one driver shone all weekend it was Allan Herridge. Determined to run his first six with either the dragster or the funny, he was in and out of the two all day, and predictably perhaps it was with the funny that he succeeded. With the giant engine loaded up with nitro and belching great balls of flame from each header he went through two stunning burn-outs that covered the strip in dense clouds of smoke. After positioning the car in stage by stabbing the throttle and "jumping" the car forward or sideways with the torque reaction he was gone, wheels pawing the air but not letting up for a second, and just 6.82 s later he was there, well into the sixes and the quickest run of the weekend, although at a "mere" 191 mph. With the glove down, Dennis Priddle was out a few minutes later with the STP Avenger and with a 100 cubic inches less ripped off an equally stunning 7.19 s at 194 mph, over half a second quicker than his best. But if these runs were good, the final was unbelievable later in the afternoon.

Meanwhile, Clive Skilton had run a 6.86 s at 209 mph and was troubled by a rare stability problem at the top end. With him was Herridge in the fueller, which once again was in trouble, apparently with out of balance slicks as it crossed lanes violently and chased Clive through the finish. Clive repeated his time on the next run but had the front torsion bar break in the speed traps, so his day was over. The only remaining round was between Herridge again, and Hutcherson, but neither went well, with Herridge leaving before the other car was staged when the engine started to overheat.

Top Dragster went to Roz Prior in another exiting race, Ray Hoare having fallen to her in the first round despite a sizeable "hole-shot" 10.0 s to 8.6 s. Gerry Andrews in the Stones car was the other finalist with a bye run 9.2 s. With both taking their now in-

famous time to get warmed up, Roz was staged first, with Andrews creeping in a few seconds later. At the merest suggestion of the green she was moving, and once again the incredible traction had another in trouble. Andrews' front came up three feet or more but he too kept on it, and after coming down once lifted them yet again at the eighth mile but still turned an amazing 8.29 s at 177 mph. Roz's start had won though, despite her 8.4 s at 157 mph. Other Dragster winners included Martin Rowat's very neat Senior Dragster with a 10.4 s over Malcolm Olley's 10.6 s, both in Chevrolets, John Rotherham in Middle with a very popular "hole-shot" 11.6 s to 11.2 s for the oldest competitor in the sport over John Whitmore's rear engine car. Gerry Cookson and Geoff Masters bounced their way down the strip in their Junior class cars with Cookson winning with an 11.1 s to 12.2 s.

With Dave Page obviously absent, Dick Sharpe didn't have too much trouble winning Senior Comp with a 12.5 s over Bob Deichen's Daimler, but with the teams' new injection fitted, they were not going as well as usual. Dick Fielding's amazing little Twin Cam device won Middle, beating not only the famed "Strip-teaser" to get to the final, but the Skinner Bros' equally fast Jag/Falcon with an 11.3 s to 11.6 s, both at 112 mph.

In the Street classes, the day was also a good one, with well filled eliminations in the lower brackets if not in the Top ones. DLT made his competition debut against Al O'Connor's Chev Anglia altered, but wary of redlighting was left at the line and lost despite turning a good 2.2 s to the winning 12.4 s. A later match race was inconclusive, with O'Connor breaking his diff on the line, but DLT had the Precision Tapes sponsored Escort moving right on the green and looks like developing into a first class competitor.

O'Connor went on to win Super Street, beating Dave Rose who really went to sleep on the line in his 'Cuda 440.

Pro Stock first had the two Camaros of Crane and Goggin with Crane making his first and last complete run in competition with the car with a game 10.8 s to Goggin's 10.6 s.

Mullan tried Rosin on his burn-out but bogged slightly to a "mere" 10.0 s. He tried it again in the final, and although Goggin again left first and was really trying as hard as he could, there was no way that he could match the power of the Dodge as Mullan reeled him in with another 3.6 s at 140 mph to 10.3 s at a shut-down 117 mph.

And so to the final that everyone was waiting for. Both funnies had been in the bleach box area for some time with the drivers getting suited up as the tension mounted, and it was pretty obvious that while Allan wanted to back up his six, Dennis wanted primarily to beat him, hopefully with a six of his own. The grenade like noise of the Pink motor was heard first, then the slightly "smaller" noise of Priddle's trusty 392. With two cars covering the track in burn-out smoke it was even more dramatic as the two came slowly back like some snorting monsters through a mist, heightened even more by the bark of their engines as they finally staged after more burn-outs. With two greens, both moved in unison, with first Herridge lifting his wheels, then Priddle, then Herridge swerved towards the pit fence, lifted the wheels again as he powered out of it, Priddle was near the centre line, then back to his fence, then both nearly touched in the centre, but still neither let up and the crowd was going mad with excitement—Priddle's win light came on and the roar could be heard even over the mad scream of the engines as the chutes came out. The erratic runs had hurt the times, with Dennis hitting 187 mph and Herridge 168 mph, but both turning identical 7.71 s times. It is hard to see how the race could ever be topped, and it made a fitting end to a really good weekend.

AUTOSPORT, MAY 30, 1974

▶ The action is frozen as Mike Key's camera catches Dave Page rolling his Panic at Santa Pod story opposite. Dave escaped unhurt, but the Comp Alt didn't.

TURNING THE PAGE



Santa Pod drag

THE Bank Holiday drag race meeting at Santa Pod was another expensive event for many competitors with several engine and transmission failures and one write-off, the second inside a week, for Clive Skilton. He had crashed at Silverstone in Ed Shaver's Funny car whilst trying the car out. Luckily the body was not fitted at the time, but the rest of the car was well bent! However plans now include a front-engined version of the car which hopefully should be easier to drive.

Dave Page was the second unlucky driver for, having qualified with a 9.8s in his Fiat Chev altered, he came out alongside Dick Sharpe's Pontiac Austin to try and improve his already dominant position. But some fifty yards out, the back end came round and he spun into the barrier and rolled over, climbing out unscathed almost immediately to survey the remains of his car. The main hardware escaped relatively intact, but the chassis was ruined.

In the Top Competition class, Dave Stone's Altered was out waiting for a new axle that remained obstinately at the airport, whilst neither Freeman Rodgers nor Phil Elson made runs on Sunday - the massive 220-strong entries giving rise to long queues to get into the fire-up road.

Dennis Priddle was present with his STP Funny car and went well to record an 8.0s run. The two Santa Pod owned American cars also had an expensive time, with Owen Haywood breaking a blower belt and later a drive-shaft in the Houndog car and Allan Herridge breaking a reverser. The Raceway had bought a brand new and very impressive Ed Pink motor to replace the one destroyed a few weeks ago for the car, and to supposedly handle the extra power a new two-speed and reverse unit with a new diff as insurance.

Staging alongside Haywood, who pulled the wheels well off the deck and holed the sump before breaking the blower belt, Herridge found that he couldn't get into reverse, a tricky manoeuvre at best with the simple in-out box, and the new unit was finished, though exactly when it broke is not clear. A replacement from the Dodge Pro-Stock was pressed into service and some hours later the powerful motor fired again and shot up the strip to a fastest ever 204mph in 7.11s, a slight weave at the start possibly costing Herridge a place in the first six.

Murton's Mustang... O'Connor in the final and also fell to the little Anglia's lightning-fast start, 12.2s to 12.3s.

A later match between DL1 and O'Connor showed that the big man could leave well, as he left O'Connor who then broke his rear end as he dropped the clutch.

In Pro-Stock, Gary Goggin and Pete Crane ran together with Crane taking his last and in fact only full competition run in the car before moving on to a rumoured Fueler ride. His injected Camaro went well again at 10.8s but was not fast enough to beat Goggin's 10.6s. Gary had taken a coil out of each rear spring overnight in an attempt to get away cleaner but it made little apparent difference and when Mullen and he met in the final he was still clearly up against it. Using all his skill he got away first with the wheels well off the ground but was slowly overtaken and passed with a 9.6s to 10.3s.

As each elimination worked to the finals they got better and better with all the Dragster elimination being closely fought except the Fuelers. Clive Skilton ran a 6.86s in the Castrol car against Herridge who crossed lanes behind him yet again with out of balance slicks apparently the trouble. On Clive's second run, also a 6.86s, his suspension broke as he slowed to a halt so that he was unable to come out for the final. Herridge came back in against Hutcherson but overheated and left early so that neither car recorded times.

In Top Dragster Roz Prior pulled off another sensational hole-shot over Gerry Andrews in the final as the Stones car hooked up to the sticky track too well and carried the front wheels for what seemed like nearly the entire quarter mile. But even so he hit a stunning 8.29s at 177 mph to Roz's slower but earlier 8.4s, 157 mph.

With only the two Alteredds of Rodgers and Elson around they ran each other with Elson taking the first run, 9.2s to 9.4s, for the Ford and Rodgers the second with a 9.2s when Elson failed to make it in time for the race. In the final both had trouble so it was left as a draw!

Dick Sharpe won Senior in the absence of Page's car and with the new injection fitted to his big Pontiac motor was not as quick as usual with a 12.5s over Bob Deichen's Daimler at an equally off-form 14.2s. Dick Fielding took Middle with an 11.3s over Skinner's 11.6s in his Jag with his fast Twin Cam powered MG replica.

With Herridge jumping from one

car to another he just had to make a magic number in one of them and with the dragster as unmanageable as ever it was in the Funny car that he finally became the third man to run a six in this country.

The capacity crowd waited all morning for the run and then watched as the car was finally readied in the start area. The traction was good and improved by two glorious burn-outs well up the strip. With no further trouble with the Lenco unit the car backed into the stage area and crept forward as only a Funny car can - in a series of car-shattering lurches as the throttle is stabbed, shaking the body from side to side. An explosion of sound came as the green came on and he was on the way, wheels in the air but still foot down as the car weaved slightly at the top end to a 'slow' 191 mph - but with a fantastic 6.82s time, breaking into the sixes with a vengeance.

This fired Dennis Priddle up and within minutes the bark of his 392 was heard as he readied his STP car for an assault on the record. Knocking over seven tenths off his best with a 7.19s he topped Herridge's speed with a 194 mph blast and everyone knew that the final was really going to be a race.

By five o'clock the strip was a frenzy of excitement as the two climbed into their cars. Herridge's was running first, then Priddle's, and both moved into the burn-out area together and screamed over the line laying down even more sticky rubber. When the smoke cleared they were both on the way back for a repeat performance. Then the preparation was over and it was time to run.

Dennis moved first but Allan was right with him and well in the air. From then on things happened too fast to follow. Priddle, too, found his front way up and the car drifting to the centre. Herridge was close to the fence by this time and as he got out of the slide he came close to Priddle who was running right on the centre line. He then drifted back towards his own fence and then from the start tyre smoke and heat waves from the straining engines made it hard to follow, but at no time did either of them back off for an instant. Then the win light came on in Dennis's lane - though both turned identical 7.71s times, his top end was faster at 187 mph to 168 mph. An amazing run that will live in the minds of all who saw it for a long, long time.

J.T.D.



Drag racing



BLASTING off the line at the Santa Pod Raceway, Dennis Priddle's 'Avenger' lifts at front wheel and twists a rear tyre almost beyond belief. Starting with a low pressure, the tyre will 'inflate itself' be centrifugal force and heat build-up until it reaches full pressure for the rest of the run.

The 6½-sec wonder

WATCH out, soccer — here comes drag racing! British sports fans are developing a taste for this speed spectacle that lasts as little as six and a half seconds per two-dragster race.

Allen Wigmore, chairman of the National Drag Racing Club, reckons the sport will soon be demanding major attention.

"It came over here from America about four years ago and since then it has been growing in popularity," he said.

"In those days a good turnout for a meeting was 5,000; now we attract 30,000.

"That's more than usually go along to a Grand Prix circuit meeting."

There is only one permanent drag strip in Britain—at Santa Pod, Wellingborough.

But Silverstone, Snetterton and Blackbushe — famous for conventional motor

racing—have semi-permanent strips where regular meetings are held. Rigorous safety rules make what looks a death-dicing spectacular a relatively safe sport.

"Our only major worry is fire," Allen Wigmore said. "With our kind of fuel an engine could blow itself to bits at speed and that can mean big trouble."

Despite top prices of around £30,000 for a good dragster and fuel at £7 a gallon, the sport is the cheapest form of motor racing.

"You don't have to pay thousands for your machine, though," Wigmore said.

"You could turn up with your ordinary road car, pay the appropriate fees, get a special licence and you're ready to drag."

Seven pounds in entry and membership fees plus the price of a crash helmet is enough to get you on the starting grid.

NDRC DRAGS '74 NDRC

5th ROUND CASTROL-RAC NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP

Sunday JUNE 2nd LONG MARSTON

Nr. Stratford-on-Avon. Gates open 9 a.m., racing till 6 p.m.
Grandstand, refreshments, bar—admission includes pits and parking

CHILDREN UNDER 12 ADMITTED FREE!



- EUROPE'S No.1
- DRAG RACE
- HERE AGAIN

JUNE 15 & 16th SILVERSTONE

INTERNATIONAL DRIVERS FROM SWEDEN,
GERMANY, U.S.A. and U.K.

Bjorn Anderson (Sw), Dennis Priddle (UK), Willy Hersterman (Germany), Jim Eury (USA), The Stones (UK), Clive Skilton (UK), John Anderson (Sw), Ed Shaver (USA), Fredrych Kruk (G), Roz

Prior (UK), Rowland Pratt (UK), Gunne Backe (Sw), Kevin Pilling (UK), Anders Lantz (Sw), Garey Goggin (UK), and many, many more top line contenders, too many to mention!

ADMISSION £1 PER DAY. TWO DAY TICKET £1.50. CHILDREN 20p PER DAY. WEEKEND CAMPING FACILITIES AVAILABLE.

SEE ALL ACTION INTERNATIONAL DRAG RACING AT EUROPE'S MOST FAMOUS TRACK

Saturday qualifying 11-5. Sun racing, noon-6. Comb early for stand seats.

