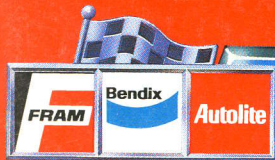


Display Until 7/29



\$2.50

CANADA

\$2.95

02443

Summer

1986

MOTOR SPORTS

# MOTOR SPORTS

**A Dragster's  
Greatest Fear...**


**Fire**

**Behind the Scenes  
With Racing's 'Hidden Heroes'**



**PLUS:**

**One Lap America, The Lure of  
Indy, Daytona, Stadium  
Racing, and More**

 An Aqua-Field Publication





# The road to the Grand Nationals isn't short and it isn't smooth, but this man wants to make the trip.

**Thompson, CT  
July 27, 1983**

*The crowd watches in stunned silence as rescue workers help two drivers who have crashed hard into the first turn wall. To the relief of everyone watching, both drivers exit their vehicles under their own power. But despite outward appearances, Jimmy Spencer is not OK.*

*Spencer begins having trouble maintaining his balance as they load up the wrecked car, and is talking incoherently on the trip back home. Concerned, his crew stops at the emergency room in Hartford, where he is diagnosed as having a severe brain concussion.*

*The bad news travels like wildfire throughout the Northeast. The trade papers that week all echo the same sad story . . . "Spencer Seriously Injured — Out For Rest Of Season".*

**Owego, NY  
August 6, 1983**

*Racegoers are astonished to see the Spencer operation pull into the pits at Shangri-La Speedway. With*

*the 32nd annual Race of Champions at Pocono International Raceway.*

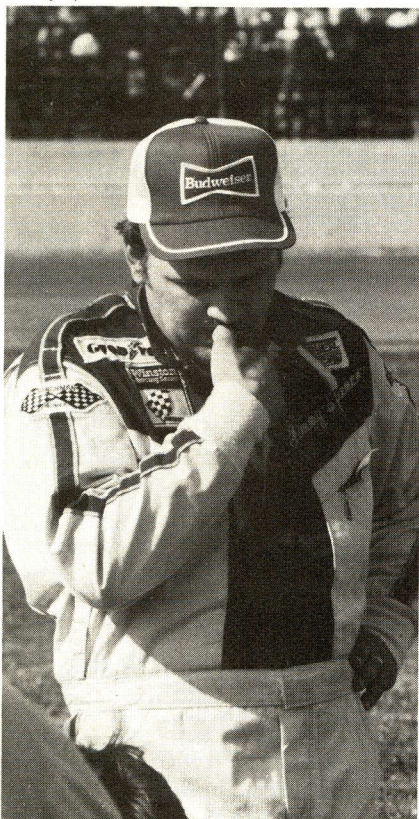
*Like the Wrangler jeans man, Jimmy Spencer is one tough customer.*

Some men are content to spend their entire existence watching from the sidelines. Others never seem to be able to find their niche in life. Occasionally there appears the rare individual who would never be content as just an observer, who feels he has a definite mark to leave on this world. Jimmy Spencer knew long ago exactly where he wanted to be before his thirtieth birthday — behind the wheel of a stock car on the lucrative Winston Cup Grand National circuit.

Growing up in Berwick, Pennsylvania, Jimmy Spencer began his racing career on dirt tracks in the central region of the state when he was 19 years old. Becoming Rookie of the Year at the Port Royal Speedway in 1976, he went on to accumulate many feature wins over the next several years. However, when 1979 rolled around, Spencer knew that if his career was to advance he would have to move on up to asphalt modifieds.

Modifieds are one of the most exotic classes of race cars in the country. With small-car bodies (such as Pintos and Cavaliers) resting on custom built tube

Jimmy Spencer



BY MICHAEL J. MARRER

## Mr. Excitement...

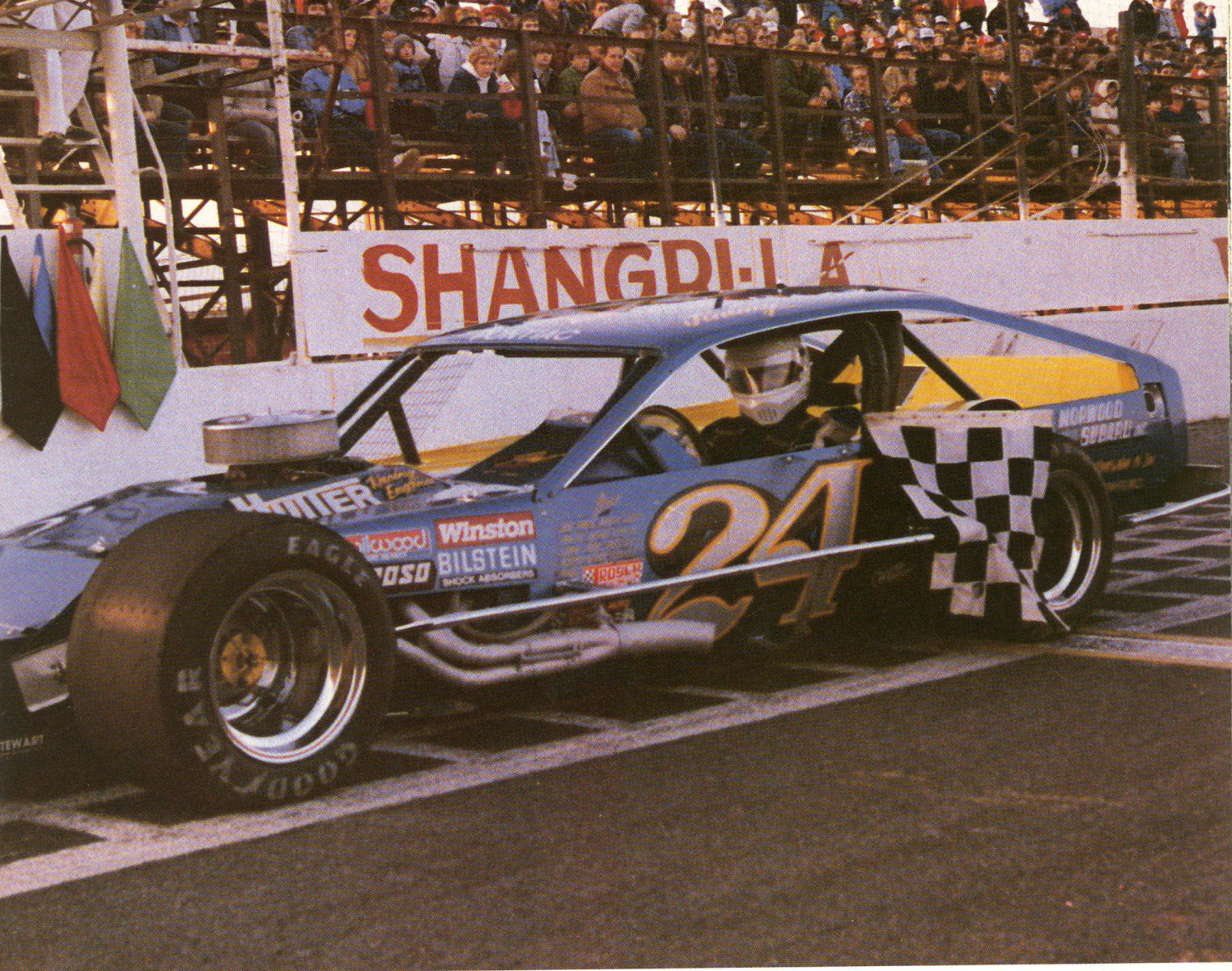
*severe headaches continuously reminding him of the near-tragedy only 10 days previous, Spencer looks shaky during the warm-ups. But insisting on sticking it out, his confidence and smoothness gradually return during the evening, and Spencer is able to beat visiting Grand National star Geoff Bodine to the checkers.*

*Not only had Spencer befuddled the experts by returning so quickly after his injuries, but he also went on to capture the 1983 Shangri-La track championship and the most prestigious event in modified*

frames and powered by unlimited displacement engines, these open-wheeled cars are the most popular class in the Northeastern United States and compete on tracks ranging in size from 1/8 to 3/4 of a mile. Spencer found the conversion to asphalt quite to his liking, and while concentrating his efforts toward Shangri-La Speedway, became it's Rookie of the Year in '79.

At the age of 27, after having raced modifieds for the previous four years, Spencer decided 1984 would be his last full year in that division. To continue his advancement and to secure additional sponsorship and exposure, he chose an almost insurmountable task — an all out





# Jimmy Spencer

assault on the National Modified Title. The title holder for the last six years, Richie Evans, was not about to let anyone just walk up and take it.

**Owego, NY  
May 5, 1984**

*It has been cloudy most of the day, but Spencer feels he should attend the opening event at Shangri-La since he is the defending track champion. Evans, meanwhile, has opted for the 50-lap event at Riverside Park in Massachusetts. Upon hearing where Evans is, the crew reloads their equipment and leaves*

*Owego for the trip to Riverside. But by the time they reach Binghamton, New York, it appears doubtful that they can arrive in Massachusetts in time. Spencer decides to chance the weather, and makes a U-turn back to Owego.*

*Evans wins his event.*

*Shangri-La is rained out. The gamble doesn't pay off, and Evans gains 180 uncontested points.*

Similar to other forms of professional sports, auto racing has its own form of farm league system whereby drivers hone their skills as they advance on their

way up to the top divisions of the sport. Those who race under the NASCAR sanction (National Association of Stock Car Auto Racing) often begin their careers in the Modified division, move on to Late Model Sportsman in New England or the southern states, and then, if lucky, advance to the premiere Grand National division.

Jimmy Spencer was well aware of how the system works. Winning consistently in what could be considered the "AA" league, Spencer has found, like many others before him, that a very good living can be made in the modified division. More and more attention is being paid to the class, and major corporations such as



R.J. Reynolds and Gatorade are adding huge sums of money to both purses and point funds. But Jimmy feels he has already spent enough time here, and is itchy to move up to the next class. His self-imposed deadline of age 30 is rapidly approaching.

In most other sports, representatives from the other divisions are continuously watching for hot new prospects. However, there are no scouts scouring the short tracks of America looking for up and coming talent. You must make your presence known to the scouts, who in this case are the car owners and crew chiefs. To do so requires that you seek them out and compete on their "turf."

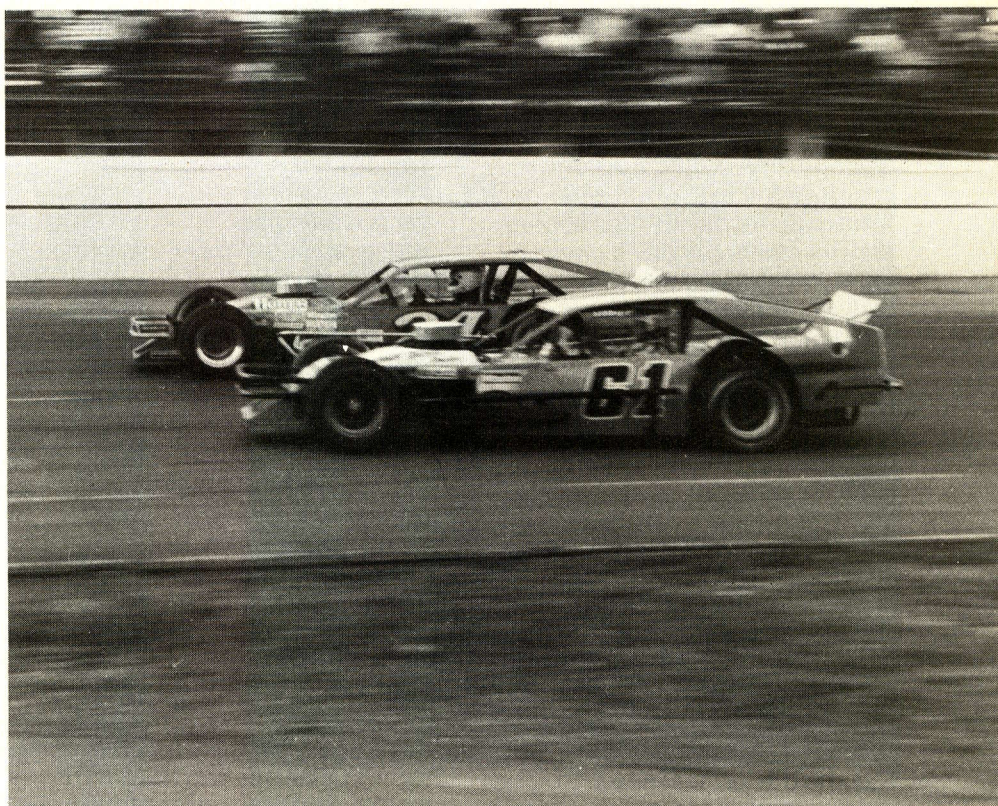
Today, major league racing has become a high-budget operation, with at least a million and a half dollars required to field an adequate team. At times, it may be the driver who can provide financing that will be hired instead of another driver with more talent. No longer can a racer be content knowing he is just a good driver. He must be skilled in public relations, accounting, marketing. In short, he must pursue racing as a business.

Jimmy is well aware of what he is getting into. "Geoff Bodine told me that the biggest mistake you can make is that if you're not really prepared to go into Grand National racing with the proper financing and proper team, you're not going to make it. You're going to make a bad impression on guys like Junior Johnson, the Wood Brothers, Dale Inman — anybody who could possibly pick you up in the future," he said.

Bodine started his climb up the ranks in the modified circuit. In the late '70s, Bodine was the most successful driver in the country — one year winning 69 percent of the races he entered. After capturing almost every major event possible in modified racing, he moved south to further his career. At a press conference in June of that year, Geoff elaborated on the process Jimmy Spencer must undergo.

"There are two ways I know of to do it (get into Grand Nationals). You have to have money in your family or have a friend with money who will support your efforts. Or you can do it the way that I did it; go through modifieds and be successful, get into late models and be successful, run some superspeedway late model races and be successful, and then hopefully, maybe, you can get a Grand National ride. But nobody is going to come and get you," he said.

What is the biggest problem in getting on the GN circuit? "It's no big secret," continued Bodine, "There isn't the turnover of drivers. It's not like basketball, or football, or any other sporting event. Age is good. The more experience you have, the better driver you become. Experience is the key to winning, so the older these guys get,



Spencer slingshots past Richie Evans in car 61 at Shangri-La.

the better they get, and they're not going to retire."

With hundreds of drivers across the country competing for the same limited number of GN rides and financing, Jimmy Spencer knows that he has a tough row to hoe.

## **Rochester, NY**

**June 17**

***Spencer wins the first of two scheduled 75-lap features. To save time, track officials decide to perform inspections only after the second feature, in which Spencer finishes second. In teardown, officials deem Spencer's carburetor illegal, one which Jimmy argues has passed inspection at several tracks previously and was not the same one on the car during the first feature. Nevertheless, after having beaten Evans to the line in both events, NASCAR strips Spencer of both finishes.***

***The psychological blow is devastating. The team returns to Berwick to regroup.***

The racer's diet is a nutritionist's nightmare. What with the long days, short nights, and constant travel, the crew is often forced to violate one of the first rules of racing — never eat the track food. A typical meal consists of soggy French fries, warm flat Cokes, charred hamburgers,

and "grease tubes" (hot dogs). One is often in competition with the flies for the relish jar.

In most other sports, travel is an accepted nuisance that is made palatable by the team being able to travel together. Only in racing, where titles are determined by total accumulated points, will an athlete be forced to compete in two separate events in different parts of the country on the same day. Splitting up the crew, the driver will have a car ready at both tracks. After competing in the afternoon show, he will hop a plane to try and make the evening show. Schedules are usually so tight they often try to have someone else qualify the car. That's where Jimmy's father comes in.

The patriarch of the family, Ed Spencer began his racing career in the early '50s and was a frequent winner at the local tracks in central Pennsylvania. At the start of the '60s, his sponsors offered him the chance to enter the bigger leagues, but he refused so he could devote more time to his growing family. Although no one has kept count, Jimmy estimates that his father has won 300 to 400 features in his career. In the late '70s, after 25 years in the sport, Ed went into semi-retirement.

Jimmy now has his father run one of his cars just for fun, as he never had the opportunity to run a really good asphalt car before. But it also gives the team an added edge — a second qualified car as a backup during the tight points chase.



## Holland, NY

August 8

*Spencer defeats Evans in the first of two scheduled 50-lap events. On a caution flag during the opening laps of the second feature, the left rear hub breaks, and Spencer coasts to a stop to await a tow back to the pits. He then climbs aboard the other team car being driven by his father. Working the 38th lap, he feels the left rear hub of this car also break, and slams into the wall. In a bizarre note, the car hits 100 yards from where the first hub broke. Damage report — \$4,000 to the car, and a broken shoulder blade for Spencer.*

All athletes at one time or another experience slumps in their careers. Only in racing will such bad luck actually cost you dollars out of your own pocket for repairs. In fact, no other sport requires such an individual outlay of cash just to compete. A basic chassis costs \$4,000 to \$6,000. Fully loaded with components the car alone costs \$10,000 to \$20,000. Engines start at \$5,000 and go up. Tires cost \$150 apiece and are usually good for only one race. And then there's gas, oil, travel expenses, a car hauler, and a complete set of tools.

If someone wants to start racing, he will probably need two engines to go along with the race car and hauler. If you are like Jimmy Spencer and are serious about chasing points, you will need two cars, three engines, and two haulers. It's not inconceivable to spend \$100,000 in a season.

There are times when it pays to be a maverick. The choosing of equipment is not such a time. It pays to go with what is currently winning and that means having Maynard Troyer and Ron Hutter build your equipment.

Maynard Troyer is a former modified driver who manufactures the most popular asphalt chassis today. From his shops in Rochester, New York, Troyer turns out over 100 chassis a year, plus a comparable amount for the dirt track circuit. Not only are they the state of the art in race cars, Troyer's chassis are popular because of the service provided to customers in case of accidents. Hutter is one of the top engine builders in the country, and supplies engines for many of the country's best drivers, including Spencer's nemesis Richie Evans.

Spencer spent 2½ seasons running other brands of equipment until he realized the only way to beat others was with their own equipment. The second night out with a Troyer chassis gave him his first asphalt modified victory in 1981, and the switch to Hutter engines provided consistent wins instead of having to settle for

thirds, fourths and fifths.

Jimmy Spencer began being known as a driver to be reckoned with in the Northeast.

## Thompson, CT

September 9

*The last round of pit stops has been completed and Jimmy Spencer is leading the Thompson 300, with rival Richie Evans coming up through the field.*

*For the last 18 laps of the race, Evans tries every trick in the book to get around Spencer. Trying both the inside and outside lanes, Evans is having no luck. Every lap finds the cars coming together, with the resulting sparks holding the fans spellbound. Spencer often finds himself sideways, but each time gathers it back in. With fist clenched high in a salute to both fans and crew, Spencer crosses the finish line first.*

Spencer had visions of Evans and himself hitting the wall head-on in that race. "I was prepared for it," he said. "I made up my mind at the time that I was going to win the race. You know, a driver can't win a big race if he doesn't feel he can."

By his own admission, Spencer categorizes his driving style as aggressive. But with today's race cars being so identical, often a driver has to be slightly over-

**Jimmy Spencer is very good at what he does but he is rapidly approaching his self-imposed deadline.**

aggressive to gain an advantage. "If a driver doesn't make that little edge, he's not going to make it," Spencer said.

It was at the start of the 1983 season that Jimmy Spencer's style of driving first drew regional attention. Competing in the Spring Sizzler at Stafford Springs, Connecticut, numerous problems throughout the weekend forced Spencer to run in the non-qualifiers race in a last-ditch attempt to qualify for the main event. Debris caused several flat tires throughout the race, but each time Spencer charged up through the field. Often hanging the car sideways through the corners, he eventually finished second, entering him in the main event. The fans loved it, and the track P.A. announcer dubbed him "Mr.

Excitement," a nickname that has stuck, and one of which he is extremely proud.

Spencer is often compared to a young Richie Evans, who 15 years ago was the brash newcomer who dared to challenge the established veterans of the sport. Now Evans is himself being attacked by someone who used to watch and admire him from the grandstands over the past decade.

## Berwick, PA

September 18

*Spencer receives a certified letter from NASCAR headquarters in Daytona Beach, Florida. The review board agrees with his argument it could not be proved that the same carburetor was on the car during both features last June at Rochester, and reinstates the win for the first feature. The disqualification in the second feature stands. Spencer regains 190 points.*

*The chase continues. The Evans vs. Spencer battle has become the hottest show in the Northeast.*

Despite high hopes by the crew for a strong autumn showing, the team is plagued by a string of bad luck. The starter comes loose and goes through the oil pan at Pocono. A tire goes flat while leading the Southern Tier 200. An exhausting all night drive the next day to Oxford Plains in Maine does reward them with a fourth-place finish. By the first of October, Spencer knows the title is out of reach. He beats Evans in a non-NASCAR show at the Lake Ontario shore track of Oswego, then gives the crew two weeks off for a much needed and deserved rest. It is time to concentrate on Martinsville. The track where he has led the last two years, only to break down at the finish. Jimmy wants this one bad.

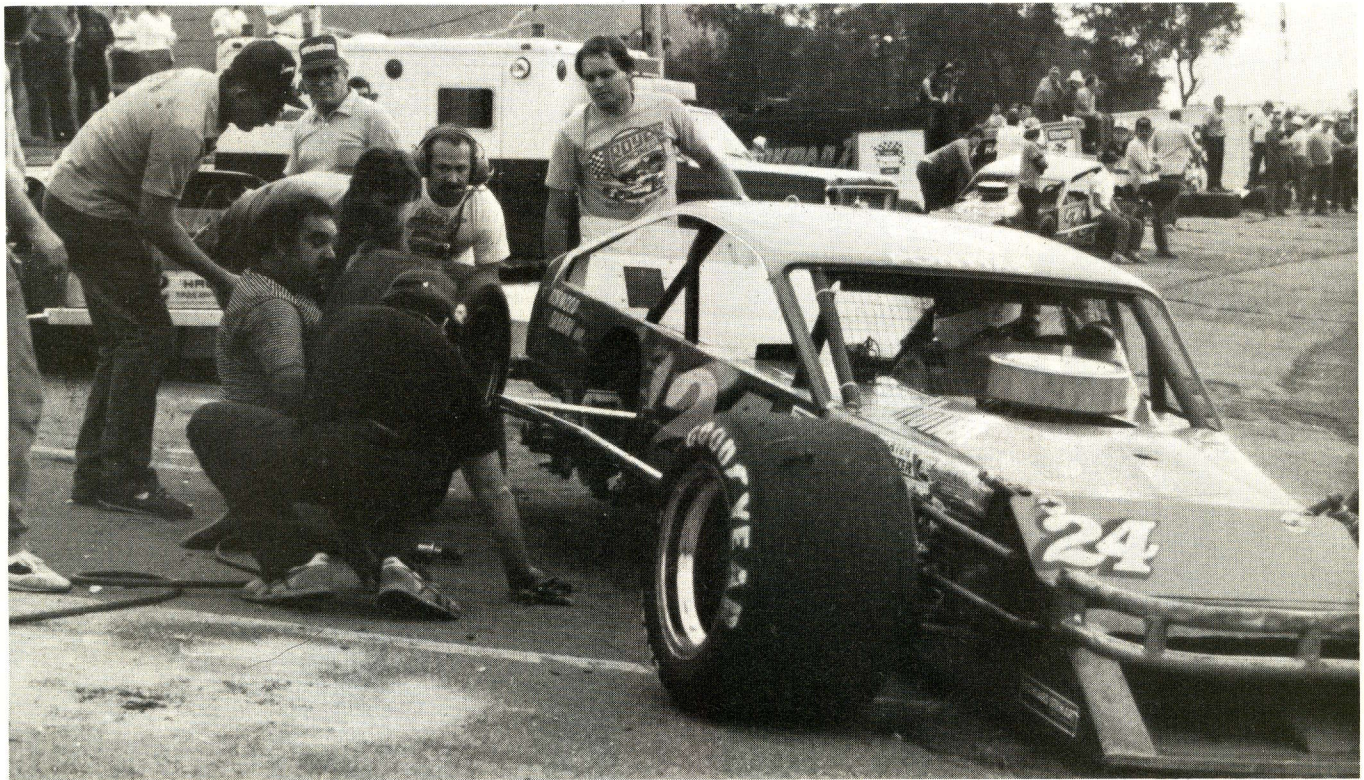
## Martinsville, VA

October 28

*Having not time-trialed among the top 10, Spencer is forced to qualify for the Cardinal 500 through the heats. Running well, the rotor in the distributor breaks, knocking him out of the event. It appears Spencer will have to sit out the final event of the season.*

*Race day, however, finds Spencer lined up at the end of the 32 car field. Due to his second place standing in the national points race, he has been added to the field as one of the two provisional starters chosen by track management. At the drop of the green, he begins his charge up through the field. It is extremely short lived. The engine overheats due to a water pump*





Spencer's crew make quick work of a pit stop.

**problem. After spending several laps in the pits, Spencer briefly re-enters the race only to verify if any damage has been done to the engine. The season is over.**

Jimmy Spencer feels the 1984 season provided the best classroom experience he could have received. The most important thing he learned was that the secret to success is preparation. Even when running up to four shows a week, nothing can be neglected. Simple things, such as checking the battery weekly for cracks, are the ones which can either make you or break you. These stupid little things are the ones which will put you out of a 30-lap feature, and drop you 70 to 80 points behind.

It is in this area, rather than track performance, where Spencer feels Evans beat him. "His preparation is incredible. He knows when to ride it out when the car is not up to snuff, while I try to stretch it a little bit," he said.

Spencer admits he is continuing to mature as a driver. He doesn't feel he is bragging when he says he is at the top of his league now, and a serious threat at any track he pulls into.

But it is time to move up to a greater challenge. He has paid his dues; working night after night until 1 a.m., traveling across hundreds of miles of country, spending thousands for new parts and repairs. He has sacrificed much to realize his dream. In his own words, "The driver has to be really devoted, really want to do

it. If he is not devoted, he will not be very successful at it."

Jimmy Spencer is very successful at what he does. But he is rapidly approaching his self-imposed deadline. He wants to drive Grand Nationals, to have his name up there with the likes of Petty, Allison, and Bodine. He feels that he has a shot at it, and is following the right path. After all, Geoff Bodine was the 1974 Shangri-La Modified Track Champion.

### Epilogue

The 1985 season will be forever remembered as a year of extreme sadness for the world of racing.

Richie Evans had already clinched an unprecedented ninth National Modified Title when he pulled out onto the Martinsville track on Thursday, October 24th.

With no other cars near him, Evans drove full speed into the third turn wall during practice laps. No cause for the crash was ever found. Richie Evans, the acknowledged King of Modified racing, died a short time later.

Jimmy Spencer began the year by winning the World Series at Florida's New Smyrna Speedway in February. There were occasional other wins throughout the year, but Spencer was not as visible as he once was, due to a cutback in his schedule. His time was spent preparing for his next move.

Unlike the waiting one must endure in other forms of sports, Spencer himself has decided it is time to make the advancement to the 'AAA' league. His eyes

are set on the NASCAR Late Model Sportsman division, which means he will be spending more time south of the Mason-Dixon Line.

Spencer got his feet wet in three Sportsman races in '85, with a fifth at Dover Downs, Delaware in September his best finish. One car is already housed in his shop, while a second one is almost completed. Jimmy has found that his expenses in this division have doubled. The extra sheet metal work causes it to take twice as long to build a Sportsman compared to a Modified, and costs approach \$50,000 for a new car.

The team expects to compete in eight LMS shows in 1986, with their first appearance scheduled for Daytona in February. Additional stops at big tracks such as Darlington, Charlotte, and Atlanta are planned. As these races are run the same weekends as Grand National events, there is the increased exposure due to radio and TV coverage. Although the modified effort will have to be curtailed, Spencer still plans to run selected major shows. Jimmy has a special place in his heart for the modifieds.

Although he has yet to secure a major sponsor, Spencer feels he cannot wait any longer to move on. He has dug deeply into his own pocket in order to keep his dream alive. Each day, each race, finds him a little nearer, but also a little farther from his ultimate goal.

On February 15th, the day of the Daytona Sportsman race, Jimmy Spencer turned 29.