

# Hallett Pulls Off The Champagne Suck

By Pat Bentley

The First and Second Annual Showroom Stock Champagne Suck was a hoot! Toly Arutunoff, founder of Hallett Motor Racing Circuit, brewed the darndest batch of road racing, buffoonery ad-hoc rules, ad-hoc rules bending, juicing and hangovers imaginable. So much so...a fella never knew whether cummerbunds and studs, or jeans and boots were the uniform of the day.

Obviously, showroom stock cars were the mainstay of the event. Close attention was paid to the "stock" facet. Conversely little was paid to a car's vintage ('68 was a good year for BMW 1600 Sedans). The race started at 11:45p.m. New Year's Eve and ended in 1979, a little after midnight, January first. The unexpected was to prove normal; enjoying one's self was directly proportionate to how much you liked road racing, champagne, the company of other car people and/or oblique craziness.

Driver eligibility required flashing some sort of appropriate competition experience and license, bribing the stewards, or any other cheap sham which just might get you on the track. Drivers were "not responsible for the conduct of their crews; and were just barely responsible for themselves," to quote the entry blank. Alterations to the schedule could be made by those in authority on the briefest of notice and flimsiest of motives. Those "in charge" were, in fact, dragged forcibly from the Stoneleigh "P" Bar and Grill in Dallas for the occasion. Through

racing gear (helmet, Nomex underwear, etc.) and then re-assembling it on one of the sweet young things, constituted qualifying. Not unexpectedly, the crowd's favorites were those speed merchants who stripped to their skivvies. Qualifying will never again be the same—neither will Fruit-of-the-Loom. Toly himself was required by the race committee to attire one of the ladies in his tux and ascot. It was a fitting penalty for missing Saturday's practice.

In the entry form, track manager, Marty Marina had zelched any sun-belt delusions by stipulating: no studded tires would be allowed. Back in October when this madness was being planned, that restraint sounded a little bit, well, it sounded...dumb. Wrong! Sunday evening it was eight degrees with 25mph winds and the landscape was covered with three inches of white stuff. The hot setup was snow tires and an extra layer of Nomex longjohns. With a wind chill factor of around minus 25 degrees, it was apparent most of the corner workers must be from Alaska the way they handled the cold.

Five minutes before the race started, a red flare streaked across the Oklahoma sky. Right on schedule, the green starting flare set off a volley of snickers, guffaws, and oh-my-gods. A herd of Saabs, Opels, Hondas, Monzas, et al roared (would you believe skated) off toward corner one. Truth-to-tell, the fastest at undressing weren't necessarily the quickest away. No one could jump the standing start since the entire field spun their tires for



Dave Lake

This, believe it or not, is qualifying for the SS Champagne Suck. We, too, find it hard to believe.

fourth was Ken Boldt (Fiat); fifth, B.J. Greber (Opel); sixth, Sepp Grinbold (BMW); and seventh, Tim (no snow tires) Allison (Monza).

Trophy presentation was in the Coyote Club, the track's private club. Grand Marshal William Jeanes (he was authorized to perform marriages which were valid for the duration of the event) did the honors for the ceremony. The three lovelies from qualifying in even smaller bikinis were led to a double bed brought in since the water bed, which was originally planned, had frozen. Jeanes admonished

the victors before they mounted winner's square, "no whips and no mayonnaise!" First place trophy was a large pink satin pig. Farnam and Robinson blushed a lot. Sullivan deferred to Jeanes, who didn't blush. Gebhardt said something about being easy and leaped in.

As of this reading: there are an awful lot of hangovers, drivers are paying homage to the exuberant corner workers, manager Marina is mumbling something about a convent, and Toly is working up an even more unorthodox way to qualify for the next Annual Champagne Suck.



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Danny Sullivan finished second in the Hallett Saab Sonnett: three inches of snow and ice made practice and the race, ah, different. The magic of free drinks, the Green Valley Racing Association rose (more like buzzards than the Phoenix) to again spread mediocrity to road courses everywhere.

Every proper race requires qualifying, doesn't it? Saturday evening the drivers did just that at Tulsa's Hilton Inn. Yep, at the Hilton. Three gals, all cute and lovely of limb, were dressed in 10 mil thin swimming suits, ready and quasi-willing mannequins. To establish a starting grid, someone must be judged fastest. Right? The most important point was: fastest at what? To Toly's somewhat suspect way of thinking, a driver, stripping out of his

five seconds before the first car inched away. Danny Sullivan, of Formula 2 and Formula Atlantic fame, was the fastest qualifier and the first to move; but Alf Gebhardt got the best start and soon took the lead. Turn One resembled an entire college fraternity trying to squeeze into a phone booth.

First time past the start/finish, Alf Gebhardt's BMW 2002 was in the lead followed by the Sullivan Saab. These two had a real goat it until push came to shove with Sullivan dropping a couple of positions. With Alf's Bimmer firmly in the lead, attention shifted to the car which had been gridded last. John "never-could-dress-fast" Farnam was going through the field like Harvey Martin past an offensive line. In a handful of laps he was past Gebhardt and stretching out a 12-second lead. Then...heresy, John came in for a driver change. Both spectators let out a sigh. Even though a talented Gary Robinson was only 12 seconds getting into the driver's seat, the Honda wasn't about to win now.

With two laps to go, Robinson was indeed gaining on Gebhardt's bumper and then it happened: the BMW spun at corner six. Both the Honda and the Saab got by and stayed there to the checkered flag. In

## An AAGT Pinto



Tom Ross' Team Hoss Racing has an All American GT Pinto set up to take a shot at the AAGT title. Although the car is just on its way into the paint shop now, it will be testing at West Palm Beach and Daytona well before its entry in the Daytona 24-hour.

Ross is hoping to campaign the full IMSA season in '79.

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