The Race

It was always dusty in the turns. There was no gravel or pavement to hold down the earth that was picked up by the windstorms that roared by. The kind of dust that gets in your eyes. Stingy red powder you couldn't rub out. And it wasn't just the dust; it was pebbles and rocks and whatever pieces of metal that flew off the track. Those projectiles left raspberries if you didn't duck.

This was the only place to watch if you couldn't afford a ticket in the stand. It was the best seat in town to see a crash- being at the final turn before the straightaway. Behind a fence low rent luxury. Nobody ever asked to see a ticket. The officials couldn't be bothered to wander too far from the beer trucks. You could watch the whole race and nobody would notice unless a driver lost control of his turn and crashed through the fence. Then you were cooked. It happened. More than once.

Darrel didn't care. The closer the better. Sometimes he could feel the rumble tires as the rocks flew past his perch. He was so close he could see flames burping out of the exhaust pipes. He felt like he was smoking in the smoke. It had to be better than cigarettes. He had never tried them so this was as close as he came to the feeling. This had to be better. Burnt Gasoline and fire mixed with dust. It was Darrel's' definition of speed – Something he lived for.

Darrel adjusted the horned rim glasses for a better look. He didn't need these thick black frames for every day, he just needed them for reading but he had gotten used to the look and he didn't feel comfortable without them. He reached into his jacket pocket and pulled out a stick of gum. He never bothered reading the cartoon it was wrapped in. The comic was never funny. The taste never lasted very long but you looked cool chewing it.

The cars were moving faster as the race started coming to a close. This was when the action happened. All the drivers would make their big move soon. They weren't thinking about the

winner's circle of the prize money. They just wanted to be first. They wanted to win. They would do just about anything to cross the finish line first.

Darrel was watching car 66. A local driver who wrenched at a local garage. He was a cool driver, consistent and strategic. He drifted around corners without losing speed. He moved to the outside and passed on the inside. His tires were bald and his brakes looked like they were on fire. 66 was finally making his move, gunning his Detroit v8 for third place. His motion crashed into the bumper of the car ahead of him. The car jerked and then spun as 66 passed on the side. Third place.

Two more, let's go 66!

66 wasn't slowing down. His tachometer was over the redline. The finish was in sight. Six laps to go. The first and second place drivers were battling to hold their positions lapping slower drivers as they rounded the track. It was like a seesaw battle with each cars nose clawing for inches. The two drivers were evenly matched. New cars, custom built engines modified from factory blocks. Forged pistons, custom built intake and sponsorship to pay for it. They had big money behind them with a team of support mechanics and assistants to change tires and replace expensive parts. Winning was a matter of how much money you had to spend.

At least that's what money often thinks. 66 had experience. He learned to build engines that would outrun the law and he spent most of his life testing his theories. The fact that he was never caught was proof to his theories.

66 was a dark horse. An unknown factor the competition had not planned for. They didn't even know he was in the race until he showed up in third place closing in on the leaders. Three laps to go.

C'mon 66.

The crowd was getting excited. A local boy was in the running. 66 was gaining ground. The leaders were so busy with each other they didn't see 66 tearing up the outside. His wheels were inches from the wall as drifted forward toward the leaders.

It was now three cars neck and neck nosing for the lead. 66's tachometer was way past the red line and there were no more gears to back it down. Smoke was seeping out from the hood. The engine was heating up faster than the radiator could cool it down. Limits were being reached.

Two laps to go. The leaders now had to contend a third party for the lead. Their own engines were whining, overheating and rising toward their limits.

66 posted to the inside but there was nowhere to go. He bounced off the leader and veered toward the wall but the leader took notice and turned 66's drift into a half spin. 66 was neck and neck with the leaders sliding sideways.

One lap to go.

The officials waved the white flag. Everyone in the stands was on their feet watching and waiting for what would happen next. Darrel knew this was the moment that something was going to happen.

66 was in trouble. We was still locked and still sliding. His engine was crying, wanting to quit but he wouldn't let it. His car was dying but he didn't car. With half a lap to go he had a chance to win it all. 66 braked hard and jerked his steering wheel into the leader. His car lurched free, spinning the leader onto the track and out of the race. Now it was only two with a half lap to go.

C'mon 66.

The entire crowd was on its feet. Everyone was crowding the fence getting as close as they could to the action. 66 was out of tricks. Hi was hearing his lifters knock and starting he hear

misfires. His engine was dying. He couldn't beat the leader, he had to take him out. He jerked his steering wheel left into the leaders rear tire but the leader wad watching and veered away.

It didn't matter, the smoke from under his hood started pouring out before a pop and bang blew his lid over the top of his roof. At the same time his front tire gave way and gouged his bumper into the track. The track held the bumper and twisted the car into a spin off the track. Oil sprayed as the car hit a post and flipped.

The leader took the checkered flag while 66 didn't even finish the race. The driver was limping away from the wreck as it caught fire. 66 would never race again.

Shit. Fuckin money again.

Darrel sat up and picked up his bike rode off.

2. Aftermath

The race was over and the victors had left to celebrate. The Coyote Café would be packed tonight. The empty lot next to the soda shop would be filled with cars tonight and crumpled beer cans tomorrow morning. The racing stands were silent now. The only things remaining were plastic cups, seat cushions, empty peanut bags and cigarette buttes. Here and there were empty or broken Styrofoam beer coolers settled in a puddle of melting ice. Broken bottles were everywhere. People loved the sound of broken bottles. Breaking bottles was the next best thing to shooting them and around here people loved to shoot.

The tow truck didn't bother to jack 66 up. It just placed its massive hook onto the subframe and drug the smoking remains to the center of the track. Jack pulled up in his Jeep Power wagon pulling a trailer. The Power Wagon was old – war surplus. You could see the army green showing through the cheap yellow paint job. It wasn't pretty but it had been built solid and it was strong and dependable to a fault. Jack reached out of the window and opened the cab door. He favored his right foot as he stepped out and limped toward the wreck. Darrel rolled his Schwinn up behind Jack.

Can you fix it?

Not this time Darrel. Ole 66 has given all she had to give.

You sure came close Mr. Jack.

Yes. But not quite close enough.

Jack moved toward the wreck favoring his right leg. He was obviously in pain but he wouldn't show it on his face and he would never talk about it. He reached over and rubbed his hand across the crumpled belt line of 66. He dropped his fingers across the fender and then pulled them away. Two race officials walked up behind Jack with a stack of paper tucked into an old

clip board with STP stickers on the pack. There white jump suits made them look and feel official but they were really just high school teachers moonlighting for a couple of extra bucks.

Tough break Jack.

Yeah, tough break.

You going to take her hope or send her to the scrap yard?

Jack turned and took a look at the wreck and turned back to the officials.

She's just scrap now. Send her to the yard.

Okay Jack. Just sign this release and pay the $20 towing fee and we'll take her off your hands.

Jacked reached into his back pocket and pulled out a beat-up leather wallet with a piece 100 mile an hour tape holing it together. He opened the seam and pulled out some bills - more crumpled as the ole 66 was. He shifted the bills through his hands and counted them twice.

I only got 12 dollars Joe. Can you spot me till the end of the week?

Joe looked at the bills in Joes hands and scratched the back of his neck. He turned and looked his partner and nodded.

Fine.

Joe scribbled on his clip board and ripped off a receipt and handed one to Jack and the other to the wrecker driver.

You sure you don't need anything from the wreck? Looks like some parts are still good. That differential looks like it might have some life in it and that steering wheel looks to be in good shape.

Nope. Nothing I need. Take her away.

Darrel watched jack take one last look at 66.

I'll see you at the Garage, Darrel.

Darrel nodded. Jack put the power wagon in gear and drove away.

Home

It was dark before Darrel rode into the driveway. It was more of a long rock and dirt trail than a driveway, but it led to the house. Darrel could smell dinner cooking. Roast chicken filled the air. No one could roast a chicken like his mom. Her family had deep roots in the old south and cooking was like a religion. She had brought seeds from Delta no one here could even pronounce. She cultivated and grew herbs and vegetables behind the house in her garden. It was more Darrell's garden than hers. He watered the plants, pulled the weeds and picked and sorted the gardens offering. Still they were moms' seeds that started it all.

Papa was sitting on the porch in his rocking chair. Darrel knew from the cloud of smoke over his head that he wasn't happy. Papa only smoked when he was angry. He said it calmed his Apache and Sioux warrior blood. He preferred to chew tobacco rather than smoke it, but it didn't have the same effect.

Papa was a big man. He was getting rounder but he was still big. Big enough that nobody crossed him. Those that did were sure to warn others not to do it again. He was never one to cause trouble, in fact he went out of his way to avoid it. He could ride, rope, hunt and shoot a one-inch group at 400 yards. Mom even said he rode a big motorcycle when he was younger. He left all that behind when he met her. She was the most beautiful girl in the county. It didn't matter that neither of their families were happy about them. They were inseparable. They moved to California and left all that behind. A phone call and an odd visit kept them connected. But California had its own problems.

Your late.

Sorry Papa.

Sorry doesn't feed the animals.

I'll feed them after dinner.

Your dinner can wait. Go take care of the animals. Go on boy.

Darrel leaned his bike against the stoop and walked towards the barn. Its planks were blackened and hardened by the weather. They creaked with the wind and leaked when it rained but they kept the feed sacks and the hay bales relatively dry.

Darrel usually fed the hogs first as their troughs were closest to the barn and when the pigs heard the rustling of the sacks and wouldn't stop squealing until they were fed. Darrel grabbed the pail and started shoveling in grain pellets. He filled a second bucket and then carried them over to the fence. The hogs snorted, growled and pushed each other about, jockeying for the best position at the trough. Darrell always tried to put the grain in evenly but the greedy pigs snouts got in the way and most of the grain ended up in the mud. It didn't matter. The pigs would find it and it would all be gone within the hour.

The chickens came next. There was a big bag of dried corn next to the coop. Darrell didn't even have to open the door. He just reached in the bag and threw five or six hand-fulls through the chicken wire. His mom would check for eggs in the morning.

Darrell walked back in the barn and rolled down a new bail of alfalfa straw. They were fresh bails - dark and leafy green. They were bound tightly with three parallel wire loops, wound tight with a machine off the field. There were lots of ways to cut the wire. Twist it with a hammer, a screwdriver or even a bailing hook until the bailing wire stretched and broke. Sometimes just the twist would break off. But that way was a little dangerous. You tighten the wire until in stretches so much that it snaps. That snap takes all that energy and springs it in every direction- usually in the direction of your eye. That's what happened to one of the neighbor boys. He wore an eye patch for almost a month and you can still see a little scar.

Snippers were a better solution. Darrel grabbed the sheers from their nailed in hanging post and snipped open the wires on the bail. One, two three. Easy as that. Then pull out the wires and bundle them up. Throw them in the bin and your done. Bailing wire was useful when you

Darrel folded out three flakes. Two for the cows and one for the mare nobody rode. He tucked them under his arm and headed to the corral. He hadn't mucked the stalls in a while so the corral was a cleaner. Horses like to shit where they eat. Darrel didn't think horses were as smart as people said. But at least horses were smarter than cows, because they just shit everywhere.