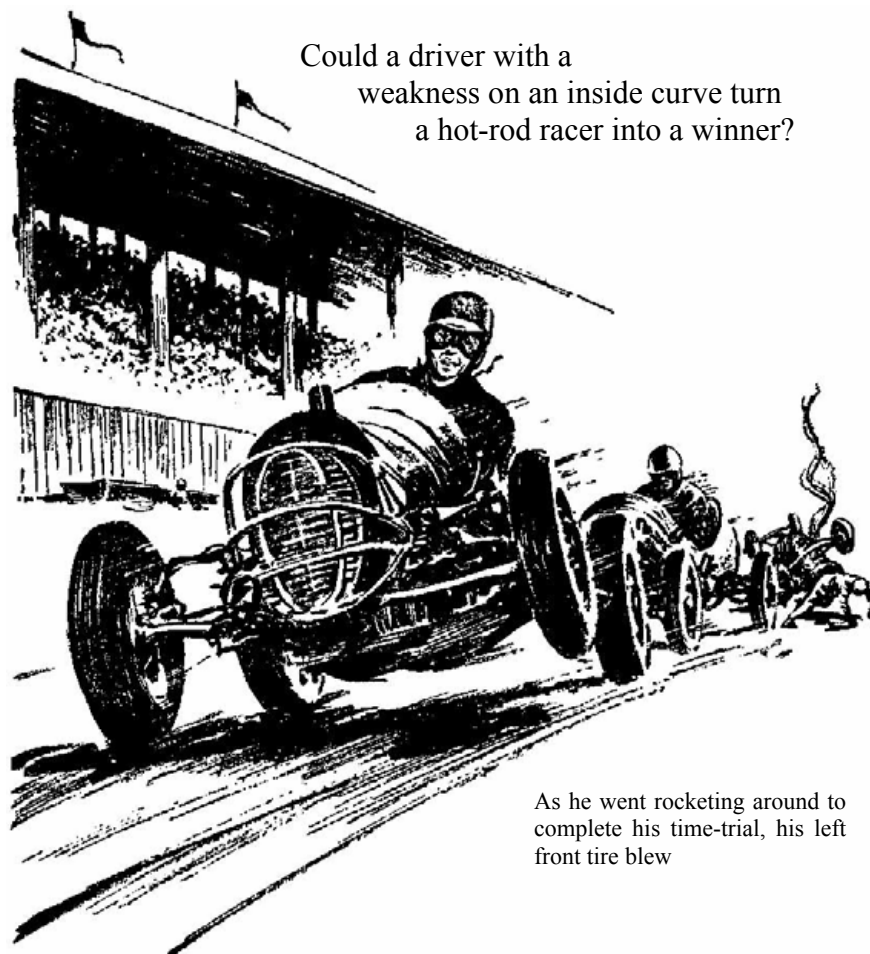


Could a driver with a  
weakness on an inside curve turn  
a hot-rod racer into a winner?



As he went rocketing around to  
complete his time-trial, his left  
front tire blew

# MIDGET MAYHEM

By ROBERT SIDNEY BOWEN

**I**TS EXHAUST kicking up a terrible clatter, the Jordon-Offenhauser sped around the one-quarter-mile banked, dirt track of the Newton Fair Grounds like a little frightened red bug trying to run away from itself. The helmeted-and-goggled youth at the wheel was taking the turns smooth halfway up, and coming down off them into the flat in an extra burst of speed. Nothing spectacular. Just good, smooth driving by a man who seemed to know what midget car driving was all about.

In one of the infield pits a couple of men silently watched the all-red Offy scoot about the track. One of them was a big-built man in his late fifties. He had iron-gray hair, and a face that was as sturdily formed as the back of a ten-ton truck. His name was Jake Bellows, and some twenty years ago, half a million people or more used to shout

themselves crazy with excitement as he hammered his Benz Special over the bricks in the Indianapolis Classic. Of late, though, Jake Bellows owned and managed a string of midget racers.

Standing next to him was a lean, wiry man by the name of "Lucky" Heftner. He was Bellows' number one driver, and a veteran of the popping ovals for several years. As a matter of fact, there was hardly a midget racing track in the country that had not seen Lucky Heftner get the checkered flag in the feature race at one time or another.

"Lucky," he was called, but luck had little to do with the manner in which Heftner had pulled down race-winning prize money over the years. Nor with the tough breaks that had dogged him on occasion.

Presently Jake Bellows took his eyes off the Offenhauser and turned to his ace driver.

"What do you think, Lucky?" he asked.

Heftner shrugged, and absently wound the strap of his goggles about a finger.

"Handles it well enough, and seems to know," he replied. "But anybody can drive the track alone. A race is different."

"I know that," Bellows growled. "But I don't want to hire a guy to drive for me that you think's a bum."

"Okay, okay," Heftner sighed. "So I'll say that he drives like he could do all right. How'd you come to dig him up, anyway? And what's his name again?"

"Jerry Hanson, and I didn't dig him up," the midget-car owner replied. "He came into my office the other day looking for a job. Showed me his ARDC card and said he'd done a lot of racing out west a few years back. He quit to go into designing and building cars. The venture blew up on him and he went broke. Now he's back to driving again."

"Well, with Stacey and Adams both out sick, I was interested. But maybe I should have got him to sign sworn statements?"

Lucky Heftner laughed and made a little gesture with one hand.

"Okay, okay, Jake, I was just curious," he said. "Most everybody knows that just to like a guy's looks is good enough with you. And I'll admit I like his looks, too. Jerry Hanson, huh? I got a feeling I should know that name, but I guess I don't."

"Then I should take him on?" Bellows pressed.

Lucky Heftner started to nod his head, and then checked the movement.

"You're the boss, aren't you?" he countered. Then quickly, "Tell you what, Jake. I'll chase him around a few times. Maybe that'll give me a better idea."

"Then what are you waiting for?" Bellows growled, and jerked a thumb at an all-blue Offenhauser that was an exact duplicate of the one on the track, save that the blue was No. 16 and the red No. 17. "Get out there!"

A FEW moments later Lucky Heftner was "out there." He drilled around a couple of laps to get his all-blue midget well warmed up, and then he fed special hop to the engine and set sail after the red Offy a good half-lap in front of him.

He caught it before a full lap had been completed, and as he pulled up abreast of it on the

outside he signaled with his free hand for the youth at the red car's wheel to release the brakes and get really rolling.

Jerry Hanson showed white teeth in a broad grin, nodded his helmeted head, and promptly started to roll the red to town. In less than nothing flat both cars were tearing about the one-quarter-mile oval full out with Hanson in front by a car's-length but Heftner sticking to him like glue.

For five laps the red-and-blue bugs scooted around, and during that time Heftner tried a few tricks that one learns only after years of racing experience. Each time, though, the driver of the red midget seemed to realize what he was up to, and went whanging out of the intended trap.

True, Heftner could have passed the red car at any time he wished and driven Hanson right into the ground. However, he had no intention of showing up the other driver. He simply wanted to find out if Jerry Hanson had what it takes. And he did find out. Hanson had been around midget speedways before. There was no doubt about that.

And then, as the little cars went streaking into the sixth practice lap, a third midget came suddenly booming along from out of nowhere. It was a Carson-Offy, all black with a bright green bonnet, and it bore the number "13." A big man wearing a golden crash helmet was behind the wheel. And he was so big it was hard to tell just where driver ended and the midget car began.

He was "Lightning" Lucca, the midget racing season's greatest gate attraction. He was a killer-diller hotshot at the wheel of a midget, and even Lucky Heftner had yet to blow exhaust in his face in a heat, a semifinal, or a feature race.

Apparently made of iron, with nerves of steel, Lightning Lucca packed them in at every track where he was booked to race. Let Lucca be in the line-up and the track management could count on a lot of fireworks at some time in the evening. And the fact that it was usually the other guy that got hurt, and his car flipped off the track, was just one of those things. Or was it?

Anyway, it was Lightning Lucca that came zooming out of nowhere in his green-and-black job, and Lucky Heftner's eyes narrowed and his lips became a thin line. He did not like Lucca, but he was not the least bit awed by the man. In his time, Lucky had seen a lot of hot-shots come blazing fast and go boom sooner or later. So it was not because he was afraid of Lucca that he eased off on the

throttle and let the green-and-black car go spinning by.

On the contrary, it was for common-sense reasons. Tomorrow night fifteen or sixteen thousand people would pay money to see him tangle with Lightning Lucca. Why now for nothing?

And so Heftner let the other car go on by. Not so Jerry Hanson, however. Perhaps Hanson went color-blind for a moment or so. At any rate he went out after Lightning Lucca as though it were the only thing he had left in the world to do. He caught the green-and-black car at the next bank and went flying around it, low down.

Lucca took it smooth as silk halfway up. Then suddenly he came down into the flat like nobody's business. For the fraction of an instant it looked as though he were going to wheel-clip the red Offy and make it go flipping off the track. In the last split-second, however, Lucca straightened out and went clattering along the flat. And behind him he left a very white-faced Hanson, who took his foot off the throttle so fast that Lucky Heftner, trailing along behind, had to swing out fast or ride his grille guard right up over No. 17's rear end.

AS HEFTNER coasted by he waved for the other driver to go into the Bellows' pit, and a lap later he rolled the blue into the pit, himself.

Jerry Hanson was standing beside the midget-car owner, staring at the ground and looking for all the world like he had taken a poke at his own mother. Jake Bellows shot a quick look at Lucky Heftner, and then seemed to relax when his ace driver grinned, winked, and made a little soothing gesture.

"Know who that was, chum?" Heftner said, going over to Hanson. "Only Lightning Lucca, the tops in the business this season. You want to learn to pick your spots, Hanson. Besides, Lucca is a very mean guy with anybody. Now, forget it, huh?"

Jerry Hanson lifted his eyes off the ground and grinned faintly.

"Sure, and thanks," he said. "I was a dope!"

"Aren't we all in this racket at times?" Lucky laughed. And then he looked at Jake Bellows and nodded plainly.

The midget-string owner understood the nod and turned to Hanson.

"All right, Hanson," he said kindly. "I'll take you on, and at the terms I mentioned in my office.

You can start here tomorrow night. One thing, though: Lucky, here, is driving-team boss. What he decides, goes. And that includes me, too. Remember that!"

"Yes sir, I will, and thanks for the chance," the newcomer said.

And then at that exact moment, as though fate or somebody had timed it, Lightning Lucca in his green-and-black Offy went cutting by the pit all out. As Jerry Hanson jerked his head around to look, his face went a little white. Then almost instantly it went beet-red, and a hard glitter lighted up the new driver's steel-gray eyes.

Both Jake Bellows and Lucky Heftner saw Hanson's violent change of expression but neither of them said anything. In fact, neither of them so much as gave it a second thought.

At seven o'clock the next evening, when time trials were started at the Newton Fair Grounds track for the card of races to be run, a good nine thousand midget-racing fans were already in the stands. And by eight o'clock, when forty-two cars had qualified and the first-heat entries were getting ready to start, the attendance figure had soared to almost sixteen thousand.

Ten cars were in the first heat, and one of them was the No. 16 Jordon-Offy with Lucky Heftner at the wheel. Another entry was the No. 13 Carson-Offy with Lightning Lucca doing the driving. Jerry Hanson had qualified to go in the second heat, so he stood with Jake Bellows on the rim of the infield as the first-heat cars went rolling down the back stretch to make the turn, and come off it into the flat and get the starter's green flag.

"Lucky wasn't kidding about Lucca being a mean guy, Hanson," Bellows suddenly said. "Watch this one closely and learn something. It might come in handy if you make a semifinal or the feature race."

Hanson didn't make any reply. He just grunted faintly, nodded, and kept his steel-gray eyes fixed on the little cars that were now clattering down off the north turn full out. Seconds later the green flag went down and the race was on. And it became an official race when nobody spun or tangled to make the red corner lights flash on during the first lap, and a restart necessary.

Living up to his reputation, Lightning Lucca got the jump on the field and streaked out into the lead. But not much of a lead over Lucky Hefner in the number two spot, however. Heftner was no more

than half a car's-length behind, and while four of the eight laps became history he more than matched Lucca's every effort to pull out to a more comfortable lead.

In the sixth lap there was a spin, and the yellow caution lights flashed on. The spinning driver, however, managed to regain control of his car and straighten it out on the track without clipping anybody, and the lights went from yellow to green again. As they did, Lucca poured on the coal in a mighty effort to jump away from Heftner.

He didn't succeed, however, and the two cars went tearing around the oval with less than half a car's-length separating them.

On the final lap, Heftner made his bid to take the lead, but he was up against a man who knew all the tricks in the business. The good ones as well as the bad, and it was Lucca who finally got the checkered flag.

AS JAKE BELLOWS turned from watching the race he suddenly stiffened as he caught a look at Jerry Hanson's pale, strained face.

"What's the matter?" he asked sharply. "You sick, Hanson?"

The new driver seemed to shake himself before he met Bellows' anxious stare. He shook his head and turned away.

"No," he said. "Don't worry, I'm okay."

Jake Bellows frowned and opened his mouth to speak again. Instead, he checked himself. By then Hanson was sliding into the bucket seat of his Offenhauser and fastening his safety belt.

Some ten minutes later the second heat of the night was track history. And for the second time a Bellow's entry finished right behind the winner. It had not been a very thrilling race, but Bellows and Lucky Heftner had watched it keenly every foot of the way, however. And when finally the checkered flag dropped they looked at each other and nodded as though in silent agreement.

"He can drive," Heftner spoke the words aloud. "Hanson will do all right for you."

Jake Bellows nodded absently and stared at the all-red Offy being tooled back to the pit by Hanson.

"Yeah, I guess so," he murmured. "I'll know better, though, if and when I see him go against Lucca."

Lucky Heftner started to speak, checked himself and tried again.

"Lucca?" he echoed. "What do you mean?"

About that brush on the turn he had with Hanson yesterday?"

"That and a couple of other things," Bellows grunted. Then with a faint frown, he added, "Something about Hanson I don't quite get. Can't put my finger on it, but maybe it's his eyes."

"Eyes?" Heftner said. "What's wrong with them? You feeling all right, Jake?"

"Skip it," Bellows said after a short pause. "I just got a hunch that Lucca coming into the picture has done something to Hanson. Tell better when I see them in the same race."

And as luck, or fate, would have it the midgest-string owner got that opportunity in the twenty-five-lap feature race of the night. Both his drivers earned the right to race, and so did Lightning Lucca. As a matter of fact, Lucca's time in the first semifinal earned him the pole position. Right beside him was Heftner in the all-blue Jordon-Offy, and on the pole in the third row was Jerry Hanson in the all-red.

As though expecting, or even sensing, something very special, a tingling hush settled down over the packed stands as the twelve cars in pairs went tooling around the track preparatory to the actual start of the race. And presently the race was started in perfect style.

Like his nickname, Lucca lightning-streaked into the lead before the first turn was reached. And like in the first heat when they had met, Lucky Heftner hung right close to Lucca's rear deck and let the big man set the pace.

Nor was there any slow-motion about Jerry Hanson when he went by the dropped green flag. He opened up like a frightened rabbit and promptly started to weave and twist his way up until he was right behind the two leaders. For a couple of moments it looked to Jake Bellows, watching closely, as though Hanson was going to keep right on going and grab the lead if he could. However, the new driver seemed to ease off his wild speed a shade and be content to trail the leading pair.

And that's the way the race picture was lap after lap, as far as the three leading drivers were concerned. Driving fast and hard, Lightning Lucca kept out in front. And copying his every move Lucky Heftner stuck right there behind him. And as though content to let the suction of the other two pull him along, Jerry Hanson easily held his third spot position.

As a matter of fact, the non-changing monotony

of the race began to bore the thousands present and they started yelling for a little more race action. And in the nineteenth lap the unlucky fates up and gave it to them.

Halfway through the lap Lucky Heftner started to pour the coal on and make his bid to wrest the lead away from Lucca. And he was almost doing just that when an oil line let go in his engine, and by the end of the lap he was forced to roll his No. 16 into the Bellow's pit and out of the race.

However, no sooner was Heftner forced to give up his efforts for the night than Jerry Hanson drilled the No. 17 all-red Offy right up into the slot Heftner had vacated. And then the crowd began to get its thrills.

As the No. 17 Offy came up alongside him, Lightning Lucca turned his head, grinned broadly, and started to go to town. But quick as a flash Jerry Hanson started to go to town right along with him.

FOR THE twentieth and twenty-first laps it looked as though the two cars were tied together. In the twenty-second lap, however, Lucca started pulling the cute tricks that made him the season's greatest drawing card for thrills.

He started taking the turns high and deliberately squeezing off every attempt by Hanson to cut by. And when Hanson saw that he couldn't go around the green-and-black midget, he switched to taking turns low and cutting by on the inside.

But that was when Lucca really drove rings around him. Time and time again Hanson would take the turn low and try to drill through the narrow opening that was presented for the brief moment. Each time, though, Lightning Lucca, like a cat playing with a mouse, would slice down off the turn and Hanson just didn't seem to have what was necessary to bang on through and take the lead. Instead, he eased off and allowed Lucca to close up the hole.

In the twenty-fifth lap Hanson didn't make one effort to pass on the turns. It was almost as if he realized that Lightning Lucca was his master. Either that, for he definitely lacked the courage to take a chance on pushing on through, regardless of the possible danger.

To Jake Bellows it was definitely a lack of courage, and disappointment showed plain in his face as he looked at Heftner when the race was over.

"I guess my hunch was right," he sighed.

"Lucca got him on the hip yesterday and Hanson is scared stiff of him tonight."

Lucky Heftner didn't reply for a moment. He watched Hanson and Lucca circling the track on the way into their respective pits. Lucca was making gestures at Hanson and laughing. Hanson, though, wasn't paying the slightest bit of attention. He seemed only interested in getting back to the Bellows pit as quickly as he could.

"I'm not so sure," Heftner finally grunted.

"You're not?" Bellows exclaimed, and gave him a sharp look. "Didn't you watch the race?"

"I mean about his brush on the turn with Lucca yesterday," Bellows' head driver replied quietly. "Guys who have raced before, and Hanson certainly has, don't get put on the hip that quickly. No, I think Hanson didn't have it because of something else."

"And just what the devil do you mean by that?" Jake Bellows demanded.

This time Heftner didn't make any reply at all. Jerry Hanson had rolled his car in, and was legging out. His face was slightly brick-red under its coating of dirt and oil splatterings. And when he looked at Bellows he grinned a little sheepishly.

"Sorry about that work on the turns," he said quietly. "It was strictly lousy! It won't happen the next time."

"It had better not!" the midget-string owner snapped. "You were—"

Bellows cut himself off short because at that moment Lightning Lucca rolled by slowly in his winning car. The big man leaned out a little toward Bellows and laughed.

"Better pay off your new man, Bellows!" he called out. "I think the bum is yellow!"

And with a nod, and another laugh, Lucca went rolling on to his own pit.

Face blazing red, and both fists clenched, Jerry Hanson made as though to leap out onto the track and give chase after Lucca. He checked the urge, however, and started peeling off his coveralls. Lucky Heftner watched him out of wise eyes for a moment, and then walked over to him.

"Had a bad crack-up once, didn't you, Hanson?" he asked in a gentle tone.

The new driver stiffened, turned his head and seemed to hesitate. Then he nodded.

"Yes," he finally replied. "Three years ago. Flipped over three times and came out with two busted legs and a fractured skull. That's one reason

I quit for a spell to try designing and building. Anything else you'd like to know?"

The bitter tightness in the speech caused Heftner to put out a hand and touch Hanson lightly on the shoulder.

"Take it easy," he said. "But there is one more thing. You flipped when you got squeezed off a turn?"

Once more Hanson seemed to hesitate. And then he nodded again.

"That's right," he said shortly. Then he added quickly, "And if you're thinking something, you're wrong. After tonight I'm not worried a bit!"

"Check," Heftner smiled. "No reason at all why you should be. Relax, Hanson, you're still on my team."

THE NEW driver gave him a grateful look, then reddening in apparent embarrassment, he bent over and resumed climbing out of his coveralls.

Lucky Heftner looked at Bellows and winked and nodded. The midget-string owner scowled, and bided his time. It came later at the hotel, when Hanson was not around.

"Maybe I should let you run everything?" he suddenly growled out of thin blue air. "Or are we running a school for cracked-up drivers?"

Lucky Heftner grinned and took the biting words like a duck takes water on his back.

"I want to give the guy a fair break, that's all, Jake," he replied. "You should know how tough it is to come back after a bad one. And you don't make it in your first couple of races, either. Not usually. And Hanson did finish second."

"Sure, Lucca got the tip-off by accident yesterday, and gave him a good going over tonight. Well, in my book that was just what Hanson needed to find out a couple of things. I'll even guess it was a couple of things in his favor, too. But—you're the boss, Jake."

"Yeah, I'm the boss," Bellows echoed with a grimace.

"Well, we'll soon see," Heftner grinned. "If he doesn't come through the next couple of meets then, okay, he's out. I only wish I could remember where I've heard his name. I'm sure I have."

Jake Bellows grunted, let it go at that. Considering one thing and another, he wasn't quite in the mood to express his thoughts. And besides he was really willing to give any man a break who deserved one. And Jerry Hanson *had* finished

second in his first feature race after a three-year lay-off.

In the next three or four weeks that followed the Newton Meet, Lucky Heftner's guess about Jerry Hanson seemed to prove to be correct. The new driver was no startling sensation, nor did he climb up into the ranks of crowd thrillers. Just the same, he won his share of races and drove as a real good teammate for Lucky Heftner. Between them they hauled down a nice load of prize money, and everybody was more or less happy.

However, there was one little item with reference to the following four weeks. In not a single one of the race meets was Lightning Lucca a contestant. The current crowd-pleaser of the year had accepted more lucrative dates in other parts of the country. And so Jerry Hanson had yet to prove, to Jake Bellows anyway, that his first race with Lucca had just been one of those things that wouldn't happen a second time.

And then came the Waltham Meet with seven races plus a feature fifty-lap event. Over the years the feature fifty-lap race at the Waltham lightning-fast dirt track, one-fifth-of-a-mile, had reached a point where it was regarded by all race drivers and car owners as the one big race of the year. And its winner was generally regarded as the national champion of the popping ovals. At any rate everybody pointed for the Waltham "Fifty," and the real top drivers in the country always showed up.

This time no less than eighty-four drivers were there to compete in the program. And no less than twenty-five thousand red-hot midget-racing fans were in the stands to get their fill of thrills and spills.

And they received their first thrill spill shortly after the time-trials got underway. And it was the finger of fate that was pointed at Lucky Heftner. As he went rocketing around to complete his time-trial, his left front tire blew and he went skidding crazily into the guard wall, to ricochet diagonally down across the track and onto the infield, to flip over.

The all-blue No. 16 Offenhauser was banged up enough to put it out of the night's activities. And so was Lucky Heftner. A badly sprained right wrist had swollen to twice its normal size by the time the track doctor was able to attend him.

So Lucky became a pitman, instead. And while Jack Bellows went around like a walking cloud of black gloom, the veteran driver gave all the advice he could to Jerry Hanson, who would go in the all-

red Offy No. 17.

Hanson won the first heat. He took it hands down and without any trouble. The win caused some of the dark gloom to leave Jake Bellows' face, but not all of it. Lightning Lucca had not been in the first heat. Instead, this year's thrills sensation was in the second heat, and he didn't do any more than set a new track record for the ten laps!

In the semifinals, fate, or what have you, worked the same twist. Jerry Hanson won his again, and once again Lucca's green-and-black thunderbolt was not one of the cars racing against him. Lucca raced in the second semifinal and almost hung up a new mark for the fifteen laps.

So finally, at long last, came the big event of the night. The all important Waltham Fifty for the best hot-rod drivers in the business.

**F**OURTEEN cars and drivers made up the field, with every car and driver at top peak and ready to go the route full out. At the pole in the first pair was Lightning Lucca, and right beside him was Jerry Hanson. As the seven pairs of cars went tooling around the track to get the green flag when they came by the official starter the next time, Jake Bellows stared hard at Hanson in the all-red Offy.

"I'd give a lot if you were out there, instead," he said to Lucky Heftner. "This one I'd like to win bad."

"And maybe you will, Jake," Heftner grinned cheerfully. "Hanson has got a lot of racing under his belt since that last time he tangled with Lucca—"

The veteran driver suddenly stopped short, his mouth hanging open and his eyes wide with the dawn of a startling truth. Bellows grabbed his arm.

"Hey! What's the matter?"

"It just clicked!" Heftner cried, and clapped his good hand to his forehead. "Jerry Hanson! I knew darn well that name should mean something. And how it does, now! Right here, in the Waltham Fifty. Three years ago. I was in the grandstand that year, and I saw it!"

"Saw what, for heaven's sake?"

"It was Lucca and Hanson!" Heftner got out with an effort. "Neither of them hardly known, then. But they were red-hot that night. The forty-eighth lap, as I remember. Hanson took the bank low and tried to sneak by. Lucca closed the gap and Hanson pulled off. He pulled too quick and he hit the infield like a bouncing ball. To me it looked like a foul, but the officials ruled no. Lucca went on

to win and Hanson went away in the ambulance. Great grief!"

"Great grief, is right!" Bellows shouted, and started for the track. "That Hanson isn't racing in any car of mine against Lucca. Not if I—"

In a flash Lucky Heftner whipped out his good hand and grabbed Bellows by the arm,

"No, you can't, Jake!" he cried.

"Can't?" the midget-string owner thundered. "You think that cars like mine grow on trees?"

"No!" Heftner shouted back. "And neither do drivers like Hanson will be, if he's licked the thing. You can't, Jake! Besides, it's too late now."

And it was! The fourteen cars, in seven pairs, had gone by the dropped green flag and were on their way, seemingly to shake down the very heavens with their popping, clattering roar. And out in front Lightning Lucca had jumped to a one-car-length lead. But the car just behind his was the Bellows' lone entry, with Hanson in the bucket seat.

The first lap was covered without any restart and the race became official. And all fourteen drivers began to bear down and really go to town.

The wildest, hardest-driving one of them all was Lucca out in front. He gave his mount everything it could take.

In five laps he increased his lead to a good twenty-five yards over Hanson, in the all-red No. 17, and a driver named Hicks, in a jet-black Offy with white wheels that was stuck to Hanson's rear deck like glue. In the sixth lap, however, Hanson started rolling the turns low and hugging the pole.

Little by little he began to pull away on the all-black and crawl up on Lucca out in front. And by the time the tenth lap had become history, Hanson was right up close to the leader, and on the inside.

And it was at that point that the race seemed actually to begin. It was then that Lightning Lucca seemed first to realize that somebody else was close. And also to recognize just who that somebody else was. At any rate, Lucca kept looking back and grinning broadly. And on the north turn in the fourteenth lap, when Hanson made his first bid to sneak on through on the inside, Lucca swerved down and plugged up the hole.

The instant he saw it, Jake Bellows groaned aloud and clenched his two hands helplessly. Lucky Heftner made no sound, but shadows began to slide through the eyes he held clamped on the two cars.

In the seventeenth lap Hanson tried once more

to streak by, but once again Lucca made him quit. And again in the nineteenth lap, and once more in the twenty-first. As a matter of fact, Jerry Hanson seemed to make the futile effort every odd lap, but not one bid was any better than the previous one. To one and all, watching breathlessly, it became apparent that Lucca had the sign on Hanson and could easily take care of the driver challenging him for the lead, when and how he pleased.

**B**UT, eventually, came the forty-eighth lap. Only ten cars were left in the race, and Lucca and Hanson were far out in front of the pack in the same one-two positions they had maintained all through the race. And it looked to some twenty-five-thousand people as though it would be just that way when the checkered flag dropped at the end of the fiftieth lap. However, some twenty-five thousand screaming midget-car fans guessed wrong!

As the two leaders hit the north turn in the forty-eighth lap, Jerry Hanson once more poured on the coal and tried to cut around on the inside and into the lead. Like several other times, Lightning Lucca promptly took steps to close up the opening and squeeze the all-red Offenhauser back. But this time, no soap!

As though fired by the one great inspiration of his entire life, Jerry Hanson stuck to his knitting. He hugged the pole a shade closer, if anything, and went rocketing around and into the flat with Lucca's left wheel hubs almost kissing his own right wheel hubs.

For a brief, flashing instant it looked as if the two drivers couldn't possibly avoid locking and spinning. Then at the end of that brief, flashing instant Hanson in the all-red went zooming out in front with the lead. Like nothing that has ever been seen on any midget track before or since, Hanson tooled his midget around the racing oval at a

breakneck, nerve-sapping speed.

Behind him Lightning Lucca gave frantic all-out pursuit, but Hanson had done the trick on the north turn of the forty-eighth lap and Lucca was helpless.

Two car-lengths out in front, Jerry Hanson went by the dropping checkered flag, and the gathered thousands screamed and yelled in excitement.

Not until an hour or more later, after the stands had emptied and the race drivers were dollying-up their cars and going away, did Lucky Heftner corner Hanson long enough to get off what was on his chest.

"I saw this one three years ago, Hanson," he grinned. "It just came back to me as tonight's go was getting away. So I understood a couple of things. One, though, I still don't. What was it that made you get your nerve back in the forty-eighth lap?"

Jerry Hanson grinned slowly.

"Nothing," he said quietly. "In that Newton go with Lucca I found out I hadn't lost it."

"Not lost it?" Jake Bellows choked, his eyes wide. "And Lucca squeezed you back turn after turn?"

"I know," Hanson nodded, and grinned some more. "I wanted it that way. After three years I needed some races under my belt. Besides, I was pointing for tonight. So I let Lucca think he could do it every time. Even in forty-seven of them tonight. Then in the forty-eighth he found out just who had been fooled. I was out in front and going away by the time he woke up. Same lap as before. Maybe I'm just sentimental."

"Maybe," Lucky Heftner grinned, and squeezed Hanson's arm. "But a very sweet hot-rod driver as well."

Jake Bellows frowned, then grinned, and nodded. "Yeah," he murmured. "I'll buy that last, too!"