



Vintage Views

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Garden State Vintage Stock Car Club

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Too Many Ghost Tracks!

Flemington, Harmony, Old Bridge Among Those Not Forgotten

by John Snyder, as published in
Area Auto Racing News, December 1, 2020

Last week's column included a discussion of Webb Island Speedway, a short-lived and long-forgotten track around sports fields on the outskirts of Oneonta, NY. That got the wheels turning, and I came up with a list of my "ghost tracks", speedways I've attended that have been lost to what some folks refer to as "progress". Not me. Replacing a racetrack with a big box store or a mall or a warehouse, or even a housing development, robs the sport of, in many instances, places of historic importance. And for me, a part of my 6 ½ decades of racing involvement.

Let's start close to home. **Flemington Fair**



Flemington was known for exciting racing like this close finish for ?? and Gerald Chamberlain (#76). *Photo by Dave Innes*

Speedway was the first track I frequented, investing years - first as a wide-eyed teenage spectator, later as a participant, and still later, as a media member. Just fifteen miles from where I grew up, from midsummer 1955 through 1969, I didn't miss any Saturday nights at Flemington. Even after moving from New Jersey to New York in 1973, I often returned during the dirt track era, and a few times once

the track was paved.

Thus, I was witness to the great Al Tasnady - Jackie McLaughlin rivalry, tragically cut short when McLaughlin lost his life in 1964 at Nazareth Speedway. I saw the evolution of the race cars, which in turn, led to the way the drivers attacked the square track. The half-mile clay track, originally built with horse racing in mind, was narrow - racing three cars abreast was courting disaster - and driven with four straights and four about-equal 90 degree turns.



Over the years, however, the track was widened twice, mainly by moving the inside fences inward. The combination of a wider surface and more powerful and modern-style "kinda" Gremlin Modifieds with wider tires, changed the way competitors drove. It became a big circle with cars seldom straight more than a few feet. This generated problems with flying dust and clods of clay. And the presence of "bleachers creatures", wearing paper bags over their heads. Eventually, environmental issues led to paving the track, and that to a completely different brand of racing. Flemington - paved, was far different than Flemington - dirt. At the same time, Hunterdon County, especially in and around Flemington, was experiencing a rapid population growth. The completion of I-78 just to the north, coupled with expanding NJ Route 31 and NJ Route 202 to four lanes hastened the transformation of the county noted for its agricultural base into one of being a suburban commuting region.

The result was that property values shot up, especially areas already zoned "commercial" or with that potential - the venerable Flemington Fairgrounds included. To some extent, the end of racing at Flemington was inevitable, but also personally regrettable.



Dirt standout Billy Pauch won the 1993 Race of Champions—on Flemington asphalt. *Photo by Gracie Ryan*



Photo by Alan Edelson

GSVSCC meetings are held on the 3rd Wednesday from January through November, 7:30 p.m. at the West Long Branch Firehouse, Rt. 71 (Monmouth Road) and Cedar Ave. West Long Branch, NJ. For directions call 732-330-8349 or go to www.gsvscc.org.

But that wasn't the only Garden State track that's been lost. To the north of Phillipsburg along the Delaware River, **Harmony Speedway** was built – opened June 7, 1963, with its final race on July 7, 1972. During



This photo of standout driver Toby Tobias shows Harmony's impressive grandstands. Photo by William Scholl

that ten-year period, races were run for nine seasons, but only five years with a full weekly schedule. History shows Harmony hosted 124 Modified feature events. I was in the stands when Sam Beavers won the inaugural race run under the NASCAR banner. A decade later, Will Cagle captured the finale, a post-Independence Day 100-lap affair. Harmony never lived up to its builders' expectations. It was a 5/8 mile D-shaped clay oval with a long home straight, fairly sweeping turns and a kink in the middle of the backstretch. It was built with a drag strip between the stands – wide, concrete ones built into the natural hillside – and the racetrack. This put the fans too far from the action. The location in Brainards along the Delaware River was several miles off County Route 519 and accessed from a narrow twisting country road or directly north along the river from Phillipsburg on an equally-narrow country road. This wasn't encouraging for fans, and the riverside location often was shrouded by fog late in the evenings, which didn't help matters either.



This photo shows the infield, backstretch and the drag strip of Harmony. Photo by Richard Coleman

In both 1964 and '65 I was there every Friday night with good buddy Leon Harrison, as we chased NASCAR Novice points. Perhaps our Harmony highlight was qualifying for the 100-lap Modified feature with our six-cylinder GMC-powered Novice coupe and finishing in the top 10. Harmony was fun while it lasted.

Old Bridge Stadium opened August 21, 1953 and was shuttered following its finale on August 25, 1968. The half-mile, relatively flat asphalt speedway in central New Jersey drew the most outstanding Modified fields of any track, but internal squabbling, among other factors, shortened its existence. I first saw a race at Old Bridge in 1962. It was during the next two seasons that I was a more frequent visitor.

Opening day, April 21, 1963 ushered in a northern invasion as Yankee "Wild" Bill Slater won the Modified feature over Bill Wimble, Pete Corey, and Ernie Gahan. I specifically remember the team cars of Corey and Ken Shoemaker pulling in to the track still covered with mud from the previous night's competition at NY's Fonda Speedway.

I was back at Old Bridge a couple more times before the June 23, 1963 NASCAR-sanctioned 200 lap race that drew teams from across the entire Modified spectrum. A race that looked to be an easy win for Joe Kelly in the Don House #XL1 had a dramatic finish when, just a couple of laps from the checkered flag, Kelly coasted to the infield - out of fuel. That handed the race to New York driver Ed Ortiz, who finished ahead of Bob Rossell, Ernie Gahan from New Hampshire, Virginia's Ed Crouse, and Mario "Fats" Caruso from Massachusetts.

In the summer of 1963, while driving home from summer classes at Rutgers University, I passed several NASCAR Grand National rigs headed towards Old Bridge. I couldn't make it to the race that year, but promised myself I would be there if the GN gang returned north the next year. So on July 10, 1964, I

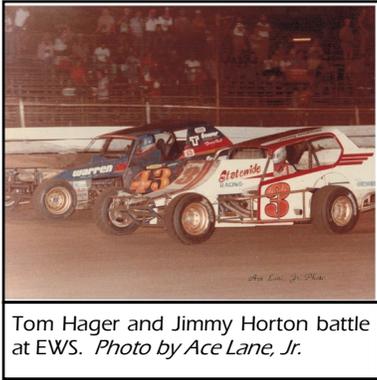
was in the Old Bridge stands and watched Billy Wade driving Bud Moore's land-ark-sized Mercury to victory, beating out Ned Jarrett, Richard Petty, Jimmy Pardo, and David Pearson. It was the first of four consecutive Northern wins for Wade - and unfortunately, the only ones of his career, shortened by a fatal accident while tire testing at Daytona in January 1965.



Plenty of fans were in the stands for an early (or late?) - season...

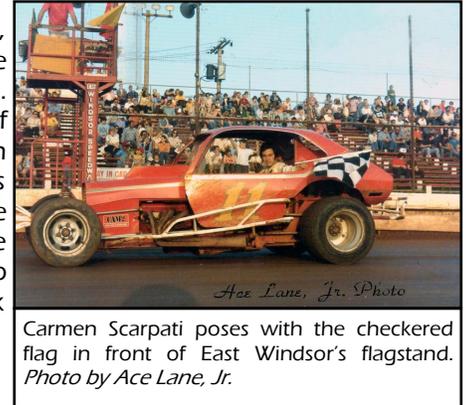


Midget race at Old Bridge Stadium. Photos by George Pavlisko



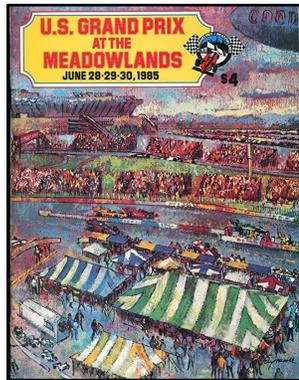
Tom Hager and Jimmy Horton battle at EWS. Photo by Ace Lane, Jr.

East Windsor Speedway opened in June, 1965. I recall attending a couple of early race meets when full Modifieds were the "A" division. During the '60s era, at the end of a couple of seasons, East Windsor held open competition extra-distance races for limited sportsman. I was there with Leon Harrison in two consecutive years. The first time, we finished fifth, making the grand sum of \$75. The next year, we made it to 4th, but the prize money was cut and we took home only \$70!



Carmen Scarpati poses with the checkered flag in front of East Windsor's flagstand. Photo by Ace Lane, Jr.

I only went to one race at **Atlantic City Speedway**, a.k.a. "**Pleasantville Speedway**". I remember that Tony Siscione smoked the competition that evening. I guess you could call **Bridgeport's** big sweeping 5/8 mile a ghost track since it's been replaced by a shorter and banked arrangement. Likewise, the old quarter-mile paved **New Egypt/Fort Dix Speedway**. I spent several race nights at both now-gone tracks.



I had media credentials for the first Indy Car race around the parking lots of **Meadowlands Stadium**. I was not impressed by the course layout and especially the "appeal to the beautiful people" attitude of those in charge of the event. Legitimate auto racing folks were shunted aside from the few good vantage points for the likes of someone from *Women's Wear Daily*. The event ran from 1984 through 1991 before it was mercifully removed from the Indy Car schedule.



Trenton Speedway Photo by Race Day Images

I also only attended one race at the **Trenton State Fairgrounds** track, but it was a significant one in NASCAR history. In the 1960s, the NASCAR Grand National cars were the size of aircraft carriers and, except for the superspeedways, looked like lumbering whales as they turned laps at most venues. In 1967, Bobby Allison had a better idea. He showed up with a mid-sized Chevelle. On July 9 that year, I was at Trenton for the Northern 300. While Richard Petty won that day, it was Allison's little Chevelle that garnered much of the fans' attention. Allison battled overheating issues but finished 9th. Al Tasnady represented the local gang, driving one of Buck Baker's Oldsmobiles. He dropped out after only 89 laps.



Aerial view of Trenton Speedway

That wraps up New Jersey, but there's more personal ghost tracks in Pennsylvania, Connecticut, New York, North Carolina, Florida, Illinois, and Canada - more stories for another time.

Editor's note: our author must not have been able to take in races at other New Jersey "ghost tracks" with which our readership is familiar. Vineland Speedway, Hinchliffe Stadium in Paterson and Long Branch Stadium come to mind. We will look at Long Branch Stadium in a coming issue.

“STOCKS FOR TOTS” FUNDRAISING AUTOGRAPH EVENT MAKES SUCCESSFUL RETURN

By Joe Zalescik

Mooreville, NC- The 32nd annual “Stocks for Tots” holiday event was held on Tuesday, December 7, 2021 at the Charles Mack Citizen Center in downtown Mooreville, North Carolina. Started in 1989, the event was cancelled in 2020 due to mandates surrounding the COVID-19 virus. The fundraiser has contributed more than \$1 million and collected more than 70,000 toys for at-risk children in North Carolina.

Tanya Fowler, the Executive Director of Pharos Parenting, said the fundraiser and toy drive makes a major difference to the social service agency in Iredell County. Pharos Parenting serves more than 175 families that are at risk for child abuse and neglect. The mission of the social service agency is to build hope for children and families through education, counseling, and intervention programs to end the cycle of child abuse and neglect.

The orderly crowd waited in cold temperatures, some more than 2 hours, to enter the venue. NASCAR Hall of Famers Bobby Allison, Jerry Cook, Dale Inman, and Bobby Labonte were on hand. Former New Jersey driver and Cup Crew Chief Ray Evernham was on hand with his family along with Joey Logano and his son. Santa was in the room for the kids along with Cup driver and new Xfinity owner Joey Gase with his twin boys and wife Caitlin in attendance.

A group photo was taken of all the drivers and other participants. Media personalities Ralph Sheheen of Speed Sport and Winston Kelly from the NASCAR Hall of Fame and Motor Racing Network were in attendance. Humpy Wheeler, former President and General Manager of Charlotte Motor Speedway, made the rounds talking to drivers and fans. He turned 83 in October.

The event is coordinated by staff and volunteers from the North Carolina Auto Racing Hall of Fame in Mooreville, with Don Miller as Chairman of the Stocks for Tots Foundation. The atmosphere in the Charles Mack Citizens Center ballroom was a combination of a racers’ reunion and a gathering of more than 350 excited fans seeking to meet 60 participants for autographs and fellowship. Plans are already in the works for the 2022 event.



Group photo of all participants in Stocks for Tots 2021



Ryan Newman and Santa



Joey Logano (L) and Humpy Wheeler (R)



From Left: Randy LaJoie, Ray Evernham & Family, Jerry Nadeau



Bobby and Donnie Allison (center) are all smiles.

Thanks to North Carolina club member Joe Zalescik for submitting this article and photos.

PHOTO TRIVIA ANSWER—FALL, 2021

Here's a good one for you. At what track, and in what year was this photo taken? Hint: it looks like it was a mild November day. How many of these drivers (and officials) can you name? Doesn't it seem like only a few years ago?



"Only a few years ago", these Modified drivers, two track officials and Seymour the Clown were assembled at Wall Stadium before the running of the 1979 Turkey Derby feature races. See the following image for the identification of these talented people who brought thrills and excitement to the fans gathered for TD V.

6th Turkey Derby - the starting field

<p>Top Row - L to R 1. Bob O'Rourke - NASCAR 2. Jerry Bartlett 3. Doug Hendch 4. Mark Engle 5. John Blawie Jr. 6. Bill White 7. Tony Sizone 8. Larry Boyd 9. Jim Hendrickson 10. Ned Harbach 11. Tom Baldwin 12. Bill Park 13. Chas. Jozombek 14. "Moose" Leo Hewitt 15. Tom O'Rake - Pit Steward</p>	<p>Bottom Row - kneeling L to R 1 - 2 Gary Cretly 3. Mike Murphy 4. Wayne Anderson 5. Tom McClain 6. Leo Murray 7. Chas Kremer Jr. 8 - 9 Dave Thomas 10 Dick Lewis 11 Joe Ballini 12. Leo Kent - the winner 13 Ray Everham 14. Sonny Seamon</p>
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Seymour the Clown

not shown
 Leo Wagner III, Tony Blackman

JANUARY 19, 2022

The January meeting of the Garden State Vintage Stock Car Club was called to order by President Ray Shea at 7:38 p.m. Eleven members were in attendance.

A moment of silence was held for the following folks who recently passed away: longtime club member Jerry Schiel, racer from the 1960s and '70s; the wife of member Phil Spino; longtime car owner John Norcia; former member Bob Hopely.

Ray Liss mentioned that member Cliff Bessett is in the hospital. Get well wishes also went out to John Megill.

The Vintage Automobile Museum of NJ's Winter Display Car Show opened last weekend. The display will run until February 27. The museum is open Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays from noon-4:00 p.m. Thanks to Ray Liss and Larry Housman for their hard work in organizing the exhibit. The museum will show race footage movies on January 29.

The Motorsports Race Car and Trade Show will be held this weekend in Oaks, PA. We are getting ready to set up tomorrow. Thanks to the folks who are going out to set up, man the booth, and take down. We have a great display planned that centers on Tom Skinner and Parker Bohn.

The club's awards banquet is still scheduled for March 20. Ray will be sending out sign-up forms next week.

Ray displayed a Wall Stadium program from the 1961 season. Tommie Elliott, Jack Hart, and Joe Kelly autographed the cover. Ray offered the program for attendees to take a look.

Ray wished all those traveling to Florida for racing safe travels and good luck in competition.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:55 p.m.

FEBRUARY 16, 2022

The February meeting of the Garden State Vintage Stock Car Club was called to order at 7:40 p.m. by President Ray Shea.

The invocation was given by Earl Krause.

A moment of silence was observed for the passing of Jack Patterson's wife and member Cliff Bessett.

Ray reported on the Motorsports Show in PA in January. The club's booth was a tribute to Tom Skinner and Parker Bohn. On display were Doug Megill's #659 coupe, Norris William's #659 Vega and Ed Bohn's #659 Modified. Thanks to Bill Force for designing the booth and everyone who helped make it possible. We were presented with the First Place award in the Vintage category.

The club once again participated in the Winter

display at the Vintage Automobile Museum of NJ, located in Point Pleasant. Ray thanked Ray Liss and Larry Housman for their efforts in making it all happen.

Ray congratulated Donna and Lenny Boyd on their championship in the ATQMRA for 2021.

Welcome to new member Damian Simon. Damian was a crew member for Mike Marcotte's #07 Modified.

Banquet forms will be mailed out soon.

Many Wall Stadium drivers were in Florida for Speedweek. Some did very well, winning a few races, and others - not so much.

The motion to adjourn was offered by Ray Liss and seconded by George Klein.

MARCH 16, 2022

The March meeting of the Garden State Vintage Stock Car Club was called to order at 7:35 p.m. by President Ray Shea. Eighteen members were in attendance.

The invocation was offered by Earl Krause.

Ray announced that a friend of racing, "Jalopy Jack", is experiencing serious health problems. We offer him our best wishes.

The 2020 Hall of Famed and awards banquet is almost here. This Sunday, 127 people are expected as of today. The Spring Lake Manor will be the location. Three years have passed since we had a banquet. We are good to go. Unfortunately, honoree Tim Stephan will not be able to attend the banquet.

Ray informed the group that Wall Stadium has signed a multi-year lease with the property owners. We are glad to hear this news. We thank the Krause family for hanging in there to negotiate a new lease.

The club's museum at Wall Stadium is being freshened up for next season. We are working on putting new items on display for the new season.

Linda Cooper, Newsletter Editor for 10 years, announced that she will no longer serve in this position after 2022. If anyone is interested in becoming the new Editor, please contact Linda for more information.

Earl Krause spoke about his experience at the indoor races recently held at the Syracuse Expo Center in Syracuse, NY. He and his wife Pam ran the Press Room at the event. Earl described the new building, located on the former NY State Fairgrounds dirt track property. Earl described a Motorsports-type trade show that also took place. This was the last of the indoor racing series events for the Winter. Earl mentioned upcoming indoor races for next winter.

