

PERSON to PERSON
with
"DYNO DON" NICHOLSON

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Many of our readers have expressed their approval of our personal touch as concerns the sport of drag racing: Hall of Fame, Personality Profile, Drag Racing Spotlight, etc. We are therefore introducing another personal first—"Person to Person."

This new presentation will feature revealing, in-depth interviews with the biggest names in our sport, names such as Nicholson, Garlits, Prudhomme, Landy, Collett, and so on ad infinitum. We hope you enjoy the new department; as always, the object is to help our readers become better acquainted with drag racing and really "get to know" the stars of the sport.

DRM: Well, Don, congratulations on another fine year; but then you've been having great years as far back as we can remember. You were virtually unbeatable again this past season on the match race circuit. Let's see now, how many years has it been since you started racing?

Nicholson: Well, I guess it's been since 1949. Gosh, I guess that's 16 years. It sure doesn't seem that long. We used to run at the dry lakes under the old Rosetti Timing Association, but a lot of us wanted something better.

DRM: Did you attend your first drag race as a spectator or a racer?

Nicholson: We took a car to race.



DRM: Rumor has it that you and your brother gave C. J. Hart a helping hand in getting Santa Ana, California's first organized drag strip, started.

Nicholson: Well, when we first started racing I actually didn't know C. J. very well. In those days, before Santa Ana, we used to run anywhere we could, even on the street. But we realized this was no good and used to run at an old blimp landing field when we could. We just wanted to race without getting chased out. Out of all this came Santa Ana. That's when we got to know C. J.

DRM: Correct me if I'm wrong, but although you now make Atlanta, Georgia, your home, weren't you born and raised in southern California?

Nicholson: Actually, I was born in Springfield, Missouri, but I lived in California so long it always seemed like home.

DRM: What influenced you to move to Atlanta?

Nicholson: Money. We ran our stockers for nothing on the West Coast, so I moved to Atlanta, where the stockers were really popular. It was down in the South, where the run-what-cha-brung racing got its start. We always ran for nothing, until this year, on the West Coast. It's just a case of we had to go where the money was.

DRM: Counting your new car, which is near completion, how many does this make for you?

Nicholson: Well, that's hard to figure. I guess there must have been at least 15. I'm not sure though, it might even be more.

DRM: Wasn't there a roadster and a rail in there?

Nicholson: Yes, we had a rail and a roadster. Actually, it was a modified roadster which we ran at Santa Ana.

DRM: Drag racing has seen many drastic changes since that first meet you attended. What are some of the biggest differences you see now as

compared with the "good old days"?

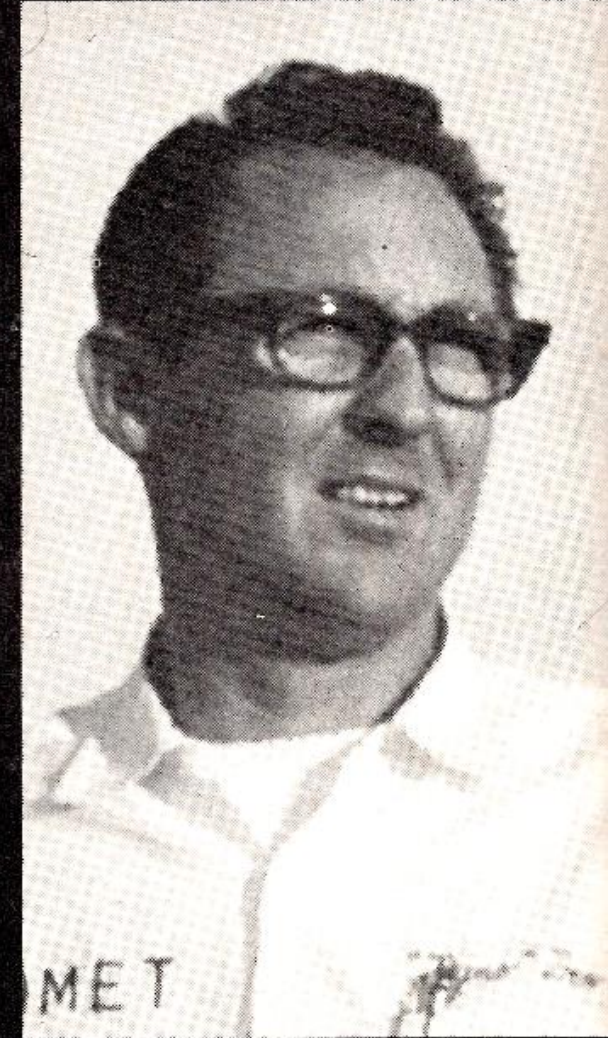
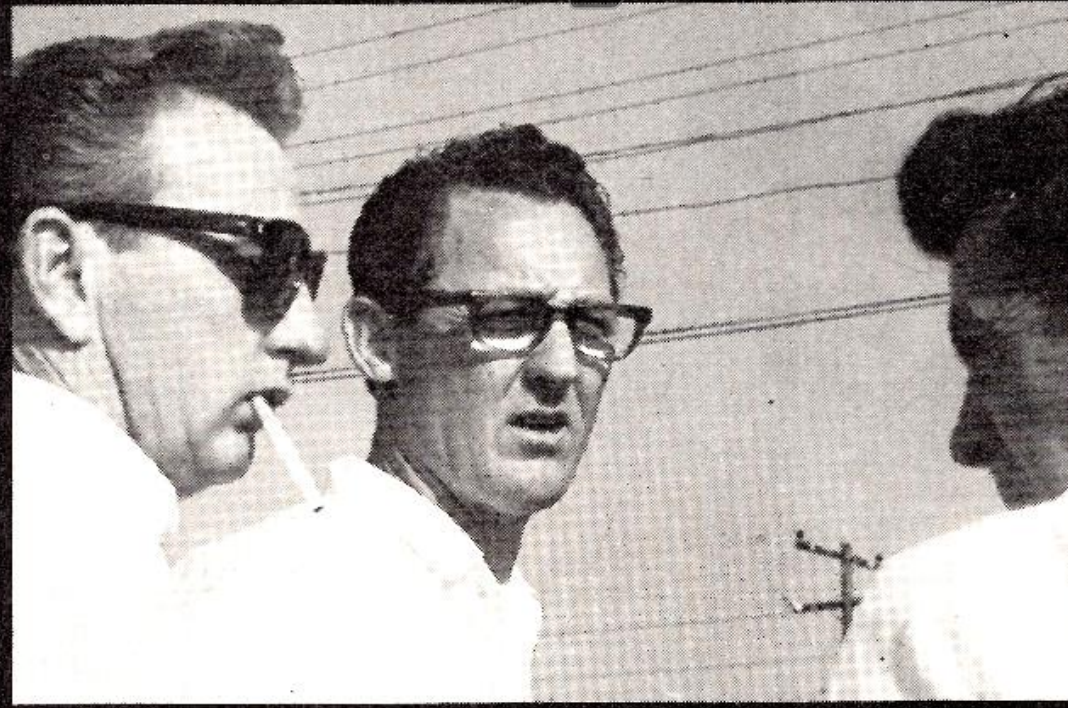
Nicholson: Well, there have been many changes. I guess the biggest one is the growing public interest. Getting the public to really accept drag racing has been hard. Of course, better strip facilities are a big factor—better seating facilities, better concession stands, better rest rooms, etc. Yes, I guess the biggest change is public acceptance.

DRM: What changes do you see in the near future—let's say in the coming season?

Nicholson: Well, it looks like the Super Stocks and funny cars are be-

ginning to get coast-to-coast acceptance. The West Coast has really taken to our cars, finally. This next year should be the biggest yet. Sometimes, it seems the guys with the lower class stock cars resent us—being able to go to the line and run anytime we want. But I think they forget it costs the strip promoter a lot for us to put on the show, and a lot of the smaller strips would have gone broke if they hadn't been able to get cars such as ours to bring in big crowds.

DRM: What do you believe is the big reason many areas of the country prefer funny cars to dragsters—a change which appears to be taking





"Dyno Don," the most successful S/S pilot in drag racing, appears here in many stages of racing activity — everything from 9.40-150 blasts (lower left) to sweeping the track (left center) in preparation for (he hopes) an even better run. Dyno Don puts dollars in "Nickel"-son.



place on the West Coast at the present time?

Nicholson: Well, I really enjoy watching a fueler smoke all the way through the eyes, but it gets boring quick. It seems like you've seen one you've seen 'em all. This is why I think the spectators really enjoy the funny cars more. When two dragsters line up to run each other the only thing the fan knows is that they most always have either a Chrysler or Chevy engine; actually, no other real difference except the personalities involved. But the fan can identify himself quickly with a Super Stocker. If he drives a Chevy he'll root for a Chevy; if he drives a Mercury, he'll



root for Merc. At least he can identify himself with the cars. Another thing, you never know for sure what the funny car is going to do. It may go straight, it may do a wheelie, or it might even go sideways. There is just enough uncertainty to keep the spectator on the edge of his seat.

DRM: What effect do you see the factories having on F/X type racing? Do you see them playing a lesser role in the coming few years in drag racing?

Nicholson: The factories must certainly be aware of the influence cars like ours are making upon the youth market. Comet, Plymouth, and Dodge

all have enjoyed better sales the past two years. I think drag racing definitely has a lot to say about what the factories do. It looks as though this coming year will see fewer factory funny cars, but they are going to sponsor quite a few lower class cars. But even though there are going to be fewer factory sponsored funny cars, they will be quite a bit wilder—like ours, with full fiberglass body, tube frame, etc. Yet, it seems like the factories will still have a big role in drag racing but will do it with fewer cars.

DRM: What about the blown funny cars?

Nicholson: Well, I hope we don't have to race them, though it looks like we might. I hope we aren't forced to put blowers on our cars, but it seems imminent that we will.

DRM: In your yearly travels how many miles do you figure you average per year?

Nicholson: Well, the only thing we have to go by is the truck speedometer, and it averages about 95,000 to 100,000 a year. A truck lasts us only about two years.

DRM: You've raced under all conditions and raced every name in the sport—who do you regard as the toughest to beat?

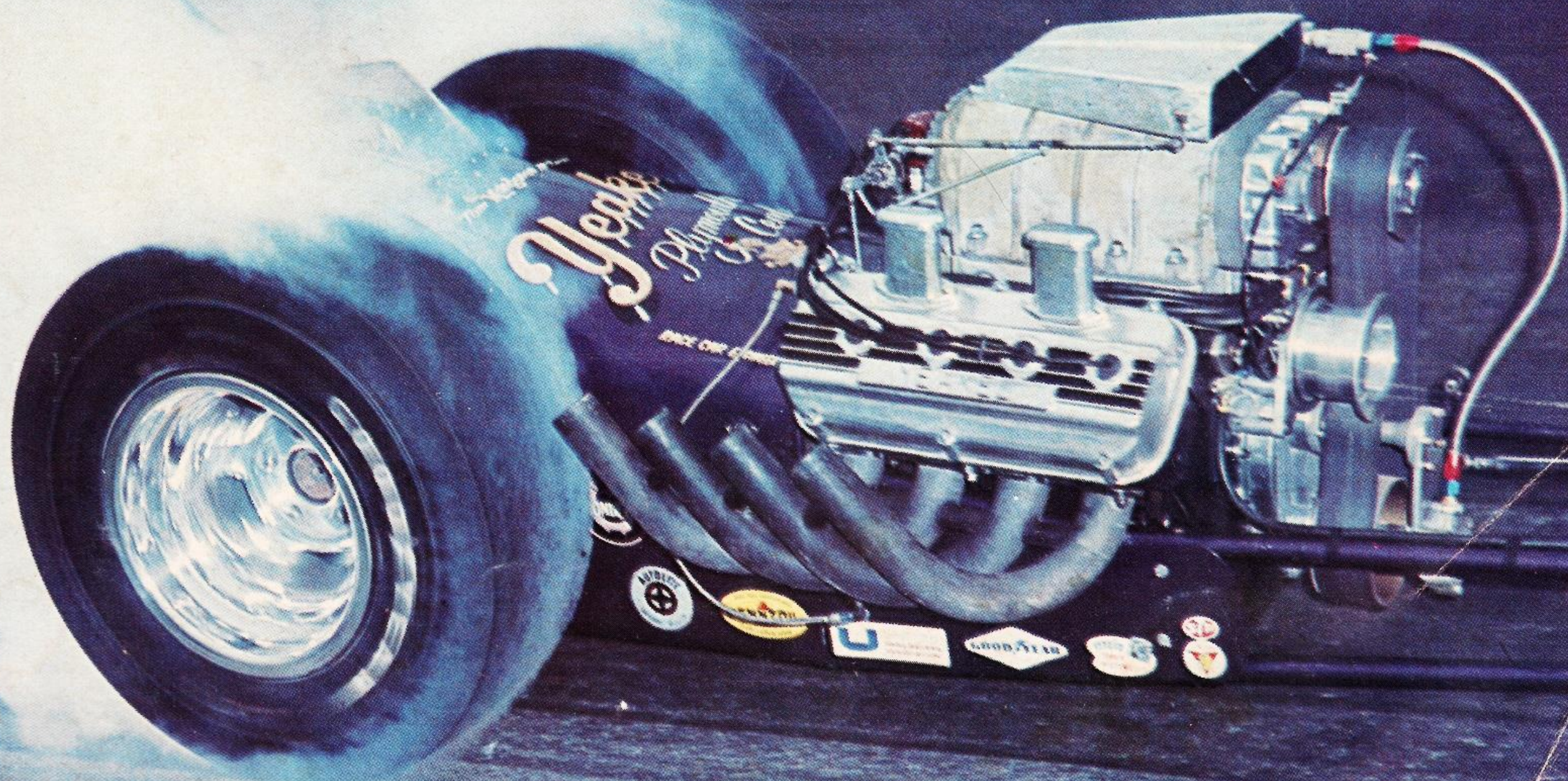
Nicholson: Well, they're all tough, but figuring both cars equal on any given afternoon, I would have to say Ronnie Sox is the toughest. He's real tough to beat out of the hole, can handle a car excellently and is just all around, I think, the toughest in the country to beat. He's a great competitor, a good sport and a credit to drag racing.

DRM: Don, you are No. 1 on our National Drag Racing Poll and likewise No. 1 on our Eastern S/S-ALT F/X list. Do you feel it will be difficult to hold onto these spots during the coming year?

Nicholson: It's always rough to stay on top. It will be even harder this coming season, but I believe our new cars will be real competitive. I plan on working real hard to stay No. 1.

DRAG RACING

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