

Texas College Drag Racing meet set for Saturday

By STEVE UECKERT

The Christmas tree lights up, tires smoke and exhausts thunder a loud report as two cars leave the starting line. One quarter of a mile later, this race is over and two more competitors repeat the ritual.

Saturday will be the running of the third Texas College Drag Racing Championship. The event is sponsored by the Intramural

Department of the University of Texas at Arlington in cooperation with intramural departments at universities and junior colleges across Texas.

Three years ago two UTA students presented the idea of college sponsored intramural drag racing, said UTA Intramural Director Jim Garrett.

"I remember telling them to come back the next day if they were really serious," said Garrett. "Well, the next day they were back in my office, eager as ever. I had to give it some thought."

Garrett's planning resulted in the 1972 championship in which 163 cars from throughout Texas gathered at Dallas International Motor Speedway.

This drag racing championship is the only collegiate sponsored drag racing event in the country, said Garrett.

The sport of drag racing stretches from Australia to Ger-

many; however, it is most popular in the U.S., according to Hot Rod Magazine.

Drag racing is two cars accelerating from a standing start with one trying to complete the quarter of a mile distance before the other.

Drag strips are laid out in a straight line as the competition does not involve any cornering. The course is one quarter of a mile long with a staging area behind the starting line and a shut down area past the finish line. At the end of the race portion of the strip is a series of timing lights referred to as "the traps." The automatic timer is actuated at the starting line when the starting lights are illuminated by the starter. The starting lights are vertically mounted on a pole on the starting line between the lanes and is called "the Christmas tree."

Last year's championship was held at the Dallas International Motor Speedway, but this year, it has been moved to Green Valley Race City near Fort Worth, said Garrett.

Garrett and Green Valley operator Bill Hielscher expects about 300 cars to be entered.

"Hielscher has been great in helping us organize this race," said Garrett. "For instance, to be sure that participants and spectators have access to gas, Bill has arranged for a station one half mile from the track to be open."

Green Valley is located four miles north of Loop 820 and Texas Highway 121 on F.M. 1938 (Davis Blvd.).

"Last year's entries represented 24 colleges and universities throughout the state and came as far away as Lubbock, El Paso, Houston and Beaumont.

"UTA entered the most cars (36), followed by Texas State Technical Institute in Waco with 18 and North Texas State with 16," said Garrett.

Among the semi-finalists in last year's races was an Aggie, Curt Dickinson. Driving a Volkswagon powered Karmann Ghia, Dickinson demonstrated that it doesn't take a super-car to be competitive.

"There are eight elapsed time brackets separating the cars into their classes to provide more even matching among the cars.

"The morning of the races is spent running the car in time

trials so that you can determine your 'dial in' time. If a car is dialed in at 12 seconds, then he cannot run any quicker than 12 or he will be disqualified. When two cars approach the starting line, their respective dial in times are set on the Christmas tree and the slower of the two receives the difference of the two times as a handicap start. This makes the race even and the drivers are racing more against themselves and the clock than the opponent," said Dickinson.

However, the winner is still the first one to reach the finish line, provided that he doesn't run

faster than his dial in time. "break out," said Dickinson. "There's a great deal of pressure involved," said Dickinson. "When your opponent has received a second handicap head start, you are tempted to push yourself and make up the difference too and you risk breaking out."

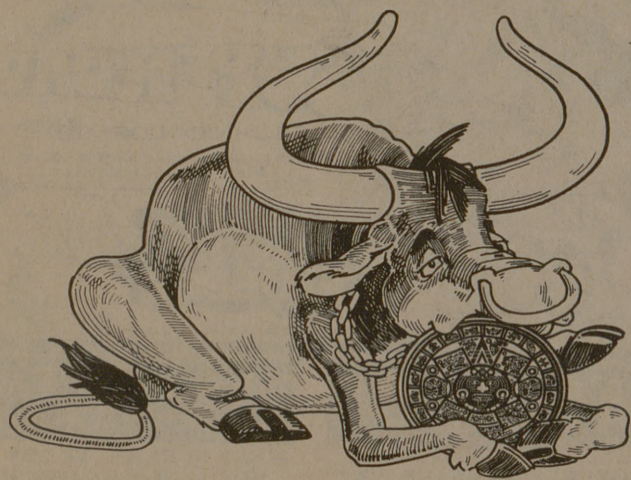
Dickinson applauded the race as being "really great. If you just want to try drag racing, you can. The people are all friendly and it only costs \$3.00 to run instead of the usual \$15."

Jim Nelson, also an Aggie, is competing for the third time this time at the championship. "My first year at the race, I ran a modified production Camelle and was bracketed with a really exotic racing machine," said Nelson. "In one race, I was paired-off with a Nitro-Methanol burning dragster and I had a 3 1/2 second handicap start. At the end of the strip, he bladed by me at about 190 miles per hour and then popped his drag chutes (a braking device) in my face, really psyching me out; however, he ran too quick and broke out," said Nelson. Nelson also said that "all of the racers there are true sportsmen."

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