

Memories of the 1965 NW Grand Prix

From Pat Hues

My father was Dr. V. D. Clausing, racer of the late 50s and early 60s, and the long time course physician at Pacific Raceway. Here are my memories of the 1965 NW Grand Prix at the track.

I so very much appreciated seeing Dan Gurney in action at that race ... with his arms extended out ... driving on the absolute edge, and yet never making a mistake (I heard, un-officially, that he broke the course record on the first lap of that race in his Lotus 19)? He was a master. But it helped that Dan Gurney's car was a new Colin Chapman scientific marvel.

What I thought was also remarkable was that Lew Florence came in 5th overall at that race in 1965, since the car he was driving (a Lister Corvette that was formerly owned by Tom Carstens) was technologically speaking: "yesterdays newspaper". It was an eight-year-old race car. But Lew had raced everything that had wheels ... including dirt track cars and motorcycles. He knew what that car could and couldn't do when he bought it, but he was one guy who really knew how to get the most out of that type of machine ... as dated as it was by then.

I used to have a snap shot of Lew at the end of the straightaway at Kent, and the front wheels of his Lister Corvette are about two inches off the pavement: the car is starting to fly! Lew estimated that he was probably going about 140 miles an hour right at that point in the straightaway.

Oh ... and I remember looking at the "tattle tale" for the tachometer on Lew's Lister Corvette, just after he finished that race (the tattle tale shows the highest RPM point the engine had turned. It stays in that position until you re-set it). Anyway, the tachometer tattletale showed about 7,200 RPM. I don't know at what point that Chevy small block would have blown up, but I don't think it would have gone too much higher? (and while I'm sure Lew didn't hold it at that high of RPM for very long, I mention it because it gives an indication of how hard he pushed the engine).

As Lew was staying out our house that weekend, I happened to ride home from Kent with him in his car after that race. The race was exhausting for him: he looked like he just got in a stick fight, but he didn't have a stick! I was only 16 years old in 1965, but I knew that Lister Corvette had to be a monster to manhandle around the race track? So I asked Lew Florence how that car handled? And he said: "well ...it doesn't handle for shit ... but it's fast as hell!"

Lew Florence was an awesomely talented driver with an unusual amount of guts, and I just feel that his efforts in that Grand Prix of Kent in 1965 are noteworthy ... even if it is noted forty-four years after the fact.

—Pat Hues