

Changing Times

Former racer remains a fan regardless of sport's evolution

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By Katie Evans

It seemed like every race Buster Burt went to, something had changed.

"From race to race, you'd see changes," said the former race car driver. "People who'd come out with ideas and adjustments and modifications and so forth."

"It changed a lot, really."

Part of that, Burt thinks, was the times: About 50 years ago, people were allowed to use their imaginations and modify things as they went along.

"You did things you had to do; if you got away with it, you would," he said.

Racing today is a far cry from what it was when the Village of Country Club Hills resident entered the sport 58 years ago.

"Racing was more fun, I think, then," he said. "We didn't have the big sponsors; it was a lot less expensive. It was a bunch of the good ol' boys."

Burt thinks the big changes started taking place when Daytona International Speedway opened in 1959, offering a 2.5-mile paved track versus the beach track that racers had been accustomed to in Daytona Beach.



First step onto track

Burt participated in the first race on the new track, a modified sportsman affair, and still remembers how amazed he was when he first stepped onto the track.

"We tried to walk up the curve – the banking there in the second and third turn," Burt said. "You couldn't walk up it."

"I'd never seen anything like that before."

Burt said his knees were shaking as he took his car out onto the track for practice.

"It was just overwhelming," he said.

The opening of Daytona International Speedway also started a transformation that has completely changed racing from what it was when Burt began racing in 1949.

"It certainly increased the length of racing, because it used to be little five-eighths- and three-eighths-mile tracks," he said. "Then, people had a chance to go where cars were going faster speeds and higher distances. The speed alone was different; I think it gave people a lot of thrills to see them going faster."



And with the opening of Daytona International Speedway also came the opportunity for more money.

"It took it from street cars to race cars: It was no longer street cars that you built yourself, it went to full race cars that you were

ordering from a company," he said. "It brought a lot of sponsors and a lot of money into racing that otherwise wouldn't have been there."

"We used to haul the car around with us on an open trailer," Burt added. "Now they've got multimillion-dollar, enclosed semi-trailers hauling them."

As the big money started flowing, it also started pushing some racers out.

"It opened up new opportunities for some people, but it also took away from the Saturday-night races and so forth, because they couldn't afford to race with them cars," Burt said. "I think it took some away and it added some."

Burt said he doesn't like the direction racing, specifically NASCAR, has taken. He said he's against the points system. He said he thinks it keeps the individuals who don't have big sponsors from getting a chance to race.

"I don't think it's fair that they set up the point system so that there's only 35 guys guaranteed," he said. "I don't think anyone should be guaranteed. I think if they qualify, they should be allowed to race."

Some changes are good

Not all the changes are bad, though, Burt said. In fact, he thinks one of the more recent changes, the switch to the car of tomorrow, was a great move.

"I think it's probably a good idea to have the cars alike as much as possible," he said. "Especially with some teams owning three or four cars."

"I think it keeps the teams closer together."

Regardless of the changes, Burt remains a racing fan, and he still plans to watch the 50th running of the Daytona 500 on Sunday, although he admits it isn't always easy to watch the races anymore."

"I get irritated with them," he said with a laugh. "So sometimes I fall asleep."