

1st Vacation Day-NHRA and H-Dogs

By Walter Wersching

Last Friday was my first vacation day of the year. I had it all planned – breakfast with Cindy, ride 140 miles to the Atlanta Dragway, enjoy a day at the races and stop by H-D of Greenville on the way back. All of this and be home by dark – approx – 8:30PM.

It was a tall challenge but everything went off great. I only forgot one thing – sunscreen. The sun cooked my face and arms. I won't forget again!

I awoke at the normal time and Cindy and I met her friend and her husband for breakfast. It was the husband's birthday and IHOP gave him a chocolate Sunday after he ate his breakfast. Something more fitting to breakfast would have been better. He still enjoyed it.

I left for Atlanta about 9:00AM. It had rained the night before and the clouds were lingering. It was cool and overcast with the look of rain any minute. I had my rain suit if it started. I headed south on rt 18 and turned right onto I85. I stayed on I85 until the Commerce, GA exit. I turned right and then left at the first light to the race track. I got there about 11:15. I was flying all the way down. The Sportster just purred at 80 mph as I was getting passed by many other drivers. Needless to say, everybody speeds on I85.

Atlanta Dragway has special parking for motorcycles. If I had driven a car, I would have parked a quarter mile or more away from the gate. With the bike, I parked less than 100 feet from the gate. It was great!

I had tried to get a "Media Pass" to the event but they said no so I had to pay the \$31.00 for the general admission ticket. Looking back – it was money very well spent.

I had gone to www.nhra.com and looked at the Pro Stock Motorcycle (PSM) category. I wanted to meet and interview somebody interesting. I determined that Peggy Llewellyn would be that person. She hadn't raced for six years and was already in the top-ten in points along with two other women who were placed 1st and 2nd.

They were already racing some of the lower class qualification runs as I looked for the PSM trailers. They were pretty far from the entrance. I located Peggy's trailer and walked around looking at the Buell motorcycle she races. As I was standing there, up comes this young lady and she started fixing the plastic garbage bags in the two waste baskets near the trailer door. I asked if she was Peggy. When I did, she turned toward me with this big



smile and said that she was Peggy. She is a beautiful young lady about 5'2" tall that one would never think as a motorcycle racer.

We talked about why she wasn't in racing for so long. She had been trying to get sponsorship and a complete race program before she made her comeback. She located some very talented individuals and got a good sponsor that will be there for her for

the entire 2007 season. As we talked, she never stopped smiling. Anyone could see that she was very happy to be there. She had been working on her techniques and other things that we take for granted. The simple things can make the difference in winning another round. She is very dedicated. She comes from a Texas drag racing family. Go to www.peggyllewellyn.com to read all about her. She'd been working all her life for this and I'm sure that she will get to the final round this year and might even with a "Wally". That's the trophy named after Wally Parks (the founder of the NHRA) that event winners get.

While I was there with her, some other fans came up and asked for autographs and their picture taken with her. She was enjoying every minute in the lime-light and she deserves to be there too. By the way – she won't ride a motorcycle on the street – it's too dangerous!



After saying our goodbyes, I headed to the stands to enjoy an afternoon of tire-smoke and nitro-methane exhaust. I looked at the flags and the wind was blowing toward the pit side of the track so that's where I went – to the first grandstand on the pit side (top row). I was close to the starting line action and could see the full length of the track – perfect seats.

While I was there a man sat down with about a dozen of those rental seats with backs and placed them on the benches in front of me. He boasted that he was celebrating his 25th anniversary that weekend. I thought that it was his marriage anniversary but it wasn't. He and his family and friends have been coming to the Atlanta Dragway for the past 24 years to watch the same race in the same seats. It was their 25th Race Anniversary. His family and friends bring their campers and setup in the old pit area and stay the weekend. They were a little loud but it was easy to see that they were enjoying themselves. It made my visit even better.

To my left was Larry from Macon, GA who had come to the race for almost as long as the family in front of us. He knew them too. To my right was Al from Columbia, SC who had come a lot but not consecutive years. We became fast friends. Being in the stands with fans (some very diehard) enjoying the sport enhanced my experience. Peggy came up for her qualifying run and turned a 7.06 and was #1 Qualifier for a while.



She wound up #6 Qualifier for the event. Eventually on Sunday, she lost in the second round – she's still in the top-ten at #10. Her reaction time was great but the bike got a little squirrely as she went down the track.

Then it was what everyone was waiting for – the Nitro Funny Cars. To experience them is worth the price of admission. They are awesome. The first one up was John Force. He's got hundreds of wins and quite a few championships.

This is the sequence of events. First they fire up the beast – everybody looks over in anticipation. Second they do a burnout – the noise is deafening and there is so much smoke, it's hard to see. Then as they are backing up to the starting line, the wind blows the smoke across the track into our faces. The smell of burnt rubber is intoxicating. Next they stage, it's relatively quiet. The engines are at a high idle. After they are both staged, the light goes green and all hell breaks loose. It sounds like an explosion as the sound waves bounce off our chests and we feel the vibrations in our feet. In an instant, they are gone. In two city blocks they have reached 300mph or more. Everybody is cheering, laughing and some even screaming. Then the nitro-methane exhaust hits us and we are in heaven! To a drag race fan, there is nothing better than what I have just described.



I guess that I'm a wimp because I had earplugs in. Most of the people didn't. That much sound hurts! There can be too much of a good thing.

I left after the first round of qualifying. There was another after dark and the fire from the exhaust only makes the experience better. Maybe next year, I'll spend the night nearby. I headed back the way I came but I was pretty tired. The sun cooked me all day. I smelled the nitro exhaust in my nostrils all the way to South Carolina. It was great!

When I got to Woodruff Road in Greenville, SC, I turned off to go to the Bike Nite at H-DOG. It was a nice respite from the day's noise and the wind noise from riding at 80 mph. There was a small band playing and Fuddruckers was supplying a great hamburger plate for only \$7.00. I just had to have one. After a while to digest my food and enjoy the music, I started on the last leg home. I got home at about 8:20, the sun had just set.

I hope that all my vacation days are as fun-filled as this was. I hope you enjoyed reading this as much as I've enjoyed reliving it as I wrote it.

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