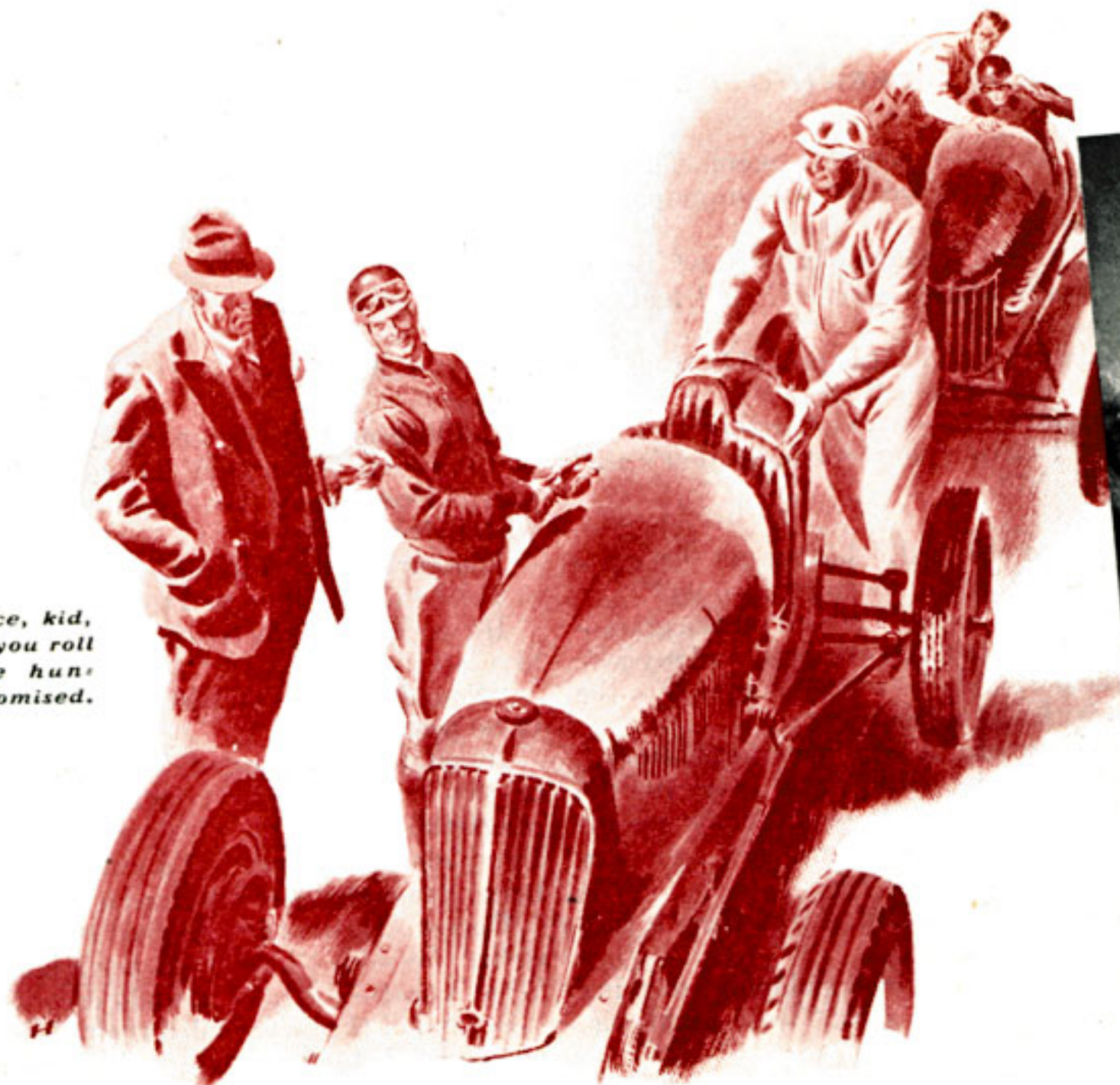


"Cop this race, kid, and I'll see you roll in the five hundred," he promised.



A CAR FOR THE BRICKS

By RICHARD HOWELLS WATKINS

ILLUSTRATED BY PETER HELCK

THEY were ganging up on Sparrow Earle in the pits. Over in the grandstand the crowd was indicating by a rhythmic stamping of the feet that instant action on the mile saucer was desirable. But the contestants were too busy working on Sparrow to hear the row.

Sparrow, in the center of the group of aggrieved drivers, had his head on one side, and though his eyelids were lowered, he took care not to conceal the deviltry glinting in his bright blue eyes. He knew his thin, grinning face was pasty from a hospital sojourn, his shiny yellow hair looked like a misused doll's toupee and his toothbrush mustache failed utterly to give his five feet of figure the dignity he desired. Nevertheless, his tan whipcord breeches and tan leather windbreaker were snappy looking. And this angry bunch considered him a cocky little devil. Sparrow was all for preserving the illusion. He kept his right arm, which wasn't so good, at his side, where nobody would notice it, and spread his grin to include everybody.

Pete Unger, the starter, had his eyes, as sharp and barbed as fishhooks, digging into Sparrow, though he spoke in generalities.

"Now listen! There's some drivers that think that at the start they can slip up along the outside of the track and blast over the line in first place when I drop the flag. Well, I'm telling 'em flat they can't, and they hadn't better try."

"What he means is lay off, Sparrow," said Russ Garvin. His voice had an edge to it. "Try it on me again and I'll slap you off the track."

"You've hurt my feelings," Sparrow complained gently to Starter Unger. "Just because I happened to open her up a trifle wide at the start of my heat yesterday, under the impression the other gentlemen had decided not to race —"

Everybody drowned out that impudent crack.

"I was uncorking my mill plenty, with the first curve right in my teeth!" roared Garvin, who had been in the pole position.

"That little nut nearly broadsided through the fence!" Ray Boyle protested.

Sparrow Earle shrugged his insignificant shoulders. "Are you gentlemen rolling 'em to save fences or win races?"

His bright eyes wandered to the edge of the circle, where an elderly man with a pushed-about face under a snap-brim hat was watching.

In tight-lipped menace, Russ Garvin raised a fist almost the size of Sparrow's head and shoved it close to the little driver's face. The fist looked as hard as a coconut. "I'll make you crawl today, Sparrow," he said and stamped away.

"As I understand it," Sparrow said mildly to Pete Unger, "if you show a green flag, it's a start. Correct?"

Unger snorted. "Get going, everybody!" he bawled, waving his arms. "Two warm-up laps!"

He gave Sparrow a final jab with his eyes. "No matter what else I miss, Sparrow, I'll be seeing you," he promised.

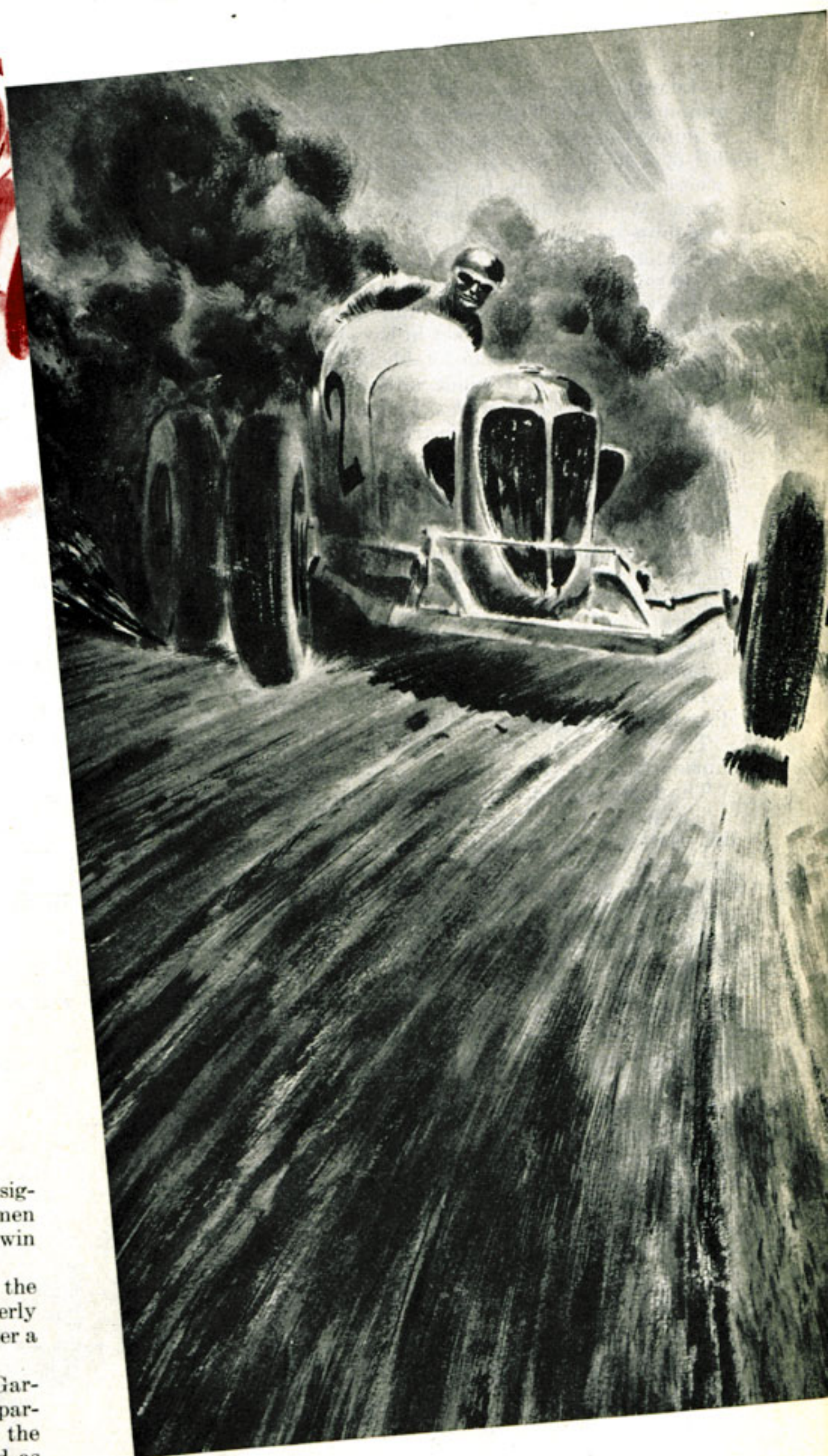
Sparrow Earle nodded approvingly. "My wheel work is worth watching," he agreed. He strode off on his short legs and stopped, chest lifted high, to face the unblinking eyes of the damaged old man in the snap-brim hat. This man really didn't look like much, but he held the keys to the top of the game in his twisted fingers.

"I got your post card from the hospital, Sparrow," old Chris Bull said, with dry sarcasm. "You can see I came a-running."

He pulled out the card and studied it with exaggerated interest. "So you're going to clean up Russ Garvin and the cream of the East today to prove I'm chucking away money if I don't let you pilot my Monitor at Indianapolis. It don't say here, but I gather you think you're good."

"We both know I'm good; I'm going to show you I'm the best," Sparrow explained confidently.

Chris Bull laughed like the screech of a rusty file. He fingered a jaw slightly dented from that time back in '09 when the Lozier clipped him.



"Cock-a-doodle-doo," he said. "The guys that nicknamed you Sparrow didn't know their natural history." A thought struck him. "Say! Is it true that when Garvin came to see you last fall after that Flemington crack-up, you chased him down the drive into a brook in your wheel chair?"

"No," said Sparrow. "It was a ditch." He chuckled.

"You busted an arm doing it, didn't you?" old Bull said. "D'you think it was worth it?"

Sparrow looked wonderingly at him. "What kind of a man are you, anyhow?" he asked. "There were nurses watching. And my arm's swell now. I'll show —"

"Say it with miles per hour, kid," old Bull broke in coldly. "I want a fast driver, not a fast talker."

"You've got both if you can sign me," Sparrow assured him over his shoulder. He chuckled. Old Chris Bull thought he was cocky.

The starter as well as the grandstand was getting hoarse. Sparrow strolled out to the brown car in the fourth row, outside. The fingers of his left arm lifted absently to cradle his right elbow. His eyes were looking at an ordinary dirt saucer, but his mind was seeing the greatest track of all, the Indianapolis bricks. If he didn't get a mount this year, he might as well stay down in the dirt the rest of his racing career.

Wheelock, his mechanic, was worried. Wheelock was a clumsy-looking ox of a man until you glanced at his long hands the second time.



He dared Garvin to try to pass—always with that right hand plainly off the wheel. "Come on, you," he whispered through gritting teeth. "Come and take that Bull's Monitor away from me."

"She isn't set," Wheelock mourned. "There are six hotter jobs in this race, the starter's out to get you and —"

Sparrow dragged himself away from the bricks and back to the dirt. "Good!" He nodded benevolently. "I like the other boys to have some slight chance to win."

The mechanic growled disapproval. His shrewd eyes dropped to the driver's arm. "How d'you know that screwy wing of yours is good for a hundred laps?" he asked. "Why not lay —"

Sparrow jerked his fingers away from his elbow. "Leave my arm out of this," he said softly. "Haven't I told you I drive with my head?"

Wheelock grunted. "I'm sure happy that I don't have to ride with your bean. I like arms, strong ones."

Sparrow was glad that on the dirt circuit he rode alone and that no mechanic would be involved in any chances he might take.

The stand was thundering. The starter was waving on the field of twelve cars. Tow cars were busy; mechanics shoved balky entries until the motors fired. The battle scent of castor oil rose with blue smoke from the track.

Somebody grabbed Sparrow's arm. It was old Chris Bull. Bull didn't look like a prosperous motor-accessory manufacturer now. He looked like an old racing man who was sore because he wasn't a young racing man. The bug had got him again.

"Cop this race, kid, and I'll see you roll in the five hundred," he promised tautly. "I've told Garvin the same thing."

"Why get him all stirred up for nothing?" Sparrow asked.

But Chris Bull was gone. He dodged over and yelled in Ray Boyle's ear.

Sparrow whistled. "Looks like a race," he murmured. Before he slid in behind the wheel, Sparrow glanced with bright interest at the curving way beyond the starting line. Wheelock groaned. Sparrow chuckled. The mechanic thought he was cocky.

Sparrow got under way. The cars were scattering around the oval as some drivers opened up and others rode with lifted throttle feet. Sparrow gunned his mount and waved cheerily as he went by Russ Garvin's robin's-egg-blue speedster. Russ scowled. He was watching Sparrow; the other drivers were watching Sparrow. Everybody was watching Sparrow. Sparrow grinned. Nobody loved him, but they all watched him. They thought he was cocky.

After throwing the car into a couple of curves, Sparrow eased to forty and crept meekly into his place in the formation. As he passed the grandstand Sparrow caught sight of Chris Bull's snap-brim hat up in the judges' stand on the edge of the track. The old pilot wasn't going to miss anything. Twelve cars, two by two, went muttering along the short backstretch. There were a hundred long miles, a hundred tough laps, ahead of them.

Garvin, riding in pole position, turned to locate Sparrow and to count the cars in the line-up. He stepped up the pace. In compact formation they came humming around the track.

In front of the grandstand Pete Unger strained on tiptoe, legs spread apart. As the cars came blasting down on him he was checking their line-up with peering, critical eyes. He exchanged a quick jerk of the head with the judges up in their stand and nervously fingered his rolled green flag. He was looking for a brown car out of place.

Sparrow, back in the fourth row, with brown dust and blue smoke streaming past his helmeted head, lay doggo. He kept his dirt-colored mount in tense subjection. They were all watching him and they were all riding a little to the outside of the straight-away to block him off.

Sparrow's squinted eyes were on the starting line. He saw Pete Unger's first quick move to flip open the green flag. Then, one quick breath before the redoubled roar of released power from the other cars hit his ears, he jammed down his foot. Screaming, his mount leaped ahead.

There was a scant chance, if he chose to try it, to swing outside and draw level with the two cars in the row in front of him. But Sparrow had other ideas. Those six pilots ahead were all riding wide, set to block him off from the lead.

He swerved sharply inward, in front of the car that had started alongside him, (Continued on Page 82)

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and swung his wheels perilously close to the infield fence.

It was all a matter of a split second in the midst of swirling, bellowing confusion. Flying dirt, deafening uproar, blurred, churning wheels, bouncing cars and straining arms—all combined to give his scheme a chance.

Sparrow went belting up along the inside of the track, missing fence rails by the thickness of the paint they lacked. There was room inside. There shouldn't have been. But that half-conscious edging outward by the other drivers to stop the wild man behind had opened a crack.

As he shot past the helpless starter in third place, there was nothing to slow him except the realization that he was shooting much too fast at the first bend in the red-brown track. And that didn't slow him.

Garvin's smoothly hitting motor had hammered out a lead over the man who had started outside him. He was riding well out in the center of the track into the curve. His right foot was lifting judiciously on the throttle paddle as Sparrow blasted up inside him. Faster though Garvin's car was, he was too late to block Sparrow then.

Sparrow knew he had beaten the cars, but he had still to beat the curve. His sensitive, clinging fingers on the steering wheel read and anticipated the surging lurches of his mount quickly enough to get past Garvin without sliding up into him. But, ahead of Garvin, momentum, that relentless physical law, coldly proceeded to carry his car on in a straight line. And the dirt track was curving there.

Sparrow, feeling out the force he had to conquer, was broadsiding up the bank. His skittering wheels, scooping at the dirt, cut his headlong pace only a little. His job was to use the power of his whirring rear wheels to keep ramming his front end on around the curve. A wide skid would be fatal to his speed and chances. He fought it out, got his car under control two feet away from the crash rail at the top of the bank and triumphantly kicked it on with his throttle foot.

"That ought to flatten 'em!" he muttered.

There was not a tight bearing in his motor; John Wheelock had looked after that. He could dare to dive headlong at top speed into that hundred miler, with his wheels churning on the scant edge of a disastrous slide. Both he and Garvin had more power than the curving track could take.

Sparrow jerked his head around to grin back at Russ Garvin. Russ thought he was cocky; that was swell.

More hotly than Russ Garvin, Ray Boyle was resenting Sparrow's headlong plunge into first place. First is always the place to ride in the dirt. Boyle's white car was spurting along, following Sparrow's inside course before Russ Garvin could plug the gap. Boyle was driving in the scouring blast of grit and dust from Sparrow's wheels. He, too, had plenty of power and he called on it with an intolerant foot.

In that jerk of the head Sparrow saw Boyle coming, bouncing along, the head of a comet of swirling dust wherein were half hidden hurtling cars locked in duels and free-for-all fights. Sparrow aired out.

Boyle's blood was up. The brown bus and the white, close as car and trailer,

went screaming on around the track. It was no part of Sparrow's plan to wear out his meager body and uncertain arm in an endless duel; his idea was to jam through into a clear lead and then settle down to making mileage. Back in third place, trailing them, but well ahead of the pack, Garvin was riding in comfortable isolation.

There was room only ahead. Sparrow Earle buckled down to staying there. Ray Boyle had the gun to pass. But the track wouldn't hold a car going faster than Sparrow. More gun would throw his machine into a spin rather than shove him ahead. Sparrow's hands on his wheel were feeling out the track with almost delicate precision, checking a slide before it started, keeping those rear wheels scouring the dirt in an endless, controlled surge almost as steady on the curving banks as if his car was shooting straight ahead.

Mile after mile whirled past and still Ray Boyle clung stubbornly to Sparrow's rear end. That multicolored comet's tail that he had headed had broken up into chunks of flying metal ramming around the endless rim of that smoking saucer. There was a hole in the crash rail near the bend into the grandstand stretch. A car had pulled into the pits. Another, sparking explosively, was crawling around close to the infield fence.

Sparrow's right arm, weakest link in that small body, was aching badly. He had to use it much more than he had hoped, to stand off Boyle. But though it ached, it was still strong enough. He took most of the strain on his left arm. He could do it; he had driven shorter races with his right merely touching the wheel.

The track was loose and the red dirt didn't seem to be packing down under the rubber. There was too much slide to the whirring wheels and not enough straight pounding to tamp down the earth. Ruts were showing; dust was piling up in long windrows; holes were being scooped and hard spots were lifting up. The dust was bad—very bad. The going was getting worse.

But with that grim nut Boyle riding his neck, Sparrow had no chance to ease up. He learned the changing track; picked out the spots on the curves where he had to swerve from the infield fence and ride up the bank. Boyle's white car was no longer challenging; he was hanging on, getting a tow in the suction back of Sparrow's mount.

Sparrow's motor was overheating. He guessed what that meant. The fine red dust was packing into the core of the radiator, interfering with its cooling action. If she started boiling, he would need water. He kept his throttle foot down. Through more laps he hurtled.

Of a sudden, Sparrow's increasing knowledge of the track gave him a chance to pull two lengths ahead of Boyle on a smooth stretch. That maddened the pilot of the white car. He opened up, riding the tense edge of catastrophe, and came bouncing and swerving up out of Sparrow's dust. He was saving inches. He saved one too many. His front left tire touched briefly the whirring tread of Sparrow's right rear shoe.

There was a quick screech, an odor of burning rubber and a harsh report. Boyle's shoe blew to tatters; his car

went into a dizzy spin. Sparrow, jerking his head around, saw the reeling car through the red pall of dirt. It shot backward through the infield fence and rolled over and over.

He saw more than that. On the black surface of his own right rear tire was a white streak. That momentary rub had gouged some of the tread off his shoe; he was riding on the cords. He kept going.

As he got around again to the new hole in the fence, he made out Ray Boyle, hands on his hips, looking over his crumpled mount. Turning his head to see Boyle, he saw also that, at last, Russ Garvin was closing up to race with him. And there were at least thirty laps still to go. Thirty laps—with the tread shot on that right rear shoe! It couldn't be done.

There was a plume of steam showing above his radiator now. And Russ Garvin was coming up steadily behind. Sparrow took a longer look. Garvin's tailor-made motor was boiling too. No motor could stay cool at that pace with a choked radiator.

Sparrow grinned. Slim as it was, he still had a chance. As he swirled past the pits, he signaled to Wheelock—an arm pointing to his radiator cap and then to the scored tire.

To overshoot the pit on that next lap would have been ruinous, but Sparrow hoarded his ninety-mile pace to the last second. Then, desperately, he got the speed off his car as the grandstands showed up ahead. Garvin passed him. Sparrow managed to bring his weaving car up with a shudder beside his waiting mechanic and pitmen.

Wheelock had the water can—he wasn't trusting anyone else to trickle cold water into that red-hot motor. The other pitmen tackled the shifting of the wheel.

Sparrow gave them no aid. He ran to the pit, caught up a piece of wire and squatted in front of the steaming radiator. While Wheelock eased in the water against the jet of steam, Sparrow dug at the dirt that had packed into the core. He got a little of it out.

Somebody punched him in the back. He turned his head. Chris Bull was squatting beside him. The old man had come down off the judges' stand. His eyes were needle sharp.

"What's the matter with that right arm of yours, Sparrow?" he demanded.

Sparrow turned his head, still jabbing at the radiator.

"I never use more than one arm to beat these feather-foots," he snapped.

"Skip that," Bull retorted. His voice was harsh. "My advice to you is to quit before you wrap that jalopy round your neck. You're a game rooster, Sparrow, but I'm not hiring any cripples to roll at Indianapolis. I been working for a winner too many years."

Garvin shot past. Sparrow tossed the wire toward the pits. Wheelock was clapping on the radiator cap.

"If I cop here I roll there—on your own say-so!" Sparrow cried, and leaped back into his bucket seat. Bull's expression was unreadable as Sparrow surged away. His own face was bleak. The stop had eased his aching arm, anyhow.

Garvin passed him—lapped him again—before he had coaxed his motor into thunderous top speed. But Garvin was no fool. He knew why Sparrow had stopped; why his own motor was so hot. He might make the finish line nonstop without freezing up his motor. But the sure way to win was to stop. Garvin cut his speed and Sparrow went soaring by him on the bank, pouring in

the gas to make up those two lost laps while Garvin got water.

The grandstands came up ahead of Sparrow. Garvin was stopped in the pits with a group of pitmen around his car. One lap recovered, Sparrow reeled off another circuit and swiveled his eyes toward the pits. The group on the track was gone; so was the light blue car. Garvin was riding again—in the lead.

Sparrow swabbed his goggles and squinted into the dust. Somebody ahead was throwing plenty of grit. He bored into it and caught the sheen of Garvin's blue tail. Garvin was not finding it easy to build up pace on that loose rough track. Sparrow skittered past him. Again Sparrow led, but within another hundred yards Garvin was hitting top. He roared after Sparrow.

Again, wearily, with most of the strength drained out of his small body, Sparrow settled down to standing off a hot challenger. He was driving on his nerve now, but that right arm of his was going wrong fast in spite of the short rest. It wasn't aching so much; that was a bad sign. It was getting numb. It was the left arm that was taking the grief now. It had to—unless Sparrow crawled—with a good car still under him. Sparrow kept airing out. A good car? He found that he had the throttle down to the limit now and could drive through most of the going that way. Grimly he planted his other foot on his throttle foot, to prevent the jarring from lifting it off the pedal. He wanted more gun than the mill could deliver.

The laps whirled by in blurred procession. Garvin seemed to be waiting; he did not challenge. That left hand was getting plenty of punishment now. The right was fading out fast. He could not even keep tight hold of the jarring wheel. No pain; no feeling; no strength. His horizon narrowed to the red-brown curving track; he saw nothing else save an occasional car. He took the tail-enders without shifting his feet.

The starter showed suddenly in the dust haze. He was gesturing with his hand—three upraised fingers. Three laps to go!

Garvin was coming up on Sparrow. Inexorably, surely. There was still power in that blue motor. He was coming up.

There was nothing Sparrow could do about it. All his motor had, it was pouring out into those swirling rear wheels. It wasn't enough. Garvin was coming up. His radiator was level with Sparrow's seat and his bouncing, swaying car was still gaining on the rough and curving dirt. Sparrow kept watching.

Garvin's eyes were on him behind his dusty goggles. Sparrow could feel the triumphant eyes boring in out of Garvin's oily, lined face. Garvin's body was bent around his steering wheel, manhandling his sliding car into submission in his heavy-handed way. He didn't anticipate slides; he wrenched his job out of them. He crept up.

Sparrow was beaten. He knew it. But there was something in him stronger than regret, a spirit that ruled him even in this bitter defeat. He took his useless right hand off his wheel and waved it at Garvin. He grinned; he tried to make his gesture jaunty as he blasted on at his best speed.

Garvin, close alongside, with starting eyes saw Sparrow lift his right hand from the control of his skittering, surging car to wave. At once, with desperate energy, Garvin's two-handed straining grip on his wheel wrenched his car

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higher on the bank. He would be safer there from the expected slide of Sparrow's lightly controlled car. But the brown car did not run wild. It swept on, close to the infield fence. Garvin's own tires were churning in the thick red dust flung up the bank that day by countless wheels. His car lost speed on that heavy going.

Sparrow divined what had happened. Garvin thought he was cocky—cocky enough to risk his neck for a grandstand play. He turned his head, still grinning, and shoved his right hand back above the seat. Urgently, challengingly, he beckoned Garvin to come on. And still he drove with one hand, laughing, anticipating the car's surges. He dared Garvin to try to pass—always with that right hand plainly off the wheel.

"Come on, you," he whispered through gritting teeth. "Come and take that Bull's Monitor away from me."

Garvin hung on, two lengths behind. Had he quit? Or was he waiting? Suddenly Sparrow guessed. Coming up, not a quarter of a lap ahead, was a spot where a car with a broken axle had plowed deep gouges across the track. It was the roughest place on the saucer. The smoothest course was close to the infield fence. But surely a man would need two hands there, and a lifted throttle foot as well, to hold his car down by the fence, clear of the rutted bank.

Sparrow had only one hand and he kept his feet—both feet—down on that throttle. A man couldn't win in that game by lifting his foot. Stubbornly he kept his right hand in Garvin's view. He set himself to keep control with all the will in his body.

Garvin watched Sparrow's arm. And then, sure that Sparrow would slide, he began to close the gap, ready to knife by inside when Sparrow went barreling up the bank.

Sparrow did slide. But he had managed to cling to the fence till he shot past the gully in the track. His car went skidding up the bank where it was fairly smooth. Garvin was too eager. His car was moving faster than Sparrow's as he jammed it toward the infield fence. He slid, too, and sooner. His front wheels hooked into the gouge. The car bounced high. As it left the grip of the dirt the rear wheels whipped around. It landed on the bank with the rear end still whipping. Vertiginously the car spun, churning away its momentum with hot tires grinding into the dirt.

Garvin was through; he was fighting for his life now.

Only the loose dust high up the track saved Sparrow himself from the crash rail. But his feet were still planted one above the other on the throttle pedal as he plowed on out of the clogging piles. He darted another glance behind as his car picked up speed. Through the swirling red dust of his passage he looked, unbelieving.

Somehow, by some mighty feat of muscle, Russ Garvin had manhandled his car into submission before he had hit the crash rail. It was still on the track, hardly moving, but quite undamaged. And Garvin was gunning it again, jumping on it, uncorking his hardest in a forlorn effort to get Sparrow.

Sparrow could tell that just by the set of Garvin's big body in his bucket seat. He was beaten, but he didn't know it. He wouldn't know it.

For a moment Sparrow felt some grudging admiration for the nerve of that big car wrestler. But mostly he felt weary, and his right arm was dead. He would win this race. He saw the Indianapolis track ahead, but it was a different Indianapolis from the one he had seen before the race. As plainly as if he were riding it, his red, dust-tortured eyes saw the broad sweeping curves and long, wide straightaways. But they also saw the unending distance of the race—five hundred miles—two hundred long, grueling laps. Not one hundred miles—five hundred miles. And his right arm wasn't worth much after fifty miles. He saw old Chris Bull's entry trailing along with the tail-enders—a car that deserved to win. The old man had worked years to produce a winner. Perhaps he couldn't even finish.

"I can't take Bull's car," he muttered. "I can't."

But, riding home in first place, he couldn't refuse it either. He couldn't. The scrappy, fighting little pilot he had created in the minds of all men couldn't refuse it.

He jammed toward the grandstands and saw Pete Unger on the track. Pete snapped a flag out in front of his eyes—the blue flag. He was starting into his last lap.

He knew, then, in that split second, that they were right—all of them. He was cocky. He didn't just pretend to be any more—he was. Cocky! He was being afraid to turn down a job for the bricks—to plead a bad arm—because he was too proud to take the stares of drivers who would saw off an arm for a chance to drive in the five hundred. That's what being cocky really was!

He glanced around. Try as Russ Garvin would, he wasn't building up his speed enough to menace him on that last circuit. Of course, Sparrow could lift his foot —

But he couldn't do that, either. He couldn't slow down; he couldn't let Russ Garvin go drumming triumphantly past him while he still had gun under his foot. He couldn't.

"Too cocky," he muttered. His bloodshot eyes surveyed the next bend and flicked toward the crash rail. The

surface of the bank didn't look too bad. He nosed his car in close to the infield fence where the curve was sharpest and kept his feet down. His left hand on the wheel got set to let her slide up the brown slope into the high dust by the crash rail.

Momentum grabbed the car by the tail. Sparrow felt his tires skitter, then slide. Broadside, he skidded up the bank. He was alert, ready to let her kiss the crash rail only after his scooping wheels had cut his speed to nothing. Sparrow Earle could get away with a stunt like that.

It was while he was halfway up the bank that his right front shoe, the weakest link in a complicated chain, gave up. It was a good skin, but it blew. It shouldn't have let go. But it did. There was no argument about it.

The steel rim dug like a spike into the loose dirt. The car started cartwheeling over the crash rail. Sparrow's heart leaped high in his chest. He didn't know anything about the rest of it.

Old Chris Bull came clumping into the room with the air of a man who knows all about hospitals and can't be intimidated by the smell of disinfectant. He bent an unblinking eye on Sparrow Earle's bandaged head and sat down by the bed.

"If it hadn't been for that shoe, you'd have the five hundred in your lap," Sparrow said gruffly.

"Russ Garvin will handle the five hundred all right," Bull retorted. "Skip that." He cleared his throat.

"'Never mind his head,' I told the chief butcher when we rolled you into this shop," Chris Bull said abruptly. "'His head's solid enough,' I told him. 'But what about that right wing? Here's a guy been driving one armed for fifty laps and you're worried about knobs on his head. What about his arm, brother?'"

Sparrow Earle frowned. "I was doing —"

"Don't rush me," Chris Bull cut in. "The butcher walked all over your head, burbling about concussion, but later I got him onto your arm. Of course, he can't talk English about it. But it seems that it ain't set right. And that's only the beginning. He said that it don't work at all—only you didn't know that for the first fifty laps. Why didn't you have it fixed?"

"Fixed?" Sparrow was indignant. "I've given it ultra-violet rays, massage, infrared rays, electric —"

"Butchery's what you needed."

Sparrow leaned toward him. His left hand caressed his right elbow. "Do you mean to say they can fix it?" he demanded in a thin voice. "So it'll stand the five —"

Old Chris Bull nodded. "I might even risk a car on you next year," he said slowly.

Sparrow laughed. "Risk!" he repeated. "Where's the risk in that?"

Bull stood up. His eyes seemed to take the skin right off Sparrow and his rasping voice helped the job: "I'd never give you a gocart—if I hadn't been an underconfident, overtalking little squip myself once."

"Me underconfident?" Sparrow decided to grin. "Well, maybe you're right," he admitted cautiously. "But I'll never let it interfere with the speed business."



"They're both trying to sell me insurance."