

# Speedway overcomes adversity

By KYLE CREWS

What goes varoom and contributes over five million dollars annually to the Bryan-College Station economy?

Texas World Speedway, Inc. Located approximately six miles south of College Station on Highway 6, the Speedway is one of seven facilities of its type in the world and the only one in the Southwest.

"For every event held at this track, area businesses bring in about one million dollars over and above what they would make in a regular weekend," Mike Connor, vice president of Texas World Speedway, Inc., said. "This money filters down into the local economy by means of the added business that our fans give to the restaurants, service stations, motels and other businesses in the two towns."

Connor also said that the corporation that owns the speedway pays about \$25,000 a year in school taxes.

Five major events are held at the

facility each year. This year's season begins March 11 and lasts through November 12.

Pat Mann, executive vice president for the Bryan-College Station Chamber of Commerce, said that he agrees with Connor's estimate.

"Various crews come in several days prior to the races and by the time you figure in their food, gas, lodging and all their partying, I would say that one million dollars a race is a reasonable round figure," Mann said. "A race at the speedway has about the same economic impact on the communities as a home football game at Texas A&M."

He added that the local economy definitely suffered during the three years that the track was closed.

Originally built in 1969, at a cost of approximately seven million dollars, the race track was forced to close in the fall of 1973 due to financial problems.

Dallas businessman Tom Tierney was one of the original investors in

what was then known as Texas Speedway International. It was developed as a subsidiary of American Raceways, Inc.

"American Raceways was developing several other speedways across the nation and they tried to go too far to fast," Tierney said. "The result was 'robbing Peter to pay Paul.' We overspent, got rained out on the first major race and were consequently forced into bankruptcy."

He said the development was originally financed by selling shares of the project to various investors. This offering was made by means of a formal prospectus that was issued through the Texas Securities Board.

Connor said that Texas Speedway International's failure was due to a combination of factors.

"For a facility such as this to be successful, the people promoting it should become a part of the community," he said. "We have tried to do this — the present staff members own homes in Bryan and College Station and we try to become involved in community affairs. The original developers did not do this."

The 640-acre development was not used for racing from the fall of '73 to the fall '76.

The Willie Nelson Fourth of July Picnic was held there in 1974.

"We had to clear out a lot of weeds, rebuild some buildings in the infield and do some painting before we re-opened," Connor said. "But the track was still in good condition."

Richard C. Conole is the current president of the speedway. He is one of three part-owners of the facility, and is the only one that has other local business interests.

Texas World Speedway is the last automobile race track built in the world that is termed a "superspeedway." It is very similar to the race track in Indiana where the Indianapolis 500 is held. The tracks at these two speedways were designed with the emphasis on maximum speed for the race cars. This is accomplished by banking the track surface at various angles along the two miles of pavement.

The speedway's track is at a 22-degree angle around both curves and at two and 12 degrees along the

back and front straight, respectively.

"This is where the speed comes from," Connor said. "Because of the banking, the cars don't have to slow down as much around the curves. This also adds greatly to the safety of the drivers, in that it is much easier to stay on a banked track rather than a flat one."

Texas World Speedway is listed in the "Guinness Book of World Records" as the world's fastest speedway. It earned this distinction in October, 1973 when Mario Andretti was clocked at 181 mph during a 200-mile stock car race.

Connor said that there was one fatality at the speedway several years ago. This occurred when a driver was killed in a collision during a Sports Car Club of America race.

"We have insurance coverage for all major events," Connor said. "But we still require all drivers to sign a release which protects the Speedway in the event of an accident."

Auto racing is the largest non-gambling spectator sport in the United States and it draws more than 50 million fans annually. All other professional sports draw less than 40 million. College football draws 32 million and professional tennis attracts two million spectators a year.

Connor said that most people do

not realize that auto racing has been instrumental in bringing about desirable changes in the automobile industry. These include: seat belts, disc brakes and durable tires.

"The only reason Goodyear and Firestone are involved in racing is that it gives them a means for developing better tires," he said.

Major events at Texas World Speedway consist of competition among either stock cars or Indy cars. A stock car is a modified street machine and generally averages 160 to 170 mph for one lap around the track. Indy cars average 205 to 215 mph per lap.

Indy cars, who got their name from the Indianapolis 500, are small, open-wheeled cars, which do not use petroleum fuel. They run on nitro-methanol, a product made synthetically from various substances such as wood pulp or waste products.

All major events at the Speedway are sanctioned by the United States Auto Club. The organization serves as a go-between for speedway owners and race car drivers. The owners are assured that any driver belonging to the club has adequate driving experience, is physically fit and that his car meets specific requirements.

Similarly, drivers are assured that any speedway belonging to USAC meets rigid safety requirements, and that it is a credible event.

All major events sponsored by the U.S. Auto Club are point races. Drivers who compete in these gather various amounts of points depending on how they place in the race. Prize money for each race is allotted according to these points. The racer having the most points at the end of the season is also awarded an extra cash prize.

Participating speedways pay the club a sanctioning fee for each race that it sponsors.

The Aggieland 250, a national championship stock car race, will be held at the speedway on March 11 and 12. Expected entrants include A.J. Foyt, Bobby Allison, Silkevela, Bay Darnell, Paul Fellers and Ramo Scott.

Officials of the Adolph Coors Company have announced that they will sponsor the April 15 Indy race at the speedway. It will be a 200-mile race and will be telecast nationally by CBS Sports Spectacular. It will be blacked out in Texas.

On June 4 the speedway will host a 500-mile USAC national championship stock car event. The Texas Grand Prix will be held August 6 and will be followed by a 250-mile USAC national championship on November 12.

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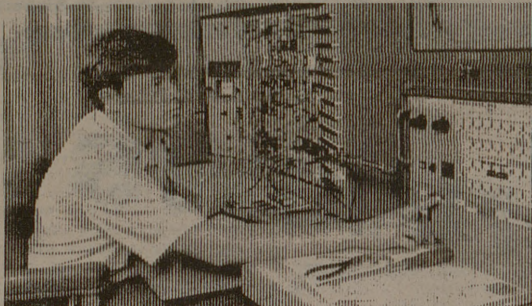
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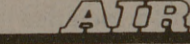
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