

Two Drivers Hurt In Fiery Smashup

By HOWARD KLEINBERG
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SEBRING — Two drivers were injured and nearly 130 pit crewmen and paddock patrons faced with sudden horror in a

spectacular accident in front of the main grandstand last night during the Sebring 12-hour sports car race.

Two racing cars — a contending Ford Cobra and an

Alpha-Romeo collided along the inside of the race course, rupturing the gas tank of the Alpha-Romeo and sending a flaming sheet of gasoline splashing against a three-foot-high wall separating the spectators from the race course.

Consalvo Sanesi of Italy, driver of the Alpha-Romeo, was severely burned and treated at a first aid station prior to being sent to a hospital. Reginal Smith, a spokesman for the Sebring race course, said Sanesi was "burned all over pretty bad. But he'll live."

Bob Johnson of Columbus, Ohio, whose Cobra was in fourth place at the time — with one hour remaining in the race — received bad bruises as his car flipped end over end before coming to a halt under the spectator bridge which crosses the course just below the main grandstand.

Observers in the area said it was a miracle that spectators weren't bathed in the flaming gasoline. One crewman received minor burns and scratches in the near stampede to evacuate the vicinity.

Both cars were destroyed in the accident and Sebring fire fighter spent 10 minutes trying to extinguish the flames. As hundreds of curiosity seekers converged on the area, Florida Highway patrolmen and race course officials were forced to get rough.

The grandstand on the other side of the 30-yardwide racing strip was filled with more than 2,000 spectators.

According to pit stewards, Sanesi — driving a comparatively small racing car — was driving slowly along the inside of the course, with a crank shaft malfunction.

Johnson, who took over the driver's chores from Dan Gurney minutes before, came racing down the straightway at better than 150 MPH and smashed into left rear of Sanesi's car. The tank ruptured and gasoline exploded, while Johnson's car lost a wheel and began flipping over.

The sheet of flame covered more than twenty yards of the pit area and flames shot better than 15 feet in the area as fire engines raced through the maze of parked cars in the paddock area to reach the scene.

It was the only sizable accident of the day and the major one here in four years. A Tampa Tribune photographer and a California driver were killed here four years ago in a single accident on the hairpin turn.

Country Town Wakes Up When Cars Roll In

By JOHN CRITENDEN
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SEBRING — The most impressive record set at Sebring this weekend was recorded at 2 a.m. Friday. A Corvette was hitting 115 miles per hour entering downtown Ridgewood St. when police chief Lonnie Curl turned on his siren. This was a full 10 MPH over the previous record for a 40-MPH speed zone, and almost 15 MPH faster than the lap record at the Sebring Race course.

The 12-hour Gran Prix of Endurance has some remarkable influences on this country town (population 6,323) but many of the residents catch the spirit, too.

"The local boys," said C. E. Fritz, the policeman in charge of the downtown traffic circle, "are quite, peaceful drivers 51 weeks a year. But this weekend they're scratching and digging out like everybody else."

Race week brings a change for the Sebring girls, too.

"There are 15 benches out there in the park in the middle of that traffic circle," said 20-year-old Bonnie Jean Fisher, the Sebring librarian. "That's one bench for every eligible single girl in this town." Bonnie Jean, and the rest of the town's young ladies, were as popular as chorus girls this weekend — the men outnumber the women at least 30-1 here. Sebring girls, like local motels, take reservations for dates a year in advance for this festival.

There are 10 hotels in Sebring, with a total of 730 rooms, and 11 motels, with 173 living units, and many of these are filled by the 3,000 tourists — mostly retirees — who winter in Sebring. But the Chamber of Commerce estimates that 33,000 added sleepers are here overnight on the Friday evening of race week.

Like the race drivers they come to see, the spectators warmed up for yesterday's main event by driving around in circles.

Police Chief Curl keeps two barricades in his storeroom, marked "do not enter." These are brought out for race week, and placed at the points where Ridgewood St. intersects with the mid-town traffic circle. "The kids don't have anywhere else to go," said Fritz, the officer in charge, "and if we don't put up the barricades to stop them, they just ride around and around the circle all night."

Most of the race drivers and their swankier devotees went to the Gran Prix ball Friday night at the Kenilworth Hotel (rooms: up to \$40 a night) for a dance with intermission performances by an artist named Marlene ("exotic dances in every language"). But most of the visitors, the ones who didn't sleep all night at the track, were downtown, swarming around the traffic circle.

Fort Lauderdale notwithstanding, this is where the boys

