

# Texas Race of Champions

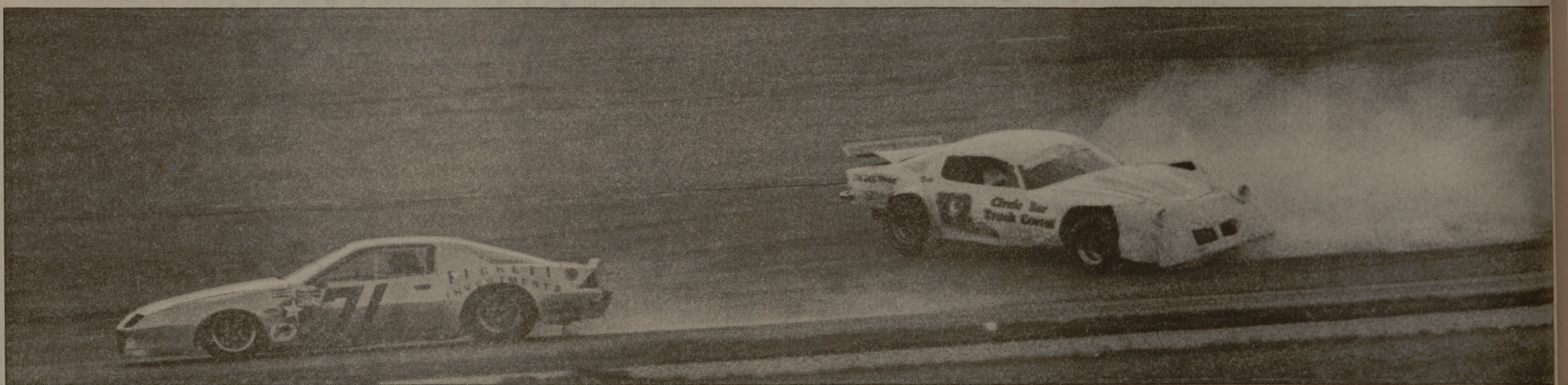


Photo by FRANK IRWIN

After running to the back of Ross Beedle's Camaro (71), Chet Fillip (72) loses control of his car on the high-banked oval at

Texas World Spedway during this past weekend's Texas Race of Champions. Most of the stock cars driven to the limit

Saturday were Trans Ams, Camaros, Firebirds and Corvettes. Freddy Fryar, from Beaumont, took first place and \$3,200.

## Wide World of Sports ain't for auto racing

By TONY CORNETT  
Sports Writer

Before last Sunday's Texas Race of Champions, I had never been to an auto race. But, thanks to ABC's Wide World of Sports, I knew that all auto racers grease back their hair, wear dark glasses and have big toothy grins. I thought all racers looked like Richard Petty. And, of course, they all hail from North Carolina.

I figured that the race would be a dull affair, but maybe there'd be a good spread of food and beverages in the press box. The only racer who had any kind of name recognition was Chet Fillip. Fillip actually raced at Indy a couple of times.

It's great going to any sporting event with a press pass, but I think the guy from the Houston Post said it best when I asked him where a press pass entitled us to go during the race.

"Anywhere," he responded. "You got that press card and you're the biggest bull in the woods."

As I expected, there was an abundance of food in the press box and, judging from the breaths of many of the crusty old race reporters, there was plenty of booze, too.

Where I screwed up was figuring that the race would be dull.

I cleared off a space by the window and sat down to see what auto racing was all about.

I don't care how many times you've seen great auto races on the Wide World of Sports. You just can't get the feel for the excitement of the track until you're there and have to hold your hands over your ears to drown out the deafening drone of 39 high performance engines whining at the start of the race.

I had the unusual foresight to take my binoculars. Since I just bought my first pair not too long

ago, I usually forget that I have them. Fortunately, I didn't. Texas World Speedway is a huge two-mile oval track with a road course thrown in. Something better than your own two eyes helps when you're straining to see who just ran their car up who's rear end.

OK, I was set. Things got started a little late, but apparently race times are like concert times — they tell you to be there at a certain time just so they can taunt you and keep you from darting off to the bathroom.

The starter said those immortal words about gentlemen and engines and the racers lurched forth.

After a couple of parade laps, the race was on. I had gradually moved to the edge of my chair. As the cars screamed by the starting line, I suddenly realized why auto racing enjoys the following that it does. It's just a downright exciting sport. It's an excitement that just isn't made for television.

And loud? Boy howdy! I mean to tell you it was loud. It wasn't too bad once the cars got spread around the track, but those first few laps made me wish that I'd listened to my photographer and brought some cotton wadding for my ears. Frank's a track veteran.

The race went pretty well, like you would expect. Where can 39 cars go on a track that basically goes in an oval?

I'll tell you where. Car No. 17 didn't even complete the parade laps. It had trouble making it out of the pits for the start. That dilapidated box of bolts followed the Corvette pace car off the track and into the pits, never to rear it's ugly hood in the race again.

Other drivers had trouble remembering that the course had turns in it and slid off the track when they got to the first turn.

After the first few revolutions, ev-

erybody seemed to have figured it out.

There was really no doubts as to who had the strongest car. Freddy Fryar, No. 46 and the eventual winner, was burning up the track and surged into the early lead. Fryar won the Texas Race of Champions back in 1980. He obviously knew what he was doing. It looked like he would lap the field several times at the rate he was going.

Then, the very thing that I had brought the binoculars for happened. I was watching the No. 72 car starting to make his move going into the first turn on the 19th lap and thinking to myself.

"Great galloping gallbladders," I thought. "That guy is going to run up the other guy's rear end."

And sure enough, Fillip, No. 72, hit No. 71 and promptly lost control of his car.

I shot out of my chair. I couldn't believe it. The guy (Fillip) who had raced at Indy had made a fool out of himself. He was the only guy who had a full page photo in the race program. With a \$3,500 first prize purse, Fillip really didn't need to risk everything with an "Indy style" drafting maneuver.

Meanwhile, Fryar had lost his lead to No. 96, but regained it in lap 22. But by this time car No. 11, driven by Leroy Farmer, had crept up from the 33rd position to take third and then second. By lap 28, the race was down to 20 cars.

Farmer and Fryar battled it out on every turn.

Finally, the white flag, signalling only one lap remaining, came out. It was going to be close finish.

Farmer and Fryer came out onto the oval and careened into the last turn. Fryar gunned it. Farmer stood no chance but gunned his too. It

went down to the finish line and the checkered flag. Fryar won by only a car length.

I was out of my seat once again. What a finish — the closest in the history of the Texas Race of Champions.

Freddy Fryar "The Beaumont Flyer" pulled into the winner's circle, accepted the required hug from the pretty gal and collected \$3,500 of the \$18,000 in total prize money.

In the press conference afterward, Fryar disclosed that he had intended to race in California instead of TWS, but when that race was cancelled he decided to drive at the Texas Race of Champions.

"We only decided last week that we were coming here," Fryar said. "We were supposed to go to California for a big race out there and for some reason it was cancelled."

And how about that close finish, Freddy?

"Leroy could have pinched me off (coming down the to the finish) if he'd wanted to," Fryar said, "but he drove a clean race. He gave me a line and let me come on."

There were some warm-up races held earlier in the day for other classes of cars.

In the George Pharis Chevrolet Showroom Stock Car Race, the winner was George Pharis in a Camaro. No kidding? Winning your own race?

All in all, it was a great day at the races. I'm a little dealer for the experience but I'll know better next time.

I think that George Pharis has the right idea. Next year, it'll be the Battalion Sports Department Unlimited Class Modified Nitro-Burning-On-Shuttle Bus Competition. Only the sports staff can enter. That way we'll win for sure.

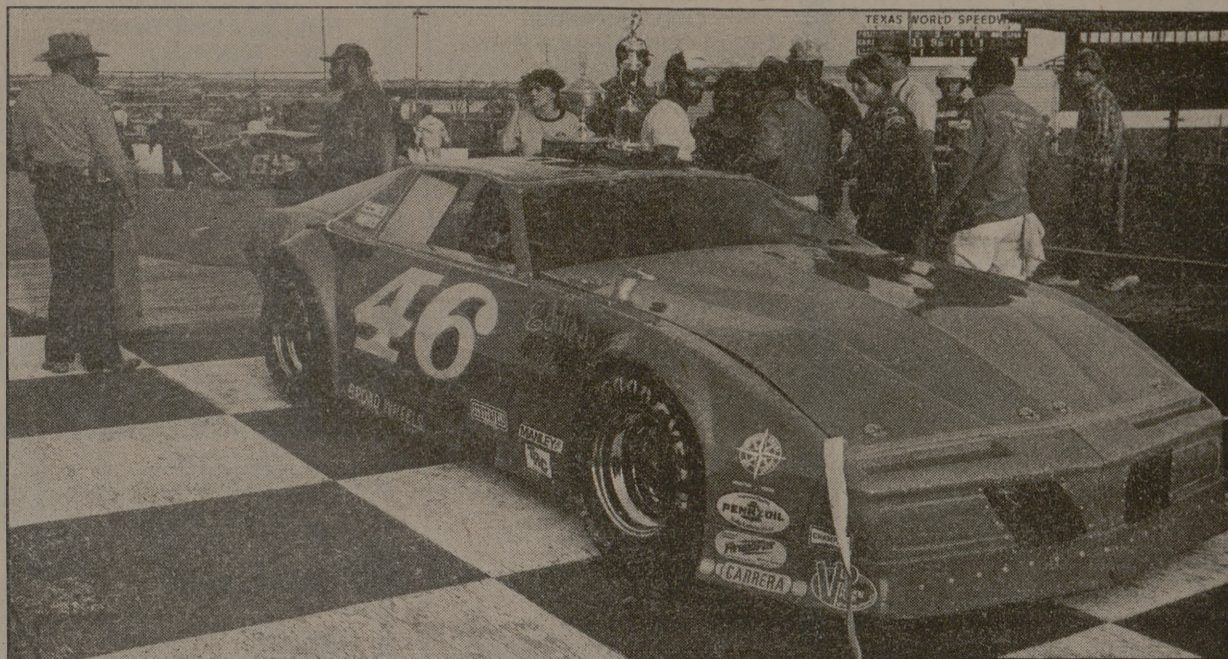
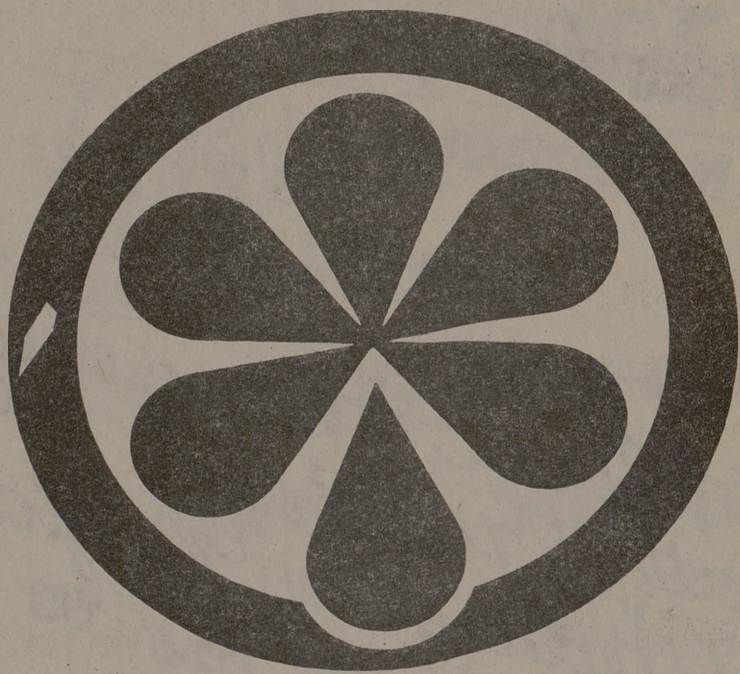


Photo by FRANK IRWIN

TROC winner Freddy "The Beaumont Flyer" Fryar (49)

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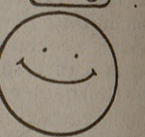
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