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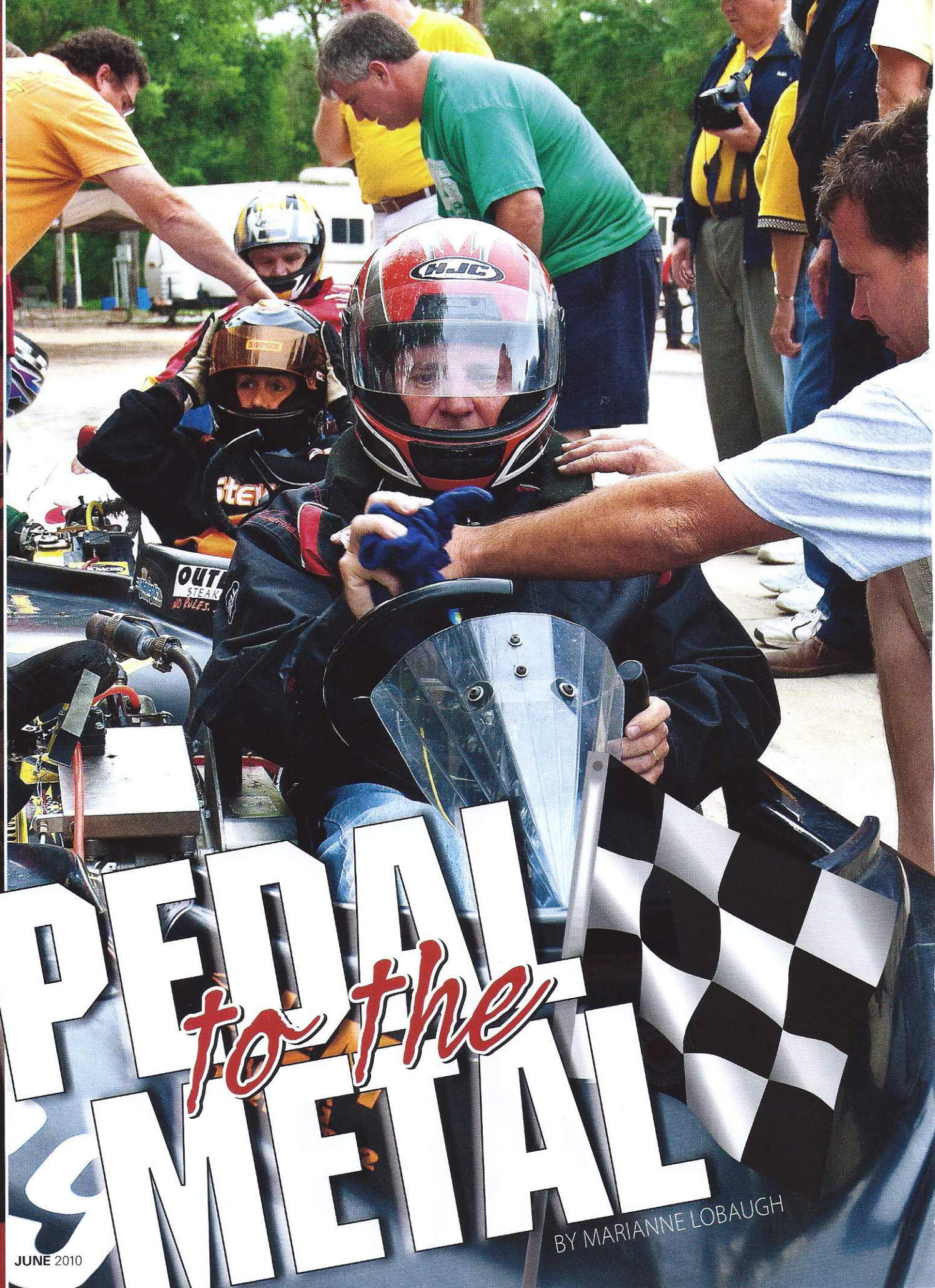
The Villages[®]

MAGAZINE



Villagers Race to Win

Motor Racing Club throws down for cart race



PEDAL to the METAL

BY MARIANNE LOBAUGH

It had all the elements of an intense NASCAR race — speed, extreme competition, banged-up cars, trash talk, dramatic crashes, cheering fans, a driver tantrum and glorious victory.

Engines were humming at Speedway Park on April 18 as members of The Villages Motor Sports Fan Club headed to the Fruitland Park track to test their racing skills against each other. The group usually meets as spectators at races from NASCAR in Daytona and NHRA in Gainesville but, for this event, members themselves were behind the wheel of go-carts.

Club members eagerly signed up to race go-carts provided by Speedway Park. Thirty-two daredevils in all set out to win trophies and more importantly, bragging rights as the top racer in the club.

"The Villages Cup" was the chosen name for the event, mimicking NASCAR's Sprint Cup, the sport's most prestigious award bestowed on the top driver of the season.

Club president Gerry Hafer set the tone for the competition as he sent out e-mails to members prior to race day.

"The tension is building as the drivers confirmed for Sunday's competition go through their pre-race preparations. Rumor has it that veteran Buster Burt, for example, has been seen jogging and doing extensive weightlifting as he conditions himself for the grueling event. Likewise, Glen Carter has been rumored to be practicing driving repeatedly through the Buena Vista Boulevard roundabouts to hone his steering skills, and Wendy Touchette has been overheard negotiating with Eric Jones for additional seat-time in his dragster prior to Sunday. It seems many of the drivers are pulling out all the stops for this one!" Hafer's e-mail read.

Experience ranged from former professional racers to novices who had never entered a race.

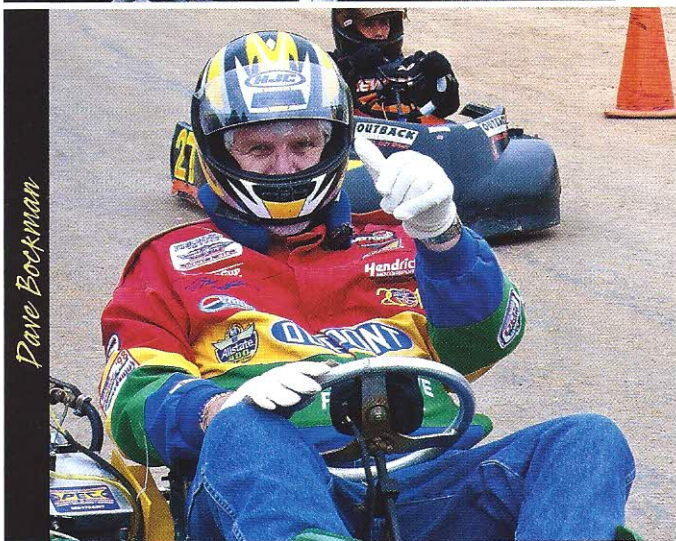
And the competition was fierce. Even the drivers' walk around the track turned into a race as the competitors took off in a sprint to be the first one to finish.

A serene setting was created by the mature trees surrounding the track located just outside of The Villages along Micro Racetrack Road and County Road 446A, a mile east of Colony Plaza Shopping Center. The one-eighth mile clay oval is surrounded by a fence and several stands around the track gave spectators a close view of the action.

Drivers arrived pumped up and ready to rumble.

Though fun was the main objective for the day, safety was just as important. Drivers were required to wear helmets, neck supports, long pants, long-sleeved jackets and gloves. Track officials were on the track before each heat to help racers properly equip for a safe race.

Drivers drew numbered cards to determine their starting position before each race. Each heat began with three laps of warm-up and then carts were reset to their starting positions before going to battle for five laps. Eight heats of four racers began the field with the top two finishers of each heat advancing to the next race.





One driver confidently said he was going to use his extensive driving skills to advance to the winner's circle.

"I used to be a drag racer — quarter-mile drag racing up in New England. Always went straight. Never made any turns, so this ought to be interesting," Mike Touchette said.

He also spent his career behind the wheel — of a much larger vehicle.

"I drove a tractor-trailer for 30 years, but this is going to be a little different than an 80,000-pound rig going down the road," Mike said.

His strategy for the day?

"We're going to keep it nice and tight. Try to stay to the inside where all the rubber is from last night and see what happens," the Village of Sunset Pointe resident said.

Mike's wife Wendy is also racing today. What are the chances Mike will meet his spouse on the starting line?

"I'm not racing against her yet. We'll see what happens as the day goes on," Mike said with a chuckle. "It will be interesting. She's not afraid to get at it out there."

Wendy had an opinion about the results of a race with her husband.

"If he knows what's best, he'll let me win," Wendy said laughing.

Sure, but will she run a fair race?

"Absolutely, she will," Mike said.

"I might like Tony Stewart, but I don't drive like Tony Stewart," Wendy quickly replied.

Fans were solidly behind Wendy, one of five women drivers in the field of 32. Crowds were chanting her name before her races and also calling out the name "Danica," for Danica Patrick, a popular female racer of the Indy and NASCAR circuits.

Wendy started the event with a bang in the first race by taking first place. Dave Bockman finished second.

The Touchettes were running hot as Mike also won his first race.

"It was fantastic. The car was quick. It really stuck, pulled right out and stayed there," Mike said. "You feel the speed a lot more because of how the cars are so low to the ground. It doesn't look like you're going that fast, but when you're in the car, nice and low, you can feel it."

His strategy for the next race?

"I got a feeling for it now. Rolling into the corners, accelerating halfway and then down the straightaway wide open, and roll into the next corner. Keep nice and tight on the inside," Mike said.

Another drag-racing veteran who was asking the question, "Can I turn left?" was Village of Lynnhaven resident Dave Colbert.

"I did a lot of drag racing, but no oval track racing," he said.

Even with the experience, Colbert found the day challenging.

"It was very good competition," he said. "Some people in our group are experienced drivers and others are naturally competitive."

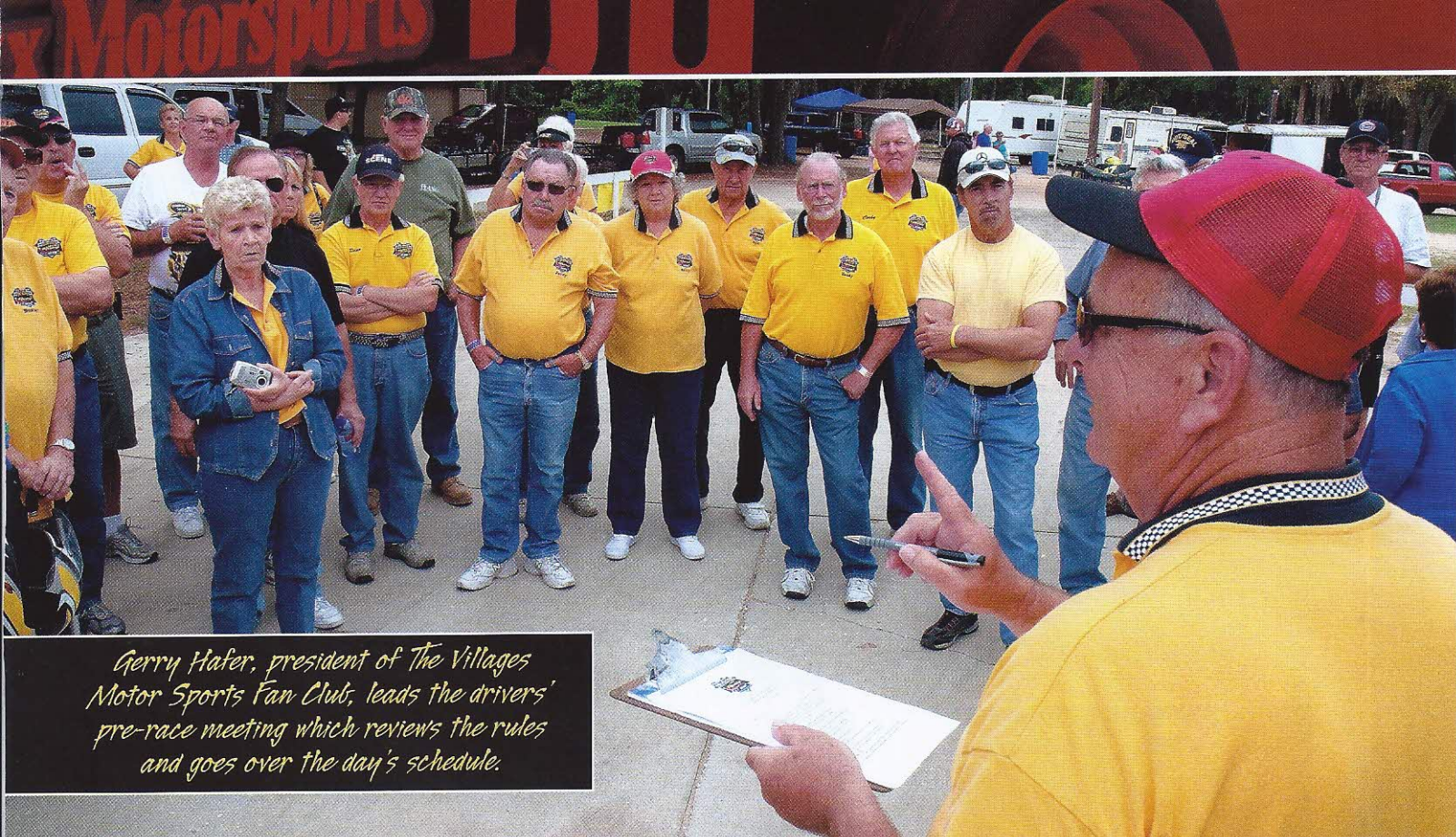
Colbert's first race taught him a hard-knock lesson.

"It wasn't easy. In my first race, I took the lead and thought I could take it easy, but Keith Moldenhauer shot by me on the inside. I learned I needed to race like I wasn't in first place," he said.

But Colbert turned the tables when the two met again in the next heat.

"My best race of the day was my second race. I was against the guy who beat me in the first race. I started out fourth and we had a heck of a battle trading paint, but I was able to get by him. He came over to me after the race and told me it was a good race," Colbert said.

As track officials watched racing action from the infield, the mood was light and they joked as much as the Villagers about their driving skills. As one driver lost control of their



Gerry Hafer, president of The Villages Motor Sports Fan Club, leads the drivers' pre-race meeting which reviews the rules and goes over the day's schedule.



Dean Vetter has close competition in the corner.



George Glotfelty leads the pack in race No. 13 followed by Wendy Touchette, Richard Psyk and Dean Vetter.

cart and drove into the grass on a warm-up lap, one of the men yelled, "Hey, where did you get your license?" Another joked, "That's why I never drive in The Villages unless I have to."

Corky Eck brought his own fan club to cheer him on to victory, including his son Robert and grandson Finley. Eck's neighbors from the Village of Sunset Pointe and friends from The Villages Vintage Car Club also came out to show their support.

One fan, 3-year-old Finley, didn't know his granddad when he was fully suited in racing gear.

"I don't think he recognized me when I put the helmet on, but I think he recognized my voice," Eck said.

He and other club members had watched a race at Speedway Park the night before to observe racers on the clay track. He used the opportunity to get advice from experienced cart racers and said they gave him a lot of great tips.

Eck devised a conservative strategy to keep him in the competition.

"I'm just going to try to come in second. I don't want to do anything stupid because the top two qualify. I told my son I'm not going to try to pass anyone and spin out. So as long as I can stay in the top two, I'll be happy. I learned that from Jeff Gordon," he said.

Eck exceeded his expectations by winning his first race of the day.

"I was very nervous when I first got in. I could feel my stomach churning a little bit. But once I got the first race under my belt, then I was fine. I kind of knew what to do and the competitive spirit kicked in and I was ready to go," Eck said.

He said it was hard not to get drawn into the "rush" of racing.

"As much you say you're not going to be competitive, as soon as you get in something like that and you're racing, I said, 'I'm going wide out. If I'm going to do this I want to win.' I didn't want to disappoint my son and grandson who had come from Ocala to watch me," Eck said.

His racing experience, thus far, had all been on two wheels.

"I used to race motorcycles a long time ago, but nothing like this in a go-cart. So it's a little different, but a lot of fun.

It was different than I thought it would be. It's a little bit bumpy but the cars held really well. It felt like when you went around the corners you might slide off the track, but they held nicely."

The speed of the carts was quite intense.

"I was told I was probably going to be doing about 30 mph but it's going to feel like I'm doing 100 because I'm so low to the track. Every little bump you can feel," Eck said. "It does make you feel like you are going faster than you actually are."

But he admitted that speed was important for a successful finish.

"Stay low and keep the pedal to the metal. If you let off on it, you lose speed," he said.

All the carts used by the racers were factory-made with a top speed of 50 mph.

One veteran drag and snowmobile racer was very surprised by the speed of the small vehicles.

"They were fast. I didn't think they would put that fast of cart out there for us older guys," George Glotfelty said. "But those things would go."

Glotfelty said that his past racing experience helped him significantly, even though he had only driven a go-cart once or twice before and just for fun.

"The snowmobile racing part of it helped a lot because we did oval racing. The platform is different, but it still helped to get the idea of four corners," the Village of Largo resident said.

Glotfelty's first strategic move of the day was to watch the first race to see how the carts performed on the track.

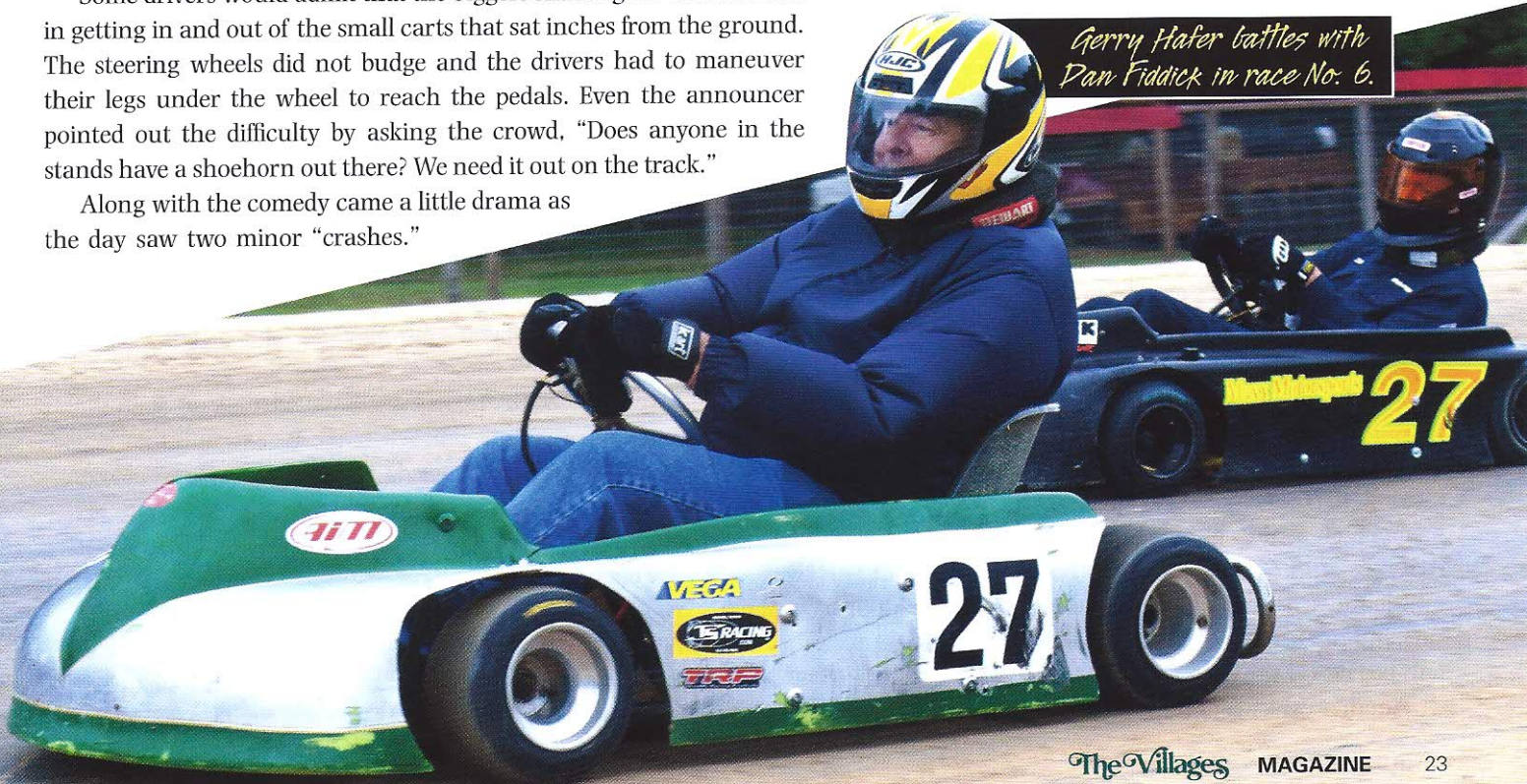
"We had six carts that they were alternating on the track. I watched the first race to see the carts and I picked the one I thought was the best," Glotfelty said of his observation of the black No. 29 cart.

Some drivers would admit that the biggest challenge of the race was in getting in and out of the small carts that sat inches from the ground. The steering wheels did not budge and the drivers had to maneuver their legs under the wheel to reach the pedals. Even the announcer pointed out the difficulty by asking the crowd, "Does anyone in the stands have a shoehorn out there? We need it out on the track."

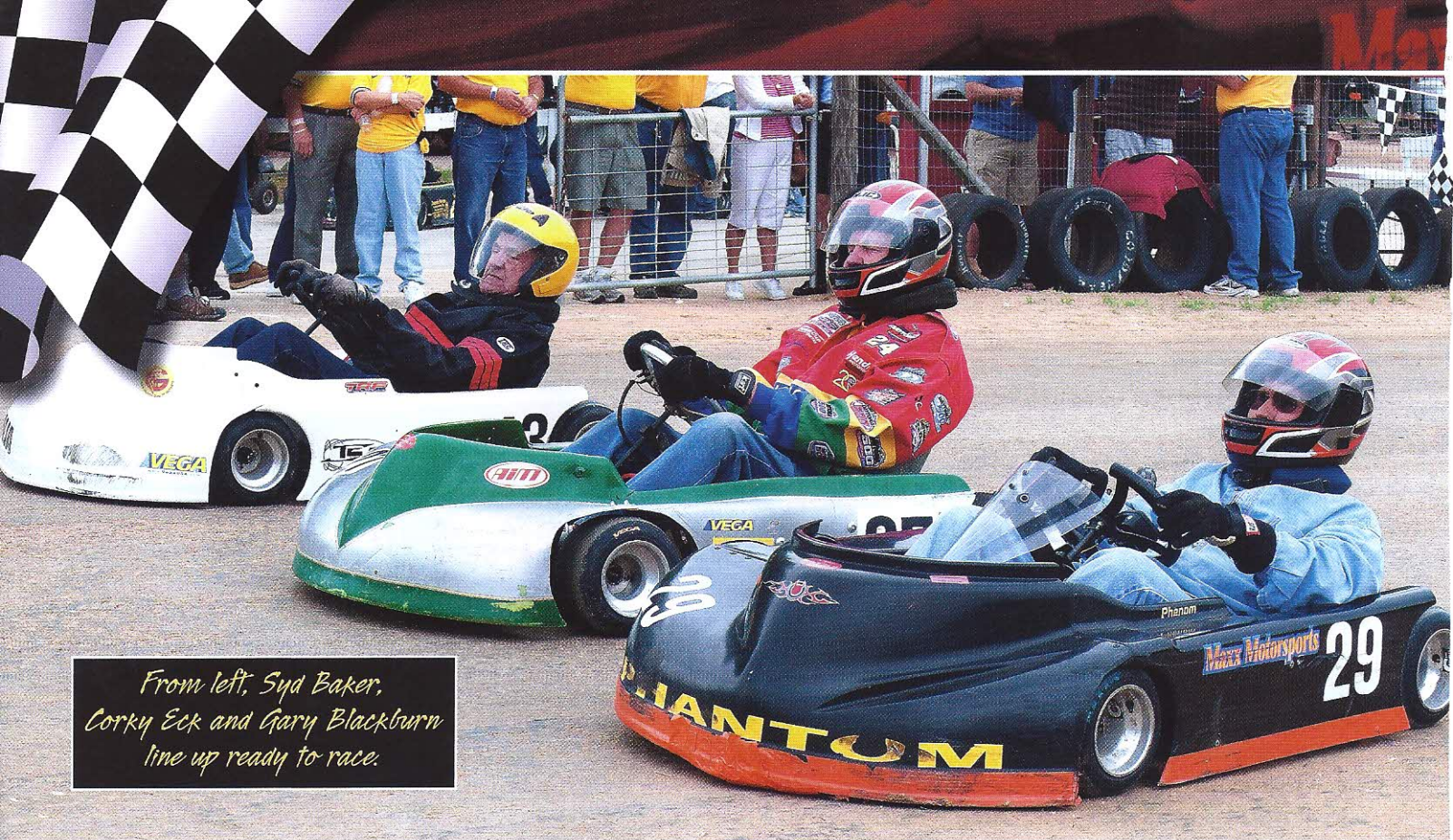
Along with the comedy came a little drama as the day saw two minor "crashes."



Corky Eck with his son Robert and grandson Finley before his next race.



Gerry Hafer battles with Dan Fiddick in race No. 6.



From left, Syd Baker, Corky Eck and Gary Blackburn line up ready to race.

In race 10, Zoe Ann Burt's cart collided between turn three and four with Arnold Birchwale, resulting in a broken toe for Burt.

Eight drivers reached the semi-finals for the day, having each placed first or second in their previous two races. At this point competition became more serious and racing more dramatic.

One of the most sensational races of the day happened in the second semi-final.

Eck recalled being bumped off the track in lap two by another cart, but regaining control and getting back into the race in fourth place. But in the fourth lap, the first and second-place carts of Gary Blackburn and Keith Moldenhauer collided, sending Blackburn over the front of Moldenhauer's cart, which grabbed a little air before coming back down on the track. It prompted a gasp from the crowd, but neither driver sustained injuries and they quickly got back into the race.

Eck said that Dave Colbert and he were able to take advantage of the situation and pass the accident to win first and second place respectively, and move on to the championships. Despite the elation of coming in second and moving to the championship race, he couldn't shake the memory of getting bumped off the track in the second lap. Arriving at the stopping point for the carts, Eck decided to have a little fun with the situation and quickly jumped out of his cart and ran around to the other drivers angrily asking, "Who bumped me off the track?"

Another driver replied that he was moving too slow in the

corner.

"I was trying to recreate a little of the NASCAR drama between the drivers," Eck said with a chuckle.

It all came down to the final race of the day when four drivers battled for the coveted Villages Cup: George Glotfelty, Corky Eck, Wendy Touchette and Dave Colbert.

Glotfelty had found his groove with cart No. 29 and chose it for all his previous races, but feared his streak might stop at the championship race.

"When we got to the feature, (final race) we drew cards for the carts, but I got lucky and picked the same cart," Glotfelty said.

Drivers also drew cards for position and Wendy won the pole position and started in the first row inside. Eck was outside in the first row. Colbert began inside second and Glotfelty started outside on the second row. Glotfelty didn't let last position "blow his pistons" and immediately devised his strategy.

"We got lined up. I was last. When we took off from the green flag, I was right on their butts. We got into that first turn. Wendy hugged the inside, which I knew she would do, and Corky went wide and gave me just enough room to get through them," Glotfelty said. "I held it open and then I kept it wide open."

Glotfelty held a solid lead for the remainder of the race and took the checkered flag after 10 laps with Corky Eck in second, Wendy Touchette third and Dave Colbert fourth.

The winner of The Villages Cup gave credit to Speedway

Park for their hard work in providing quality carts, keeping them running well after the collisions and for their support of the racers throughout the day.

George's wife Mary thought her husband might be thinking about squeezing one more small vehicle in their already crowded garage.

"I thought maybe we would bring that 29 cart home," Mary said. "I asked the guy if it was for sale and he said they were all for sale."

Glotfelty admitted he enjoyed the day and was eager to do it again, but was not thinking about buying his own cart.

"I thought it was a great day. It was a great idea and a fun thing," Glotfelty said.

Eck said he was pleased with his finish.

"I got beat by a guy who was a professional racer, but I kept up fairly decent with him," Eck said.

He admitted his only goal for the final race was beating his neighbor Wendy Touchette.

"I could see Wendy was really close behind me and if I had made a mistake she would have passed me and she would have never let me forget it," Eck said.

Has the racing bug bit him?

"Absolutely no doubt about that. Now that I have the experience I'm moving up to NASCAR," Eck joked.

Colbert said he considered getting back into racing.

"It was a blast. I think it was the most fun I've had since I stopped drag racing," Colbert said. "I was thinking maybe I should buy a cart and do this. I would love to this again."

While the winner's circle lacked champagne showers, scantily clad women and the fashion show of sponsor hats seen at professional races, there were plenty of smiles to go around as the trophies were awarded to the top eight finishers.

Expectations were greatly exceeded for the club's president, Gerry Hafer.

"I think it was absolutely fantastic. We had no idea what to expect, but everything was perfect. It was much better than my wildest dreams," he said.

And he'd like to see the club do it again.

"I think we'll do this at least annually, and I'm thinking from the feedback that we may do it more frequently than that. Sixteen races, two wrecked cars and one broken toe — that's pretty good. It was a great day for the club," Hafer said.

THE VILLAGES CUP FINAL RESULTS

1. George Glotfelty
2. Corky Eck
3. Wendy Touchette
4. Dave Colbert
5. Dean Vetter
6. Richard Pysk
7. Gary Blackburn
8. Keith Moldenhauer



The racers gather after the trophies were awarded.