

Back behind the wheel

Conkle, Seyler to race Saturday night at Citrus County Speedway

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By Keith Chartrand

Some Villages residents in recent years have had the privilege to drive a pace car at a local speedway. Others have been lucky enough to be driven around Daytona International Speedway at speeds in excess of 100 miles per hour.



None of them, though, have recently gotten behind the wheel and raced against other cars in competition. That all changes Saturday night when Gary Seyler and Jerry Conkle take to the track at Citrus County Speedway for a 15-lap race under the lights.

The two members of The Villages Motor Racing Fan Club won a chance drawing that will put them in cars for Saturday's hornet class race on the asphalt track in Inverness.

"The only type of racing, well racing that was legal, was some drag racing back in 1965," Seyler said with a laugh. "I was 18, 19 years old when I occasionally raced at U.S. 30 Dragway in Thomasville (Pennsylvania). My wife was my pit crew"

"I drove a sprint car on dirt in 1992 at Lincoln Park Speedway in Putnamville, Ind.," Conkle said. "Before that, the last time had to have been when I raced twin engine go-karts for five years from 1960-1965"

Needless to say, times have changed and so have Seyler and Conkle.

"I know I don't have the reflexes I use to have," Conkle said. "But still it will be great to get a feel for it again and to do it will be a great thrill."

Today, both Conkle and Seyler are heading up to the track to get sized for custom-fit firesuits as well as for practice laps around the 3/8-mile oval. Each hornet class race at Citrus County Speedway has four cars in it: two drivers that are regulars at the track and two people who pay upward of \$200 to get into the race. The speedway offered two complimentary spots to The Villages Motor Racing Fan Club.

The cars that Conkle and Seyler will be driving are small in size. They are comparable in size to a Dodge Neon, Ford Focus or Chevy Cavalier.

Ever since it was determined that Conkle and Seyler would be the ones trading paint under the lights, the club has had a boatload of fun getting the two drivers ready. Conkle was given the nickname "Flash," while Seyler is now known as "Cyclone." The club reported that each driver entered a grueling conditioning program to get back in shape while both have been seen practicing left turns around traffic circles on Buena Vista Boulevard.

"It is going to be an absolute blast," Seyler said. "I'm really looking forward to racing with the guys and to see what I can do."