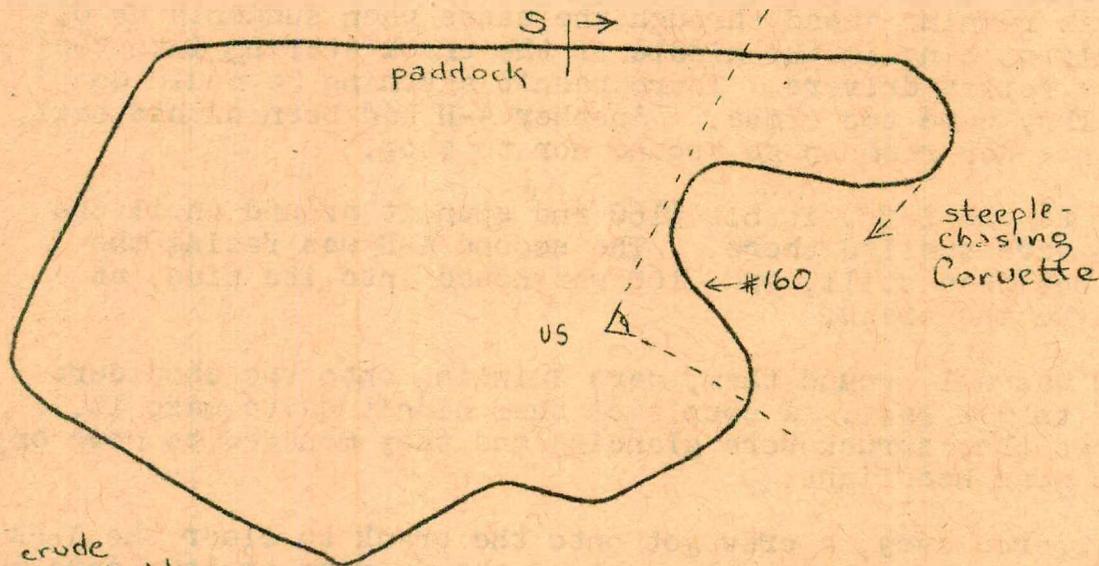


BAD
DAY
AT
LIME
ROCK

BAD DAY at LIME ROCK

It wasn't really a bad day -- not for most of us. Only for a few people, like John Meyers whose Special blew up during practice, and like Gordon Grimmett whose... but let me start at the beginning.

The gang of us: Kiki and Dick Greenhaus, Aaron Rennert, Ray Sullivan and Lee Hoffman, have been working as technical inspectors at SCCA races in this region. On 17 October we (minus Aaron, who had to work that day) went up to Lime Rock, Conn, for the one-day Regional Championship races. Lime Rock is a lovely track, situated smack in the middle of some magnificent scenery. It's a short, hilly track, 1.53 miles long, and it is shaped roughly like so:



A crude
and probably
somewhat
inaccurate
diagram

After we finished with tech inspection, we went up a hill to a vantage point overlooking the esses. From this spot we could see a goodly portion of the track (as indicated in the diagram). We settled down there with an assortment of cameras and stop-watches, to await the first race of the day.

Lime Rock (2)

GOING COOPERS:

The first race had the GTs and the Formula 3s running together. As they came off the grid, Walt Luftman's Ferrari took the lead. But before long Jas. Hayne's speedy Cooper had passed him. The Cooper was roaring along, singing loudly and happily, and really covering track. If my memory serves (no guarantee) it made the best lap time of the day.

By the end of the 15 laps, Mr Luftman was third to a pair of Coopers, and Mr Haynes was trying hard to lap him. Had it been a longer race he might well have done it.

THE GORDON GRIMMETT EFFECT:

The second race of the day got started with a bang. There was a grid full of MGAs and Austin-Healeys, about two dozen altogether. The green went down and they started fast and furious. Into the turns they roared, in a pack. The A-H #160, driven by Gordon Grimmett, was running ahead through the esses when suddenly Mr G. found himself sitting in the middle of the track staring into the faces of his fellow drivers. There wasn't anything he could do about it. They were too close. Another A-H had been on his tail, and it had neither room to go around nor to stop.

Swinging to the left, it hit #160 and spun it around until the two of them were stalled there. The second A-H was facing the right way, but dead still, and #160 was nosed into its side, at a right angle to the track.

The pack was all around them, cars swinging onto the shoulders of the road to get past. A couple of them didn't quite make it, but the blows they struck were glancing and they managed to move on, one of them sans headlight.

As they roared away, a crew got onto the track to clear the A-Hs. The yellows went up, warning the rest of the drivers to take care in the esses. The driver of the second A-H was able to get out, and help push his car off the track. An ambulance came for Mr Grimmett and after that, his car was moved.

We were advised by the PA system that he wasn't hurt, only badly shaken. When I checked this with some of the people in the paddock later, it was confirmed.

Nobody else piled up on that stretch, but some of them came pretty close to it. The flag went up indicating oil on the track, and at two points in the esses, cars were spinning and weaving throughout this race. Several drivers managed to get good looks at the track they'd just covered before moving on. From where I was sitting I could see some of the drivers clearly, their hands busy on the steering wheels as their cars moved in undesired directions.

Lime Rock (3)

WE MISSED YOU, JOE DANIELS:

The next race was the F and G Production cars and the H Modifieds, and was notable in that one of the HMs, a DELTA, wasn't able to start, but finally got going about six laps late, and took second in class because all but one of his competitors had returned to the pits for various reasons. It's a shame the Danielini wasn't racing that day.

THE CHARLIE GIBSON ROLL BAR:

Race four was the HPs and the IPs, with a pack of A-H Sprites included. I was really pleased to see that one of them was #58, driven by Charles Gibson of Cambridge, Mass. At the races at Bridgehampton, I'd seen this small machine go. It had shown itself beautifully in the Handicap Race, and I'd developed a fondness for the happy little car, and an admiration for the driver who could make it roll so readily past all of its fellow Sprites. Gibson had taken the checkered in that Handicap Race.

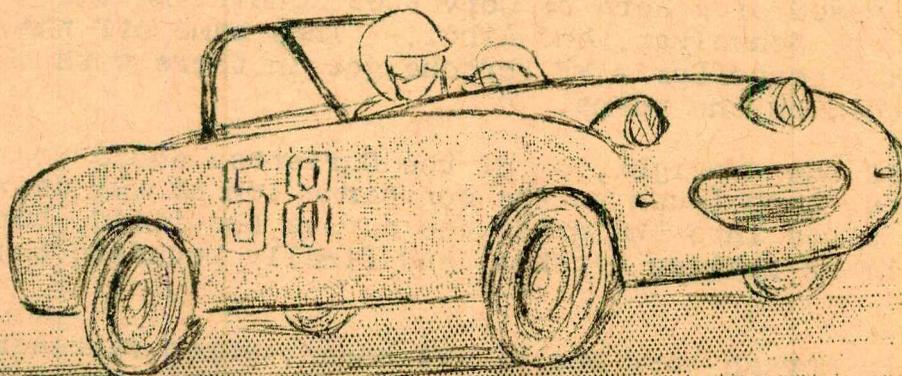
Here at Lime Rock, I was delighted to see Gibson move #58 into fourth place, leaving the rest of the Sprites to their private battle aft. And I rooted for him as he fought it out with the number three car, taking his lead in the esses and hanging onto it.

I had the stopwatch on him when he disappeared into the back stretch. He was going hard for second place, and I wished him luck. I watched the straight as the number one car appeared. Then the second car... I was ready to read lap time on the Sprite. But it never returned.

Bad luck, I thought, but I didn't know then how bad. I figured some mechanical failure had sent #58 back into the pits.

The PA announcer missed him, too. He asked what had become of the Sprite. Later he told us that it was out of the race and that Mr Gibson was "alright". Despite the ominous sound of this, he failed to give us any further details.

Later, in the paddock, I saw #58 and found out what had happened.



Line Rock (4)

On that turn into the straight, which is a rough one, the Sprite had encountered difficulties. It had, as they say, gotten bent a little when a wheel tore loose and the car rolled.

Since racing sports cars occasionally decide to sun their bellies at most inopportune times, the SCCA requires them to have roll bars. But since some drivers seem to be less concerned with the unity of their necks than others, the construction standards for these vary from region to region, and car to car. Sometimes a driver, operating on the theory that (a) a roll bar adds too much weight, and (b) he isn't going to flip his car anyway so what's he need a roll bar for? -- will provide himself with the least possible bar, and then argue with the safety inspector who doesn't like it.

Mr Gibson was not one of these drivers. His roll bar would, I'm sure, have pleased any safety inspector around. It was large and sturdy, running the width of the cockpit, and well-braced. It had been built to do its job.

And it had been called upon to do its job. Now it was deeply scratched and twisted slightly out of shape. But it had held up when the Sprite rolled. The rest of the little car looked like so much scrap metal. The bonnet was crumpled and deeply rasped. All of the glass was gone, except for a few shards gripped in their framing. The smiling grille was twisted out of shape and the headlights were like empty eye sockets.

I felt very sad, looking at it there in the paddock. Mr Gibson had himself one going little Sprite, and it is an unhappy thing to see a well-functioning piece of machinery racked up.

Although the announcer had said that Mr Gibson had come through "alright", I inquired around the paddock for more information. I was told that it was true, that Mr Gibson had not been injured.

Roll bars, crash helmets, and safety belts -- they're all required by SCCA, and all for good reason.

PASS THAT BLOCK:

Race five was the Production cars, classes B, C, E and F. Class B was composed of a herd of Corvettes, including the machines piloted by Tinker, Schweizer, and Aibel. They came off the grid fast, but Frank Wagenhoffer's FP Porsche got in there with them and began pushing them on the turns.

Coming off the straight, one of the Corvettes chose to ignore the exit from the loop (much to the consternation of the driver, I suspect) and vaulted into the grass and across the field, hurdle-jumping a couple of shallow ditches, and finally bounding back onto the track.

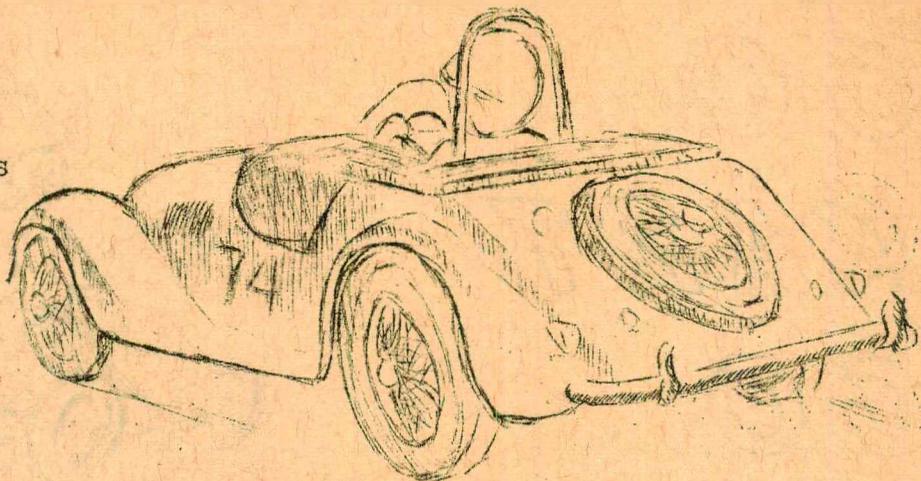
An elderly Morgan lost one of its bonnet-strap fasteners and pulled out to remove the strap altogether. From then on it had

Lime Rock (5)

difficulties on the straight of way, with the wind in its bonnet.

Another Morgan spun out in the esses and left the race.

Mr Wagenhoffer was having his troubles too. Not with his own car, but with the others. When he'd come into the turns where his Porsche would have its advantage, he'd find himself blocked by the less cornerable machines. But as the pack spread out, he got the room he needed and rolled on to win the race.



ADDITIONS AND SUBTRACTIONS:

The sixth race of the day saw a goodly number of entries scratched. John Meyer's Special was out. Walt Luftman's Ferrari and Dolph Vilardi's ASARDO were among the other cars that pulled out.

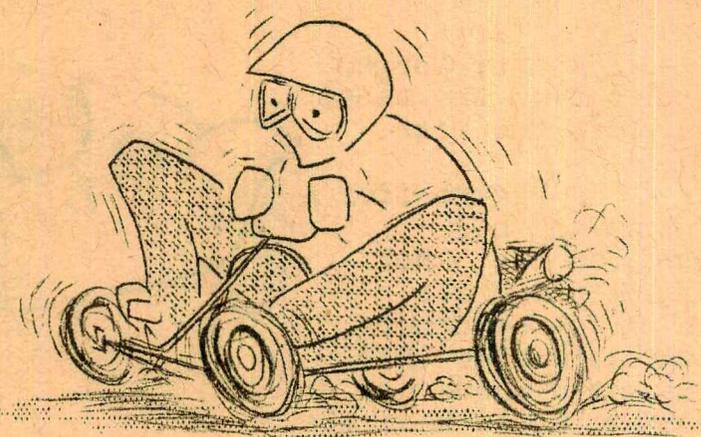
Among the cars that came on as late entries was John Fitch's Cooper-Monaco. This is a fast car, and Mr Fitch is a fast driver who knows the track at Lime Rock. It wasn't a surprise when he took the checkered flag.

FAREWELL:

Back in the paddock, we collected our plaques and loaded our gear into the Volkswagon. I paused to bid a sad goodbye to the Sprite #58. And then we left for home.

This was our last sports car race of the season. But by no means our last race of the season, for we had discovered go karts...

GO KART GO



The Formula 3s and the Formula Juniors both claim to be the "poor man's motor racing", but neither of these can compare in economy with go karts. You can buy an unwelded kart kit, with the wheels, tires, engine and so forth, all included, for around \$100, or so. For about \$50 more you can get your kart complete, with such extras as upholstery. And for about \$250 you can have a really good racing machine.

After that the Law of Diminishing Returns may set in. Unlike the hot rodder, the karter may find that he can't buy his way to the hardware.

If you're handy with tools and have a few bits and pieces of small motorcycles or motor scooters or the like lying around your house, you may find that you can assemble a winning machine for a few bucks. Your whole kart may well cost you less than one racing weekend of operating your Formula 3 car. Besides, it's easier to load a go kart onto the roof rack of a Volkswagon than it is to get a Cooper up there.

So we cast aside all thoughts of picking up an unwelded Maserati kit cheap, and settled upon Kart Racing as the sport for us.

We started sending for literature from the various kart manufacturers, and dropped by the California Speed and Sport Shop (which is in New Jersey). There we tried on some karts for size, studied their construction, and found out about the American Kart Association.

We contacted the secretary of the AKA, Irene Martin, and learned that this group was holding races every Sunday at the Westbury Drive-In Theater, on Long Island. So on the following Sunday (6 Sept) we piled into the VW and off we went to Westbury.

We got there early enough to browse around and admire the karts. They were running the time trails on the track, and in the pits various karts were being revved up.

These little machines with their two-stroke engines make a wonderful lot of noise. Dick perked an ear to the din and picked out the roar of a particular machine. This kart, he told us, would warrent watching. It was a light-blue Joy Kart with a Clinton E-65 engine.

I settled myself by the track to watch the time trails and note the drivers. One in partiucular caught my attention. He handled his kart well, taking fast and intelligent lines through his turns. On comparing notes with Dick I realized that he was driving the aforementioned light-blue Joy Kart.

We watched this gentleman roar through his first race of the day well in front of the field. And after the race, Dick inquired about him. We learned that he was Richard Watson, and that he had been racing sports cars in the past.

Mr Watson found out that he'd been asking about him and dropped over to learn why. We talked a bit and he told us that he'd bought himself a competition Corvette just before he discovered karting. Since then the Corvette had been sitt ng in the garage, while he spent his Sunday afternoons in the kart races. Running flat out in the kart, he explained, felt like hitting 150 mph in a sports car. Karting had the kick of big car racing at about one-twentieth the cost.

We cheered Mr Watson as he rolled to victory in the main event of the day.

The following weekend we packed out to Westbury again, and again

Go Kart Go (3)

cheered Mr Watson to victory.

We missed the following weekend because of the sports car races at Lime Rock on Saturday, but the kart race of 25 October was to be the big event of the season, and that we didn't want to miss.

That Sunday found us at Westbury not only as interested spectators, but as representatives of Magnum Automotive Magazines. Magnum, planning to use material about karting regularly in their new publication, CARS, and also to put out a one-shot on the subject, wanted photos and articles. The race was the big Regional event, and seemed a likely place to gather material.

Ray and Aaron brought full photographic equipment with them -- more than they take to the auto races -- in order to get a thorough coverage.

We especially wanted some pictures of Lou Caruso's Special. Mr Caruso is not only president of AKA, but also is manufacturer of Joy-Karts, which are among the most popular karts in this region. His special is a deluxe Joy Kart with a live rear axle, hydraulic drum brakes, and a very hot engine. But the Special was on display at an automotive show that weekend, so we didn't get our photos of it.

We wandered on, looking at and photographing many of the karts that had turned out.

There was some hairy looking machinery in the pits -- E 65 powered karts, a small motorcycle engined custom, some live rear axle beasts (which aren't common among Class A karts at all) and such. It looked like Mr Watson would have some worthy competition this day.

We were rooting for Watson. But karts are temperamental machines. Even a going kart like his can have its off-days. And with a pit full of machinery like this... We wished him luck.

In his first race, Mr Watson was running in number one position as he hit his last lap and he held it -- until he was within feet of the flagman. Then a sudden burst of speed put one of the live-rear axle machines ahead of him by inches, just as the flag came down.

It is practically impossible for me to give a detailed account of the races at Westbury. The fact that there is no program of drivers and machines available limits me muchly. When they're going, it's easy to confuse two similarly painted karts with similarly clothed drivers. And I know only a few of the drivers by name. Lacking identification, such as a numbered list of entrants with the makes of their machines, one has little go by in recording and recounting a race.

The big event of the day was coming up. It would be forty laps and the starting grid was full. There'd be karts dropping out because of mechanical failure during the race. We hoped Watson's would not be one of them.

Go Kart Go (4)

He'd drawn 15th position on the grid, but in a race this long starting position isn't very important -- unless you make your move wrong and pile up going through the pack.

Once the flag went down, Watson began moving deftly through the field. It became obvious that in karting as in any form of motor racing, driving skill counts for a lot.

The machinery on the track was really going. There was trouble on the fast turn. A couple of karts piled up. The field was thinning. A kart threw its chain in front of us and had to be carried off the track. Another kart's gas tank came loose, and the driver pulled out, refastened it, and went back in again. All the while, Mr Watson moved steadily ahead.

I wasn't the only one who lost track of the laps. But I was assured that Mr Watson lapped most, if not all, of the field. His kart was performing beautifully, and he was handling it beautifully.

A stalled kart on the fast turn was blocking traffic and sending the racing machines far out of their way. Mr Watson's line through this mess was so well chosen that it brought a round of applause from a group of spectators.

He won.

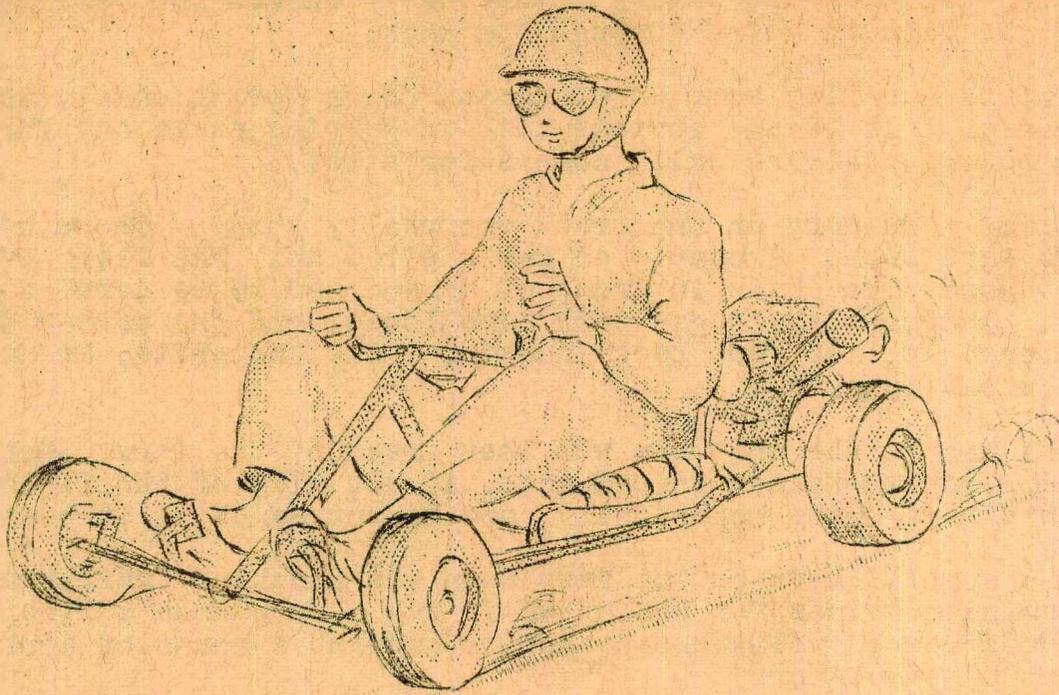
This had been a fast and exciting race, as enjoyable to watch as any sports car race I've attended. The karts are small, somewhat conical machines, but they are as cantankerous and unpredictable as racing cars, if not moreso. They're shiftless creatures that, running flat out, couldn't catch the family sedan at cruising speed, and they're simple enough to be operated by kids. (The minimum age in the children's racing classes at AKA is around 5 or 6 years.)

But they are racing motor vehicles and although they don't threaten the lives of their drivers at regular intervals, they can pile up and dump them on the ground. In some ways karting is an abridged version of sports car racing: in other ways it is a sport unto itself. And, as Mr Watson has so ably demonstrated, it is a sport wherein driving skill can be a vital factor in bringing home the hardware.

Oh, yes, our first kart should be completed and on the track within a couple of weeks -- and the construction of the second kart well under way. (Our third kart is still on the drawing board.)

---Lee Hoffman
30 October 59





BAD DAY AT LIME ROCK is a one-shot amateur publication, produced in a limited quantity for private circulation. It is published for Ger Steward, for the RSV Racing Team, for a few special friends, and for any other persons who might be interested. It is offered at no charge to anyone who writes and asks for it -- so long as the supply holds out. Apologies are offered for the inferior mimeography this time. The mimeo, while not a racing motor vehicle, can be pretty cantankerous and unpredictable at times itself.

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