

AN AMERICAN SPEEDWAY ODYSSEY

By now, you would be familiar with the adventures of Sydney's Peter Physick and his wife Laima. For many Australians, who for whatever reason never get the chance to go to America themselves, Peter's insightful diary notes do a very good job of letting the reader know more than who finished first, second and third. It paints a total picture of the USA and its many wonders, whilst also including speedway in general.

In April 2007, the Peter and Laima did it all again and the following is a summarised account of the entire journey.

Matt Payne – Editor Speedway Racing News.

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Every third year, **Laima** and I go away, for usually eight weeks or so in a Motorhome and that represents our holidays for the previous 36 months.

It all came around again in April of 2007 when we found ourselves at Sydney airport ready to wing our way to San Francisco. For the first time we were travelling with another couple **Paddy & Sonya** who, like us would pick up their RV in Chicago in a week's time.

But first there was the fun of the city on the bay (Frisco) to experience along with the Napa Valley where **Paddy** and I enjoyed our daily fruit intake in liquid form, courtesy of the dozens of wineries that populate the Napa region. Hidden away in this exquisite setting is the famous hot springs town of Calistoga where an immorally fast ½ mile dirt track awaits those game enough to test its wide open spaces in a sprintcar on the Napa County Fairground.

One of those who regularly did so was "the Preacher", the late great GP, **Gary Patterson**. Sadly he ran his last race at Calistoga in 1983 when his non winged sprinter wickedly corkscrewed into the turn 4 timber where a memorial still marks the spot. The Outlaws run there later in September and the annual double header sees the joint packed out as the winged warriors start their California tour beneath the picturesque St. Helena mountain range.

Northern California is a hotbed for racing, be it sprints, midgets, modifieds or anything else that can turn left in a hurry. It was therefore important (for me anyway) that we left the vineyards late Saturday afternoon because Chico was just up the road. Well, about 175 miles up. Just a leisurely drive really on the I-5, dodging the trucks which appear to wander aimlessly with no motive other than to scare the crap out of tourists in cars.

After depositing the girls in a non descript motel at Williams, **Paddy** and I continued north to Chico. On the way I recall remarking that only a hard core fan would do what we are doing. It was 8.00pm and we still had 50 miles to go in pitch darkness and only the bible with us – that is the 2007 edition of **Allan Brown's** National Speedway Directory – a must for every visiting Aussie by the way.

On the way I promised **Paddy** that I would pay for his entry seeing as how he was silly enough to keep me company on this Chico safari. He reluctantly accepted the offer but did say he would buy the first couple of rounds. After a couple of attempts at finding the Fairgrounds in this larger than expected city, I was pleasantly surprised to see the admission price was only \$10. **Patrick** wasn't happy though to find out the price of a beer was \$6.

We missed the heats of the winged 410's but caught the non winged 360's and the sensational Legend cars. Knew about them but hadn't seen them before and they were absolutely fantastic. Indeed the whole show was excellent. The Mayor was in attendance and the track announcers kept in good with him by continually broadcasting that the curfew was 11.00pm on the dot.

Curiously though, after bidding him farewell at the end of the 410 A-Main they then proceeded to run the features in all other divisions. **Paddy** and I left the precinct around 12.15am

Our next foray to a race track wasn't to be for a week or so, hence we toured the outstanding Lake Tahoe which sits on the border between California and Nevada. If you ever want to take your lover to the most romantic place on earth then this is it, with the scenery and atmosphere beyond description. Then on through the Grand Canyon where your lover will also probably want to go and then into Las Vegas, where you stand a good chance of exchanging your lover if you wanted to.

But now it was time for Chicago and the RV pickup. We had arranged for two 29 footers to be ready and after a few teething issues we were on our way out of Illinois, across the top of Indiana via Fort Wayne and south into Ohio. At the end of the rainbow that day was Eldora Speedway near the tiny town of Rossburg.

I'm not sure I can even tell you what Rossburg looks like because as you drive south down Route 118, the excitement of nearing Eldora just dominates all sense of memory control. At times I imagined our motorhome had a sprintcar inside it (instead of living quarters) and there I was driving our race car into the in-field pits.

Dave Argabright turned up from Indianapolis and before we knew it that familiar sound of the ring pull from many a cold can of Bud resounded around the carpark. I think six cans was all the time we had for reminiscing before the sound of World of Outlaw sprintcars labouring under full noise emerged from deep within the adjacent speedway. That was enough for me - I wanted to see everything, even hotlaps. Although I had been to Eldora before, the anticipation of entering this legendary colossus never wavers and my patience almost ran out as we queued to get tickets and then got searched for alcohol. I had plenty in me, but they couldn't confiscate it.

My mate **Stubb**, being the Eldora veteran he is, had arranged a private box for us all. Well, call it a chalked off area on Turn 4 where he had previously deposited eight or so fold up chairs. But it was the spot to be as we had Yankee fans dropping in all night long to say hi to the 'Ossies' in the crowd. **Jason Meyers** was the victor on a track as dusty as I've ever seen. It reinforced the message on that old T-Shirt which proclaims that *"you're not a true sprintcar fan unless you have dirt in the bottom of your beer glass"*.

It wasn't all beer though. **Stubb** insisted we try a couple of 'Washington Apples' from the very generous barman he knew. Consequently this potent brew of Crown Royale Canadian Whisky, Sour Apple Pucker schnapps and cranberry juice found its way many times down to the Budweiser I had earlier carried into the track.

Regretfully the Saturday of this two night show was rained out and Eldora turned from a vibrant, alive, noisy, pulsating place of energy to a silent and sorrowful stadium surrounded by cornfields. It is so sad to see any speedway with the gates locked by rain.

The next experience to recount will create jealousy and animosity in that you too would have loved what we did in Indianapolis the next day. **Andrew Quinn** (now, he is a hard core fan) had suggested we cruise around Brownsburg, Indiana with him and visit the race shops dotted around this suburb. (*The ladies went Outlet Shopping down in Edinburg, Indiana.*)

First up was to the immaculate, "eat your food off the floor", Titan Garages team with **Daryn Pittman, Glenno Inglis** etc. They were very welcoming and allowed us every access to transporters, cars and even **Toni Kruck's** one meeting old Chili Bowl midget.

The Modern Day cowboy, **Daron Clayton** was next just across the alley. Someone in Australia just has to put this man in a Downunder sprintcar one day. He is as fearless and talented as I have yet seen, and humble to boot. He couldn't believe that someone would come all the way from Australia to see his operation. T-Shirts, decals (stickers) were freely provided by the Cowboy.

From there it was on to **Scooter Ellis'** garage. Not a household name is our Scooter, but as an owner he has put some very famous identities in his midgets over the last few decades. It was Scooter who asked if we were going to the Nine Racing team owned and operated by **Steve Lewis**. "You won't get in of course unless I set it up for you", he proudly proclaimed.

So a quick phone call, to verify that we were good guys and not spies, allowed us entry to an Aladdin's cave of treasures like you wouldn't believe. Midgets, midgets and more midgets were lined up everywhere. To an untrained eye, all were identical white racers with a big red #9 on the tail tank. But no doubt each was in a differing stage of development.

Every car had its own locker and only pieces from that car went into that locker as it was disassembled between race meetings. Presumably after winning drives from its house chauffers **Dave Steele, Dave Darland** and **Davey Ray**. No closeup photos were allowed, but long range general shots were permitted. Now that was a very special visit to be sure.

Tony Stewart's shop was next but regretfully we had chosen a day when they were out testing at Winchester Speedway, northeast of Indy. Adjacent to the TSR garage was the absolutely monstrous set up of **John Force's** Indiana drag racing operation. They were closed as well with flags at half-mast due to the racing death just hours before of their driver **Eric Medlen**. We let them be

Lunch was now beckoning but before that we dropped in to see **Rob Hart** who was at the time working on **Craig Dollansky's** team. His garage was adjacent to O'Reilly Raceway Park (formerly IRP) and after a friendly visit and inspection of the cars and the extraordinary Karavan Motorsports transporter, we headed for Kelly's Pub, the celebrated racers' hangout on Georgetown Road. The mood inside was sombre however as patrons watched the unfolding of the dreadful shootings at Virginia Tech only an hour beforehand.

As we ate our cheeseburgers and fries Cheers style, we made sure we met everyone who walked in. Including **Lee Kunzman** who won the Indy 500 in 1979 and had 21 top 10 finishes. Lucky to still be in the land of the living after two horrendous sprintcar wrecks, **Lee** invited us to pop into his Hemelgarn team garage at 130 Gasoline Alley to see the cars he was entering in this year's 500. Our luck was continuing

On the way out of there we spied **Kerry Madsen's** Selma Shell transporter, but regretfully **Kerry** was back home in Iowa. But the boys in the crew enjoyed our company. As did **Jesse Hockett** a USAC racer Andrew knows. Next door to **Hockett** was Van's Metal Craft, the owner of which was **Merle D. Van Steenwyck** whose only trade these days is restoring Kurtis Kraft midgets for an eager market place. We wrapped up the day with a visit to Indianapolis for the inevitable track and museum tour before a great cookout (*read BBQ*) at **Dave** and **Sherry Argabright's** house. Their lovely quiet street resembled an RV sales yard for the two days we were with him.

Sprintcars took a back seat for a while now as we made our way progressively south to New Orleans. But we did sneak in a 360 race at Riverside Raceway in Memphis, otherwise known as the "Ditch". Now Memphis is in Tennessee, but the track lies on the Mississippi delta two miles away in Arkansas. The best way to describe this place, which has spawned such ilk as the **Swindells, Bobby Davis, Greg Hodnett, Lee Brewer, Hooker Hood** and latterly **Ricky Stenhouse Jr**, is to take a quote from **Kevin Eckert's** Open Wheel Times editorial of May 2007.

"They don't call it "The Ditch" for nothing. Riverside (International?) Speedway is a road apple; an old gully that has held water beside the Mississippi River since 1949. Its entire property would not fill a modern parking lot. Its wooden bleachers on the backstretch are one grease fire from being replaced like the ones on the front. Step too close to the edge of any board and the other end may pop up. Mosquitoes are mythic.

"Gumbo" is what Riverside calls its clay racing surface. It has always been addressed as such. Nowhere else has used such a description. It is pure river bottom gold. Thousands of years ago (there are fossils for the fundamentalists), Riverside was river deep. When the water receded, West Memphis speedway sat on the kind of clay others pay to truck to them. Riverside rarely needed replenishing. And every Saturday night when the sun sets on Arkansas, moisture rises through its pores to grab rubber like no other."

Amongst my most vivid memories of Memphis on this stop along the trail were the eight glorious hours spent in Beale Street, the home of the Blues and the birthplace of Rock 'n Roll. Deciding to share it with us were more than 400 Corvettes and their owners who had chosen that weekend to hold their 3rd annual international show.

Onwards we drove, travelling through the southern states of Mississippi, Louisiana and Alabama where we witnessed firsthand in places like Biloxi and Gulfport, the indescribable devastation left by Hurricane Katrina in late August 2005. The city of New Orleans has arguably been restored and little, if any, evidence is left for tourists to see. Bourbon Street and its surrounds in the French Quarter are back to normal, but the holiday makers still shun the area. The rest of Louisiana is a sight to behold, however.

Even though it was 18 months later, the beachfronts on the Gulf of Mexico have had zero work done on them. The casinos have been rebuilt (*for obvious reasons*) however we couldn't see anything that resembled a serious attempt to repair the US\$82 billion dollars of damage to public and private property. To be honest, the aftermath of Katrina is a blight on the US authorities.

Twelve days in Florida was just what the doctor ordered. Not a great deal of driving but just lapping up the sunshine and the incredibly picturesque state that it is. 22 million is the permanent population, but they enjoy in excess of 50 million visitors each year who flee to the Sunshine State in the winter. Imagine this number of people squeezed into an area marginally bigger than Tasmania.

But amongst the attractions Florida has, but Tassie doesn't, are the sensational Everglades with their naturally habitated alligators (*you must drive US41 which is otherwise known as the Tamiami Trail*) to see these things close up and in the wild. Then get down to the Florida Keys and spend at least two nights in Key West making sure you are sober at least for one night to watch the sunset, followed by the Orlando entertainment mecca which includes the Disney resorts and every conceivable leisure activity you could possibly want or need.

The time was drawing near though for my own personal version of Speedweek. As we meandered north up I-95 (*at 1,927 miles it is the longest north – south freeway in the country starting in Florida and ending in Maine*) I contemplated the stature of this road. It has double the number of fatalities than any other US freeway and really one shouldn't be surprised at that.

The amount of traffic it carries is ridiculous in the extreme. It traverses all the heavily populated States on the eastern seaboard and as it goes around Washington DC for example, the road(?) becomes 18 lanes in what is still a futile attempt to take the immense amount of transport

However it did get us to Pennsylvania eventually. Of the 59 speedways in this state, there were six in particular that I wanted to get to. The spring Outlaw invasion of PA was nearly underway and they were riding into Lernerville just north of Pittsburgh in a few days' time. But before that there was much to be done.

The All-Stars were also in town, specifically the tiny town of Port Royal in Juniata County 40 miles from the state's capital Harrisburg. Like Knoxville and hundreds of other tracks in the US, Port Royal speedway sits squarely in the Fairgrounds totally surrounded by residences. A row of 20 houses overlook the back straight of this famous half mile ribbon of clay which has no curfew and uses no mufflers.

Apart from a 15 minute thunderstorm at Epcot in Florida we hadn't seen rain since the washout of Eldora's second night 29 days ago. As we neared Port Royal on this Saturday afternoon it pelted down just to prove a point that Huey knew I was around again and near an operating speedway. I was heartened however by the transporters passing us at speed going the same way. Maybe they know the weather patterns best of all. After all the **Bob Weikert** Memorial had to be run and won.

Yep, as we rounded a few more hills, there in the north western sky was sunshine and clearing clouds. There is a god after all. As we neared Port Royal, the weather was beautiful, but it had rained a lot. Entering the very old facility, the pits were full of 410's (39 of them), and the car park was full of expectant fans all looking skywards. The track was being dried and we were going to go racing. Yippee

Until it turned nasty again. This sport can provide such a high for so many people, but in an instant it can twist your emotions so much that it hurts. Why, oh why, do I love it so much. When they finally announced the rainout and postponement to June 14th, I was devastated. Whilst not a major racetrack such as Knoxville or Eldora, Port Royal has such incredible history and it was definitely one track I wanted to experience.

I wandered around aimlessly for 30 minutes or so, not really knowing where I was going. I just walked to try to eliminate the emotion. In the end I just returned to the RV in the parking lot and went to bed. It was only 9.00pm. The earliest bedtime yet on the trip. No one talked to me, not even **Laima**. She knew better than that

The next morning I discovered that many of the drivers, upon hearing of the rainout announcement simply drove across to Selinsgrove 30 miles away and picked up drives in the 358 sprints which ran there. Others moved on to Bedford some 60 miles to the southwest where the All Stars would take on the PA Posse on Sunday night weather permitting.

And that's where we were headed, via some extraordinarily beautiful Pennsylvania countryside. Like any good historian, you just have to wonder what still remains to be discovered in the thousands of barns in the thousands of farmyards on these byways.

We rocked up at the gates of Bedford around 2.00pm and they were locked tight. But all was OK, we were just too early. The weather was clear but chilly as I jumped down from the RV and went over to introduce myself to a young man standing at the gates. Before I had even opened my mouth, he said *"You must be from Australia"*. *"Why would that be I said?"* *"Because only a dumb Aussie would wear shorts and thongs in this temperature."* With that we got on famously and it turned out he was the Promoter who had taken the gamble of running sprintcars at his late model track for this one off All Star race.

What a great facility? Another half mile (*dirt not clay*) Fairground track with virtually no banking. Free camping, free power, and friendly people. The Musco lighting was superb and the whole complex was bathed in brilliant white light, but at a half mile around, I decided it was simply too big. Things happen both fast and slow on tracks this size. Clearly the speeds are extremely high, but when there is a stoppage it takes an age to get the races going again.

Qualifying for 28 cars took upwards of 55 minutes. Part of that delay came about when two drivers, after being pushed off, couldn't find the chute from the pits onto the track and drove in and around some ditches and holes amongst an otherwise well-groomed infield. Another unusual aspect I noticed at Port Royal and again at Bedford was watching the track being packed in. Not by the race cars as we do in Australia, but by dozens of push trucks, graders and water trucks all travelling clockwise, which is the opposite way to racing. Maybe there is something in that tidbit of trivia?

Very little passing throughout the heats and feature. Start on the front row and win, it seemed to me. The feature looked as though all 24 cars were qualifying rather than racing, which clearly they were, but it wasn't the best spectacle I have seen. The veteran **Bill Rose** won his first ever All Stars feature and he was stoked.

"Speedweek" night 2 was over and we now had 24 hours to kill before I had to front up at the ticket booth in Lernerville. Sarver was only 80 miles away to the west so avoiding the dreadfully bad Pennsylvania Turnpike, we picked SR30 for no reason other than it looked scenic on the map. As we rambled through numerous delightful towns, climbed steep gradients and passed winter ski fields, we hit Shanksville. Not a name that stands out. In fact the sleepiness of this village would have remained intact for years to come had United Flight 93 not crashed in a field there on Sept 11th, 2001.

A simple sign along SR30 invites visitors to the memorial established at the exact point of impact. This was one we had to see. The beast was backed up to the intersection and we turned into a real country lane. At the time of the disaster, the rescue vehicles would surely have had difficulty in passing side by side as they raced to and from. We drove in silence for several miles until the site materialised over the crest of a hill.

The owner of the property where it went down has permitted the National Parks Service to establish the memorial and now 125,000 people come each year to pay their respects. The memorial stands about 500 metres away from the crash site and other than relatives of the victims, the public cannot go there. It would be insolent and discourteous to do so anyway.

A newspaper article pinned to the very large collection of tributes on a wall, described the initial thoughts of a Shanksville villager who was amongst the first on the scene. *"We expected to find some pieces intact of the tail or the wing, but there was nothing larger than a dinner plate."* The remains of the aircraft, which went in upside down at 900 kmh, plus passengers, crew and the hijackers were buried in a crater 25 feet deep.

Humbled by this unexpected encounter we quietly retreated making our way north to Pittsburgh and then on to Sarver. Lernerville Speedway had long lived in my imagination as a "must see" track with the **Don Martin** Silver Cup a traditional race on the calendar. Now don't get me wrong, it's a great track, but it just wasn't what I was expecting

Like a lot of US speedways, it has no fence, except for along the main straight where 10,000 permanent seats are constructed. The back straight is extraordinary. Go off here and you finish up in the junkyard some 200 metres down the hill. **Fred Rahmer** was once life-flighted out of Lernerville after doing exactly that.

There was an included pit pass for this one and I wandered around inspired by the absolute cream of the sprintcar crop with the only absentee being **Brooke Tatnell** who was back in Oz at his Dad **George's** funeral. Nightfall didn't come until 8.00pm, so it was in brilliant afternoon sunshine that my Canon got a workout on some simply stunning machinery. If **Daryn Pittman's** Titan 21 is not the prettiest car on the circuit, then I'm a poor judge. Spent plenty of time with **Kerry Madsen** who had a night he would prefer to forget, by failing to qualify for the A Main. The man in the green car (**Steve Kinser**) took the win followed by **Joey Saldana** and **Jason Meyers**. Just like a PCR January feature really ...

Next night was back east to Lincoln Speedway near the famous civil war town of Gettysburg where the 55th anniversary of the track was to be celebrated in style with most PA Posse drivers expected to be in town. The Outlaws are restricted in racing in non-sanctioned events such as these where they are scheduled between WoO races.

But nobody raced this night. The rain bucketed down the whole day so all we could do was hole up in the Gettysburg KOA campground where just after 5.00pm it cleared allowing **Paddy**, the girls and I to enjoy a sumptuous BBQ, plenty of Pennsylvanian Yuengling beer, Kentucky bourbon and Californian wines, surrounded by a superb campfire with the company of other campers.

It was a beautiful day when we awoke the next afternoon!! It is said that the dreadful Civil War claimed more US lives in this one five-day Gettysburg conflict, than all other world wars combined. Well I think you can now add four more to those stats! Williams Grove was just 45 minutes up the road and as we near the end of our journey, we will take you to what many call, *"the most historic speedway in all of America."*

After nine fabulous weeks in a Motorhome and 11,500 miles of highway travel, we finish off with the Pennsylvania Posse, perhaps the strongest local winged sprintcar racing group in all of the world.

Williams Grove is in the beautifully named community of Mechanicsburg, so it was just a leisurely trek from Gettysburg under the brilliant azure, blue skies of a May afternoon for the first night of an Outlaw double header. But there was one further pressing matter to fulfil before hitting the Grove because midway between Lincoln and Williams Grove is the outstanding Eastern States Racing Museum in the Latimer Valley Fairgrounds.

Easy to find and easy to spend two or three hours in there amongst the treasures of 70 years of Pennsylvania sprintcar and midget racing.

Due to the South Central Pennsylvania location of the museum, the intent of the founders was to provide support for the forms of racing so long dominant in the area. In historical order, the major categories of racing have been "Big Cars" (*with close ties to the Indianapolis 500*), Midgets, Sprintcars, Modified Stock Cars and today's winged Sprintcars. For the diehards amongst us, the following sacred tracks were / are in a 150 mile radius of where the museum stands today. Revered names such as Trenton, Langhorne, Allentown, Flemington, Reading, Nazareth, Lincoln, Williams Grove, Pocono, Jennerstown, Harrington, Selinsgrove, Lernerville, Port Royal, Grandview, Silver Springs and Susquehanna.

Built on 40 acres, the Museum also includes a track where the WGOT (Williams Grove Old Timers) take their passionately restored historic racecars to once again be brought to life and be seen as they should be seen – under power on the 1/3rd mile dirt oval. Along with these vintage racecars, friends, families, fans and competitors alike reunite to reminisce about the glory days of yesterday. Not only do they relive fond memories and renew old friendships, they create new ones for the generations who follow.

But it is inside the museum where breath is stolen ten times over, as astonishing displays demonstrate just how brave the drivers really were in the open cockpit era of years gone by. My all-time favourite is the restored garage of the “flying farmer” **Tommy Hinnershitz** which shows his workshop exactly as he left it when he retired in 1964. Midgets from every era and type are grouped together, demonstrating how they evolved over time, plus you’ll see first-hand how the early “Big Cars” progressed into today’s fire-breathing sprintcars.

But it was time to move on to the modern day Outlaws and make my third attempt to see a race at the hallowed Williams Grove, which really does resemble a giant ½ mile paper clip. Rain had been the winner in previous years, but there was no such chance of that happening tonight. Both RV’s rumbled into the 50 acre field outside the back straight which has been set aside exclusively for campers since opening day in 1939.

Devoted entirely to Motorhomes and tents, there were many vacant spots at these springtime races, but the house full sign sure gets put up early when the Outlaws’ September summer swing arrives. An alternative carpark on the front straight is allocated to those who just rock up for the racing and then go home.

As we drove through the grassy meadow to our chosen spot on top of the hill, we marvelled at the ingenuity of people as they awaited the opening of the gates. Tailgate parties are popular with those in the other parking lot, but when you have an RV things become a little more creative. Fans were everywhere, all eagerly anticipating Thursday and Friday’s races. Tents, caravans small and large, Motorhomes our size, (*ie medium compared to some*) and ones that cost well over a million dollars dotted the car park for as far as the eye could see.

Many had been there since Tuesday to make sure they got their favoured spot. Like **Stubb** had done at Eldora, personal areas are roped off, fire rings are embedded into the ground, BBQ’s are constructed, chairs and tables are set up and the Cornhole / Cornboard competitions get underway. The afternoon sun is there for their enjoyment, drinking in the rays and the Budweiser.

If you’re not familiar with the rivalry between the PA Posse and anyone else who doesn’t live in Pennsylvania, then a trip to the Grove will fix that. Usually the infield pits are big enough to house all competing local teams, but when 25 Outlaw transporters turn up as well, the car count swells and overflows to outside the back straight. Weirdly enough, after paying your admittance money at the gate, to get access to the spectator areas one must walk right through these temporary pits where you can get up close and personal with Donny & Danny. You can virtually feel and hear the tension as the best collection of sprintcars outside Knoxville get ready to tear each other apart.

The Posse spectators are fiercely loyal to their own. The two most famous components of the Grove are the bridge over the back straight (*I'll get to that in a moment*) and Beer Hill. This aptly named spot is inhabited, not surprisingly, by the Beer Hill Gang and they occupy that piece of real estate just outside where the 'loooong' back straight becomes Turn 3. The experience from here is almost indescribable.

The locals don't lift going into 3; they know what's required. After all it's a regular Friday night job for them. But pity help an interloping Outlaw if the well-oiled boys on Beer Hill hear him lift coming off the back of the paper clip at 140mph. Every red blooded sprintcar addict knows that Eldora must be experienced but believe me it is also compulsory to watch at least the heats on Beer Hill with the Gang at the Grove where these lads financially support the rookies to give them the chance to race.

The pits are on the infield at WG, but so are some very large expanses of grass for the public to watch racing from a perspective that's usually only the domain of the crash crew. The public can access the infield via a tunnel on Turn 1, or via that infamous bridge over the back straight. In bygone years I can understand its role and why it was never demolished.

As a general assumption, sprintcars in the past were highly unlikely to have ever flipped high enough to hit it. However a few years ago **Greg Hodnett** became the first when he rode a wheel at full noise and cannoned into the top of the bridge. Naturally the public are kept off the overpass when a race is on so they're protected, but I fail to see how you can apply that same logic to a driver. It is a disaster waiting to happen

We watched night 1 from Beer Hill, the infield and the bleachers on the back straight. A pit pass secured us entry to say hi to **Kerry Madsen** but by night 2 he didn't want to see us again with his first time at Williams Grove being nothing but a painful memory. Although he failed to get out of the D on night 1 and the C on the second night, he did receive a provisional to start each A Main from the rear.

Parked next to the Selma Shell team on the Friday night was a local who ran a plain, but neat white racer #47. Hardly a sponsorship decal on the car and the open trailer he pulled it on indicated he was indeed a budget racer. He nudged the wall between 3 & 4 in hotlaps and it came in on the hook. We watched as crews from other local cars rallied in support and he was back in time for qualifying.

A budget racer, but clearly a popular one. The camaraderie was strong between **Billy Kimmel** and his peers. It's sad to have to say that three months later that same turn 3 took Billy's life when his flipping racer was pounded by two others in full flight and caught fire, all in full view of his only sponsor. The Beer Hill Gang would have been distraught.

But in June it was the indomitable **Donny Schatz** who won both nights much to the chagrin of the local fans. As Donny got out of his car on the main straight, as happy as a winning driver could be, the crowd was deathly silent, devastated that one of their own didn't win. Had it been a Pennsylvania Posse boy, they would have burned down the grandstand. He thanked them for paying to watch him win, which only served to anger them even more.

Meanwhile back in the RV parking lot, the action had begun. There were more campfires than you would find at a Boy Scout jamboree, music blared from every RV, BBQ's sizzled around each corner, **Jack Daniels** and **Jim Beam** were two very fashionable visitors and the sky was littered with exploding fireworks. As we spent the balance of the night with some terrific people parked around us, I wondered what it would have been like if a local had actually managed to win the thing!!

We would have gone with the Outlaws to Orange County Fair Speedway in Middleton, New York State the following night but the rain beat everyone there, so it was back to Lincoln for their regular "*Saturday night with the PA Posse show*" and it was sensational value for the asking price of \$15. There were 105 sprintcars in the pits across the three categories of 410's, 358's and Super Sportsmen. A truly wonderful night of racing surrounded by thunder & lightning from all directions. Then it was off to Grandview in PA a few days later for another "drag 'em down, pull 'em out" Outlaw fight. In a belter of a race at this superb track in Bechtelsville, **Lasoski** took the win by .036/sec from **Schatz**.

Next up was a night in Intercourse. Intercourse, Pennsylvania that is. Lancaster County is a hotbed of sprintcar racing, but it also shares the limelight with the Amish and it is around this quaintly named town that these "*plain people*" live and work in PA. The Amish trace their heritage back hundreds of years and yet, despite all the time that has passed and the many changes that have taken place in society, they still live and work much as their forefathers did. Their families and their farms are their top priorities, second only to God. electricity,

They do not permit electricity, radios, TV's or telephones in their homes. By restricting access to these contemporary inventions, the Amish are better able to keep the modern world from intruding into their home life. They have long preferred farming as a way of life, feeling that their lifestyle and their families can best be maintained in a rural environment.

They do not permit the use of tractors in their fields, preferring their farm equipment to be pulled by teams of horses, or mules. Nor do they own or operate automobiles, believing that cars would provide easier access to the ways of the world. Their horses and buggies always get right of way on the local roads.

To put a speedway flavour to all this, I well remember the first time that **Freddy Rahmer** came out to race at Parramatta in the early 90's. As is the practice of all Americans to name their town and state they live in, Freddy shocked the hell out of **Steve Raymond** as he was being interviewed trackside when he told him he lived in Intercourse, Pennsylvania. "*That's why I've got triplets,*" he said!! Ever since then, I've always wanted to go there

By now it was just a few short weeks before we had to take the long flight home and although there were no more speedways to visit, the Outlet Stores remained fashionable. Before leaving Pennsylvania, we found it essential to visit Hershey Park (perhaps 40 miles at most from Williams Grove) and ride the 10 monster roller coasters they have. The 12 hours we spent here was as good a day as I've had.

As we progressed through upstate New York via Syracuse, along Lake Ontario, into Canada and then across the New England states of Vermont, New Hampshire and Maine, the scenery simply became incredibly breathtaking as the colder northern states blossomed into their late spring. By the way the lobsters in Maine simply cannot be surpassed. Check out the one **Laima** ate in Freeport just before and after we cooked it.



We then turned south again for NYC but not before spending several glorious days in Newport, Rhode Island. I've stayed in bigger campgrounds than this State has land mass, but as we all well know the America's Cup was unceremoniously stolen from them by Bondy and the crew of Australia II in 1983. And the hurt is still there for the old timers who abound in the nook and cranny bars around the harbour.

They like taking an Aussie's money, but they also don't mind if you leave town in a hurry either. But in the main, Newport is now a young person's domain and the partying around the harbour is intense. Not to mention, the overwhelming mansions in the place which, whilst still impeccably maintained for today's tourists, were once the summer residences of the wealthy high flyers from down south in the early 1900's.

The trip sadly came to an end after four days in New York. A speedway magazine is not the place to write about this city, but believe me, in the USA there are some compulsory places to visit and experience and the Big Apple is most definitely at the top of the pile. I have briefly mentioned others throughout these stories and there are many more that we have yet to discover in a country that is so full of surprises and bargains everywhere you look.

Do it one day soon in an RV. The Yanks think fuel is expensive but compared to what we pay, it's cheap, the exchange rate is getting really impressive and the racing is out of this world.

Oh, and for the girls, **Laima** says *"don't forget the shopping and the Outlet Stores. That exchange rate makes 'em even more appealing fellas."*

There are deliberately very few photos in this story. However should you want to look at 1,117 of them in order from Day 1 to the end then **feel free to do so by selecting this link**. We are progressively captioning each photo. One day it will be finished!