



**MICHAEL**

**MARRER**

I stood in the hallway, face to face with this enormous eyeball.

Although it was faded, it still gave me the creeps. It was also the type that followed you no matter which way you moved.

Around it were painted the words: "Madame Zhabo - Astrologer and Psychic."

Just below the logo in fresh paint was the slogan "The FAX Machine to Your Future." Well, no one could accuse her of not keeping

up with the times.

She had set up shop in one of the seediest buildings in town. It obtained that reputation not from the neighborhood but because of the tenants.

Most of the offices were occupied by lawyers.

How I came to be at Madame Zhabo's doorstep is too long a tale to go into here. Suffice to say that the FasTrack staff will go to any lengths to uncover the latest racing news, and she came highly recommended. But I was starting to have my doubts.

I opened the door to a world where both sunlight and fresh air were rare visitors. Over in the corner a mangy looking black cat was on the losing end of a battle with a fur ball.

There was no sign of Madame Zhabo anywhere, so I cleared my throat and called her name. I heard movement in an adjoining room, and eventually she parted the beaded curtain and entered.

On the trip over here I tried to picture what she might look like. She didn't look anything like I had imagined. It was worse. I believe it was Joan Rivers who said it best - she looked like she had been beaten with an ugly stick.

"Do you come seeking enlightenment?" she asked. I could only nod the affirmative.

"Two questions, Fifty dollars."

The thought of parting with that much money suddenly allowed me to regain my voice. "Two questions for fifty bucks? Isn't that somewhat expensive?"

"I don't think so," she replied. "Now, what's your second question?"

I could see this look of evil that began in the back of her eyes and was slowly starting to spread across her face. Realizing that it might not be in my best health to back out now, I bid the portrait of President Grant good-bye.

Madame Zhabo motioned me to a table in the center of the room. As I sat down, she removed a sheet that covered the obligatory crystal ball.

"What was your second question?" she commanded again.

Since I had already blown the first one, I had to quickly combine what I had intended to ask into one statement.

**(Continued on Page 16)**

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## MICHAEL MARRER

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"What opportunities will there be for short-track racers in the next 10 to 15 years on the NASCAR Winston Cup circuit?"

As she peered intently into the ball, I wondered how she could possibly see anything in it. The globe was just begging for a healthy bath of Windex.

But from the expression on her face I could see that she was beginning to make out images.

"NASCAR will be faced with two problems," she began. "First, there will have to be new tracks built in major markets. That's the only way the major sponsors will be happy, and new ones can be attracted. NASCAR has to get into Seattle, Denver, St. Louis, Dallas, and Chicago. Second, they cannot eliminate events at existing facilities.

"The problem will be solved by forming an Eastern and Western League, just as pro baseball and football have.

"While there will still be single car operations, the major players will

be the multi-car team owners. Drivers and teams will be assigned into their respective leagues by NASCAR. The maximum number of drivers on a team would be four.

"Each league will make one appearance at every track, thereby allowing each facility to

continue to hold two Cup events. The fans would see a different set of drivers at each race.

"Some tracks, such as Daytona, will hold open competition weekends. Both leagues will run qualifying races on Saturdays, with the top finishers combined into a Sunday shootout.

"There would be two point standings kept - individual and team. In the team standings the top finisher on that team would be the only one receiving points.

"With a two- to three-fold increase in the number of rides available, there will be plenty of opportunities for short-track racers."

Madame Zhabo suddenly fell silent, and pushed her chair away from the table. She draped the cloth back over the ball and said, "The session is over."

Just as quickly, I was again alone in the room.

It wasn't a particularly pleasant drive home. I couldn't believe that people would someday be able to field five-car teams. Plus that hard-earned fifty dollar bill kept popping into my thoughts.

I also wasn't looking forward to the reception I knew awaited me. There was someone who thought this whole idea was ridiculous from the very beginning.

My wife greeted me at the door with that smug look that she always gets when she

knows she's right. "Well, how was your 'research'?" she asked sarcastically.

"Fine, just fine," I replied. "Where's the mail?" trying quickly to change the subject.

She handed me the stack of bills and trade papers, and from her expression I knew she had enough ammunition for a long time. I retreated to my office, and tried to forget about the day's misadventure by immersing myself in the racing papers.

"HENDRICK FORMS FOURTH TEAM!" screamed the headlines. "SACKS TO DRIVE ULTRA SLIM FAST CAR!"

A few weeks later Sacks almost won at Talladega.

Gee, maybe the old woman wasn't so crazy after all. It definitely gives short trackers something to shoot for.

Until the next race, I can be reached at Drawer 7308, Endicott, NY 13760.

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## PHIL ROBERTS

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releases will arrive by mail (or fax) and the results will arrive soon after the completion of races by fax (or phone, if you or the media does not have a fax machine.)

\*Ask the editor to make every effort to review the material and use it if possible.

\*Then send the releases and results—just like you promised. It might help in the beginning to call and tell the sports