

Joe Scalzo's

City of Speed and elsewhere

EIGHT-BALL

No ride-buyers, control-freak sanctioning bodies, public-relations doctors of spin, corporate sponsors, or other up-to-date aberration invitations to this Hooligan, Jack.

Only rowdy roundy-rounders with bad nicknames and racing Eight-Ball monster-mobiles did.

Flog the memory button and beat a time retreat of better than half a century. It's the Memorial Day weekend of 1958, and we're out on the burning edge of southern California's desert, near Los Angeles, at dear old Riverside International Raceway, where a gigantic pack of Eight-Ball machines and men are gearing up for a 500-mile-long Hooligan road-race.



And spending six slogging hours going up, down, and over RIR's three tormenting miles of kinks, wiggles, and switchbacks, isn't going to be a snooze for the likes of Nick "Tiger" Valenta, Ron "Full Race" Cummings, Allen "Knothead" Heath, and Danny "Termite" Jones – honking sprint car daredevils all. Their thing, usually, is steering hard-left for ten – not 500 –

nerved-up miles. To mitigate their drudgery, this RIR Hooligan is being conducted circle-track style, or counter-clockwise.

This is sadistic, although it's intended to be helpful. It means that Tiger, Full Race, Knothead, Termite & Friends will be humping their Eight-Balls downhill into RIR's

most diabolical real estate – the serpentine, mile-long esses – and doing it for 162 tormenting laps.

Plus, for an epilogue, they'll be forced into the fun of making their Eight-Balls take 162 plunges off turn one's fast lip.

The Hooligan's starting field is over-subscribed, nearly 50 Eight-Balls strong. Many are real cutie-pies. "The Purple People Eater," a mastodon Dodge, or maybe it's a De Soto, is making the greatest din, but also acquitting themselves handsomely are various oversized Caddys, Pontiacs, Mercs, and GMCs.

Quickly, though, it's apparent that a lordly and out-of-place thoroughbred named "The Clark Gable Special," is effortlessly making its way to the front; what with its classic Kurtis-Kraft coachwork, and its championship Meyer-Drake JoOffenhauser roar, the bright red Clark Gable Special is in a class of its own. And, out-of-place as it looks, it also seems familiar, and well it should. After all, the Gable once was a famous movie star, and just about the only redeeming memory from TO PLEASE A LADY, Clark Gable's and Barbara Stanwyck's huge, horrible, Hollywood melodrama about heartless Indy 500 racing drivers and femme news hawks.



The catalytic agent responsible for taking a sham movie racing car and converting it into the romping, raging, real thing is "Jiggler Joe" – Joe Gemsa -- a righteous mainstay of Los Angeles racing. In his role of walking, talking, encyclopedia of all dead and gone competition marques, including Staggervalue Frontenacs, Cragars, Gerbers, Hissos, four-port Rileys, Dreyers, and buzzbomb Offys, plus Jiggler Joe's favorites, and the source

of his nickname, Ford Model B Jigglers. He's also kept in touch with the whereabouts of almost every worthy vehicle that ever raced, including the Clark Gable Special.

Ever since LADY's 1950 release, the beauty has been at rest and in mothballs inside a warehouse on the Metro-Golden-Meyer lot. Accordingly, hocking himself to the hilt, Jiggler Joe acquires the Gable for RIR's giant Hooligan.

Eight years worth of hibernation notwithstanding, one afternoon's worth of rehabilitation back at the Gemsa compound restores all its old glory and muscle. Already having been a participant in too much of Hollywood's fraudulent Indy 500 racing, Joe the Jiggler believes the Gable deserves the opportunity to try and win Riverside, a legitimate 500-miler.

There's still another odd twist. One of Jiggler's oldest comrades-in-arms is Bud Rose, the same journeyman racing driver, stunt man, and handsome devil complete, with debonair-moustache, who'd doubled Clark Gable in LADY. Age 52, Rose quickly demonstrates that he's lost none of his old licks. Bud's got Tiger, Full Race, Knothead, and Termite covered!

Making his own unique contribution to the cause, Jiggler Joe, working on the sidelines, has erected an enormous scaffold for extra-fast gravity re-fueling. This, combined with Jiggler's cooking squad of tire-changers, guarantees the Clark Gable Special pit stops of Indy 500 quality.

Victory seems in the bag. The Clark Gable Special is leading. The majority of opponent Eight-Balls are dropping out with cases of mechanical hell. Jiggler Joe is envisioning a

\$10,000 winner's pay day.

But, suddenly, the Gable is getting caught and over-run by the most frightening Eight-Ball in the 500 – an old and mutant Kurtis-Kraft Indy roadster bellowing maniacally through eight different exhausts festooning out of 400-cubic-inches of Buick.

On the big Buick's pedal is a hard-case named Scotty Cain, who isn't sprint,

midget, or even taxi-cab talent at all. Instead, Scotty's a maverick man-handler and



roughneck refugee straight from one of the staples of L.A. racing culture called “Jalopy Derby,” which is high-lighted by Scotty and battalions of other belligerents in iron junks pounding on each other for the edification of Sunday afternoon TV.

Scotty and his big Buick hammer away at the tail of the Clark Gable for several laps; at last blowing past, he motors away, and it isn’t surprising, Scotty’s blaring Buick is blessed with a close-ratio and four-speed tranny, an appendage missing from all its opponent Hooligan Eight-Balls, as well as the Gable.

Things are getting hairy.

Deciding that playing head games with Scotty will provoke him either into blowing up the Buick or blowing his mind, Jiggler Joe, who is canny, chalks up messages to Bud Rose, who is equally canny, commanding Bud to: GET SCOTTY!

Result: Cain misses the line into the esses four laps in succession, then takes himself out by smearing the turn six railing.

Jiggler Joe Gemsa’s Clark Gable Special wins the Hooligan 500 in a cakewalk – seven laps and 20 miles ahead of the first Eight-Ball. But then MGM threatens to sue Joe’s socks off for using Gable’s name without permission. -JS