



Golden State Shake

By Kevin Eckert



March 26, 2009 Van Horn, Texas: In search of Michael Schenker, international guitar hero. It has been 31 years since I first saw Schenker play for UFO in Allentown's Agricultural Hall. And though much of my heavy metal youth has faded, Michael remains my favorite six-string performer, full of gritty tone and melody within melody. Unfortunately, the teenage alcoholic (now 54) has forever been a German version of George "No Show" Jones, canceling shows and bustin' up bands.

Schenker in San Diego was my Monday choice to chase Saturday's scintillating World of Outlaws show of 35 frantic, uninterrupted laps. I left Tulare for San Luis Obispo only to learn Monday's MSG concert was cancelled. Still slated for El Paso on Wednesday, I lit out for Texas on 166 across the Sierra Madres to Barstow down 247 to Joshua Tree and across the Mohave Desert to the Colorado River that marks Arizona.

Tuesday's sunset signified an end to four wonderful weeks in the glorious Golden State. It all started in Perris with Darren Hagen's last-to-first midget charge, climbed the Pacific Coast Highway to San Francisco, split Sacramento to Auburn and ascended to Grass Valley, base camp for the NorCal opener at Marysville, Mini Gold Cup at Chico and St. Patrick's Day in Nevada City, which is "swarming with artists and hippies and old prospectors" according to harp-pluckin' resident Joanna Newsome. Marysville saw a last-to-fifth surge by Tyler Walker, Chico counted Danny Lasoski as the last cushion rider, and Tulare ended with Joey Saldana and Terry McCarl trading slides.

My time in the Golden State would have been less golden if not for saint Leslie Goodhue, who suffers Crohn's Disease eased by state law that allows six plants of sticky green marijuana. During eight years of Bush, such law was ignored. Under the Obama watch, decriminalization has quietly commenced.

California in my mirror, I attached to I-10 for 112 miles that brought "Tehachapi to Tonopah" to life. It's a line from Little Feat's first album (and they were albums in 1971) by Lowell George. The song is Willin, which Steve Earle covered in 2002.

I exited I-10 "halfway to Gila Bend" on I-8 to Casa Grande (rumored recipient of Manzanita relocation cash) and I-10 again. I considered a southern route through Tombstone's scene of the Gunfight at the O.K. Corral (1881) to Skeleton Canyon where Geronimo surrendered in 1886. However, hysteria about Mexican drug thugs made me stay on the interstate. My duct tape bumper would surely stamp me "undocumented" by Border Patrol or worse, coke mules with machetes. Anderson Cooper is interviewing them right now.

During the 165 miles of New Mexico on I-10, I passed the prison exit for Southern New Mexico Speedway, which was Mesilla Valley in 1987 when Tommie Estes and Sonny Kratzer won with the Jim Klein 39. World of Outlaw winners in Las Cruces were Andy Hillenburg ('96), Dave Blaney ('97) and Steve Kinser in 1999. Kinser carries sponsorship from Mesilla Valley Transport, a partner to Southern New Mexico Speedway and J.H. Rose, the Texas trucking firm that finished fourth in the 1962 Indianapolis 500 with Arizona's Don Davis.

El Paso is home to Lee Trevino Drive to honor the golf pro. I once asked another famous resident about the location of Van May Way. "It's behind there," Van revealed. It was 1971 when May used his Corvette to tow his sprint car to Hanover, Pennsylvania. El Paso's Steve Siegel and George Bischoff of Las Cruces would follow Van and big brother Walter ("W" or Dub) May.

I arrived in El Paso feeling good. I had Schenker for Wednesday and maybe Thursday in Dallas, and a new track in Crandall on Friday followed by ASCS national forces in Oklahoma City.

It went to hell in a hand basket.

Schenker cited visa problems for postponing his entire Texas tour. My brother predicted as much, so I phoned to let him laugh. He told how Lanny Edwards had already thrown ASCS down the drain in OKC. Wednesday appears as if I had driven past Ventura, Perris and Manzanita for 305 sprints in Crandall and ASCS Gulf South at the Gator Motorplex. That was before Crandall postponed a week. I still plan to span 622 miles to Willis, unless they cancel before you read this.

Texas is long way from Monterey, where I last posted. I was only 27 miles from Ocean Speedway in Watsonville, where the World of Outlaws were slated to start the California season on March 7. Monterey Bay had been soaked by rain on 21 of 23 days and Watsonville was wiped out well in advance. I assessed damage to the Santa Cruz Fairgrounds as puddles in the pits. But the strangest sight was the grass that covered the quarter-mile. Ocean Speedway looked like a spinach farm. March 7 was to have been my first visit since 2001 and in those eight years, banking has been reduced.

Highway One past La Honda (home to Neil Young), I entered South San Francisco. As an Oakland Raider fan of 38 years, I had to visit Jack London Square. I wondered which waterfront bars once welcomed Raiders, Black Panthers and Hell's Angels. I passed the police station and wondered which Raiders had been fingerprinted there besides Warren Wells and Sebastian Janikowski. In the search for silver and black artifacts, I found the Pacific Coast Brewery and its Leviathan Stout, a 10% grog advertised as "blacker than squid's ink."

I bounced back across the Bay Bridge to San Fran, circling Fisherman's Wharf and dodging a trolley up Nob Hill. I thought of Joe DiMaggio smacking baseballs for the San Francisco Seals in 1933 and Bill Russell rebounding basketballs for USF championships in 1955-56.

Van Ness Avenue had an old eight-story theater that played Slumdog Millionaire, which is an intricately woven tale. Tired of motels, I headed for Grass Valley via UC Berkeley, which Ronald Reagan called "a haven for communist sympathizers, protestors and sex deviants" before opening fire on students in 1969.

Concord to 680 to 80 through Vacaville, home to a mile and a quarter of asphalt on which Roger McCluskey defeated CRA in 1959 and Ken McLaughlin perished in 1960. I passed the exit to the Dixon Fairgrounds where Ohio's Rick Ferkel defeated Dub May in 1977. West Sacramento makes me regret not seeing West Capital Speedway or watching Gary Patterson race. I reached Roseville and thought of Dave Bradley Jr. As with GP, Junior drove for Clyde Lamar when I saw him win the 1986 Jayhawk National in Kansas City and beat The Outlaws to open the '87 Mini Gold Cup. Dave died at that year's Dirt Cup.

On the eve of the 2009 NorCal opener at Marysville Raceway Park, the thermometer in Grass Valley read 30. Sandals of San Francisco quickly dropped to the bottom of the rotation. The time had arrived to suit up as if Lambeau waited. Fortunately, mercury remained in the low 40s and promoters Paul and Kathy Hawes had full bleachers and pit. Their track has Sierra Nevada on tap! In all reality, 2009 was my first visit since I had only ever been to an afternoon stock car slugfest in 1989.

Back then, Marysville Raceway Park was called Twin Cities Speedway. It opened in 1968. Two years later,

Sierra Mesa National Raceway sprouted nine miles east of Marysville. It was paved in '72 (when Leroy VanConett of Galt gathered the NARC checkered for Ted Hunting) and closed by 1973. In the field of winged 360 sprint cars at the Marysville opener of 2009 was Ted's son Doug Hunting.

The early cancellation in Watsonville brought Outlaw talent to the Twin Cities of Marysville and Yuba City. Faced with 14 days between Las Vegas and Mini Gold Cup, Tennessee 360 product Jason Sides swapped Ott engines at BR Motorsports in Hanford and headed north on 99. Last season when early Outlaw races were ruined, Sides swapped Bulls Gap for Devils Bowl, Eldora for Hohenwald, Haubstadt for Wheatland, Sioux Falls and Knoxville for Little Rock, and Granite City for Oklahoma City.

Also making a Marysville debut was Oklahoma native Shane Stewart, now selling his home in Indianapolis. Last season, Stewart was the World on Outlaws driver for Dennis Roth. This year was uncertain. The orange Screamin' Eagle One of Mike Doyle is no more. Shane won 43% of his A-mains in that car. He returned to Australia to drive Colin Bulmer's car second at Classic and eighth at Presidents Cup. Marysville saw Stewart and car owner/crew chief Paul Silva debut an A.R.T chassis by Art Boune, builder of the wings which won Gold Cups for Steve Kinser in 1978-79. Stewart and Silva emerged from Devil's Bowl atop the chase to be \$60,000 ASCS champions.

Returning to Marysville for the first time since NARC Speedweeks of the 1990s were Tyler Walker of Los Angeles and Tommy Tarlton from Fresno. Fastest on the clock at 12.74, Tarlton thanked Dean Bruns, who finished 2008 with Tom and visited on a night away from chores for Chad Kemenah. Second fastest was Pockets Silva and Hillenburg prodigy Shane Stewart.

Marysville was muddy. It needed extra hot laps to burn what became about a groove and a half. Tarlton and Stewart were unable to transfer through heats, finished first and second in the B, and were inverted to row five. On pole was Auburn's Andy Forsberg, winner of 60 races in 12 seasons, most recently the Marysville finale of 2008.

Outside of Forsberg was three-time track champ Korey Lovell. Korey and Kevin are sons of Richard Lovell, who (together with brother Ron) owned the Yuba City Scrap & Steel 71 that won Gold Cup prelim with Wayne Sue (1980), Western World prelim with Chuck Gurney ('81), Dirt Cup with Tim Green ('83), Louie Vermeil Classic with Ron Shuman ('83), Jayhawk National with Jimmy Sills ('84), Chico with Shane Scott ('85) and Rick Haugh ('87), Hanford and Placerville with Rick Hirst ('89), Chico with Kevin Pylant ('91) and Walter T. Ross Memorials with Marc Zieske ('92) and Darrell Hanestad in 1994.

NorCal's winged 360s enjoy extraordinary numbers (much like central PA 358s) that resist North America's alignment to ASCS cylinder heads. Pacific Sprint Cars as Marysville calls them were preceded by wingless two-barrel 360 "spec sprints" that fire by 12-volt battery. Mason Myers crashed one in turn two and was hooked around to a mud hole inside turn four, which got the highway tow truck stuck. Spec sprints were cut from 30 to 20 laps.

Redding's Tyler Wolf, another champion of 12-month karting campaigns, was a Silver Dollar 410 rookie who peaked seventh last season. With steel cylinder heads, Wolf was a spec sprint leader in Marysville until Terry Schank of Santa Rosa ran him down. Second in a two-barrel Ford was Jeremy Hawes, son of the promoters.

Eighth in the spec sprint opener was Sacramento's Ralph Cortez, who has guided BCRA midgets to second at Ukiah and third at Petaluma. Cortez competed in Chili Bowls in 2003 (D16), 2005 (J12), 2006 (E13) and 2007 when he ran one of four Cliff Blackwell midgets to eighth in an I-main.

Cortney Dozier was the only Marysville driver in both sprint car classes. On any given Saturday, Brandon and Derek raise the number of Doziers driving sprint cars to three.

When the winged headliner began, Tyler Walker had his right rear shredded by contact. His gang green swapped it and the left rear, a tiny unit seldom seen outside of Chico. The increase in stagger enabled Walker to roll the top of turns three and four where others could not.

Forsberg led every lap in his Triple XXX. He is the son of Richard Forsberg, a Calistoga NARC winner in 1981 and '84. Andy was pressured slightly by Sides, who started fifth and finished second assisted by his ex-wrench from Tasmania, Scotty Males, married to Greg's sister Shelly DeCaires of Elk Grove.

Lovell and Jimmy Trulli took third and fourth followed by Walker's first appearance since 1996. Chili Bowl competitor Kyle Larson brought Harley Van Dyke's car from row ten to sixth chased by ex-Roth wrench Steven Tiner, Stewart, Colby Wiesz and Mike Monahan, who towed 125 miles from Sparks, Nevada.

Out the gate headed for the airport was Darin Smith, who helped James Sweeney in Marysville before reuniting with Rocklin's Robert Ballou. Sweeping a Golden State weekend at Watsonville and Placerville in 2006, "Heavy D" and Bob-a-Lou bring the Dallas Mulvaney Maxim to Eldora on April 10-11.

Washington native Rod Fauver fielded a wingless USAC 410 that Jason York flipped at Perris a week prior to bringing a winged 360 to Marysville for Zach Zimmerly of Oregon. Fauver's truck was sponsored by the Jimmy Sills Driving Experience that conducts class at Marysville.

Marysville's first NARC 410 winner in 1992 was Kevin Pylant of Santa Cruz. He and father Don rolled into the 2009 Mini Gold Cup early as did the weathered Goodhue camper and newer unit of Denny and Cindy Thomas. Tulare told how well cared for fairgrounds are in California and Chico reinforced it. Restrooms and showers were cleaned and stocked on a daily basis, albeit with the toilet squares or "post-it notes" cursed by Silver Dollar demon Randy Frank.

Forsberg, Sides and Walker led nine guys from Marysville to Chico in successive weeks. Mike Stallings left Chico for Hanford and Monahan skipped the Outlaw opener. Mason Moore crashed the Steve Tuccelli/Alan Bradway 360 and had the family 410 at Silver Dollar. Brett Miller missed the 360 A-main but cracked an Outlaw 410 feature. Also in both places was Pat Harvey, father-in-law to Jason Statler, who relocated baby Craig Statler from Los Gatos to the Grass Valley hometown of wife Stephanie. Robbie Whitchurch was in Marysville and Chico after racing his USAC midget in Las Vegas.

The Gold Cup Race of Champions is so big that it spawned a baby. Halfway through its 55-year run, Gold Cup added Mini Gold Cup, which began as a second World of Outlaws visit in 1987. It remained an Outlaw show until 1992 when Ted Johnson tired of NorCal's nasty months of March. Mini Gold Cup rolled on for 17 years until the 2009 version returned to WoO sanction. The 23rd annual was unique in following contemporary Outlaw protocol where both nights pay the same \$10,000 to win and lock no one into anything. Everyone must qualify anew which by definition, makes Friday no preliminary at all.

Friday was my first Chico card since the Gold Cup of 2001, which was three days before 9/11 and sadly, how I remember it. I had seen no Mini Gold Cups since the first four, though I was rained out of the prelim in 2000, when a second rainy day coaxed me 540 miles to Perris. In my absence, Eric Rossi (Wright 35) won that Mini Gold Cup.

Mini Gold Cup 2009 was the first Silver Dollar program directed by John Padjen's son Alan, who has big plans for the quarter-mile. He wants to completely resurface and in the process, carry turn four to the wall and eliminate reverse bank. Just like at Marysville, such changes will make Chico larger and faster.

Joey Saldana became the fastest man in Chico history by turning the first 10-second circuit. During the 14-day schedule break, Kasey Kahne Racing left Vegas for the southern Indiana enclave of Tim Engler, the injection

wizard who helped fuel their Gasoline Alley Mopars. Silver Dollar started Saldana fifth before he took the Budweiser Maxim around Jonathan Allard on lap one, Donny Schatz on lap two and Terry McCarl on lap seven. Last car between Saldana and Silver Dollar was the Direct TV unit of Kahne comrade Craig Dollansky, who was taken wide by crippled Kraig Kinser. Saldana used the obstruction to drive away.

Silver Dollar has certainly been rougher, but the spring return of the World of Outlaws encountered two trenches, at least. Dollansky dropped second to Sammy Swindell, altered his entrance to turn three by inches, yet hooked a hole so hard that it threw him straight off the track, all four wheels in the air.

After backing into Vegas concrete, Jason Meyers spent the schedule break in Fresno recovering physically and mechanically. Chico started with Meyers seventh to second in the GLR Investments KPC. "I think we ran about 200 laps tonight," Meyers told Tony Veneziano about 13 yellow and two red flags.

McCarl won the Crane Cams Dash before the finest finish (third) of his World of Outlaws season and Silver Dollar career. Terry's best previous Chico finish was sixth for Country Builders in his prelim to the Gold Cup of 1992. Carrying associate sponsorship from the AmeriCash Advance company of Adrian Berryhill, Terry's black Big Game Treestands Maxim hooked a rut on the final restart and had his left rear wheel mangled by Tim Kaeding, who surrendered several spots.

Danny Lasoski's fourth-place in the Casey's General Store Maxim was best of his World of Outlaws season and hinted of more in store. Steve Kinser owned 21 wins in 57 Chico cards entering Mini Gold Cup, where he backed down the hill in the dash to trash a Quaker State Maxim. Starting last in a spare, The King dodged carnage to fifth followed by the Kantor Oil Maxim of Chad Kemenah. Sitting second in the quest for his first Chico checkered since 1996, Swindell sailed the Tom Rolfe Maxim over the hill to settle for seventh-place.

Mini Gold Cup opened with too many stoppages to be good. Everyone hoped for a better conclusion but was disappointed. The cushion was on edge for heats already and after the middle was pillaged, rubber screeching did commence. Such a travesty was beyond my Chico experience. No aid came as rain was reported. Wet weather never arrived until Sunday morning.

We cannot control the quality of racing. We can however, control our quality of drink. Since 1979, Chico has been home to the Sierra Nevada Brewing Company. In four nights, I tried eight of 'em from Best Bitters, Porter, Brown and Stout to Torpedo, Bigfoot (9.6), ESB (Early Spring Beer) and the pick of the crop, Chico Estate Harvest Ale bestowed upon me by Chris Lovett, brewmaster and former partner-in-crime to Randy Frank.

Brad Furr, beating the World of Outlaws of 2002 in finals at Watsonville, Port Royal and Fort Worth, landed on pole for a Friday heat, jumped the start and was docked one row. Later, he was among the locals black-flagged for violating the two-spin rule. Saturday started with Sammy Swindell jumping from the pole in the same fashion as Furr, yet he was afforded another chance.

When inconsistencies by referees are separated by hundreds of miles, few see them. When they are committed in front of the same fans on the same weekend, it insults intelligence, like telling people that only one of Saldana's many cautions was "unassisted." Saldana stopped to service a tire flattened by his teammate, but officials must view stops and spins differently.

As the surface withered, Jason Meyers was first to make the middle work, gliding inside Jason Sides for the crucial second spot into the dash, which he won. To lead all 40 laps after qualifying 31st best shows the best and worst of WoO procedure. Good things happen to Meyers in Chico, where he posted the first win of his sprint car career at the 1999 Mini Gold Cup. During last year's schedule lapse, Jason won it a second time.

The finale to Mini Gold Cup would have been a total follow-the-leader snore if not for upstairs drama from

Danny Lasoski. Quickest on the clock (11.58 from Friday's 10.91 record), Lasoski was last in the dash but found a thin cushion around one and two that carried him to contention. On lap 22 of 35, he passed Kraig Kinser for second. The Dude drew alongside Meyers but could not get to the bottom of turn three as leader. Lasoski landed second for Kistler of Ohio and a Pennsylvania crew of Chris Strait and Barry Jackson, who is the "J" in JEI chassis.

After two Friday crashes, Kraig Kinser dropped a cylinder on a Chevy yet stayed in the rubber to get third in the Bass Pro Shops Maxim. Dollansky finished fourth as Maxims horded 3-4-5-6 with Steve Kinser and Jason Sides. TK Concrete collected seventh with a KPC commanded by Kerry Madsen, who opened a third straight season with Sonny Kratzer of Allentown, Pennsylvania as crew chief. Two more Maxims filled the Top Nine for Jac Haudenschild and Jesse Hockett.

Tenth was Jonathan Allard's A.R.T. As the only American to appear this winter in New Zealand and both coasts of Australia, Allard made 15 starts that snared first in Auckland and Bay Park, fourth at Palmerston and fifth at Wellington, Brisbane and Parramatta City. In his first U.S heat of 2009, Jon won.

Hockett hit the Silver Dollar jackpot. Driving for his fifth different car owner (Joe Loyet, Tom Buch, Carl Edwards and Jim Massey) this year, Jesse put Duke and Scott McMillen on pole of a heat, which they won. After the dash, Jesse just hugged the bottom to collect \$1600. World of Outlaw drivers want to time first, second or ninth through 16th fastest because if they rank third through eighth, they must pass a really fast car to start better than row six. And winning a World of Outlaws A-main from behind a ten-car dash happens about every 80 races.

One night earlier, the roulette wheel went against Hockett and Wayne Johnson, both of whom progressed from C-to-B but no further than four and five spots from the A. Overfilled oil caused Wayne to watch gauges when Sean Becker sailed under Johnson and Randy Hannagan in their heat. Ultimately, he earned eleventh for Harold Main, who made the 2006 Gold Cup final with Becker but never finished as high with the World of Outlaws.

One of eight car owners to employ Johnson in 2008 (along with Wayne Simmons, Hammers, Al Christoffer, Anderson, Glenn Styres, Pete Postupack and Scott Benic), Grass Valley's Harold Main sat Johnson in his JEI for Chico and Tulare. They ate steak with us at The Willo, where I agreed to show an Okie what is Behind the Green Door in San Francisco. Wayne chose to wait for his wife in September when he and Harold do Gold Cup.

From the Mineshaft Saloon, Johnson told the Toller sisters that our San Fran plan was postponed on St. Paddy's Day. Did you know "paddy wagons" were so named because they mostly contained drunken Irish? 'Tis true laddy. Seeking a green shirt in my satchel, Trevor Green was all I could find.

Saint Paddy's Day meant that it was time to quit wrestling with "J.J Yeley" the 180-pound Rottweiler and release the hounds to the Tulare Thunderbowl for two races that easily exceeded anything at Marysville or Chico.

Highway 49 from Grass Valley to Oakhurst is 230 miles of smiles. Ireland itself cannot be greener. There are only 25 miles from I-80 to Placerville yet I was reminded why 49 is a bad road to bring a rig. As navigator for Mile High Racing in 1987, I guided Rich Bubak through mountains that heated his engine on the way up and brakes on the way down. In my limber little Escort, it was a blast.

Drytown brought me five miles from Ione, home of Justin Grant, due to crew for Jeff Walker in Noblesville, Indiana. After winning BCRA midget races at Hanford and Petaluma last year, young Grant won in his second start in the sprint of Steve Harris, a 2009 Mini Gold Cup car owner behind Bobby McMahan and son Kyle Harris. Steve started www.racingforthetroops.com. I neglected to mention how my visit to the General Patton Museum found Justin Grant/Steve Harris Racing cards free to the public.

Oakhurst brought me to the door of Katie's Country Kitchen, the diner started by Mrs. Morrie Williams. Morrie has created heroes in zeroes for 13 years with Greg DeCaires (1996), Jim Carr ('97), Peter Murphy, Tim Kaeding (2002), Dennis Moore, Trevor Green (2004) and Jonathan Allard, all of whom won with a Williams Zero. Oakhurst is also home to Mike James, now forever known as the tosser of cheese at the final wingless 410 race ever at Manzanita. Oakhurst Mike would not join me in the Oak Room, so I caught 99 in Madera for "Chowchilla Mike" Lindbeck's couch.

Madera Speedway was recently the third-mile of asphalt chosen for the DeBeaumont Motor Sports Driver Challenge. From a field of 33, ten names were reduced to three: Arizona's Alex Bowman, Oklahoma's Jonathan Beason and Colorado's Levi Roberts, who shined brighter than finalists Keith Bloom, Kyle Cummins, Kyle Dickerson, Joe Liguori, Justin Melton, Cody Swanson or Tanner Swanson, according to Motorsports Management International (Lorin Ranier and Kirk Spridgeon), Marc DeBeaumont and Tim Clauson. Beason and Roberts will drive a second DeBeaumont midget to Bowman, who will begin in BCRA because he is just 15.

Thunderbowl Raceway in Tulare, California has attracted international talent ever since meat merchant Dennis Roth decided it should. The circle of World of Outlaws promoters is a tight click but as participating owner of two or three sprint cars, the man who made millions from Beef Packers guaranteed Steve Faria's first Outlaw purse in 2004. Thunderbowl has become the kind of place eagerly anticipated by fans and teams alike.

The place threatened to come unglued when Australian native and adopted Fresno son Peter Murphy won his heat, won the dash, and took off with an ex-Elite engine. It was bolted into a former Steve Kinser Maxim like the one in which The King cashed \$50,000 at Parramatta when Peter served as Steve's winning crew chief, not Nick Speed as reported. Speed stayed to Robbie Farr's side of the Waldron pit area, according to Murph.

Traveling internationally for 15 years, Randy Hannagan has a few places where he surprises people. Generally, they are big half-miles like Eldora or Knoxville but in recent years, The Hurricane has developed affection for Thunderbowl. Two wins in two 50-lap Trophy Cups helped. Randy has really polished a diamond pattern that enters Tulare's first turn on the cushion and skims to the bottom of turn two. Second quick, Hannagan used it on Lasoski in his heat. Fourth in the dash, Randy altered his exit to glide around Murphy for the lead.

Sammy Swindell was fourth fastest and second in his heat for a dash spot. In the feature, Murphy fell behind Swindell and Jason Solwold, who raced for Marc (Shark Engines) Huson at Chico and Dennis Roth in Tulare. Sammy slid Randy in turn four and again in turn one of lap 22, crowding him hard. The Hurricane stood his ground. The final caution on lap 25 of 35 seemed to leave too much time to stifle Swindell but Hannagan split provisional Kraig Kinser and Lucas Wolfe to buy time.

Hannagan's last lap was brilliant defense. Entering low into turn three to block a slide, Randy drifted to the wall off turn four to block again, and back left to curb any crossover. Had it been anyone other than a former pupil, Swindell may have been less gracious. On the podium, Sam talked of leaving Randy just enough room, which the teacher was proud to see Hannagan hammer.

Tulare represented Randy's second win with the World of Outlaws and first since Pevely 2001. Hannagan's winning Gaerte Maxim was suspended on Integra shocks without national Penthouse sponsorship but local bucks from the Central Valley Meat Company of Lawrence Coelho, car owner to sons Brian (a Golden State winner at Watsonville in 2000) and Steve Coelho, who crossed third against NARC at Antioch and Santa Maria.

Hannagan had spiritual guidance too. Last fall, he dedicated Trophy Cup to late friend Walt Branco. Last winter, he lost mother Margie to lung cancer. In his pit was father Jim while his brother Terry "was probably jumping out of his wheelchair at home."

Washington's Jason Solwold finished third as teammate to Tim Kaeding. Tyler Walker was fourth in the JEI of NMI Industrial Contractors. A nice tussle on the cushion involved the Leonard Lee Maxim of Jac Haudenschield and local boy Jason Meyers, who finished fifth and sixth. Jac will spring son Sheldon into the Ohio sprint scene as soon as snow melts. Terry McCarl set a track record and reached seventh with Tim Kaeding eighth in a KPC.

Murphy fell to ninth. If anyone had told Peter on Thursday that he would score a Top Ten with the World of Outlaws on Friday, he'd have been mighty pleased. But to lead ten laps and then retreat made Murphy uncomfortable with the praise heaped on him.

Peter talked of a slight vibration in the engine. On its second night, the motor did not complete its heat race. "Remember that vibration?" Murphy asked. "We don't have it anymore."

Friday turned a trifle quiet so I dragged DAK Simulations down K Street to join Kaeding Performance at Vejar's cantina. Two-time USAC Silver Crown king Brandon "Bud" Kaeding was helped to a siesta when friends tagged his face with graffiti. BK (Brent) and BF (Bill Foland) opened the motor coach bar to rum that we drank like Captain Jack Sparrow. Details are disputed yet one trash can was reportedly sacrificed. Still, I sensed a deeper respect when Brent called me "Bela Lugosi" for sucking blood 'til five AM.

Friday is promotional suicide in California, where Thunderbowl boasted twice the crowd as the first night. Other than Chico where Friday racing has remained the norm, California sprint car racing is a Saturday sport.

Arriving late Saturday was Washington's Logan Forler, a 600cc graduate of Deming dirt who made five pavement midget starts in 2008. Third at Port Angeles was Logan's best. For his first three weeks as a sprint racer, Forler chose ASCS Gulf South in Beaumont and Cleveland, ASCS Southwest in Tucson, and the World of Outlaws in Tulare.

Kasey Kahne's USAC wheelman Brad Sweet of Grass Valley observed the Marysville opener before flying to Texas for midget dates in Wichita Falls and Austin. Unfortunately for fans (but fortunately for Sweet, who is lost on pavement), Wichita Falls rain caused the Lloyd Ruby Classic to die two weeks before Lloyd himself. Back under wings on the Thunderbowl where they topped Trophy Cup four months before, Sweet and Rod Tiner lost a Shark engine early Friday but nearly made Saturday's dash.

Sam Hafertepe of Texas seemed eager to escape California. Chico found him in two crashes that kept him from either A-main. Sam's Silver Dollar crew included Ontario sprint driver Daryl Turford but when hasty repairs fell incomplete, Turford was shipped home to Canada. In danger of missing all four California A-mains, Hafertepe found a low lane past Lasoski and Lucas Wolfe that shuffled Tommy Tarlton from a transfer. Tarlton had taken the Rebel 360 opener at Hanford after crashing in Marysville.

Tulare saved the best for last. I've seen every sanction of note and more obscure and where the World of Outlaws exceeds every other club is its ability to reel off non-stop features. These races are rare and precious. And in a series where traffic determines victory, Thunderbowl thrust The Outlaws into 35 green-flag laps.

Swindell challenged in Vegas, Chico and Tulare, where he followed fast time with a zero pill and eight laps ahead of the dash. With the cushion on the wall and middle turning black, Thunderbowl threatened to go like Chico because bad weather approached again. To its credit, the surface stayed shiny and slick and never locked tires to one lane. Smart as he is, Sammy did not have his Honey Run Quilters Maxim as ready for 35 laps as the Burnett Rock Maxim of McCarl (which passed him on lap seven) or the Budweiser Maxim of Saldana that ultimately won the race.

Saldana slid McCarl only to see Terry immediately swipe the lead back. On lap 14, Joey managed his slide out of turn four to secure the spot. "When I got to Haud," said Saldana, "I didn't know what he was really going

to do, so I slowed myself down.” Joey soon found McCarl at his elbow, forcing a move past Haudenschild to scamper out of danger.

“The cushion was right around the fence and I hit the wall a couple times,” Joey revealed. “This is the World of Outlaws. These guys are professionals and we are supposed to go non-stop.”

Saldana’s souvenir trailer touted Budweiser swag ten feet from the Budweiser tap that featured a life-sized cardboard of winning car owner Kasey Kahne, who had Joey’s third win witnessed by his father Kelly Kahne.

Winning the first World of Outlaws stop at Tulare in 2004, McCarl scored second in 2009. Swindell suffered third-place and surprise. “I figured someone would get in the wall,” said Sam.

California was a dent to the Armor All of Donny Schatz, who could not leave Chico fast enough. Thunderbowl opened with Donny doing a wheelstand off the turn four cushion that dropped him out of sixth-place. Tulare’s conclusion was better for the champion’s Shaver J&J, which finished fourth after a nice dice with Craig Dollansky. Craig’s crew chief Mike Woodring worked on the historic Tulare winner of Erin Crocker in 2004. Thunder claps on the cushion by Tim Kaeding crossed sixth chased by Kemenah, who failed to transfer on Friday.

World of Outlaws left the Golden State of California for the Copper State of Arizona and their last look at the venerable Manzanita Speedway in southwest Phoenix.

The biggest story in sprint car racing is how Manzanita was purchased by Southwest Industrial Rigging for a sum between “10 and 20 million” according to Bobby Martin. I know the Martins lost money last year (“about \$468,465”) and hope they can live with killing a family member. They should either take their riches out of town (how can they look friends in the eye?) or build a new facility as close to the city as possible.

I fear that Phoenix will go the way of major cities such as Memphis, Dallas and Denver where weekly sprint racing is all but dead. Sure, some discarded dates will go to Canyon or Tucson. But not everyone will drive that far. Some will stop racing altogether.

I have seen it happen all too often. It only takes a tour of my homeland to remember how raceways are fragile. Harmony, Reading, Flemington, East Windsor and two tracks in Nazareth all perished within about 25 years. West Capital, Baylands and Ascot all fell within 11 years.

The corner of 35th Avenue and Broadway in Phoenix never seemed attractive as a development among the endless junkyards. The Big Money leaked in from the south. Where’s the love?

Rolling across Texas from 4979 West 13th Street, Speedway, IN, 46224 or (317) 607.7841 or Kevin@openwheeltimes.com