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When I was younger I never really liked hearing endless stories from older folks about how tough it was when they were young and how easy us kids had it. We all know that our parents worked 7 days a week and they got up at 5 a.m. to milk the cows before they walked 10 miles through 3 feet of snow uphill to get to school. Then after 9 hours of school they again walked uphill back home (I never figured that out) and completed 4 hours of chores before they did their homework and went to bed.

Well, at the risk of sounding like my parents I thought I'd like to talk a little bit about race tracks... then and now.

I have, on more than one occasion heard negative comments about race tracks or race track preparation. This amazingly seems to happen at some of the best prepared race tracks as opposed to some that are not very well kept. I suppose the racers don't expect much from some tracks and a lot from others.

But I want to go back a few years, actually about 30 years and talk about some of the tracks I grew up racing at. I'm sure my "bad track" stories pale in comparison to drivers like Garlits, Prudhomme, McEwen, Ivo and others but, I've raced at some pretty gnarly places.

It was in the Carolinas in the late 70s and I had a two car match race with "Wild Wilfred" in our Alcohol Funny Cars. It paid \$500 for three runs on Saturday night which wasn't much but it was only an 1/8 mile and, didn't have to go fast and heck, in 1976 \$500 would buy you a set of tires and a good dinner.

Well my friend and crew member Randy Larimore actually got me the date and he told me the track was on the side of a mountain. I thought that would be okay because the track at Denver was on the side of a mountain and it was nice. Randy told me it wasn't quite as nice as Denver.

So we drove down this dirt road for a mile, turned a corner in the forest and there it was. I'd never seen

anything like it. The race track was literally cut out of the side of the mountain like a step. On the left side there were remains of a guardrail that had fallen down the hill into the first row of the pit area. The pits too were cut into the hill like steps and provided room for about one row of cars on each level. On the right side there was a dirt embankment that went uphill. That is where the spectators sat. A lot of the dirt had washed out onto the right lane from the recent rains. The track was just a bit wider than a single lane at one of our tracks now.

The mountain curved around at the end so as to make the shutdown area run uphill onto the mountain side. The grade was so steep that it looked like a wall not a hill. When I sat in the Funny Car on the starting line I could not see the top of the hill in the shut down area... just a wall of asphalt reaching skyward. This wasn't so bad though after it got dark because there were no lights in the shutdown area and I couldn't see the asphalt wall in front of me.

I didn't like this place one little bit. Why didn't I just leave? So many things were different then. As bad as this track was I'd seen others almost as bad and raced at them. I was young. I needed the money. And a lot of fans with beverages in their hands had crowded around my rig and wanted to see a Funny Car run. So Randy and I thought we should accommodate them.

Getting to our pit spot we dropped a trailer wheel in a hole and broke a spindle clean off. I cut a whole through the trailer floor, jacked up the axle and chained it around the frame. That night I tore up a lot of other stuff too. The track was so slick that you couldn't possibly take enough clutch or power out to both do a burnout and then make a successful run. I don't think I ever floored it on any run. Wilfred and I agreed we had no idea of where the finish line was while driving and we couldn't see the sides of the track. Our headers actually hit each others on a burnout once and when I reached the base of that hill in the shutdown area it bottomed the car so badly that it flattened the frame rails,

broke the wheelie bar and bent the bottom of the motor plate and the bell housing back so far that I had to use a torch and hammer to straighten it out to get the can off.

Both Wilfred and I survived the night, the fans loved the show, we got our money and I bought my new tires. I opted out of buying dinner however when Wilfred's wife Sue offered up some of her home made ribs and salad instead.

There were many days like this and although they make great stories I have no desire to relive them. We've come a long way with our facilities and the sport has continued to grow.

When I stand at a beautiful NHRA raceway, long, wide, painted white walls, expertly prepared with a fabulous lighting system and staffed by dedicated individuals I can't help but think we've got it pretty good.

Our driving school is located at two of these great racetracks and visits others throughout the year. If you'd like to drive at one of these premiere facilities... give us a call.

