

DAARA and Citrus County Speedway...An Exciting Combination!

It wasn't your typical Saturday night stock car racing over at Citrus County Speedway in Inverness on August 22. In fact, race fans who braved the threatening skies were treated to not only the fierce competition that comes from the speedway's regular schedule, but a bonus class as well—a visit from the Daytona Antique Auto Racing Association (DAARA). Touring in its Southern Vintage Series, DAARA brought a field of about two dozen cars to the speedway to present a competitive display of racing the way it once was—in the cars that routinely ran local tracks in the 50s, 60s, and 70s. And this was no exhibition-type event—they were really racing, banging and trading paint just like any other stock car racing series!

On hand for the evening of racing was current DAARA president Bill Wendt, fresh off a trip to Utah's Bonneville Salt Flats earlier in the month to take on the world speed record for midget cars. On August 13, he and his race team set a new world record of 136.094 in a 1956 Offy-powered midget vintage oval track car, competing in a field of more than 500 entries. Bill, a former NHRA Funny Car competitor, brought his 1946 Hilligas V8-60 midget to Citrus County to take part in the night's events, and to participate in the display of vintage cars set up in the speedway's pit area. The car was restored by Bill in 2004 and, at the tender age of 64, he launched his career as an oval track racer! Now 69 years young, Bill continues to compete in the Southern Vintage Series, and was one of the on-track competitors at Inverness August 22.



Bill Wendt makes pre-race adjustments to his race car.

on



Janis Strickland gets ready to take the track at Citrus

As you would expect with a group of racers like DAARA, there are many stories like Bill's that provide a colorful backdrop for the sport of auto racing. The DAARA contingent that arrived at Citrus County Speedway on August 22 had several, one of which involves a racing grandmother, former school teacher, and current blueberry farmer named Janis Strickland. A native Floridian currently living in Plant City, Janis began her racing career a mere three years ago on local road-racing circuits, but stepped up to oval racing this year when her husband, Fred, re-built a midget car for her 60th birthday. "I'm having the time of my life," quipped Janis as she climbed into the cockpit of



The hood of Janis Strickland's vintage race car says it all!

the Alpha-Romeo powered car to run in the first heat race of the night. Christened the "Blonde Comet" and numbered 60 in

honor of her career-starting age, both driver and car made an impressive showing on Citrus County Speedway's asphalt track. By the way, she's looking forward to competing in drag racing events, as soon as husband Fred completes the conversion of a 1972 Opal GT to track-ready form!

Be sure to catch the DAARA contingent next time they're in our area. It's "old time" racing at its best. And if you like this sort of thing, DAARA oversees the Zephyrhills AutoFest scheduled for November 12-15 at Festival Park in Zephyrhills .



Daytona Antique Auto Racing Association cars
preparing for action at Citrus County
Speedway