

Joe Scalzo's

City of Speed and elsewhere

Candle

A long-forgotten style was resurrected in 1994. Burn-the-candle-at-both-ends racing, a



mode of adventure characterized by a racing driver competing so frequently and fiercely that his endurance exceeds belief, made a return over the Memorial Day weekend.

The candle-burner was the late John Andretti. Having just spent 490 hard miles trapped inside a neurotic Lola in the Indy 500 – and once running as high as third – hyperactive John drew a deep breath and dashed aboard a waiting helicopter. It transported him to the airport and a private jet along with another chopper carried him

to NASCAR's longest race, the World 600 at Charlotte, Less fit than its driver, Andretti's ride traveled just 330 miles before sawing its crank. So what was the big deal? Making it sound like a complaint - as if he were seeking a third marathon to fill out his day -John, tingling with unspent adrenaline, had snapped, "I'm not tired at all!"



Not even the great A.J. Foyt at his burn-the-candle-at-both-ends streak of half a century ago could have said it better. A celebrated string of eight flat - out races in barely 20 days, all in September of 1963, anointed A.J, racing's candle-burner supreme.

Three different dirt track races on two different tracks, beginning on the Du Quoin mile, started the string. The Illinois triple-header opened with a sprint car free-for-all -- howling Meyer-Drake and banshee short-stroke Chevy V8s. Racing his own sprinter. A.J. demoralized, hosed down everybody, and won with minimal effort.

The next day was a stock car conflict of 100 miles, factory Dodge 426-inch hemi-heads against factory Ford 429-inch rooster-backs. Foyt had recently resigned from Dodge to join Ford. But during warm-ups a careening Pontiac collided with him; in time trials his Ford

lacked the horsepower to qualify faster than ninth; and then, in the race, Foyt went spinning out early, allowing his old Dodge team to finish first and second.

Following a night's rest, Foyt was scheduled to race his earth-moving Indy car. Only he didn't fool with sleep at all. He caught air transport into Kansas City, where his stooges had hauled his refurbished sprinter to a 15-mile short track blast around Lakeside Speedway.



The great geriatric Don Branson sent over an air raid in an old Meyer-Drake that blued Bobby Marshman's elbow, reddened Roger McCluskey's nose and helped catch Herk Hurtubise's car aflame. Foyt finished second.

Everybody was back at Du Quoin by dawn. Time for 100 miles in Indy cars. It was Foyt vs. his nemesis Roger Ward, and Ward got annihilated.

Four days, four races, two wins. More Foyt candle-burning occurred at a weeknight meet on the Indiana State Fairgrounds where Foyt was back rampaging in his Ford stocker, racking misery on his former Dodges. The Ford still wasn't right – this time it wore out the brakes – but A.J. won anyway.

Burn that candle! The following Sunday, Foyt was in Pennsylvania for his sixth start in eight days, a stock journey of 300 pleasant miles among the deadly hummocks of Langhorne.

Leading at 86 miles, Foyt's rooster - back was taken out in yet another collision. Desperate to resume the campaign in anything available, he spotted the Dodge hemi of a used-car salesman named Honest John meandering in 14th position. Mongering his way into it cockpit by throwing Honest John out of there, Foyt demonstrated why he was A.J. Foyt.

Eight miles behind, he recovered two of them, clocked the fastest average of the race, and afterward was inconsolable about only finishing third.

Next he got blown off by a revitalized Ward back at the Indianapolis Fairgrounds in the Hoosier Hundred. But just six days later Foyt was in New Jersey dominating the Indy cars all over again on Trenton's paving.



Only then did the great one rest from his 20 days on candle-burning.

Mario Andretti, too, used to play the candle-burning game pretty well. On the same Labor Day weekend when

A.J. was taking no prisoners in Illinois and Missouri, Mario was setting his own records for candle-burning with a buzzbomb midget in Pennsylvania and New Jersey by winning three American Racing Drivers Club features on three different tracks on the same day. Five years later, in 1968, Mario's candle-burning became an international issue. Just beginning to get his toes wet at Formula 1, he arrived from out of nowhere at Monza for the opening of practice for the Italian Grand Prix. That was on Wednesday. He practiced on Thursday, broke the track record qualifying on Friday, and flew back to U.S. early Saturday morning in time to finish second (to Foyt!) in the afternoon's Hoosier Hundred. Still burning the candle, Mario employed a wild series of commercial, private, and helicopter flights to be back in Monza in time for the Italian GP.

The ending was sad. An overwrought Socialist of the Italian parliament got Mario disqualified from starting at Monza, claiming that nobody could travel and race so much without rest. Obviously he'd never heard of candle-burning.

A.J. was John Andretti's godfather, Mario his uncle. Heredity?

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