

Fitch chased Weaver during the first two laps of the recent Seneca Cup Race at Watkins Glen (Photo by Doug Morgan).

THE WATKINS GLEN

Grand Prix - 1952

NO MATTER HOW METICULOUS your preparations, how earnest your endeavors, when the human element is involved, it is most difficult to predict what man will do and why. These thoughts come to us when we try to dispel the shadows that darken our memories of the Fifth Annual Grand Prix at Watkins Glen.

Preparations for a successful race were begun earlier than in previous years.

Fred German again had undertaken the set-up of the communication system which surrounds the entire course with telephones, wireless stations, operators, observers and relief men, each post within sight of the next one. Safety zones had been established in many places and wherever circumstances permitted. Policing of the course appeared to be adequate.

But when you come to a road race such as Watkins Glen, where part of the course runs through a business street, you often are forced to compromise between what should be done and what will be done. Clearing spectators out of areas considered vulnerable always has been a problem. There are property owners whose business during race day would be hurt if spectators were not permitted to have access to

them. The Grand Prix perhaps is more business than enjoyment of the sport—to some.

Were the public, in particular the police officials and other authorities responsible for crowd control, better experienced in the potential danger involved in a road race, perhaps the organization of such an event as Watkins Glen could be made safer. But certain safety factors have been quite uncontrollable, at least so far as SCCA's authority is concerned. The Club may recommend, but the police give the orders.

That an accident of unfortunate consequence might happen was not without possibility, regrettable as such statement may appear. But then, when you consider other sport-

ing events, no matter their nature, you may acknowledge that our past road racing has been conducted with a favorable safety factor.

Considering the race as such, the first event, The Seneca Cup Race, promised to be of exceptional interest. In 1951 this event was won by George Weaver in a total elapsed time of 41:44 with an average of 75.79 miles per hour. John Fitch, who was driving Briggs Cunningham's 2.3 litre Ferrari in that same race, gave battle for some time, but the finish saw him well behind with an elapsed time of 44:46.9. Bill Spear, who also was driving in that race, finished third in 46:16.0.

This year's event seemed to be a different story because pitted against Weaver's Maserati was Bill Milliken, mounted on a four-wheel drive AJB, a car fitted with an air-cooled Steyr engine, recently imported from England where this particular car had given an excellent account of itself. Then there was Phil Cade, on the starting line with his Maserati, Garret Fuller's very fast Lagonda, driven by Sherwood Johnston, and the last-minute entry of Max Hoffman's Jaguar XK120C, driven by John Fitch.

Because of the lamentable fact that no previous practice period is permissible at Watkins Glen, race officials decreed three practice laps before each race, after completion of which a new start was to be made.

Already, during practice, Phil Cade's Maserati showed signs of ail-



OSCA on the outside, with Bill Spear aboard, took off fast and led throughout the Queen Catherine Cup Race at Watkins Glen (Photo by Doug Morgan).

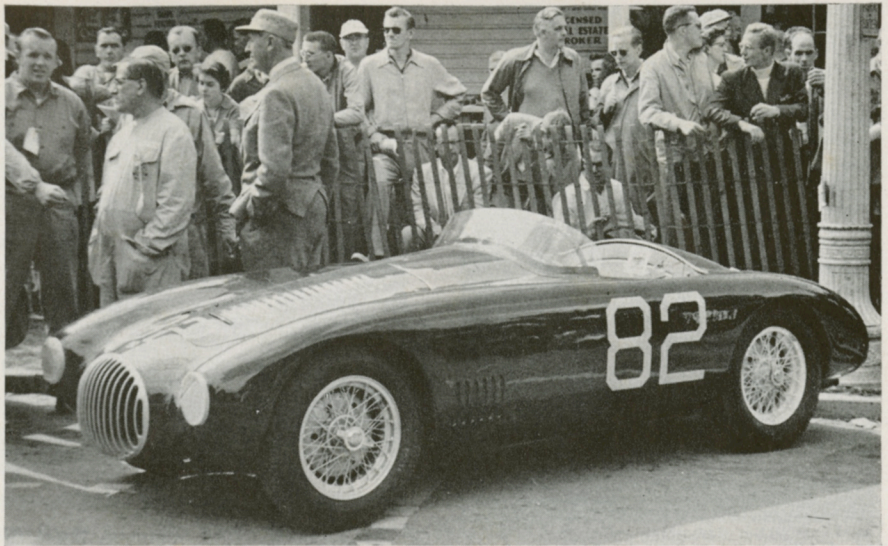
ing. Brett Hannaway's Maserati spun out and stalled. Richard Mauron, driving an MG, had worse luck. At the railroad straight he spun and rolled several times, fortunately without serious consequences.

Chicanes had been erected at the railroad crossing before practice in order to attempt to slow down the cars. However, upon recommendation these chicanes were removed after practice and a "no passing" zone was established.

The end of the first lap after the official start of the race saw George Weaver in the lead. His lap time was 5:03 with an average of 78 miles per hour. John Fitch, driving the XK120C, equalled this time during the second lap, close in pursuit of Weaver. Cade's Maserati was flagged out during this lap because of oil loss.

The public address system reported an evident battle for first position each time Fitch's and Weaver's cars passed a control point on the circuit. It wasn't until the end of the third lap, however, that Fitch was able to get ahead of Weaver for first place, a position which he held unchallenged through the race. Weaver's Maserati retired after the fourth lap. Plug trouble was reported.

The unknown quantity of this race, the four-wheel drive car of Milliken's, never came to the fore. True to tradition, Milliken met his Waterloo at Milliken's Corner, named after him because of pre-



Here's what Bill Spear's winning OSCA looks like.

vious experiences there. The FWD retired into the hay bales with a broken wheel. Meanwhile, the Old Gray Mare, known so well to SCCA members, was being driven at close to 71 mph average by Fred White, who, despite minor difficulties on the course, brought his car in overall second position with a final average speed of 68.9 miles per hour.

Third in overall position was Sherwood Johnston, driving the Chrysler-powered Lagonda. In fourth place came R. L. Moodie in a Cooper with an average speed of 67.8 miles per hour. Fifth place was taken by Arthur Iselin, Jr.'s, car, a Lea Francis, with an average speed of 67.5 miles per hour. Sixth place went to Al Koster, HRG, average speed, 67 miles per hour; seventh to Chuck Cotchan, driving a 328

BMW, averaging 63 miles per hour; eighth was Bob Said, driving a Cisitalia. A special round of applause went to Alex duPont, who, in order to finish the race, completed the sixth lap by pushing his car half way down the main street to cross the finish line.

SENECA CUP RESULTS BY CLASSES

Formula III

1. R. L. Moodie, car #96, Cooper, average 67.8 mph, total time, 46.426.
2. Alexis duPont, car #75, Cooper.
3. Gordon Lipe, car #32, Cooper (DNF).

Unrestricted Category

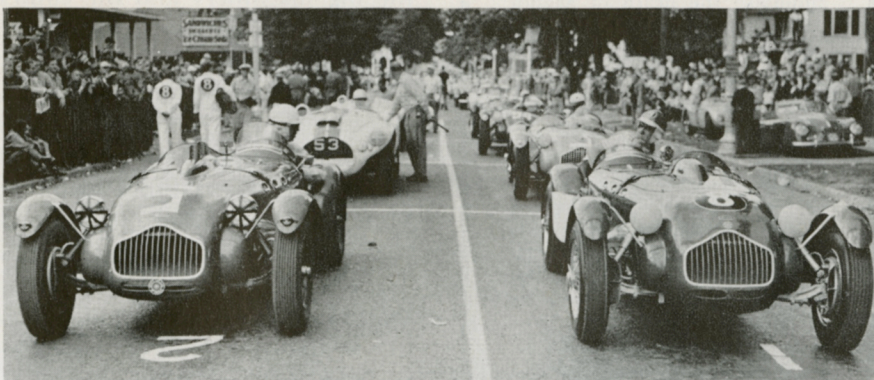
1. John Fitch, car #100, Jaguar XK120C, average 76.6 mph, total time, 41.316.
2. Fred White, car #105, Old Gray Mare.
3. Sherwood Johnston, car #106, Lagonda.

Sports Cars

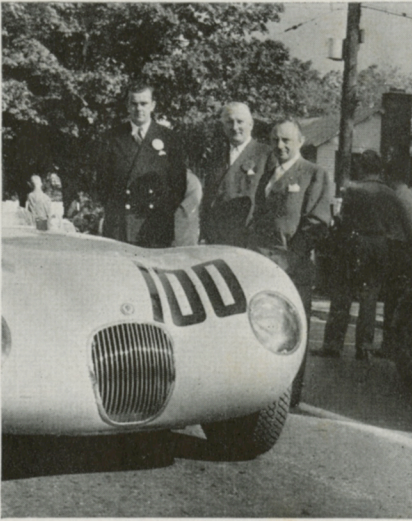
1. Bob Said, car #115, Cisitalia, average 59.6 mph, total time, 52.575.
2. Neal Gray, car # 86, MG.
3. Joseph Price, car #108, Morris.

QUEEN CATHERINE CUP

Cars quickly were aligned for the traditional Le-Manstype start for



Line-up for the Grand Prix at Watkins Glen, 1952.



England of Jaguar, Jaguar's chief Lyons and Max Hoffman, Eastern Distributor for Jaguar, study an XK 120C ready for Watkins Glen.

the Queen Catherine Cup, but much time elapsed before this race got underway. Many who have visited Watkins Glen do not know that a definite schedule has to be worked out with the New York Central Railroad whose tracks and freight trains cross the roadway of the Grand Prix course. If for one reason or another the first race does not get underway on time, a prompt start of the second race is jeopardized because of the pre-arranged schedule with the New York Central. Crowd control, together with this, again was accountable for the delay this year.

The race finally got under way at 2:21 P.M. for the first three practice laps. Starting were such well-known drivers as Bill Spear in a recently-imported OSCA, Roger Barlow with his famous Simca (all the way from California), Fred Procter, who had brought a very potent Porsche, Bill Lloyd in his Offenhauser-powered MG, Jim Kimberley, forsaking heavy machinery for another OSCA, and Fritz Koster's Porsche.

During practice, Bill Spear took the lead, averaging 72.8 miles per hour, exceptional time with a car of under 1500 cc displacement. This performance was repeated when, during the first lap of the actual race, he shot around the course in

5.19 minutes. Roger Barlow, an expected threat to Spear, was able only to work himself into third place at the half-way mark. He, nevertheless, drove an exceptional race, this being his first time at Watkins Glen. After much struggle Jim Kimberley brought his OSCA into second place with an average of 70 miles per hour. In fourth overall position was Thomas Hoan, driving an MG at an average speed of 66.5 mph. Bill Lloyd, who had spun out once at Stone Bridge, came into fifth place at an average of 66.4 mph. Fritz Koster's Porsche came in sixth. Procter's Porsche was seventh with an average of 64.8 mph and Robert Magenheimer's MG placed eighth, averaging 64.7 mph.

Among those who ran into difficulties of a minor nature was Car #17, George Schrafft, driving his special Crosley. He retired from the race with a leaky gas line. Young Briggs Cunningham was seen exploring the escape road at the end of Franklin Street. He retired on the twenty-first lap. Car #83, Dave Allen's MG, sporting a dash board sign "Relax but hurry" was out on the third lap with a broken oil line.

Considering the elapsed times established during this race, it might be of interest to note that Bill Spear's time for this race was faster by 6 minutes than the time established in 1951 by Goldschmidt's



Bob Fergus of Columbus, O., and Collins Trophy he won for fastest MG in Queen Catherine Race at Watkins Glen.

Cadillac-Allard. Other cars which retired from the race were: Francis Dominianni's Giau, #79, which spun out at the Big Bend, and Robert Hitchcock's MG, #68, which spun out at Archie Smith Corner. At the end of the race, ninth place went to Robert Fergus's MG, #38; tenth to Richard Gent's Cisitalia, #58; eleventh to Fred Allen's MG, #63; twelfth to LeRoy Thorpe, driving Bill Lloyd's Porsche, #16; thirteenth to Richard Thompson's MG, #84; fourteenth to Denver Cornett's MG, #7; fifteenth to Charles Devaney's MG, #45; and sixteenth to John Plaisted's MG, #78.

GRAND PRIX

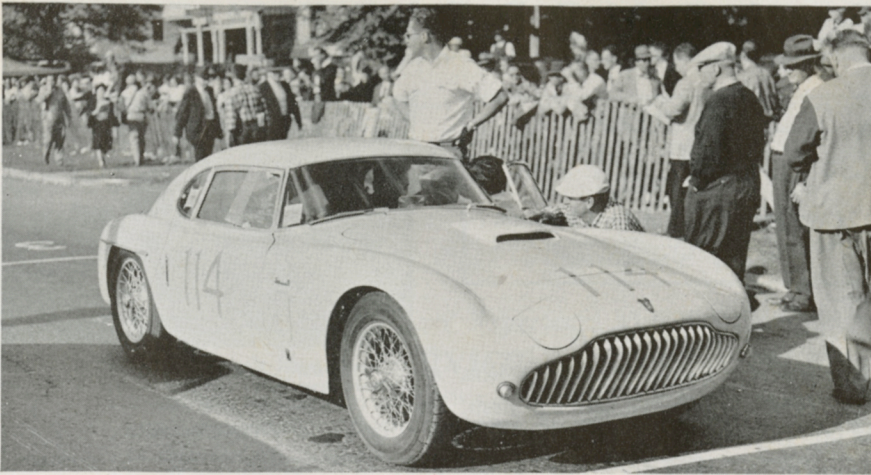
Again much time had passed before the starting flag fell for the beginning of the practice laps of the Grand Prix. Tenseness had remained high for here, after all, was the big machinery and the Club's best drivers. Cunningham cars were much in evidence, manned by Briggs Cunningham, John Fitch, and Phil Walters. One of last year's successful Cunningham models had been brought by Irving Robbins. Phil Hill, well-known California SCCA member, was mounted on a Jaguar XK120C, reputedly hotter than the one driven by John Fitch in the first race. John Gordon Bennet's supercharged MG was making familiar noise. The fast Allard of

SANDOR KREMER

It is with deep sadness that we announce the death of Sandor Kremer on August 1, 1952, in Chicago, after a long illness.

Sandy had been one of the most enthusiastic and hard working members of the Chicago Region since its beginning. Despite many other responsibilities, he found time to be Secretary-Treasurer of the Chicago Region and Chief Starter at most of the Mid-Western events, including all of the Studebaker and Elkhart Lake races.

His entire life served as an example to all of us who knew him.



The new Siata with V8 Fiat motor, makes an early public appearance at Watkins Glen.

Fred Wacker had the pole position, flanked by the Allard of Joe Sabal, with G. R. Harris behind. Harry Gray in Perry Fina's Cadillac-powered Nardi looked impressive and so did the many Jaguars, modified and stock, which had been entered for this important race. In addition there was an American sports car, the Excalibur-J, a product of Brooks Stevens (see Sports Car, January-February, 1952, issue, page 26), and driven by Ralph Knudson.

During practice there seemed to develop a tremendous battle between the Allards and the Cunninghams, each one trying to feel out the other's strength. By the time the actual race got underway, spectator tension was almost uncontrollable.

At the end of the first lap, Briggs Cunningham was in the lead coming down Franklin Street at a tremendous speed. In close pursuit were John Fitch and Fred Wacker. The

rest of the field, including Phil Walters, was not far behind. This appeared to be the beginning of the most exciting road race ever witnessed at Watkins Glen. However, it was short-lived. At the end of Franklin Street at the sharp bend up Old Corning Hill Road an accident occurred which caused the red stop signs to go up immediately all around the course. Several spectators had been hurt, one gravely, by an onrushing car positioning for the turn.

Although a tremendous effort had been made to prevent such occurrence, it happened.

Thanks to a most efficient safety organization, immediate aid was given the injured. After the course had been inspected for clearance, the hour had advanced to a point where the setting sun would have blinded the drivers ascending Old Corning Hill Road. This additional

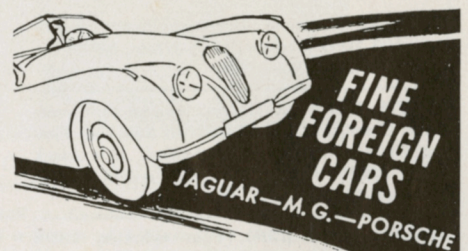


George Weaver starts to lay a smoke screen at Stone Bridge (Photo by Lloyd A. Colby).

hazard caused the race committee to cancel the Grand Prix Race.

We wish to make particular mention of the excellent safety organization at Watkins Glen. It is true a fatality among the spectators occurred, for which no responsibility is placed with the Club or the race organization. Had looseness of organization existed at any point, this accident might well have turned into a major calamity. Those members of the Club who had volunteered their services for this work deserve much appreciation. Reggie Smith's PA kept unruly crowds within bounds, and Mr. James Melton's beautiful singing quieted the ever-increasing restlessness of the spectators.

Yes, motor racing is dangerous. But we are sure the experience gained at this year's Watkins Glen will contribute much toward the future of the sport. Certainly it will convince every one of the need for even greater effort in protecting the public as well as the drivers.



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