

used...I really can't complain about it." Friday, he was pitted against six dragsters in a row. "Six of 'em in a row and beat 'em all," he crows. "So I can't complain about that rear end...It'll be back in another week or two. It won't be long; I'll be back. They ain't gonna forget about me."

Roger estimates over the past 20 years he's won \$15,000 drag racing. "So it kind of pays your way as you go, if you don't keep spending money to go faster...if you just maintain what you got."

Back at Little Orange, Tony talks strategy. If you leave too soon, and you red light; you lose. If you drive too fast and come in under your dial-in, you lose. If you come across the finish line second, you lose. Tony says sometimes you'll see racers glancing to their side quickly trying to see where the other car is. They'll even "scrub the brake," to make sure they don't break their time but still win the race. "You want to run the closest to your dial-in without breaking it and you want to cross the finish line first."

Sometimes the first one to cross that line is a woman. "They're pretty good at cutting lights." Tony points to a yellow dragster gliding by. Blond tresses erupt from the helmet. "She's a very good driver," he says reverently. "She wins a lot of races. A lot of women have a better reaction time than men. They tend to pay more attention."

There's also another class. It's called "Footbrake," and these guys do it manually which is a little easier to understand. "They are full blown race cars but they don't have the electronics in them. You just leave off the foot. You've got your foot on the brake, you run your rpms up and when you see your light turn green, you just nail it and go."

Tony Rogers has been doing this "since I was a teenager, street racing and stuff. Then we got on the dragway to get off the street.

This is a legal form. You come down here, you run wide open, have a good time and try to win money." Although, he adds, "the way the expenses have gotten, we limit ourselves a little bit more now, because it does get expensive."

Tony has worked alternately for his dad's roofing company, managed the Food Lion in Orange, and now has found his niche as Service Manager for Eddins



Tom Lillard's mean looking Monza emerges from a cloud of tire smoke with a deafening roar.

Photo by Phil Audibert



Two Orange County boys, Wells Waugh and Tony Rogers go head to head at Colonial Beach Dragway. Wells won this one, and advanced to the fourth round.

Photo by Phil Audibert

Ford in Madison, one of his sponsors. Other sponsors and supporters include his family, his wife's family, Ace Collision, and Atkins Logging, to all of whom he is supremely grateful. "If it wasn't for them, I couldn't do it." He's hoping to sell the rail so he can fix his "door slammer," a 1970 Ford Maverick, that he blew a "crank" in about a month ago.

He pours methanol fuel into the small

tank behind his seat. At \$3 per gallon it compares favorably with \$9 and \$10 per gallon racing gasoline, but "the problem is for every gallon of gas you burn, you burn two gallons of methanol." The real reason they burn methanol is that it burns cooler. And Tony is always careful to fill the tank to the same level each run so his weight will be consistent and not affect his dial-in time.

Tammy Yount trots towards the start line. "I've got my kielbasa and I'm going to go see my son," she says proudly, waving a grilled sausage in her fingers. Nathaniel "Buck" Yount is running his dad's seriously fast car at 5.17 dial-in today. Tammy says the family got into drag racing around 1990, winning \$15,000 "the first year, and that was before electronics. That was strictly off the foot."

Wells Waugh has also been doing it since he was a kid. "We've got a right good group of guys from Orange that race...All of us used to race on the street years ago...all over." A bystander mumbles, "I think the cops kind of frown on it now." Highly illegal and quite dangerous too. "We've had as many as 200 people at a street race years ago," says Waugh, fondly recalling racing "bridge to bridge," on Rt. 522 down from Baker's Store.

His grandfather, the legendary Monroe Waugh disapproved. "Monroe would say, 'you've lost your damn mind throwing your money away on that stuff.'" Wells sold his car, bought a skidder, and went into the logging business. But then 11 years ago, he caught the bug again and bought another car. He's been hard at it ever since.

Tom Lillard is another regular, with his evil looking spider motif black car, that his wife jokingly calls "the other woman." Asked where she is, he responds, "She loves to play with her flowers, man. That makes her happy and it tickles the heck out of me." Tom came home with some winnings Memorial Day weekend.

The loudspeaker blares again. It's time now for the third round, and it turns out that two Orange County Boys will go head to head: Wells Waugh vs. Tony Rogers. Wells wins.

Tony shakes his head in resignation. "He got me. He had a better light than I did...He caught me pretty quick. There's was nothing I could do. I had a terrible light." That does not mean the light was faulty; it means Tony's reaction to it was slow. "If you go in there and look at the tickets, he killed me on the tree." He shows the paper slip: .560 versus .515 seconds. "That doesn't sound like a lot, but that's an eternity."

In other words, Wells beat Tony's reaction time by 45/1000ths of a second! Now that's what wins in drag racin'!



DRAG RACING

The first thing that hits you is the noise.

When Kenny Yount fires up his brother-in-law's baby blue roadster, you don't just hear it; you feel it. It punches you in the chest. It takes your breath away. It rocks you back on your heels. Whatever you were doing or talking about or thinking, for that matter, just took a back seat.

It roars; it rumbles; it purrs; it sputters, but most of all it shouts to the world "I AM POWER!" And that's just the small block Chevy talking. Wait till the big boys crank over. When Tony Rogers flicks the Bic on his dragster, it's like Thor hurling thunder bolts.



Photos by Phil and Susie Audibert

Top photo, Orange County Boys Racing. Prior to bracket racing, Tom Lillard of Orange (right) and Roger Gordon of Unionville (left) don't really race each other; they're doing timed runs instead to establish their "dial-ins." Above, Tony Rogers has been drag racing since he was a teenager. Back then drivers and spectators would gather along straight stretches of county roads to race illegally. Drag racing in a controlled environment, such as Colonial Beach Dragway is not only legal but safe.



Photo by Phil Audibert

Tony Rogers completes his burnout, spinning his tires till they smoke.

Drag racing, huh. See who can go the fastest over a 1/8th or 1/4th mile straightaway. How dumb is that?

No dumber than knocking a little white ball around an oversized lawn trying to get it to fall into a cup.

Hey! That's my favorite sport, you protest.

Well, for a large group of Orange County folks, *this* is their favorite sport. And the deafening roar? They don't call that noise; they call it music.

Don't knock it till you've tried it because there is much more here than good ol' boy gear heads making noise and smoking tires. Yes, drag racing is about brute power, but it's also about split-second reflexes, and finesse, and strategy and cunning and preparation and competition.

The goal is simple: when the light turns green, go from here to there faster than the guy next to you. But the way you do that is far more complex and fascinating. And unlike most other auto sports, money does not buy you success. It will make you go faster—always has—but because of an ingenious handicapping system, it will not buy you victory in a drag race. A guy like Roger Gordon of Unionville in a beat-up '69 Camaro has just as good a chance of beating the \$85,000 rig next to him. He actually did it Friday night at Manassas.

It is Memorial Day weekend, and the Rogers-Yount-Nicklow families have settled into their camp at Colonial Beach Dragway in Westmoreland County, the other side of Fredericksburg from here. Just down the street are parked Tom Lillard's, Wells Waugh's and Roger Gordon's rigs. They are just a part of a large contingent of Orange County drag racers who travel most weekends to compete at events

within an 80-mile or so radius of Orange.

OCB Racing they call themselves. ...stands for Orange County Boys Racing. Actually, it was Lillard's idea—a loosely organized group of friends and fellow gear heads who enjoy competing against each other as much as they do hanging out. Barbecue grills sizzle, folding chairs sprout under RV awnings, generators hum outside empty car haulers, klatches of folks gather and discuss, men tinker, women gossip and vice versa.

"Some of it's family-oriented," nods Tony Rogers as he points to his wife, Jane, and the Nicklow family, all of whom are involved in one way or another. "A lot of friends, you know a lot of people hang out. People go to car shows for car show reasons; we go to drag races. We get together and it's legal. We're not out here in the street, and it's a chance to win the money too."

In front of these family camps are parked the main reason for being here in the first place: the cars, featuring everything from the baby blue roadster to a red sedan with what looks like a small airplane engine on the hood, to Tony Rogers' "rail." That's one of those loooooonng dragsters with the huge engine behind the cockpit, rear tires as wide as a steam roller's and the almost dainty looking skinny little kid's bicycle wheels up front.

"All three of us are running today in the same class," notes Tony. "We're all running different; a dragster, a door car and a roadster, but we're all running in the same class." And they all have an equal chance to win, even though his big-block Ford might be pitted against the small-block Chevy.

It all depends on what they have "dialed in." Running in what's called ET class, which stands for Estimated Time, each driver must guess how fast his or her car, under today's weather conditions, can run. But it's not really guessing; it's more like calculating.

Tony's wife, Jane, does a lot of it. Calling her "my little organizer," he says "Jane looks at the weather and she keeps track of the time slips and records all the information we get back from each run. And then what we do is we look at it and see what the weather is and then we'll know what to dial the car when we go up for the first round of bracket racing."



Photo by Phil Audibert

Driving his brother-in-law's roadster, Kenneth Yount approaches the start. Now that drag racing has been taken off the street and put in a controlled environment, serious accidents are rare. Still drivers wear helmets and fire resistant suits.



Photo by Susie Audibert

Orange's Tom Lillard has been a fixture at area drag strips for a long time. He coined the phrase "OCB Racing" which stands for Orange County Boys Racing.

For example, in one of the preliminary timed runs, Tony covered an eighth of a mile in 5.29 seconds. When he crossed the finish line he was doing 128.694 miles per hour! But now timed runs are over. He must choose an optimum time, and because the humidity is on the rise, he chooses 5.35 seconds. "When there's more moisture in the air, the cars generally run slower, because these cars want air, they want good air," he explains. "It's like when you breathe when it's humid, you have a hard time breathing; so do these cars." He's even got a small battery operated weather station in his cockpit.

The goal here is to run as close to that estimated time as you can without going faster than that. So, drag racers don't start at the same time. The guy next to you who dialed a 6.20 will leave first. Then it's Tony's job to catch him, but not in less than 5.35 seconds, and not before HIS green light comes on. Get it?

Whew! This gets confusing, but the beauty of it is, it puts a guy like Roger Gordon with his '69 Camaro on a level playing field with the likes of Tony's much more powerful rail. It becomes a contest of who has the best reflexes.

When drivers talk about getting a "good" light or a "bad" light, they're talking about their reaction time to the "tree," which is the bank of lights that control staging and count down to blast off. And to make things even more complicated, these drivers rely on what's called "electronics," to blast them off, basically lighting an electronic fuse before the green light comes on that will launch the car the moment it does.

Loudspeakers blare unintelligible instructions around the drag-way, and the Orange County homeboys start their cars with a mighty roar.

They idle over to the staging area. There, they are funneled two by two, it doesn't matter which two, into the racing lanes, all under the watchful eye of a magnificent fellow who resembles a launch control guy on an aircraft carrier.

The two cars will roll into position through a puddle of water. They will then do the "burn out," which is, they spin the rear tires until they're smoking. "You want to get heat in your tires," explains Tony. "You want them to grip, because what you're doing is when this car takes off, when it leaves, you've got instant 4,000 to 5,000 rpms. It ain't like mashing on the gas."

With the burnout done, they approach the start line to race. Tony tries gamely to explain the procedure. It sounds faintly like Houston communicating with the space shuttle. He points to the saucer-sized yoke-like steering wheel with three buttons on it. "What these buttons do, they allow you to do different things from your burn out to your staging...it's got a gas pedal that works on air; it's air controlled.

When I depress that button, the throttle goes wide open and the car's idling," he points to a little red one in the middle. "It's taking up the slack in a cylinder down there. So what that does is when you cut your pre-stage bulb on you press that button. The car goes to the floor, but you're sitting there idling." He looks up as if to say, 'got that so far?'



Photo by Susie Audibert

Roger Gordon drives a 1969 Camaro, with a fairly high dial-in time of about seven and a third seconds. But thanks to an ingenious handicapping system he can be competitive against newer, faster and more powerful cars.

Ooooookay.

"Then what you do is you get your foot on the brake down here and you bump in till your second bulb comes on, then you press that button." He points to a big red button, called a trans-brake. "And as soon as that tree activates, you see the first light you come off that button. And it goes badabadabadabadabada-BOOM and takes off."



Photo by Phil Audibert

Wells Waugh spins his tires during the burnout to heat them and gain traction just prior to bracket racing. Note how the tires are distorted and wrinkled by the torque.

The badabadabadabada part is the motor "hitting on every other cylinder so it won't blow up and you go up to 4,200 (rpm) and that's as far as it goes...I leave at a pre-set 4,000 rpm. That's what I leave at."

The roar is deafening. The ground shakes. Front wheels come up off the pavement from the torque. Then, they're gone like a rocket.

After that, there's not much else to do, but keep it straight for 5.35 seconds until you cross the finish line, hopefully first, at 128 and change. Then, all you can do is brake (no need for parachutes here; the track is plenty long enough), idle back to camp to your peeps, pop a soda, scarf a kielbasa, and get ready to do it all over again. The nice thing is everybody seems to be friendly. If this were a dirt track, a couple of fights would have broken out by now.

What's it feel like to go 128 miles per hour in 5.3 seconds? Most sports cars can't reach half that speed in that amount of time! "It's a great feeling," beams Tony, "but the best part about it is the burn out...The race goes quicker than you think. You're along for the ride, then."

So what can go wrong? "Any type of fluid leak," responds Tony without a moment's hesitation. "It gets under tires and breaks traction." This brings to mind a horrifying mental image of a drag racer spinning wildly out of control as one

tire bites and the other doesn't.

There are other problems. "Something could happen to the motor," he continues as he runs down the 'what if' list. "Something could happen to the linkage. Most of the time, pretty much though, they're pretty safe and reliable, as long as you take care of it, change the oil and adjust valves and do your preventative maintenance on it. That's about all you can do."

A big part of drag racing is tinkering. "Oh yeah, being able to work on your own car. Sometimes it's an enjoyment; sometimes it's a nightmare." He rolls his eyes. Still, it's nothing like the dirt track where you spend all your down time banging out dents and switching back ends.

Do they ever wreck? "You try not to, but you can. You get a blow out, something could happen." And, he adds, a few dragsters have caught fire. Drivers, of course, wear helmets and fire resistant suits.

Speaking of things going wrong, just about then, the loudspeaker blares something about someone needing a tow. It turns out to be Roger Gordon. Tony pulls the 40-year old Camaro back with an ATV. It goes clunk...clunk...clunk... on its way by. "From the penthouse to the outhouse," laughs Tony, referring to the fact that Roger won the whole shooting match Friday night at Manassas; now two days later, with a broken ring and pinion, he's in the depths of defeat.

"It just broke," says Roger forlornly. But he quickly brightens. "That rear end in there, I bought it 20 years ago



Photo by Susie Audibert

"From the penthouse to the outhouse," says Tony Rogers as he tows Roger Gordon's '69 Camaro back to the trailer with a broken ring and pinion. Not two days prior, Roger won the whole shooting match at Manassas.