



# Cannonball Running

Ted Lyons and other "lap dogs" race by day and drive overnight during One Lap of America

IT'S THE ULTIMATE MINE-IS-BIGGER-than-yours contest for street-legal speed freaks, and Ted Lyons will push his 650-horsepower Thunderbird Super Coupe harder than ever in an effort to win this year's One Lap of America. Last year he finished 13th in his second event, and the supercharged 1989 Ford, he's quick to note, finished ahead of most of the Dodge Vipers and Porsches.

One Lap is the sanity-tested version of the coast-to-coast Cannonball Rally, the inspiration for the 1981 Burt Reynolds flick *The Cannonball Run*. But instead of a cross-country sprint at highly illegal speeds, today's "lap dogs," as they're called, race against the clock at oval tracks, drag strips and road courses across the country with brutal all-night drives in between.

Lyons, a former professional boxer and advertising display salesman from Indianapolis, will start the eight-day, 5,000-mile celebration of speed, adrenalin and sleep deprivation at Watkins Glen, N.Y., during the first week of May. The "dogs" race at eight other tracks in seven states, including Indianapolis Raceway Park on May 4.

According to the rules, high-speed driving is reserved for the tracks, while time for highway travel is built into the schedule at supposedly legal speeds.

"It's designed so that racers don't have to exceed speed limits, but the faster you get there, the more time you have to sleep or work on the car," says Lyons.

Organizers alert police departments along the route that a pack of exotic and not-so-exotic cars, plastered with sponsorship decals, will be rolling through their town. Of

course, some racers consider driving as fast as possible an inalienable right. Last year, the winner in the speeding ticket contest went home with seven citations.

"We run through a lot of small towns, and I never have been pulled over," Lyons says. "I probably should have been a few times, though."

Other than the decals and rear wing, Lyons' T-Bird looks stock and runs at Busch Series speeds, clocking 173 radar-gun-verified mph at Michigan International Speedway while still equipped with a 16-way power leather driver's seat and air conditioning.

"The car accelerates harder from 100 to 150 mph than most cars do from 0 to 30 mph," Lyons says. "The faster it goes, the faster it wants to go. It's almost scary."

Modifying the car soon turned into Lyons' personal horsepower race. Hitting 500 was too easy, and soon 650 horsepower was just an air intake the diameter of a sated boa constrictor and a supercharger after-cooler away.

"Maybe if I get 700 horses," he says, "I'll be happy." |

BY GARY WOLLENHAUPT

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