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What Makes a Dragster Run?

GAS DRAGSTER KING'S WINNING COMBINATION - By Terry Cook

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SUSPENSION SYSTEMS

Inside Nicholson's 'Eliminator II'



ELIMINATOR II



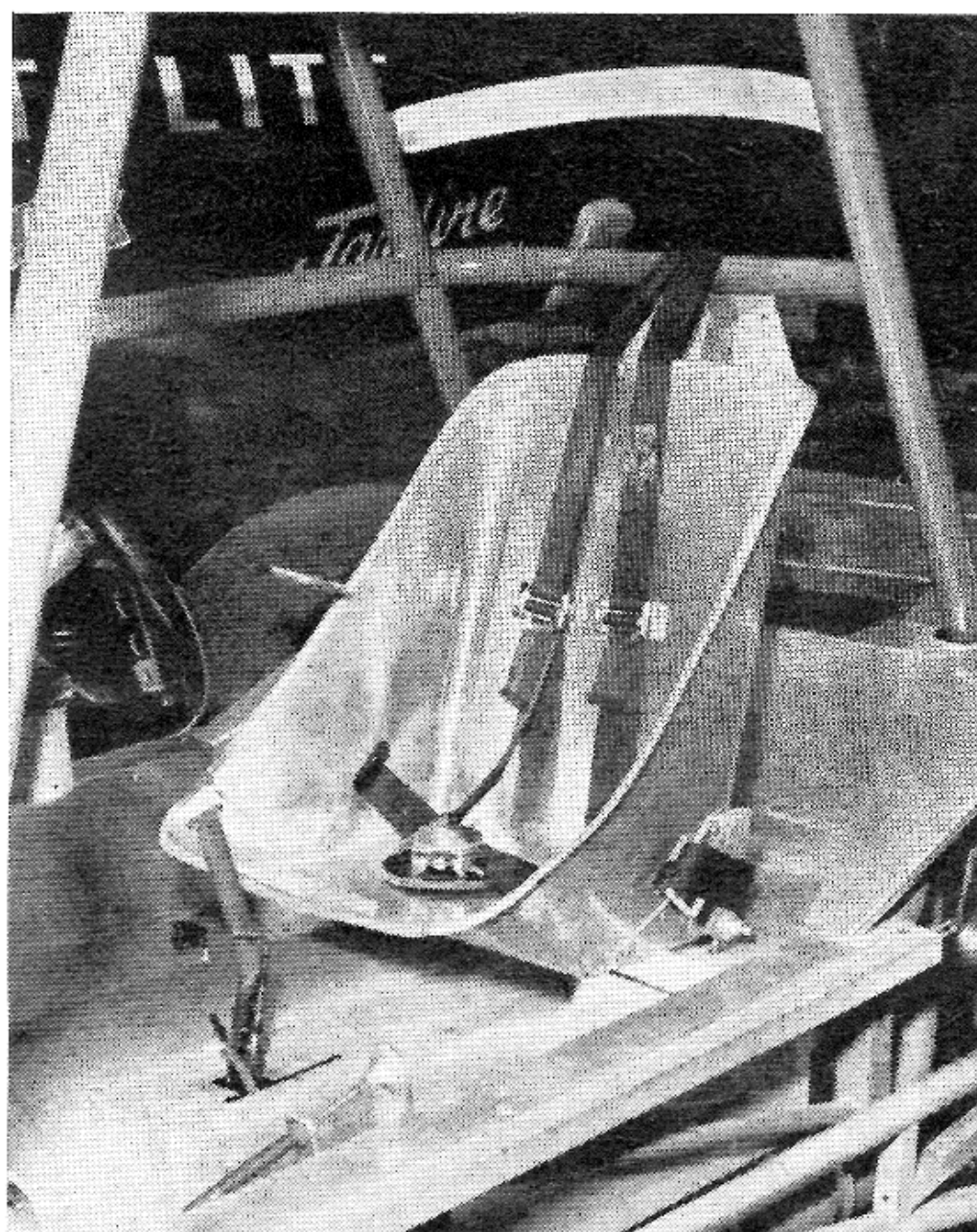
"Dyno Don" Nicholson was the terror of the match race circuit last year with his flip-top Comet. If you think that was a super-strong machine, just feast your eyes on his new threat.



TOP — With the one-piece glass body off, the inner works are exposed. The Logghe brothers of Detroit fabricated the chassis again this year. Workmanship is top grade.

ABOVE — The man himself, Don Nicholson, established an uncanny win-loss record in competition last year, with 44 consecutive match wins. He's aiming higher this year!

RIGHT — Interior of the Comet is stark but functional. Plain aluminum bucket is securely mounted, and shoulder harnesses connect to frame crossmember for support.



BY TERRY COOK □ There seem to be three prerequisites for being a "King" in drag racing: first, you must be from the South; second, your wife's name must be Pat; and, third, your first name must be Don. These general rules seem to hold true, as Don Garlits is far and away the most popular fuel dragster competitor of all time, and one Don Nicholson is renowned as the current, undisputed monarch of the "funny" car match race and competition set.

Dealing with the latter of these two "Kings" of drag racing, let's find out why Nicholson reigns supreme in his particular field. Perhaps the primary reason Don has gained the stature he holds at present is because of his mount, a tube framed, glass bodied, injected fuel burning SOHC Mercury Comet. His '66 Comet "funny," the "Eliminator I," virtually cleaned house all last season, and — together with Mercury teammate Eddie Schartman — combined to glean all the gold the exhibition stocker ranks had to offer. This Comet supremacy certified the fact that the "funny" Merc was the ultimate vehicle for its class. Don has just received ship-

ment on his new rig, "Eliminator II," a '67 Comet which appears to be a carbon copy of his '66 mount. On close inspection, however, you will find that a number of refinements and improvements have been made to the new car. For one, the frame itself is much like that of last year, a creation of the Logghe brothers of Detroit, but the dual front crossmember has been replaced with a single tube. The frame of the new car rides slightly higher than that of the old, and the body is dropped a bit lower on the chassis to compensate for this. Perhaps the greatest single change ap-

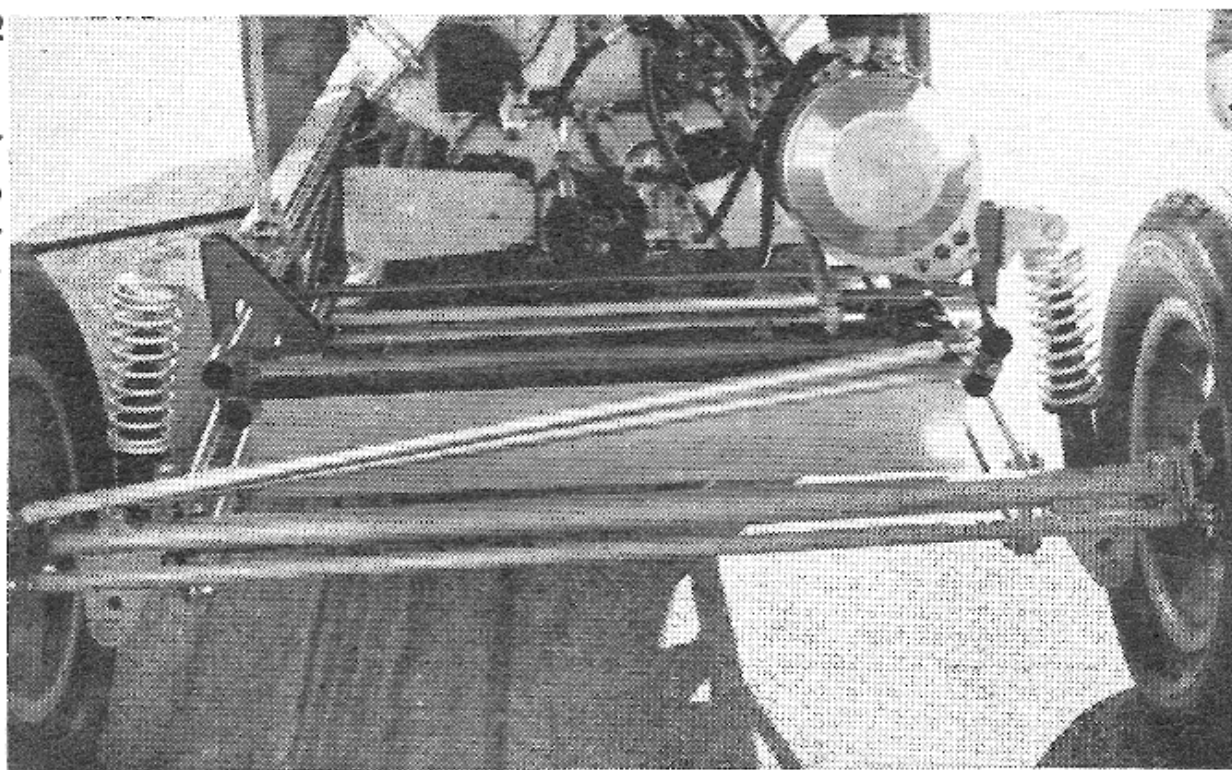
parent in the new car is that the engine has been relocated five inches farther back for additional traction. This was accomplished via the use of a shorter tailshaft on the C-6 automatic transmission. The wheelbase remains the same at 118 inches. Even though the '67 glass one-piece tilt bodies are lighter than their predecessors, extensive aluminum work was done and additional safety features were built into the car, increasing its weight some 50 pounds over the '66 model.

The Crane cammed injected 427 cubic inch engine is virtually the same as

that used in the '66 car. The Ford/Mercury C-6 automatic transmission has gearing which is approximately 3, 2 and 1 to one for first, second, and high gears respectively. The stall speed is set at 3000 rpm. The nodular iron third member has a ratio of 3.89 to 1, and special heavy steel axles by Ford drive a pair of Halibrand 10 x 16 wheels, which mount Goodyear 11.75 x 16 slicks. One additional refinement to the new car is two separate brake systems, each utilizing large spot brake calipers. But even with the finest drag vehicle at hand,

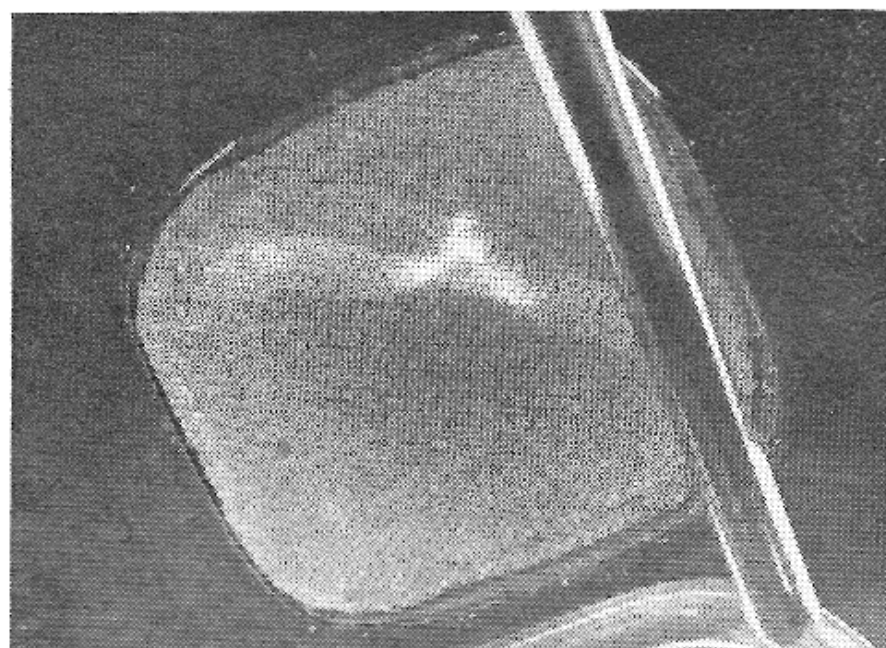
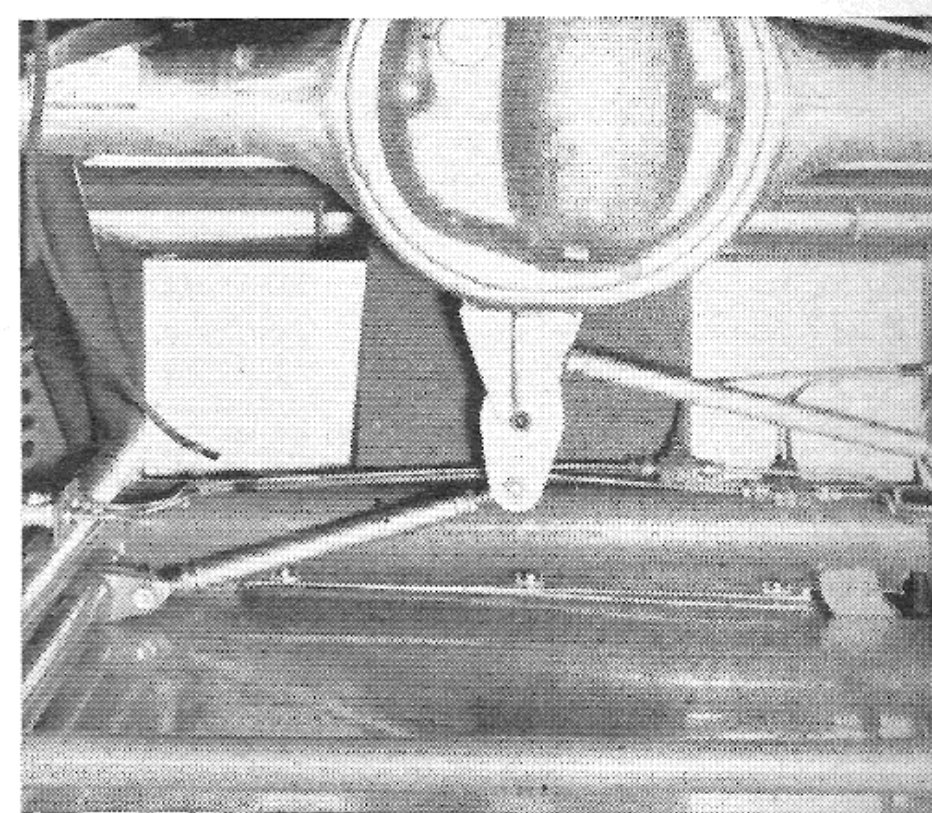
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Photos by Bob Swain



LEFT — A single front crossmember was substituted for the ladder construction in the front of the chassis this year. This change is for overall lighter car weight.

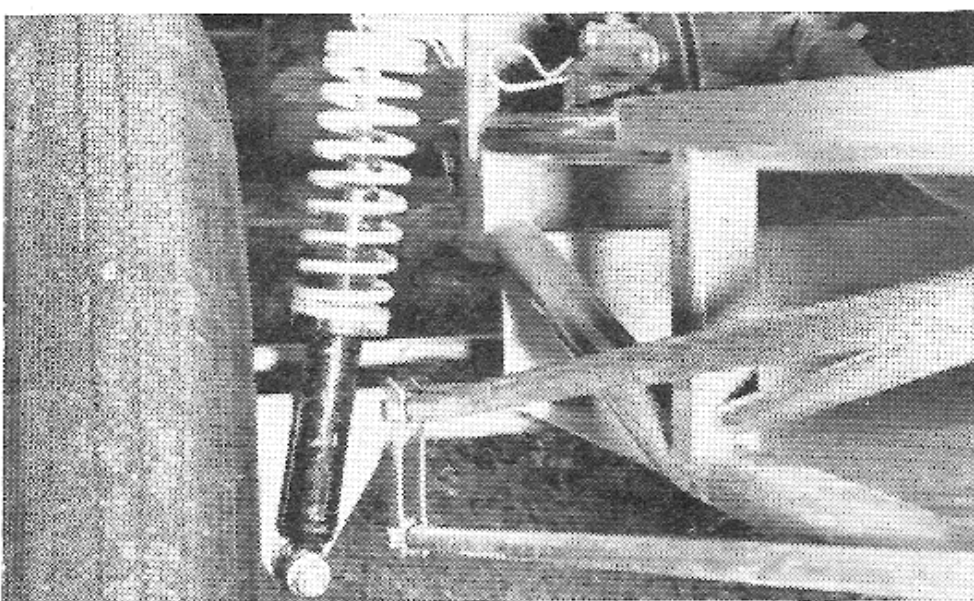
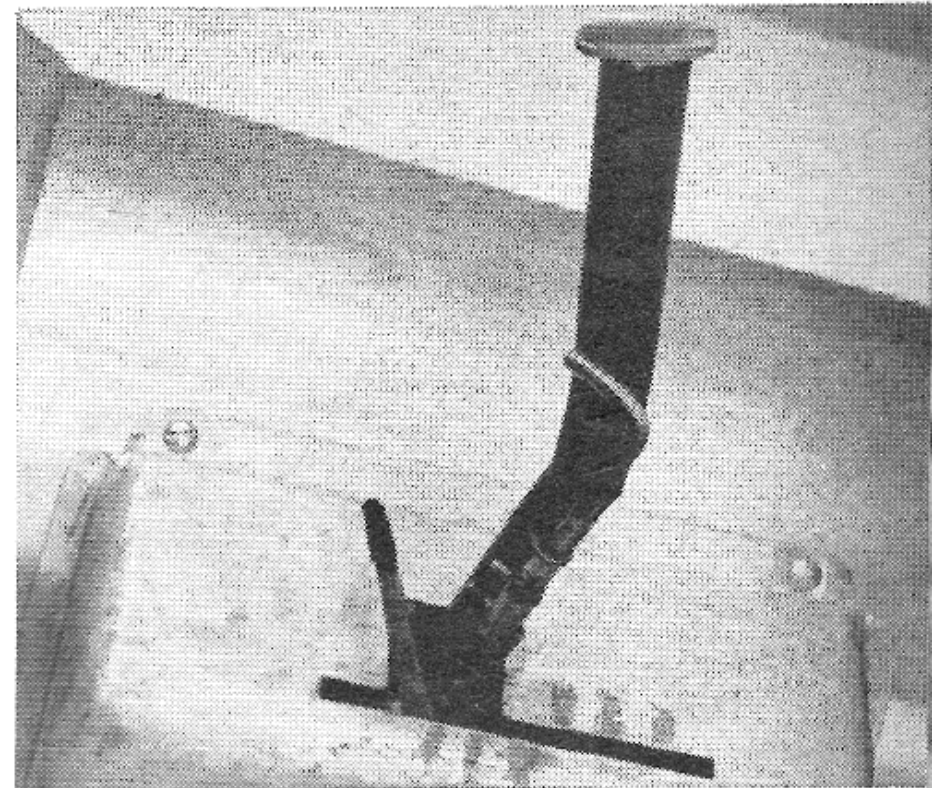
RIGHT — That mass of tubing is one of the things that makes Don go straight. Bellcrank arrangement is an anti-sway bar setup which steadies the Merc's handling.



ABOVE — To comply with a current NHRA rule, this "emergency only" escape hatch was built into car. Pop rivets hold it in place, but pressure removes it quickly.

LEFT — This year when designing the glass replica body, little things like rain gutters and window flanges were filled and smoothed aerodynamically for better flow.

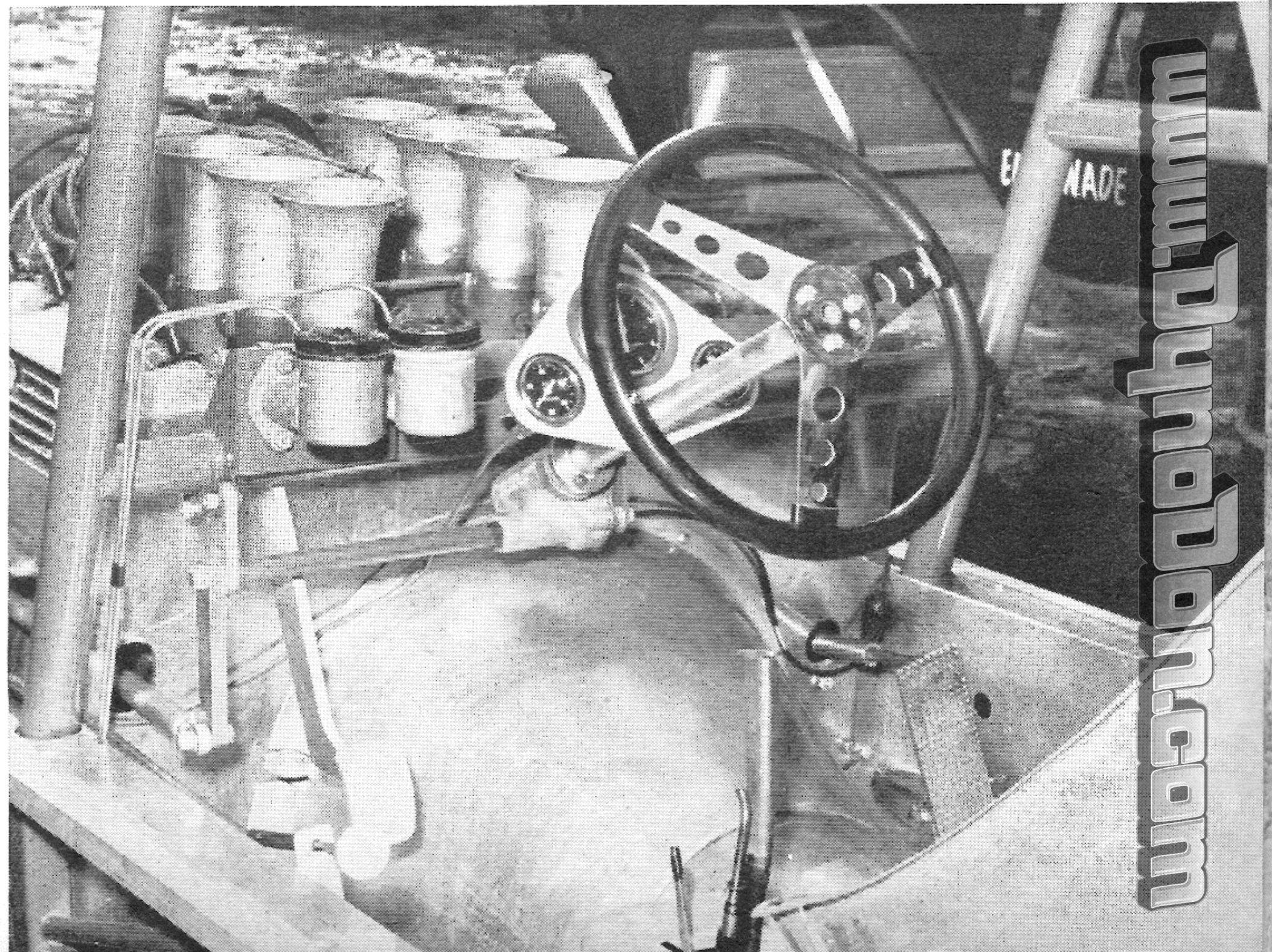
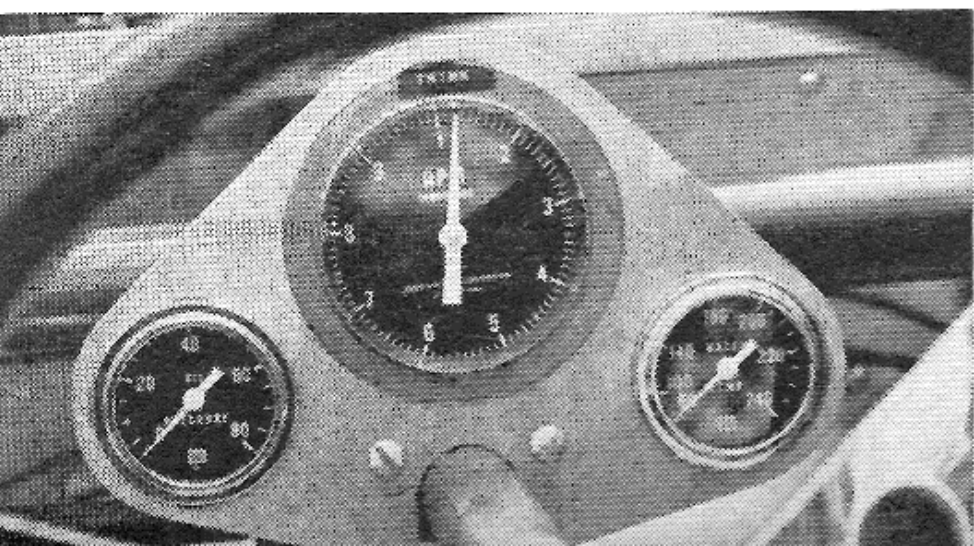
RIGHT — The shifter control sticks up between Don's legs within easy reach. One trigger locks the transmission into gear, while the other puts it in reverse position.



ABOVE — The secret to the suspension system is primarily four independent coil-over-shock arrangements like this, which can be "jacked."

RIGHT — Gas pedal, fuel shutoff cable, the shifter mechanism, brake, and steering are the controls. Note beefy Merc C-6 automatic trans.

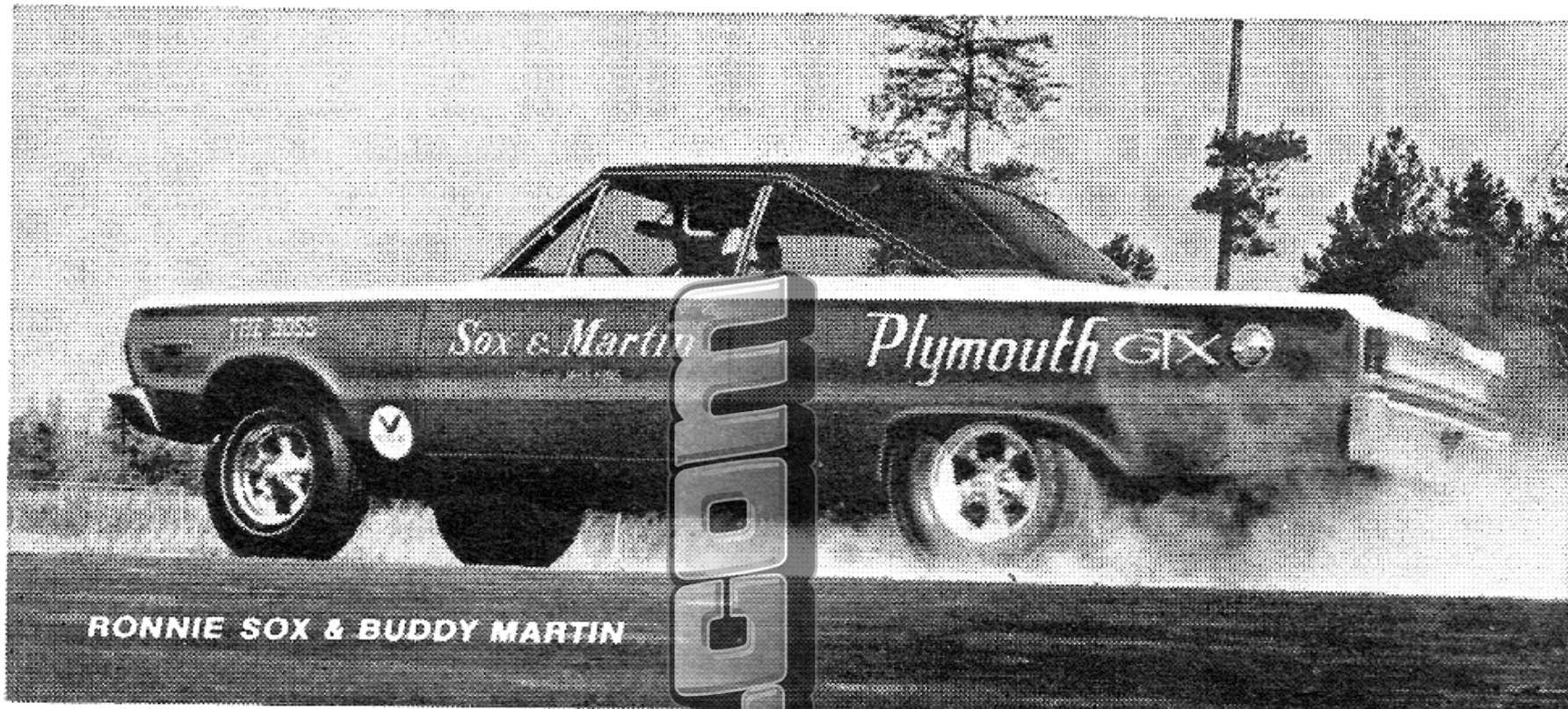
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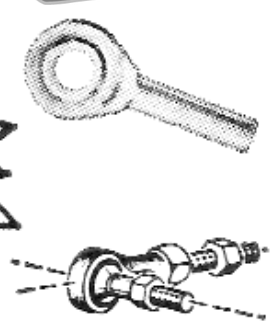
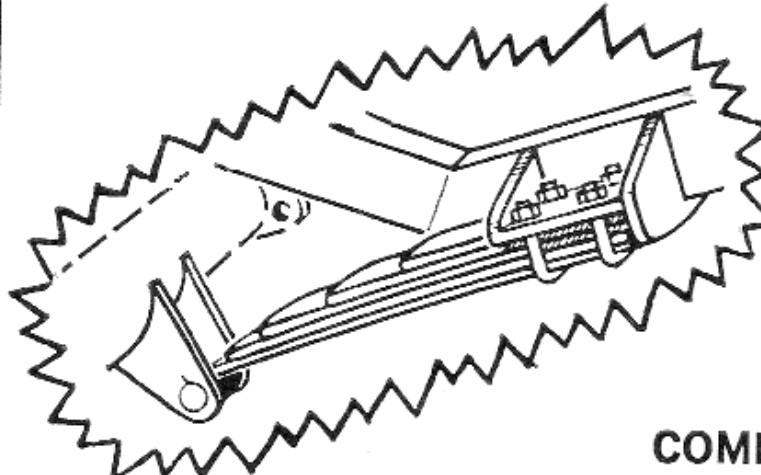
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ELIMINATOR II

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if it is operated by a racer of "average" talents, it will only produce average results. The other primary factor which accounts for "Eliminator II's" outstanding success is the man himself.

Don Nicholson has always been a front runner, even when he competed with production line Chevrolets in earlier dragging days. Not only a fine engine builder, tuner and driver, Nicholson had the foresight to move from the drag racing "capitol," Los Angeles, to Atlanta back in 1963. Misunderstood by most, the move proved to be a stroke of genius, as Atlanta soon began developing as the center of the drag-stocker-oriented South. Don had seen drag racing's growth in this area coming and had made his move accordingly, typical of his "out front" racing philosophy.

If you sit down and listen to Don talk about racing, he will use the pronouns "us" and "we" rather than "I." The reason? Don has in his regular employ a person considered by many to be the finest pit crewman available, another ex-West Coaster, Earl Wade. Ask Don about Earl and he replies, "I can sum it up by saying that I wouldn't have hired him and hung on to him if I didn't think he was the best." Probably no racer alive knows Don as well as Earl Wade. We sat down and chatted with Earl, asking him about his boss, "Dyno Don." Among other things, he feels that Nicholson's success lies in the fact that he is an innovator, as opposed to a follower, and is constantly coming up with new ideas, many of which help the car's performance. However, Don sticks to the basics and doesn't go out in "left field" with new things that "trick him out of the ball park." It's just a simple application of the wide basic knowledge which Don possesses. Earl reports that since Don understands the equipment and has a strong respect for it, he "goes easy" on the engine when racing, rather than "hand grenading" it. Earl feels that Don is "the number one man in drag racing. He's the man to beat, and it takes a lot more to remain number one because everyone else is gunning for you. Don's success is just a combination of car, engine, and a fine driving talent. Consistency is a must, and Don has it."

Red-lighting but twice in all of '66, Nicholson has to be rated as one of the sport's best drivers. The team's win-loss match record was phenomenal in '66, as they lost but five match races out of 100. At one time last year Don Nicholson had a string of 44 straight match victories going for him! How can you beat a record like that? Well, Don Nicholson and his Comet, along with crew chief Earl Wade, are out to do it in '67. Odds are they will, too.