



Open Throttles

By A. Clifford Farrell

WITH a crashing finale the circus band lapsed into silence. Then the pipe organ broke into a barbaric chant. From the performers' entrance came the buzz of motors. Two miniature racing cars sped onto the hippodrome track and whirled around the arena, coming to a halt in front of a giant silver globe in the center ring.

The organ ceased and the voice of the announcer echoed above the murmur of the crowd under the big top.

"La-dies-s-s and gen-tle-men-n-n. Barstow's World's Greatest Shows take pleasah in presenting the most thrilling act of the age. A mad race for life inside this eighteen-foot ball by two of America's greatest racing drivers. Presenting for your approval, Mr. 'Buck' Powers, world's champion speed demon. And also, Mr. 'Speed' Sloan. They will ride simultaneously around the inner circumference of this small globe at death-de-fying speed."

Buck Powers' short bullet head jutting above heavy shoulders, climbed from his tiny car and bowed. But there was no smile on his twisted face. Instead, he was muttering from the corner of his mouth in the direction of the taller and cleaner-limbed Sloan.

"Watch yourself, Sloan," he was saying. "You been tryin' to steal the act. I'm onto you. Don't forget that I'm the champion. There wouldn't be any act if it wasn't for me."

"Bosh!" snorted Speed Sloan. "You're missing on a couple o' cylinders, Buck. You're suffering from a delusion. I'm not trying to steal any glory from you."

"Don't crawl," sneered Buck. "I know you like to pose as a hero every time Mona Harris is standing there watching this act. Well, she's there again. But I'm going to show you up today. We'll

really race this time. No hippodroming this afternoon."

Speed glanced toward the entrance. Mona Harris, a cloak over her ring costume, was there. But she had a right to be. Her aerial act came next on the program. Nevertheless, Speed was sorry. He knew that jealousy was the basis for Buck's animosity.

"Be reasonable, Buck," he pleaded. "It's suicide to break away from our regular routine inside that ball. We'll crash."

"Not unless you get in front of me," snapped Buck.

"All right," said Speed, squeezing into the tiny, bespangled machine. "I'm ready for you."

Roustabouts pushed them inside the ball, then closed and bolted the tiny door into place. The twin-cylinder motorcycle engines under the stubby hoods were humming angrily. The cars, a scant five feet in length, carried tiny wheels shod with oversize tires to give them traction on the surface of the ball which was built like a cage of thin strips of steel one inch wide with two-inch spaces.

The band struck up and the two cars began moving slowly around the bottom of the ball. As they gained speed they climbed the sides until they were whirling around the little circle at what might be called the equator of their cage. Buck was leading, with Speed only a yard back.

Speed set the throttle at the usual notch. The cars were attuned to the same pace. This was their only salvation. If one moved too fast or too slow at the wrong moment they might crash.

A bell clanged and Speed moved up alongside of Buck. The bell clanged again. The miniature race was on. This was Speed's turn to win the hippodromed event, but Buck gave his little car far more than the agreed amount of power and shot ahead. Speed could not overtake him. The bell

clanged again after ten whirls around the globe and Speed eased up on the throttle. But Buck continued to revolve at full speed.

Buck caught and passed him, their little wheels nearly locking. To avoid the menace Speed, gritting his teeth, swept high in almost a loop-the-loop. He whirled down to the bottom and shot up again on the opposite side, his nerves flinching at his peril. For Buck was still grimly whirling around, disregarding the routine of their act.

In a moment Speed was looping from top to bottom while Buck raced around at right angles to him.

In this manner their paths were crossing continually. Speed tried to keep an eye on the glinting shadow of Buck's car but Buck held to a steady gait, ignoring his partner.

How they avoided crashing was forever a mystery to Speed. It was partly due to luck and partly to his keen sense of position. Time after time their cars grazed.

For a dozen more revolutions Buck held to his course, but his face was growing pallid. This could not keep up forever. Sooner or later they would meet. And they were traveling forty miles an hour in a close space. It would mean death under their smashed cars at the bottom of the globe.

Buck's nerve finally snapped. With a curse, he swung down and up again in a loop over the top, following the same path that Speed was pursuing.

The crisis was over and Speed led the way out of the maze. He leveled off the loop until they both were circling the sides. Then they eased off the motors and drifted to the bottom, coming to a stop. Speed turned to Buck with a grim smile. That proved to be too much for the squatty driver. He leaped from his machine and swung a vicious punch at Speed, who, though still in his car, blocked it and retaliated with a right hook to the ribs. Buck reeled back and fell over his machine. He leaped to his feet to renew the attack but a gale of laughter stopped him.

"I'll get even, Sloan," he muttered furiously as they stepped out of the cage, bowing mechanically to the applause. "Wait till we get back on the track. This is child's play here, but things will be different when we ride the big bowls again."

Speed did not answer. Mona Harris was approaching, accompanied by Charley Harris, her brother, a slender, dark-haired youth who bore a striking resemblance to his sister. They were twins.

But he had little of the strength of character in his face that marked his sister. She was the mainspring of their act. He was only the catcher.

"What happened?" Mona whispered to Speed. "You were fighting! And you missed the routine of your act."

"Got our wires crossed," said Speed.

The announcer was intoning: "Mona Harris, ladies-s-s and gen-tle-men-n-n. World's greatest girl aerialist. She will perform without a net—without a net."

The band struck up. Mona and her brother grasped elevator wires and shot aloft as a dozen circus hands manned the ropes.

Speed stood there in the ring watching Mona, whose lithe tight-clad body now swung back and forth high up against the top. Thirty feet away, Charley, her brother, hung from another bar. Buck, too, stood there, staring aloft.

Mona began her routine. Then with a full cast she shot through the air and connected surely with her brother's arms. She snapped back to her trapeze on the next swing. Her next leap was made with a full twist. Then a half Gaynor.

The act reached its climax. The feature was to be a flying one-and-one-half somersault through the air.

Mona soared gaily back and forth, blowing kisses to the crowd. She glanced down, smiled and blew a kiss to Speed. Then she swung down, hanging by her hands. The arc of the trapeze increased. Her brother awaited, head downward, swinging back and forth.

The moment came!

Mona's lithe body arched out and upward. She released her grip and sailed on up, almost against the canvas, turning over once and then half again. She snapped out of the tuck and her outstretched legs were in perfect position for a catch by Charley. But he was not there. He clutched frantically, desperately, nearly falling from his own perch in a supreme effort. But he missed!

A rumble of horror arose from the crowd as the pink form of the girl flashed sickeningly down toward the ring.

Buck was standing directly under her falling body. He leaped aside with a hoarse cry of despair.

But Speed jumped to the spot, crouching, his arms curved outward, bracing himself tensely.

Mona screamed once as she fell. Then she landed in Speed's arms. He was smashed to the

ground by the impact and blackness engulfed him instantly. He lay there unconscious beside Mona's still form. The crowd roared with fear and excitement and then became quiet as performers and ring men ran to the spot.

Buck stood by, dazed. "They're dead," he moaned. "Both of 'em. The fool. He tried to save her."

"Nix," said the ringmaster after a quick examination. "Mona isn't dead. Can't tell how bad she's injured, though. But not as bad as Speed. Get an ambulance and call a couple o' doctors out of the crowd. Speed may be dying. Hustle."

SPEED drifted wearily back to consciousness. He had been in a hospital before and experienced no trouble identifying his present surroundings.

"I must have hit a fence again," he decided.

A nurse entered, glanced at him and hurried away. In a moment a young, vigorous doctor appeared.

Speed tried to sit up. But his body was strapped to the bed. Memory returned now. Mona—her falling body. That terrible second as he stood waiting to catch her—

"How is she—Mona?" he gasped.

"She'll be up and around in a week or two, thanks to you," said the doctor. "A few bruises and sprains. But you'll be laid up for a while. Keep those arms quiet. Try to move 'em and I'll call a couple o' nurses in to sit on 'em."

"What's the matter with my arms?" cried Speed in horror. "Why are they strapped down? Are they broken?"

"Nope, just dislocated," snapped the doctor. "You were not catching a football, you know. That girl weighs a hundred and twenty if she scales an ounce. And she fell thirty feet or more. Lucky you didn't get a broken back. If you take it easy you'll be all right in a month or so."

"A month!" exclaimed Speed bitterly. "Where's the show?"

"Gone," said the doctor briefly as he examined Speed's arms. "You know you have been in silly land for twenty-four hours. Had the wind knocked so completely out of you that we had to pump you up again."

"But I can't lie here a whole month, confound it," protested Speed earnestly. "I'm due to drive at Indianola soon. And I haven't got a car yet."

"If you move before I tell you to you'll never drive again," warned the medical man. "Remember, you need two good arms in the racing racket."

Speed lay there in despair after the doctor left. This was the end of his dreams. He smiled bitterly. What if he *did* leave the hospital now? He would not have funds enough to buy the machine that was being built for him at Indianola. Six weeks more with the circus would have turned the trick. He had accepted the winter vaudeville and spring circus contract merely to finance the new car.

Two days later Mona and her brother Charley visited him. She was being discharged from the hospital. They greeted each other with embarrassed smiles. Tears came to the girl's eyes.

"I'm terribly sorry," she breathed.

"I suppose you'll rejoin the show?" Speed asked.

"No," she said. "I'm not going back. Charles refuses to team with me any more. And I would have no confidence in anyone else."

"Yeah, a lot of good your confidence in *me* did you," Charley said bitterly. "I'll never mount a flying trapeze again. I'm going to get a job as an auto mechanic."

"What do you know about autos?" Speed guffawed.

"Charley's really a good mechanic," said Mona. "And he wants to ride in a big race."

"Better stick to your own racket," grunted Speed. "It's safer."

"We're going to Indianola and watch you win," Mona exclaimed eagerly.

Speed's good humor vanished. "I—I guess I won't enter this year," he stammered. "I'll wait until next season."

"I expected that," said the girl, reaching into her purse and producing an envelope. "I knew that you owed two thousand dollars on your new car. You told me weeks ago, you know. Here's the bill of sale. Paid in full."

Speed stared at the paper, bewildered. "Nix," he exclaimed. "I'm not taking money from you. And it's foolish. A loan on a racing car is the world's poorest investment."

"Furthermore," she continued triumphantly. "Charles will ride as your mechanic. Won't you, Charles?"

Her brother began to sulk.

"Darn it, sis," he cried. "Buck Powers promised

me a trial as a driver. He owns two cars, you know. Said he'd let me have the wheel in the race if I could qualify."

But a glance from his sister stopped him.

"Oh, all right, if you say so," he concluded. "I'll ride with Speed."

"Then it's all settled," she said delightedly. "I know you boys will win."

But Charley still pouted as they departed.

Speed lay there staring at the bill of sale. For the first time since regaining consciousness he began taking an interest in life. That afternoon the doctor found him fretting and grinned. "You'll be out of here in a month," he predicted.

FIVE weeks later, Speed was on his way to Indianola in company of Mona and Charley Harris. The five-hundred-mile race was but ten days away.

Speed's eyes gleamed when he saw the *Blue Bullet*. It stood completed and waiting for him in the shops of the builder at Indianola. A slim, low-slung mount, graceful and yet powerful in appearance. Its colors were blue and gold. Under its hood reposed a straight-eight motor of one hundred and eighty-three inches displacement, hooked up to a front-wheel drive.

"She's a lulu," he said to Charley. But the former aerialist was noncommittal. He still secretly sulked.

When they arrived at the track with the car that afternoon they found the place a swarming hive of workingmen. Preparations for the race were at their peak. Fifty machines were entered. The starting list would be cut to forty after the qualification trials, but just now every driver and mechanic was steadfast in the belief that he and his car would not be among the unlucky ones to sit on the sidelines.

Five minutes after they reached their stall in the long row of garages back of the pits, Speed looked up into the red, scowling face of Buck Powers.

"Yeah, it's me," growled Buck. "I'm located next door to you. It's my bad luck, see? But you'll never be as close to me in the race, understand?"

Speed stepped up to Buck and his gray eyes were as cold and bleak as a winter sky.

"Listen, Powers," he said tensely. "I'm riding to win fairly. Crowd me and you'll never crowd another guy. I'll give you all the room you need. But don't take an inch too much."

Buck retreated, grinning, but angry.

"I'm going to round up a pit crew," said Speed curtly turning to Charley. "We go out in an hour. We gotta break that motor in today."

Thirty minutes later he returned with three men. But Charley Harris was missing. Speed found him in the neighboring stall, talking to Buck Powers. Without a word he walked in, grasped Charley by the elbow and dragged him protestingly home.

"What d'you think you're doing?" snarled Charley, struggling in his grip. "I'm no baby. I can talk to my friends."

"Not while you're riding with me, if that friend is Buck Powers," said Speed, and the steel was in his eyes again. "He's bad medicine. And remember that your sister has two thousand berries tied up in this bunch of iron here. We've got to wheel it over the line ahead of the rest of this pack. So remember that. If I catch you palavering with that jasper again I'll put you on a collar and chain. Now come on. I want to see if you've got any guts."

"Ho, ho," chortled Charley angrily. "You don't think you can scare me, do you?"

"We'll see," said Speed as they squeezed into the *Blue Bullet*. "You watch these instruments. I'll take care of the tachometer. Keep your eyes off it and you won't worry about our speed. Here's the gas gauge. If that needle drops below forty pounds pressure, tap me twice on the left shoulder. This is the motometer. When she goes above the red give it to me three times. In your spare time watch the track back of me. If anybody is trying to pass, tap once on top of my head. And, incidentally, watch the tires on your side. If we throw a tread or one starts going soft, jam me in the ribs and don't waste time doing it or it may be curtains for us."

Bill Kelly, biggest of the three recruits to the crew, twisted the crank and the stiff motor began popping and then settled down to a throaty song. They rumbled onto the track and the starter waved them a highball.

A dozen laps at slow speed and the pilot began gunning the car gently. The pace climbed to sixty, then to seventy-five. The brick surface of the two-and-a-half-mile oval began developing unexpected irregularities. Charley found himself rattling about in his seat. The curves were making themselves felt also and Charley, in spite of Speed's instructions, glanced at the tachometer.

Its message was not reassuring. It showed only thirty-five hundred revs. Charley swallowed somewhat violently. Speed had assured him the

motor would easily turn out five thousand.

From then on he anxiously watched the tachometer. But for a score of laps Speed merely jogged along. The motor's voice grew deeper as its stiffness worked out and Speed began to get the feel of his mount. Identity of car and driver were merging into that affinity necessary for survival.

The pace increased and the car began bouncing. The tachometer moved to four thousand and onward. Charley was hanging desperately to his seat now. He glanced ahead. A curve was rushing to meet them. The *Bullet* zoomed into it, Speed, his broad shoulders swaying as he joggled the wheel, balancing it in a thirty-percent skid and straightening it out exactly in the middle of the stretch beyond. Their safe reappearance seemed magical to Charley.

They were traveling a hundred per now, and then faster. It all became a blur to Charley. A birdlike zoom down a stretch. A wrenching whirl around a curve. A surge forward again.

He hung on, forgetting he had duties to perform. He sighed with relief when the song of the motor died away and they drifted into the pits and back to the garage.

Speed pushed up his goggles and turned with a grin.

"You'll get used to it," he assured him.

"Aw, rats!" sneered Charley. "I wasn't scared."

Speed worked twenty hours a day after that. He tore down and rebuilt the motor until Charley was on the point of open rebellion. The pit crew spent hours practicing tire changes, refueling, and signal work.

Speed saw little of Mona Harris during these feverish days. He slept and ate at the track while she and her brother were installed in a downtown hotel.

The *Blue Bullet* was ready when qualification trials opened. Speed careened four times around the track for the required ten miles at an average speed of a fraction over one hundred and twenty-miles per hour. This was a sizzling pace for a two-man car on a flat track and only two machines bettered his mark by a fraction. They were Tommy Mandot in a European-built speedster and Peter Palmer in a front-drive Blackson.

Buck Powers, driving a car that he called a Powers Special, was only a tenth of a second slower, but that was enough to shove him a notch back of Speed in the starting order. That was a

bitter pill for Buck. He had stayed aloof from Speed since their first encounter. But he had seen Mona and, while she was cordial to him, he knew that her thoughts were with the *Bullet* and its driver.

That afternoon Buck steered Charley Harris into the shadow of the grandstand and talked to him for a long time.

At daybreak the next morning Charley was at the track with Buck. Speed was not there. He was downtown, asleep.

This was repeated at dawn the next morning and the next. And Speed did not know it.

IT was race day! The fifteen-minute bomb cracked overhead and a ripple of expectation ran through the packed grandstand. Pit crews swarmed around the forty cars strung along the railing in the homestretch and began rolling them out onto the track.

Speed was staring anxiously around. He ran back to the garages and searched hastily. He questioned attendants.

"Have you seen Charley Harris, my mechanic?" was his plea. But what was one man more or less in this turmoil?

He raced back to the track. His crew had rolled the *Bullet* to the line. They would start three abreast and the *Bullet*, because of its qualification speed was on the outside in the first row. Peter Palmer had the pole with Tommy Mandot in the center.

Ten minutes to go. Speed grimly surveyed his crew. "How much do you weigh, Al?" he asked a red-headed tire man, the smallest of the three.

"Hun' red an' seventy-five," grunted Al.

Speed groaned. "Why the hell did I pick out a flock of elephants? If I have to carry you with me we'll finish last. The *Bullet* is balanced for a hundred-and-thirty-pounder."

Another five minutes rolled by and Speed was about to order Al into the car when a begoggled figure, clad in a *Blue Bullet* jumper, appeared from the garages.

"Here's Harris now," said Al, somewhat disappointed. Speed whirled and swore with relief.

"Snap into it, Charley," he said. "We're away in five minutes." He busied himself with a last-minute inspection of the car while the belated arrival clambered into the seat, goggles still masking his features.

The loud speaker began intoning names of cars,

drivers and mechanics. Speed was not listening as the voice went endlessly through the long list until a name leaped out at him.

“Car No. 43,” the announcer was saying. “Charley Harris, driver. Joe Kennedy, mechanic. Powers Special.”

Speed whirled and stared at his mechanic. He reached over and jerked off the goggles. Two big dark eyes stared at him and two little red lips trembled.

“Yes, it is I,” said Mona Harris. “My brother deserted you. I’m taking his place. I weigh nearly the same as he. He’s been practicing secretly each morning in Buck Powers’ second car. I wormed it out of him this morning, so I took his jumper, badges and goggles, and here I am. I also know the signals. I made him teach me. I can do it.”

Speed could not think coherently. “But I can’t let you ride, Mona,” he said. “It’s no place for a woman. Five hundred miles. I can’t.”

But the starter was ordering drivers into their cars. Motors began to crackle, and Speed, his eyes still frantic, clambered aboard. Kelly twisted the crank and the *Bullet* came to life.

“This is fierce,” said Speed, his voice strained.

“Forget about me,” said Mona. “Drive to win. And beat that awful Buck Powers.”

Speed glanced back at Powers who had the pole in the second row. Buck was glaring at him, rage in his eyes. Somehow, somewhere, he realized, Speed had dug up a mechanic small enough to balance the *Bullet*. But Buck did not guess that person’s identity.

In a moment the pack rumbled away.

Forty cars is an unwieldy field, but Palmer, with the expert help of Mandot and Speed, brought the thirteen rows of cars, three abreast, under the red starting flag at seventy-five per.

As the flag fell, forty feet jammed down on throttles and the roar of forty exhausts merged into a screaming thunder that shook the grandstand. The pace soared dizzily.

Buck Powers, his head bent over the wheel, shot his black speedster abreast of the three leaders and crowded Mandot unmercifully, thus jamming Speed almost against the upper wall on the curve. It was the roughest kind of rough riding, and for a moment it looked like a spill. With three dozen machines bearing down on them that would have been disastrous, so Speed lifted his foot for an instant, fell back, and then booted his car lower and

dropped into the tow back of Palmer and Mandot.

Buck sped clear of the pack and into the lead. The four machines seemed to stretch out, their steel bellies skimming the bricks as they picked up velocity and hurtled down the backstretch. Mechanics in the three cars ahead of Speed were staring back, their peering faces demon-like because of the goggles and tight-fitting dust caps they wore. Speed, from a corner of an eye, saw that Mona also was looking back, alertly on the job, apparently unmoved by the pace, the roar, the unreality, the danger of a big-league race.

Speed opened up and closed in on Mandot. He saw Mandot’s mechanic warn his driver with the customary tap on the head, but Speed was alongside and past before the big broad-shouldered veteran could steam up his mount to ward him off.

The lower turn swam dizzily ahead, but Speed held his foot down as the *Bullet* side-slipped into it. He passed Palmer in the middle of the curve and bore down on Buck Powers. But Buck, warned of the onrush of the *Blue Bullet*, was motoring with everything his engine could turn out.

They zoomed across the line wheel to wheel—a dead heat for the first lap, and the crowd roared to its feet along the stretch as the forty machines, now stringing out over a space of a quarter of a mile, streamed by, exhausts flaming and thundering like guns in the heat of an attack.

Still wheel to wheel, the black Powers Special and the straining *Blue Bullet* swept into the upper curve. Buck allowed his mount to drift unnecessarily. The spinning wheels of the two cars came within inches of each other.

Speed, his teeth clenched, stared ahead, unswerving. Still closer drifted the black car. Only an inch or two more and hubcaps would scrape. But Buck finally gave way and shot down to the inside, his face distorted with rage as Speed moved ahead and into the lead.

Speed glanced at the girl. She was laughing.

It was a cruel race—a race that would live imperishably in the memory of every driver who gripped a wheel that day. Etched in searing speed, exalted by the soaring determination and unshakable nerve of brave men and finally baptized in blood, it was their hour, even though for some the path of glory led to destruction.

Speed held his lead for a dozen laps. Then Jimmy Dance, youthful veteran, in a Comet Special, passed him with a dazzling exhibition of

driving. Buck Powers and Mandot also rode past on Dance's tow, and Speed was back in fourth place again.

A green car, driven by a young Frenchman, then came up with a rush. He passed Speed and attempted to blanket Powers and Mandot. But he made an error on a curve. Traveling at two miles a minute he oversteered. The green car whipped around. For an instant it rode backward. Then the tail nipped the upper wall and it rose from the track, turning over and over twenty feet in the air like a toy thrown from a child's hand. It fell outside the track as Speed fled past the tragic spot.

A chill came over the crowd. The hum of a hundred thousand voices was hushed. But the roar of the rushing machines never ceased. They sped relentlessly on, the chorus of their exhausts chanting a mighty dirge to the fallen one.

The tide of fortune turned steadily against Speed during the first hundred miles. A tire at fifty miles cost him half a lap. He regained part of the lost distance, but progress was slow. He was trapped time after time in pockets. Teams were beginning to form and Speed was a marked man. But the *Blue Bullet* could not be held in check always, and whenever a scant opening presented itself the car streaked away from its captors.

At one hundred and fifty miles the field had thinned down to thirty cars. Half a dozen were in the pits, out of it with motor trouble. Two lay side by side upside down against the inner wall on the backstretch. They had locked wheels and their occupants were on the way to the hospital, their injuries uncertain. A third was hung up on the upper concrete wall on the lower turn its driver and mechanic, uninjured, coolly sitting on the wall, smoking cigarettes and watching the race of which they no longer were a part.

Speed's pit functioned smoothly. He was fifth at two hundred miles. Jimmy Dance, in the lead, was ten seconds ahead of him—nearly a third of a mile. Buck Powers was third.

A black machine appeared ahead and Speed's red-rimmed eyes narrowed. He nodded significantly to Mona. She was looking at the car and her mouth quivered. It was her brother's mount. And it needed no experienced eye to see that young Charley Harris was bound for disaster. Two hundred miles were taking their toll on his inexperience. The black car was not pursuing a true course. It was wobbly in the curves and uncertain

on the stretches. It was like a man beginning to grow weary.

In a moment they passed it, and Mona stared back anxiously. She looked appealingly at Speed and he endeavored to smile reassuringly.

Fifty miles later they went to the pit for gas, oil, and tires. The crew got them out in one minute flat, and Speed shouted his appreciation as he snapped the *Bullet* away.

The stop cost them nothing in distance, for all the leaders were forced in for the same purpose. At the three-hundred-mile mark Speed opened up for the drive to the finish.

The *Bullet* began moving up—up—up. Relentlessly and mechanically it mowed down cars ahead. Fourth place now.

THEN past Buck Powers. Pit captains were waking up to the menace and blackboards were flashing warnings to all pilots. The speed began to creep up. Buck hung desperately to the *Bullet* for two laps, but Speed finally shook him off.

Three laps later, Speed was within striking distance of the lead. He had passed Tommy Mandot, and only Jimmy Dance was ahead. The *Bullet* swept down on Dance and moved by him as the crowd rose to acclaim the new leader.

Speed held his foot grimly down and the *Bullet* began to pile up a long lead. Lap after lap its advantage grew. At four hundred miles he again passed Powers, Mandot, and Dance. A full lap ahead now and still the *Bullet* moaned on, its velocity unchecked. The race was being turned into a rout.

Then, with only fifty miles to go, Speed again began picking up Charley Harris. The black speedster, many laps to the bad, was reeling, and Speed studied it as he drew up. His own arms were numb and his eyes were aching. It was evident that young Harris was in far worse shape.

The deadly south turn was ahead and Charley cut down low to negotiate it. Speed saw an opportunity to pass and shot the *Bullet* ahead, high on the track.

But he had picked the wrong moment. Charley finally lost control of his careening machine. It whirled into a fierce side-slip and then shot to the top of the track.

The black machine was broadside only a few feet in front of the oncoming *Bullet*. There was

only one chance and Speed took it. He twirled the wheel far over, throwing the *Bullet* deliberately into a spin. It whirled around end for end, but it missed the black car. It spun to the bottom of the track, kicking up a cloud of brick dust, finally coming to a stop a hundred yards ahead, near the inside wall.

Speed, somewhat dazed, looked back, and even as he did so, Mona screamed. The black car lay against the upper wall, its wheels pointing to the sky, still spinning, its body crushed and shattered. A tongue of fire was licking around the gas tank. Beside it on the track lay the mechanic and beneath the wreck, pinned down by the steering wheel was Charley.

Speed leaped from the *Bullet* and ran madly back and up the track. Two humming machines swerved and passed below him, but he was oblivious of them and his danger. He reached the wreck as the fire began to seethe and roar around the gas tank. Fuel was running from a puncture and feeding the flames.

Charley was staring up with agonized eyes.

"Hurry, Speed," he breathed, "or I'm going to burn."

Speed seized him by the shoulders and pulled, but his limp form did not budge. He was caught by the bent steering column.

Speed reached in and with fierce strength twisted the steel post and freed Charley. A tongue of fire leaped upon them, but Speed, unheeding, dragged Charley to safety and sat him against the wall. He then ran to the unconscious mechanic and carried him to a safe distance from the blazing wreck.

He turned to look at Charley, but that individual was staggering to his feet.

"I'm not hurt," he said. "I'm going to ride the rest of the race with you. I know that Mona is in your car. Come on."

Help was arriving now, and there were others to care for the mechanic. Cars were roaring steadily past. A red machine swept by, followed by a white car. Dance and Mandot. Then a black form streaked past. Buck Powers.

"Come on," yelled Speed. "Sure you're not hurt? We're out of the lead again. But we can catch 'em. Come on."

They raced to the *Bullet*. Speed unceremoniously lifted Mona from her seat, Charley twisted the crank and they piled in without explanation. She stood there smiling as they roared

away.

The *Blue Bullet* was in the race again.

Fifty miles to go and they were a mile and a half behind. Five machines had overcome Speed's former advantage during his stop.

But within ten laps he was riding fourth. The *Bullet's* speed was unmatchable. But the three leaders were still half a mile ahead. Twenty-five miles to go.

A white car began to drift back to meet them. Its exhaust was puffing smoke as they passed it. Mandot, faltering with motor trouble. Tough luck. But all in the game.

Only two ahead now. Buck Powers and Jimmy Dance. Five laps later Speed passed Dance. Jimmy was nursing his car along with frayed rubber flapping from two wheels.

Buck Powers was now in the lead. His black car was growing larger. Four laps to go. Three laps. Buck was only two hundred yards ahead. Two laps. The starter was now standing beside the finish line with the flags furled in his hands.

With the *Bullet* only a dozen lengths behind, Powers' mechanic stared back continually, shouting instructions to his pilot. Buck began weaving back and forth in an attempt to block Speed.

They flashed into the first curve on the one hundred and ninety-ninth lap only a length apart. Then Speed's breath caught in his throat and his flesh crawled. For a spurt of heat whipped into his face as a tongue of flame shot from the ports in the *Bullet's* hood.

Charley pounded him on the back, pointing down.

"Fire!" he bawled. "We're on fire!"

Speed nodded grimly. Then he reached under the cowl, jerked a small fire extinguisher from its socket and handed it to Charley.

"See what you can do," he yelled. "I'm not going to stop."

The heat began to singe their faces, for, while the blaze was only a single jet of flame from the carburetor, it was curling back directly into the cockpit. In a few seconds it would reach the crankcase and the fuel line.

Charley rose in the swaying, reeling car and then crawled out on the hood. He hooked his toes on the cowl and found a precarious handhold on the hood strap.

Speed watched, white-faced. But Charley was

an acrobat, trained in maintaining his position in treacherous places and he clung like a leech as they rushed at two miles a minute down the stretch.

Charley began playing the stream from the little extinguisher through the ports. The fire instantly retreated.

The *Bullet* whizzed under the green flag wheel to wheel with the Powers Special and the crowd rose in a frenzy of excitement as it saw Charley daring death in his perilous perch.

Charley, clinging for his life, stayed there. He could not get back. For a minute and a half that seemed a year, he hung to that swaying, bouncing surface. Speed drove as he never drove before. He passed Buck and was in the lead. But he rode the curves with a finesse that he had never approached in the past.

Charley was still on the hood as the checkered flag fell. He was still there when they pulled slowly into the pits, but now he was sitting up, smiling and waving the empty extinguisher to the roaring cheers that came from the crowd.

And Mona was smiling, too, as she greeted them. Her face was still begrimed with the grease and dust of the track, but she had forgotten about appearances.

“Charley saved the race for us,” Speed cried as he came in. “Did you see him? Wasn’t that a stunt?”

“Aw, I’m just another acrobat,” Charley said. “Mona won this race for you”—then he grinned as he noted that neither Speed nor Mona were listening to him—“and I hope all the children will be racing drivers,” he concluded.