

Joe Scalzo's

City of Speed and elsewhere

No Relief

Nobody drove in relief of anyone at last Memorial Day's Indy 500. Although the rules apparently would still permit it, relief-driving no longer is a fashionable practice in this century because:

1) all drivers don't fit inside all cars.

2) sponsors demand a voice in who drives which cars.

3) Indy cars no longer put their drivers through the utter hell they did, say, back in 1953, during the 500's 37th running, which commenced under a sun so molten that half a dozen beefy drum majorettes from Purdue U needed to be carted off before anybody so much as commanded, *"Gentlemen, start your engines!"*

Whereupon the 33 gentlemen themselves started dropping.

With the 500 no more than 14 minutes old, three of its starting cars already were wilting in the 90-degree temps; a total of six got cooked within the first hour. Making a flaming refueling stop, Carl Scarborough became the initial driver casualty: tumbling



out of his scalding cockpit, he permitted Bob Scott to hop in.

Scott was the day's first relief driver. Chuck Stevenson, upon noticing Jerry Hoyt feebly tapping his helmet for relief, became the second. And when the heat started getting to Stevenson, Andy Linden volunteered to jump in to relieve him, only to have Hoyt's boiling motor succumb to

a heat stroke of its own.

By 250 miles, drivers were collapsing like insects. Freddie Agabashian, so enfeebled he scarcely could take a breath, ceded his oven to Paul Russo. Then Johnny Thomson spelled Spyder Webb, and Eddie Johnson took over for Jim Rathmann.



Refusing to travel a mile further after noticing mirages developing along the heat-rippling front straightaway, Rodger Ward bailed out, and Linden, already par-boiled, climbed in. And, almost simultaneously, Stevenson, still recovering from his misadventures in Hoyt's hot box, rejoined the heat horrors by subbing for a spent Tony Bettenhausen. Walt Faulkner, meanwhile, after completing 330

parched miles, decided he just couldn't take it anymore and invited Johnny Mantz into his cauldron.

And there was just no slack from El Sol, that even Good Samaritan Linden was susceptible to wasting temps became certain when the former slugger from the boxing ring managed barely 35 miles in Ward's stove, finally having to vacate and pay a visit to the infield infirmary.

Duke Dinsmore then took Linden's chair in Ward's firebox, followed by Ward himself, whose hallucinations had temporarily abated. But following all the effort and perspiration from Ward, Linden, Dinsmore, and then Ward all over again, the thankless hot hulk collapsed on the three of them.

The pits were busy. Physically fit drivers – fresh red meat for the grill – were getting herded up and forced to stand in 50-gallon drums of water; most drivers already were getting half-drowned while making pit stops, because mechanics were heaving buckets of cold water at them.

And the toll mounted! Sam Hanks stopped and fainted, and his fryer's new occupant was Duane Carter. Next the heat knocked out Thomson, who'd been sub-driving for Webb, and who gladly surrendered Webb's steam bath to Jackie Holmes.

Gene Hartley was the 500's final relief pilot. Although already black-and-blue from an earlier crash, he'd next stepped into the same volcano which had worn out Stevenson, who'd been subbing for Bettenhausen. And for 250 miles, Hartley proceeded to do a great job of staying in contention. His luck, however, was no better than Bettenhausen's or Stevenson's. The front axle snapped in two with only 10 laps left, causing Hartley to pound the wall for a second time.

Only a dozen of the original 33 starters were circulating at the finish – the boiling-over Brickyard had damn near emptied itself of cars – including Mantz, in Faulkner's cooker, running last, 60 miles behind.

Some 16 or 17 different relief drivers had done duty and only four asbestos asses hadn't required relief Jimmy Bryan, Jack McGrath, Art Cross and, naturally, the 500's runaway winner, the god Bill Vukovich, who'd been totally oblivious to the heat, and who, in addition to winning, delivered the cooking contest's only funny line: every time



he lapped another car, joked Vook, the sucker had somebody different racing it.

Linden was a hero to everyone but his doctors. His 500 had begun with a third-lap wreck and fire that gave him bruised ribs, burns in the second-degree; a hysterical wife; and a cot in the infield crash-house. Winning his

freedom by promising the medics that if they let him go he wouldn't try and rejoin the 500, Linden had violated this promise for the first time by doing a relief-driving job for Stevenson; then broke it a second time by spelling Ward.

Small wonder that upon getting hauled back to the infirmary for a third time, nurses and physicians alike were lined up for the privilege of treating Linden to a brutal lecturing, plus ripping him a new one.

Just like Linden, Stevenson had ended up piloting three different furnaces: his own, Hoyt's, and Bettenhausen's. But nobody else took such a battering as poor Hartley. First his assigned car had taken him slap into the wall; and then he'd received a second battering while stuck in the torture chamber of what was the Bettenhausen-Stevenson

vehicle; small wonder, then, that Harley shared with Linden the unwanted distinction of getting carried into the fracture center three times. Other unfortunates dragged there included Johnnie Parsons, Jimmy Daywalt, Ward, Bettenhausen, and Hoyt.

Twenty-five of the offending champ cars were tall, lean dirt-trackers; eight were streamlined roadsters. Each tortured its driver in a different way. Drivers of the dirt-trackers sat so high that they were inhaling air the temperature of the Sahara.

By comparison, with all that super-heated air accumulating in their ventless cockpits, the eight roadsters roasted their drivers without mercy. Thirty-two of the 33 starters were powered by 270-cubic inch Meyer-Drake Offenhausers, the strongest engines in the world ... even in 1953's heat, they refused to break down, although many drivers wished that they had. The temps getting thrown off by the 270's big, booming four cylinders (not to mention the Meyer-Drake's toxic fumes) helped bring on the hideous heat. Three dirt trackers broke, between them, nine drivers. They were the M. A. Walker, the Agajanian, and the Lubri-Loy car... all kilns. Not one of that terrible trio finished.

While Linden had been abed in the Speedway's hospital, being verbally skinned alive for breaking all the medical rules, he'd tried to explain, protesting, "But, Doc, you can't let your buddies down!" Brickyard combatants of Linden's era truly did consider each other buddies, giving a unique feel to the period.

And what later made the year's awards banquet grim – haunting – was that one of the buddies was missing. Scarborough's heart never recovered from the blast of freezing extinguisher coolant fired by a Speedway fireman, who'd only been trying to be helpful. Carl Scarborough's heart had frozen up. And nothing could get it beating again.-JS