

# Wheels

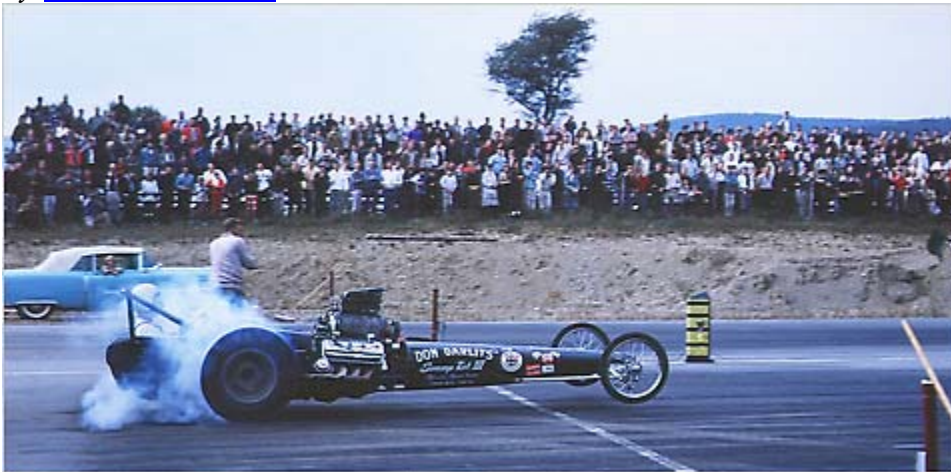
The Nuts and Bolts of Whatever Moves You



May 10, 2010, 1:24 pm

## Memories of a New York Dragstrip

By [JIM MOTAVALLI](#)



Photographs courtesy of [Doverdragstrip.com](#) Don Garlits, known as Big Daddy, racing at the Dover Drag Strip in Wingdale, N.Y., in 1965.

For 15 years, from 1961 to 1976, a green light meant go at the Dover Drag Strip in Wingdale, N.Y., north of Brewster. For young racers like Al Baran, now a Connecticut financial adviser, Sunday was race day. In 1967, Mr. Baran built a Corvette-powered Model T using a pile of scrounged parts (including a '49 Ford axle dragged out of a farmer's field). He remembers low 12-second quarter miles at 111 m.p.h. in that long-gone car.

"We had so much fun at Dover," he said. "Those were simpler times." Then he got drafted and that was that. For Mr. Baran and many other weekend racers whose glory days were in the '60s, Dover became a pleasant memory.



Ron Abbott

takes off in his supercharged dragster.

But Dover lives on, at least virtually. Dean “Dino” Lawrence, the announcer at the track from 1967 to 1972, [created a Web site dedicated to the strip](#) in 2008, and the site has grown, now hosting more than 3,500 historic photos and lots and lots of stories. [Don “Big Daddy” Garlits](#) raced there four times, and the evidence is on the site.

“The dragstrip didn’t want to die,” said Mr. Lawrence. The Web site became a rallying point for retired racers whose cars were now garage queens. There is now an annual Dover nostalgic race and reunion at [Island Dragway](#) in New Jersey. This year the event will be Sept. 25 and 26. On Labor Day, there will be [a Dover reunion at the Marcus Dairy car show in Danbury, Conn.](#) (a 20-year tradition).



Robert Burgess in the Black Arrow Hemi Plymouth .

“We had 197 old Dover guys show up last year at our first Island Dragway race,” Mr. Lawrence said. “One veteran brought a car that hadn’t run in 39 years, and his times were as fast as they were back then.”

According to Mr. Lawrence, the track opened May 14, 1961, as drag racing was just getting established on the East Coast. It closed unceremoniously 15 years later because “the track owners were not keeping up with the competition,” Mr. Lawrence said. “They would have had to take the next step into public relations, advertising and sponsorships.”

Former Dover cars are now all over the world. Mr. Lawrence, the owner of a North Carolina sign shop, says he knows of cars in Great Britain and Sweden, and one of the Web site’s 750 members is from New Zealand. The counter on the site has seen 66,000 visitors. A documentary film is in the works. That quarter mile has staying power.