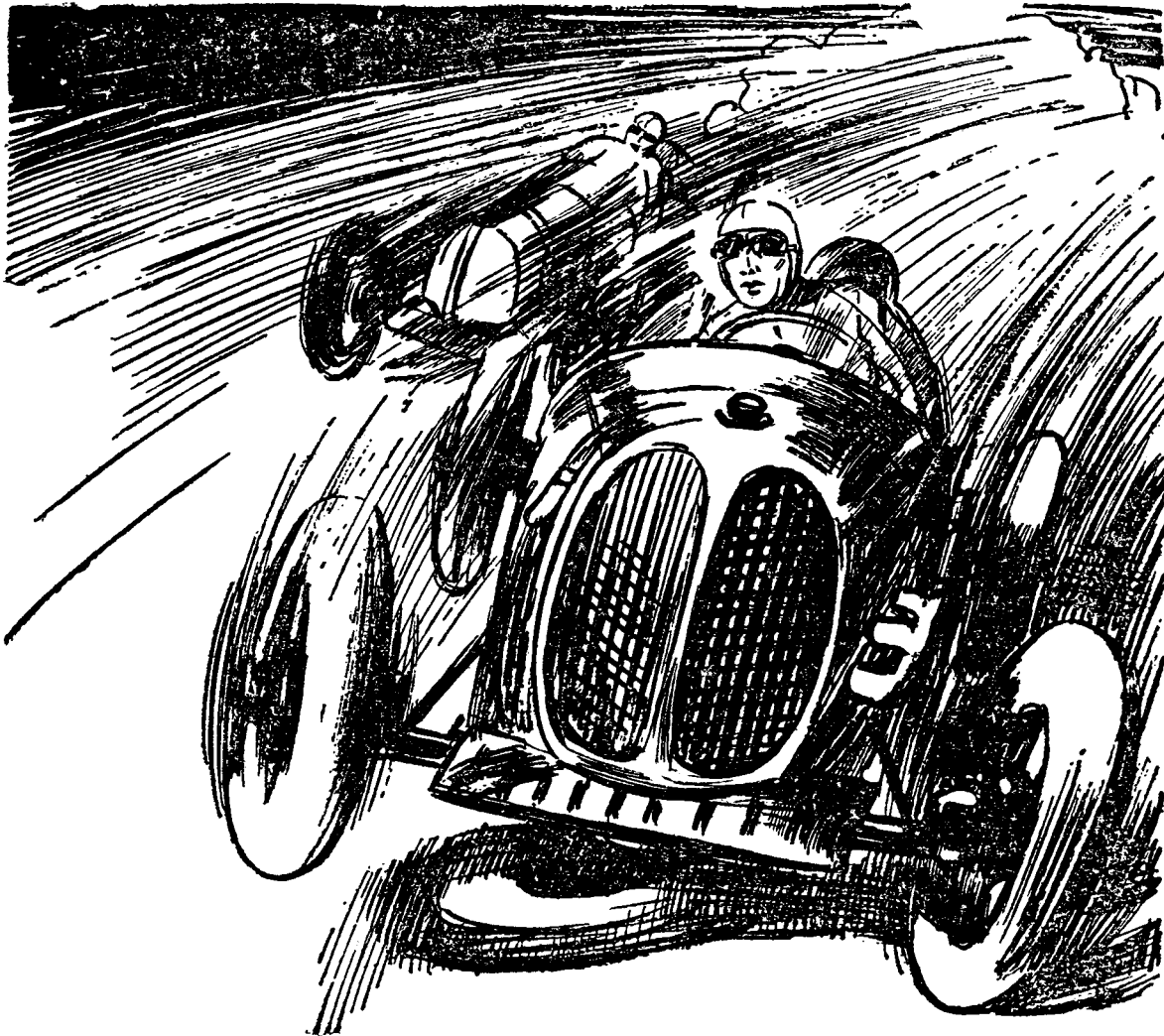


# Feud of the Fuel Lanes



*By Giles A. Lutz*

LANCE WHITLOCK stepped back and silently surveyed his work. For just a moment his hand rested lovingly on the sleek, silver hood of the midget racer. In that gesture was all the affection men reserve for special things.

"She's ready, Mike." The weariness of years crowded into his voice. "Roark Sellers will eat some of his words. So a Whitlock can't do anything. This baby will show him."

Lance Whitlock looked older than forty-five. His hair was prematurely white. His worry-lined,

flame-scarred face carried the stamp of age. Tall and entirely devoid of surplus flesh, his nervous frame seemed to be strung on piano wires.

Stocky Mike Boyle looked at him and replied grumpily: "You've been working too hard again, Lance."

Mike had been Lance Whitlock's mechanic when Lance was wheeling with the best of them. At Altoona, when Lance's overturned car became a flaming torch. Mike's hands were scarred by the same flames, for he had fought like a crazy thing, finally dragging Lance clear.

Loyal Mike Boyle, ex-marine and as tough as the legend of the corps. Watching Lance limp about the racer, Mike remembered their last race at Indianapolis. For Lance had gone over the wall and been carried away. But he had confused the best of medical minds and recovered.

Lance left much of himself in that scrambled wreck. Left the coordination between cool, thinking mind and wild, reckless hands and feet. It wasn't fear, for Lance never knew the meaning of the word. It was just a slowing of his mental processes and Lance had recognized it after a few races.

Those weren't his major losses, for the race had taken his wife. Fearfully, she had watched Lance crash through the guard-rail, and a heart that nature said was too weak to watch her husband recklessly ride the turns had let her sag to the floor and failed to bring her back. It had left Lance and the kid, for the first time, responsibility rested heavily upon him.

"I'll never drive again," he had told Mike. "Leave me alone and look out for yourself. I'll never be back in the money. I've got the kid to raise."

"And what about Sellers?" Mike had asked steadily. For it was Sellers who had caused the crash-up at Altoona, and Sellers who had shoved Lance over the wall at Indianapolis.

"Some day," Lance said grimly, "I'll pay him back. But that's not for now. G'wan, get yourself something."

Throughout the years he railed at Mike, but the stubborn Irishman always thrust forth his bulldog jaw and insisted: "We started together. We finish the same way."

Lance kept his word. He never drove again. And he never talked race-driving to his growing youngster. If at times his eyes grew hot and bitter, Mike knew the reason. Knew Lance was thinking of Roark Sellers, the man who had deprived him of the two things nearest his heart.

In the meantime they lived by the skill of their hands, the magic in their fingers. Magic that could make a whining, protesting motor change its song to a perfect symphony.

"We oughta be back," Mike often insisted restlessly.

"And take the kid into that game," Lance snapped. "Oh, no. Look at me."

**M**IKE mentioned racing less and less and finally shoved the thought to a quiet corner

of his mind. They were through, and thinking of it only made them miserable.

Mike came into the garage one day to find Lance tinkering with a motor. A small motor. "A doodlebug," Mike laughed a little scornfully. "Whose?"

"Ours," Lance said. His embarrassed hesitancy disappeared in his mounting enthusiasm and pride. "Mike, the kid's been driving. Driving for over two years. And I just found out." He paused, his eyes reminiscent. "Mike, I guess the flame is born in you. And nothing can stamp it out. He's been driving the midgets, Mike. Good, too," he finished proudly.

"Imagine him not telling us," Mike ejaculated, his jaw hanging.

Lance nodded. "He knows my record, Mike. He didn't want to hurt me. But we'll build him a car. One that will prove him a champion. Only the best, huh, Mike?" Lance's old grin was back and his eyes were young again.

It became the three of them then, heads bent over a midget motor, testing, experimenting. The song of the motor grew sweet and powerful. The Whitlock Special was coming to life.

"Lance," Mike yelled one day, bursting into the garage. "Sellers is building midgets too. He's entering them in the coming indoor meet. He's bragging his drivers will sweep everything just like he used to on the big tracks."

"Sellers," Lance whispered. His face contorted with fury as the old thoughts crowded back upon him. He closed his hand slowly, a curious light in his eyes. "At last, Mike. After all these years. We'll run him off the track."

Danny, Lance's son, nodded soberly. He looked like Mike remembered Lance, a young, blond Lance with daring, laughing eyes and a heavy foot. Almost, Mike felt he was young again.

"I've seen him around, dad," Danny broke the silence. "He's a big-mouth. We'll beat anything he has."

Danny saw the curiosity in his dad's eyes. "I've talked to racing men, dad. They told me what Sellers did to you —us," he amended. "Now he'll pay." The gesture, as he closed his strong fist, was not unlike his dad's.

The car grew under their hands from shapeless metal into a gleaming silver bullet. Mike lost his contempt for the tiny car. "Sure, it's as good," he insisted stoutly. "The scale's a little smaller, but it takes a heart to drive one and the heart must be in the motor."

They passed up a summer's outdoor racing. Danny fretted and Mike protested.

"It's going to be right," Lance said calmly. "No bugs, no defects. From the very start you're going to know you're a winner. And that takes time."

But the changing, the testing, took time and Danny began to spend fewer hours at the garage. To Mike's questions Lance answered easily: "He's driving, Mike. Getting more experience."

Mike was silent a long moment. "I saw him with a girl," he blurted out finally.

"He's old enough," Lance grinned. "I remember one or two who could even stand your ugly mug."

Mike let the remainder die unsaid. Maybe he was getting old. The young rushed recklessly across bridges. The old stood back and cautiously tested each plank.

Lance carefully put each tool in its place. The Whitlock Special was ready. Mike watched the deep satisfaction in Lance's face and resolutely decided to take the bull by the horns. Carefully framing his words, he was relieved when the quiet entrance of Danny put an end to his groping attempt.

The boy had something on his mind and the saying of it was hard. "Dad," he began slowly.

"There she is, son," Lance spoke proudly. "There's your buggy. And the indoor season opens soon." He breathed deeply as if smelling something tangible. "It's been a long time since I've seen a race. A long time."

The boy's words tumbled out, as if by sheer speed he could escape them. "Dad, I—I can't drive for you. I'm driving for someone else."

Lance stopped, frozen in his tracks. "Stop it," he said hopefully, as if it were a bad joke. At the expression on Danny's face, he asked quietly: "Who, son?"

"Maybe I can answer that," Mike interrupted savagely. "I've been trying to tell you. It's Sellers' car he'll be driving."

LANCE swung one incredulous glance at Mike, then turned to the boy. His tormented eyes said, tell him it's a lie. Throw it in his teeth. But the confirmation in Danny's eyes left him old and tired. He turned to the tool bench and slowly, methodically rubbed already clean hands on a ball of waste.

"Dad, you don't understand. Jeanne wants me to. It's for her." Danny pleaded for understanding.

"Sellers' daughter," Mike said scornfully. "The no good—"

"Mike!" Danny's cry was as physical as a slap. He forced his eyes to meet those of his father's. "There's big money behind him. I've got a chance to go places. For Jeanne. For myself. You've been nursing an old feud, dad, and it's made you bitter."

"Her words," Mike spat the words out.

Lance broke in in desperation. "Maybe big money would be interested in us, boy." He sighed wearily. "Sure, I understand. It's for the girl. Well, there's other years."

Without expression, he watched his son slowly leave the garage.

"An old feud," Mike said contemptuously. "Did you tell him Sellers wanted his mother too? And swore he'd wreck you when you got her. Ahhh, that girl's no good, Lance. I've seen and heard."

Lance said gently: "He can't help the way he feels. And it's my quarrel, not his."

"So Sellers hits us again," Mike said blackly. He watched Lance place a canvas over the gleaming racer. Watched him trundle it toward the rear of the garage. "What's the idea?" he yelled wrathfully.

"I can't race it now," Lance said almost apologetically. "It belongs in the family, Mike. I couldn't have anyone else driving it."

Mike swore then, long and savagely. "He's your boy, Lance. But I'd like to tear his head off." He stomped about in helpless fury. "Ahhh, I'm going to get drunk."

Lance became like a stream that, losing its source, flattens out and becomes lifeless. He refused to watch Danny drive. "I was a fool to think of the game again," he said bitterly. "It's hurt me enough."

"Sellers has three cars and Danny's driving the worst," Mike reported later. "What are they doing to him, Lance?"

"Maybe it's only bad luck. Maybe he'll run out of it, Mike."

Mike suddenly realized the older man was following the results and eating his heart out. "Have you noticed the girl, Mike?" Lance asked.

Mike nodded. "Pretty," he said honestly. He searched for words to describe that prettiness. "Pretty as a new racer without a spot. But the carburetor is bad, Lance. Sellers is using her to ruin the boy. Oh, he'll come back," he finished grimly. "But he'll be a different boy."

Night after night Danny finished far down. His driving became nervous and erratic. "They're sending him out with a bad car," Mike raved. "They don't want him to win. They're breaking him."

"Do you think Sellers would forget Danny belongs to you? He'll prove to the world that nothing a Whitlock can do is good."

Weeks passed and Danny continued to trail. "The kid crashed tonight," Mike reported, when he returned from the races. "He wasn't hurt," he added quickly. "But he's trying too hard, Lance. Driving with too much head and not enough heart. The crowd's booing him now."

"I know Sellers is behind that too. For it started in one small section four weeks ago and they've kept it up until the rest of the crowd has joined in. It's eating the boy away, Lance." He stomped across the garage to the canvas-covered midget. "Midgits. Hah!" he said explosively.

Lance said quietly, "I'll be there next Sunday and see for myself."

It was as Mike had said. The boy was too finely-drawn. He was overcautious, trying too hard. The crowd jeered and hooted. He had trouble in his time trial, twice stalling behind a hay-bale. Mike glanced at Lance's white, set face and swore silently. He knew how the older man suffered.

He pointed out the girl. "She's causing the trouble. She's got his head so filled, he doesn't know which way he's going."

Lance looked at her a long time. "I can understand, Mike. She is beautiful."

"Walk down by her," Mike said and his words were hard. "See her up close."

Lance walked slowly past her box, stopped, passed on. "You were right," he said dully. "But Danny's too young to see. She's selfish and cruel, Mike. And she's only having fun with the boy."

Hope lightened Mike's eyes. "If she drops him, he'll come back."

Lance shook his head slowly. "I don't know, Mike. I don't know."

Danny, goaded by the crowd's continual jeering, lost his head in his heat. He drove with the wild recklessness of an abandoned one. "He'll spill," Mike prophesied in alarm.

"Yes, he'll spill," Lance answered grimly.

**I**T HAPPENED in the eighth lap. Danny cut a corner too closely, kissed a hay-bale and caromed off. Bouncing at a tangent across the track, he locked wheels with another car, skidded a

long way, finally broke loose and rolled. Three times the midget turned completely over, ending against the wall in a crumpled heap.

Lance was on his feet, hobbling rapidly down the aisle, Mike hard on his heels.

Danny wasn't hurt. He climbed unsteadily from the scrambled pile and stood weaving, a dazed look on his face. The taut silence of the crowd broke with a hoarse laugh. It spread throughout the arena, mocking laughter, when ordinarily a driver escaping unhurt from a crash was applauded.

Danny's head came up sharply. For a moment his jaw hardened. Then his fight was gone, leaving a look of stunned incredulity. He walked from the arena, feet shambling, head down.

"They've broken his spirit," Mike said, his breathing harsh and rasping. "Do you know who started that laugh? Sellers. I was watching him." He turned in the direction Danny had taken.

"Wait," Lance held him back. "Give him a chance to collect himself. He'll come to the garage."

They sat in the garage a long time, talking softly. "He's taken a bad beating," Lance said soberly. "I was watching Sellers' girl while they laughed at Danny. He'll get another jolt tonight. It was in her face."

Finally a dragging step told them Danny was coming. He entered, carrying a suitcase and wearing the same hopeless look.

Lance broke the silence. "They gave you bad jobs, son. Sellers wanted to break you. Was it too bad?" he asked gently.

"Bad enough," Danny attempted a light tone but he couldn't carry it through. "Dad, how could I have been such a fool about her?" he said harshly.

Lance found hope. Hardly breathing, he waited.

Danny continued hesitantly: "Dad, I'm going away for a little. I'll keep in touch with you. If you need me—"

"Need you!" Mike snorted angrily. "Running away," he said heavily. "I didn't think I'd ever see a Whitlock—"

Lance silenced him and they watched the youngster turn into the night. "It's instinct," Lance said gently. "He wants to go off by himself and lick his wounds. He'll be back. But it must be of his own accord."

"But will he?" Mike asked glumly.

Sellers came the next day to gloat. "Want to sell?" he taunted. "Thought you could beat one of

my cars. Tried to make a driver out of that kid of yours. Why, a Whitlock never—”

Mike saw Lance stiffen, and took hold of Sellers' arm. “You'd better go,” he said quietly enough. When he returned, he was grinning broadly. The toes of his right foot hurt but it was worth it. For a fat man, Sellers had covered a lot of ground trying to avoid Mike's second kick.

The indoor season closed and neither of Sellers' cars won. For four successive nights his drivers had motor trouble and a wild Texas driver had blasted and barreled his way into the indoor championship.

“Ha!” Mike said in satisfaction. “The fat hog will sure scream now. Hey!” he yelled. “What are you doing?”

Lance was calmly stripping the canvas from the silver racer. “Getting it into shape for the outdoor season. It needs a little tuning up, Mike.”

“And who's going to drive it?” Mike demanded.

“I am,” Lance said calmly. “Not for long,” he interrupted Mike's howling. “Two nights and the boy'll be back. Listen.”

Mike held his shaggy head close, listening intently. There was unholy glee on his face and his little eyes twinkled. “You think so?” he asked “You really think so?”

Lance drove for the opening two nights and his time trials were bad. Nor did he finish in the money in any of his heats.

**S**ELLERS was in a jubilant mood, for one of his cars won the opening feature and placed second in the following one. Sellers' driver was off in the lead for the outdoor championship. During the second evening, he found several reasons for passing Lance and Mike. He was afraid to speak, but his nasty grin expressed his triumph.

Monday night Danny awaited them. A different looking Danny. Brown and harder, and with a hard determination in his blue eyes. He returned their greeting and asked impatiently: “Dad, what's the idea of you driving? You can't—”

“You've been reading too many newspapers,” Lance grinned. He coughed hollowly, then continued. “It's in the blood, boy. Soon as I get the feel of it—” He looked at his watch and whistled. “I'm late. Wait for me, son.”

Danny cornered Mike and under his insistent probing Mike said reluctantly: “Lungs, kid. Too much motor smoke and fumes. He should get away

from it. But business hasn't been too good. So we're trying to make it with the racer.” He shrugged expressively.

Danny sat a long time in deep thought. He even failed to notice when Mike left.

“I'm driving,” he said harshly, when his father returned. “From now on.” And his level tone said: *Don't argue.*

“You know what it means, kid?” Lance asked quietly. “Sellers missed on the indoor. His drivers will be after you. And the crowd will be plenty tough.”

Danny said again: “I'm driving. What needs to be done on the car?”

They left him, tinkering with the motor. Outside, they shook hands and grinned.

“This sport is sure growing,” Lance said as the three pushed the car onto the track for Danny's time trial. “Just look at the crowd.”

Someone recognized Danny and jeered. Rapidly the razzing swept the stands until it became a continual bleat. The cruelest sound in the world for a sporting figure and only the strongest can take it. Lance looked anxiously at Danny's face and with relief, found it closed tight and as expressionless as stone.

“Luck, son,” he said quietly, pressing the boy's shoulder.

If Danny lacked the stuff of which top-flight drivers are made, it failed to show. Recklessly but confidently, he manhandled the screaming motor around the turns. If he lost time through skidding, he gunned it faster than ever on the straightaways. His time was second best of the evening.

Still, time trials weren't races and a lone car racing against time didn't prove he could win races. It took handling when cars were jamming hub to hub, when the slightest miscalculation meant a crash. The skill and the daring to take a car through without an inch to spare.

The heart to beat off bid after bid. To keep on when wrists and hands were one tortured ache, when eyes blurred and nose stung through the haze of exhaust fumes. Those are the questions a time trial doesn't ask.

Danny took his heat and nothing in it came close to his racing bullet. “That'll show 'em,” he snarled as he took off his crash helmet and goggles. He wasn't watching the crowd but Sellers' pit, across the infield.

“Watch his drivers, son,” Lance cautioned. “They've seen what the silver midget can do and nothing in the book is too dirty for them to use.”

The Texas driver had the pole. Danny was close beside him. Behind them was one of Sellers' drivers. Three times the long line wound around the one-fifth mile oval before they received the starter's release. The green flag and the fifty-lap feature was roaring.

Doggedly, the Texas kid and Danny fought it out for position on the first turn, the Texan whipping out of it first. Close on his tail, Danny cut for the pole on the second turn and missed. He rode wide down the straightaway and as the Texas skidded from the bale, cut inside for the lead.

THE little motor sang a fiery, sweet song. Danny drove like one possessed and he was never headed. From the second lap to the last, he led the pack and twice lapped the tail-enders.

Sellers came to the garage next day. Without preliminaries, he offered: "I'll buy your car, Whitlock. How much?"

Danny grabbed him by the shirt-front and held him close. "You did a neat job of making a fool of me, Sellers. But this car's going to rub your nose in it. Now get out!" He shoved Sellers roughly through the door.

Lance looked at Mike and they grinned comfortably without speaking. Danny bent over the motor. "Work to do," he growled, dismissing the Sellers' family.

The outdoor season rolled along and it became a three-cornered race between Danny, the Texas driver, and Sellers' man, Hanford. If Danny won a feature, the other two were in the money and he failed to widen the point gap. If he lost, one of the two, sometimes both were in front. Nerves stretched taut, for the loss of a point or two now could mean everything at the season's end.

By Danny's persistent daring, by his utter disregard for public opinion, he won the crowd over. Their jeering lessened and finally stopped entirely. They massed close, called a friendly greeting when he trundled out the silver racer.

"Hi, Danny. Howsa boy?"

But he never unbent, and because of it, they tried harder to prick his aloofness.

Danny dropped out of one feature with a broken universal at the thirty-second lap and stood raving and swearing as the field swept by. Hanford went on to take the feature and for the first time Danny dropped from the point lead.

"Hold it," his father consoled. "Don't let it get you down. There's other races."

Lance said to Mike later: "He's proving to

himself he can come back. That's why every turn is so important. It's important to find out many things while you're young. Remember that old poem that goes something like 'Master of thy destiny'."

"Naw," Mike growled disgustedly, "All I know is the kid sure masters these midget babies."

AT THE three-quarter mark of the outdoor season, the Texas boy hit trouble. On four successive nights, his car failed him. He dropped far below the leaders in points garnered and it left Danny and Hanford outdistancing the field.

Points became scarcer, for every driver in the race was shooting at the leaders. Sellers' drivers ganged up on Danny, pocketed him, rode him wide on the turns, bumped him where it would do the most harm.

Twice, Sellers' second driver carried him into the infield and only his amazing driving saved him. But it was costing Danny points. Once the man rode him wide on a turn, and Danny clipped a light pole. It took long hours that week to repair the car for next Sunday's feature.

"They're trying to wreck our car," Danny said grimly. "If they can do that, Hanford will coast in."

He took two successive firsts and his margin looked safe. Just ordinary driving and luck would keep him in the money and Hanford's firsts wouldn't be enough to overcome the total.

"Sure, I'll be careful," Danny promised Lance. "And I want to see Sellers' face when we finish in front."

He rode securely in second place with two laps to go, and figured the point standing. Hanford was in front, almost a half lap ahead. Hanford would cut into his total, but only two points. It would still leave Danny seven ahead, and with two nights to go he'd be safe enough.

It happened on the first turn of the final lap. Without warning a car smacked Danny broadside. He skidded wide, struggled to regain control, but the momentum carried him far off the track. The grinding and clashing of tortured metal ended with a shattering crash, and the two cars wound up wrapped about the far light pole.

He felt hot oil sear his legs as the motor seemed to explode. Steam from the torn radiator sprayed his face. With difficulty he extracted himself and stood on trembling legs. For a long moment he looked at the silver car and his heart seemed to stop. For it was a wreck. A hopeless wreck. He turned to the other car. It belonged to

Sellers' and the driver was Sellers' second man.

Mike and Lance arrived in time to stop his crazy charge, But they wouldn't stop his tearing scream. "You wrecked me deliberately," he raved. "You dirty louse, I—" With difficulty, they dragged him away.

Hanford won the race and with his points cut deeply into Danny's total. Only four points to the good and no mount. The silver racer was hopelessly scrambled and only two precious weeks remained.

"He's done it," Danny said hopelessly. "The rat's beat us again."

"Let's go home," Lance soothed. "Maybe we can figure out something."

Danny worked doggedly all that week even though he knew it was useless. Mike and Lance dropped by for a few brief minutes. They've given up, Danny decided. He didn't blame them. Mike and his dad were old and tired. And he was a fool to keep on working.

Hanford took the next Sunday's feature and went a point in the lead. "If we only had time to get this thing fixed," Danny raved. "If we had a car. Any kind. He'd never catch me."

Saturday morning he walked out. "It's all over, dad," he said quietly. "We tried. It's simply no go."

Lance returned a few minutes later. "I followed him into the house," he told Mike. "He flopped on the bed like he was dead. He needs the rest, Mike. Let's go."

All that day and through the night they labored. It was dawn, when they straightened, red-eyed and exhausted. "I'll try it," Lance said.

The roaring of a midget motor woke Danny and he hurried from the house, blinking sleep from his eyes. In amazement, he listened to the sweet song of power as his dad tooled the car around the vacant lot they used for testing. It was a battered, decrepit-looking number, but the roar of the motor couldn't be denied.

"Dad," he yelled. "It sounds like the Bullet. How did you do it?"

"Mike and I have been working on another motor for a long time," Lance answered. "That's where we were the last two weeks. We let you work alone so Sellers would think our last card was played. The outside's pretty bad," he said apologetically. "But it was the best we could do. There it is, son," he finished simply. "It's yours from now on."

IT WAS the last night and Sellers' driver, Hanford, was leading in points. Finish in front of Hanford, anywhere in the money, Danny thought fervently. He was a lead-foot in the time trials. Tight and sure, he held the car around the turns. And the speedy Bullet flew the straightaways for the best time of the evening.

Impatiently, Danny waited for his heat and won it. The feature was what he wanted. The feature with its counting points.

Mike was in high good humor. "Sellers is a sick man," he chortled. "And Hanford is the only driver he has tonight. Just one car against you, boy. The best driver wins."

Danny had the pole and front line. Hanford rode alongside of him. For five laps their positions failed to change. Hanford roared up beside him on the straightaways and dropped back on the turns.

Time after time Danny felt the kiss of Hanford's wheels as the Sellers' driver rode desperately his tail. The winning driver had to take everything tonight.

Fumes from the racing motors made the scene unreal. A gaseous blanket hung close and heavy, stinging eyes and nostrils. The excited crowd, the cars' roar became a steady blending sound.

Tramp it down the straightaways. Fight the turns savagely, for each inch was precious. An Elto cut a hay bale too close, careened wildly across the infield and overturned. Danny flinched as he saw the smoking motor. That could happen to him. But the thought only steadied his hands and cooled his mind.

Steadily the two drew out from the pack and their daring commuted itself to the others. Danny heard a crash behind him and next time around saw a V8 that had ridden over the tail of a Harley. Both had wound up against the grandstand, a crumpled mess.

Ten laps. Fifteen. Danny still led by a length, sometimes two. But with never a safe margin. A long way to go and the pacemaker rides the tough spot.

His throat was parched. His aching wrists seemed to be strung with red-hot wires. Power, more power. Gun, brake, skid. He asked the questions and the motor answered smoothly.

He lapped the tail-enders, rode one stretch hub to hub with a faltering Davidson. Close, too close, but he couldn't slip by. Just as he finally won clear, above the motor's roar, he heard the sharper report as a tire let go.

The Davidson yawed, its nose clipping

Danny's tail. It spun him wildly, as they went into the turn, then somehow he had the car under control.

Hanford slipped by on the inside and for a moment Danny knew sick despair. But if he had been riding side by side with the Davidson when the tire blew, he would have been smashed into the infield.

Hanford was ahead, half a straightaway. It was now or never. Twenty laps, twenty-five. He cut the distance down and there he hung. At thirty-five laps, he was on Hanford's tail waiting for a chance to take him. He couldn't pass on the straightaways and Hanford hugged the turns too tightly to slip by on the inside. To go around meant loss of precious ground.

Five laps to go. His radiator was even with the bucket seat of the other car. He went purposely wide on a turn and Hanford flung him a triumphant glance. Down the straightaway he roared, still on the outside. Hanford was going into the turn, still tight. No! He skidded a little and the opening was there. Narrow and threatening, but still an opening.

Danny threw the car into the slit, felt the jar as his wheels kissed hay bales on one side, Hanford's wheels on the other. But he was through, and the moisture on his face wasn't caused by physical exertion.

He steadied the car with straining hands, came out of the turn and was clear. Clear and leading.

It was a parade from then on. When Danny flashed across the line, Hanford trailed him by lengths.

Mike and Lance wrung his protesting arms, pummeled his back. "You showed 'em, son," Lance shouted joyously. "You showed 'em." Sobering, he grinned a little sheepishly. "Say, son, when Mike told you about my cough—"

"Yeah, it was a good story, dad," Danny grinned at old Lance's confusion. "I heard you and Mike laughing over it the night I won the first feature. Couple of clever guys," he jeered.

Reaching over, he patted the car's battered hood. "Dad, this lady's not very pretty, but her heart's right. And we're gonna build some good ones," he said enthusiastically. "Maybe some for the big tracks."

Lance stepped abruptly in front of him and looking over his dad's shoulder, Danny understood. Sellers and his daughter were passing.

Danny spoke easily, dispelling his father's concern. "That's all over, dad." And as the girl passed from sight, "Nothing wrong with the chassis. But I'm looking for one with the right carburetor," he grinned.