



In the heat of the battle: Four Mustangs are boxed in between a Falcon and a Barracuda in a



**Dan Gurney**, successful Grand Prix driver and Le Mans winner last year, also campaigned a Cougar in the Trans-Am series. The Bud Moore team won't race Cougars in '68, but you may see them in independent hands. Like the NASCAR stockers, sedans have beefy roll cages for driver protection.

## America's hottest new sports thrill

# SEDAN RACING

Sporty cars competing on road circuits attract top drivers and huge crowds. Here's why

By JAMES W. WRIGHT/PS West Coast Editor

**A** few years back, no dyed-in-the-wool stock-car-racing fan would walk across the street to see a sports-car road race. By the same token, the road-racing fan couldn't have cared less about big, noisy American stocks chasing themselves in circles. Then along came the Trans-American Sedan Championship series and changed all that.

In two short, action-packed seasons, the Trans-Am has firmly established itself as a favorite with a large portion of both groups.

Take the cars. Smaller than the big NASCAR stocks, they still equal them in noise, color, and excitement. Being mostly American products, they are easy for the average spectator to identify with.

The races are run on some of America's most challenging road courses and offer a true test of the cars' all-around roadability. Not only must the cars be strong and fast, they must handle and brake superbly. And while some sports-car fans might not willingly admit it in public, the contenders—Mustang, Camaro, Cougar, Barracuda, *et al*—are true sports cars in every sense of the word.

*Continued*

Riverside sedan race.

Parnelli Jones was Dan Gurney's teammate on the Cougar team in '67. At right, lead-footed Parnelli blasts out of a turn on the inside of a more slowly driven Mustang. But it was Carroll Shelby's team of Mustangs that won the Trans-Am championship last year, with Cougar second, and Camaro third.



## Sedans give the viewer all the noise, color, and excitement of



Mahar's Barracuda leads a challenging Mustang—but only just. Race was won by Titus' Mustang.



Imported cars contest the U. S. sedans in Trans-Am races. Here, a BMW is passed by a Camaro.

The drivers are America's best—guys like Dan Gurney, Mark Donohue, and Jerry Titus from the sports-car world. Or Parnelli Jones of Indy fame and NASCAR's David Pearson.

Sedan racing, as such, has been a top event on English and European circuits for many years. In this country, its popularity was something less. For a long time, the sedan classes were a dull but necessary evil you had to endure between the more popular races at a Sports Car Club of America event. It's only fair to add that, at the time we're talking about, the sedans in question were all foreign.

**Enter the little cars.** Soon after the arrival of the compacts, the well-known firm of Holman & Moody applied their proven stock-car techniques to a pair of Studebaker Larks and entered them in the Sebring 12-hour race. The cars made a good showing, running well as long as they ran. As things turned out, this didn't do too much for Studebaker, but it did open quite a few eyes to the potential of American-car racing on road circuits.

One result was that SCCA was persuaded to place more emphasis on its sedan classes by adopting rules that would open them up to allow more American sedans to compete. During the next few years, a number of American sedans were raced in these new classes. Among them were Falcons, Corvairs, Valiants, and Darts.

Then the Mustang was introduced and quickly became America's biggest selling sporty car. Plymouth introduced its Barracuda, and there were rumors that other manufacturers were soon to follow with

their versions of a small, personalized, sports-type car.

It was partly the tremendous public interest in, and acceptance of, this type of car and partly the expressed willingness of several manufacturers to support a racing program in order to publicize the cars that led SCCA to devise the Trans-American Sedan Championship. The fact that NASCAR had staged several highly successful stock-car road races might have also had something to do with the decision they made.

The series was set up under existing FIA (Fédération Internationale de l'Automobile) rules. The key rules allow a maximum wheelbase of 116 inches, and a maximum engine size of 305 cubic inches. Various chassis and engine modifications are allowed.

For a car to be eligible for the series, someone—usually the factory—must file homologation papers on the car with the FIA. (Homologation means that a car is certified for racing in a specific category by the FIA.) The papers filed state the specifications of the car as it is offered to



One Alfa Romeo sneaks past another on the crest of a rise following a long curve at Riverside track.

## the big stock cars

One of trickiest turns at Riverside Raceway is 180-degree downhill left-hander. Note that Camaro, nearing exit from turn, is still turning left. Angle of front wheel on Mustang behind it gives some idea of how cars drift around turns. Although it lowers top speeds, windows are kept fully open to obtain maximum cooling effect.



the public. Also included are all available performance options and equipment. After the car and its optional equipment have been certified, it can't show up at a race with any equipment not on its homologation papers.

This year, the series is open to the notch-back Mustang, Camaro, Cougar, Javelin, Barracuda, and Dart.

In 1966, the first year of the series, there were eight races, ranging from the 12-hour race at Marlboro down to three- and four-hour events. In 1967, the number of events grew to 12, with the best nine finishes counting toward a manufacturer's championship.

**Mustang vs. 'Cuda.** In '66, it was a battle all the way between Mustang and Barracuda, with the Mustang finally taking the manufacturer's championship.

Last year saw increased competition with the addition of the Cougar and Camaro. The action was extremely close throughout the 12 events and the manufacturer's championship wasn't decided until the last race.

Carroll Shelby's Terlingua Racing Team fielded a pair of factory-backed Mustangs driven by Jerry Titus and Ronnie Bucknum, both of sports-car fame. Titus personally won the second race at Sebring, the fifth at Mid-Ohio, and the eighth and ninth at Castle Rock and Modesto. These, plus a couple of third-place finishes by Titus and several seconds by Bucknum, were enough to give Mustang the points championship.

When Mercury decided to campaign the Cougar they turned to Bud Moore, who had developed a reputation building

big Mercs for NASCAR's Grand National circuit. Dan Gurney was taken on as team captain, while Parnelli Jones held down the number-one driver spot assisted by Ed Leslie, Pete Revson, and David Pearson. The team had a very good first year, with Gurney winning the third race at Green Valley, Revson the fourth and sixth at Lime Rock and Bryar, and Pearson the tenth at Riverside.

The Camaro entries ran without "factory" help, though most were strongly backed by leading dealers. The factory did help to the extent that it developed the "Z-28" package to make the car competitive. Notable among the dealer entries was the Camaro of former driver Roger Penske. His driver was leading sports-car pilot Mark Donohue. They started the season slowly, having several problems to work out. By season's end, they were the team to beat. Donohue won the seventh race at Marlboro, the eleventh at Las Vegas, and the final at Kent; and finished second at Daytona, Sebring, and Lime Rock.

Dart and Barracuda almost faded from the scene in the second season. The main reason: lack of help from the factory—not so much in the form of money as in parts and pieces that would have helped them stay up with the competition. Of the two, Dart made the best showing when Bob Tullius won the opener at Daytona, mainly by outlasting faster cars.

**Lining up for '68.** Ford has again contracted with Carroll Shelby to field his Team Terlingua Mustangs. Jerry Titus continues as number-one driver. There

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## Hottest New Sports Thrill: Sedan Racing

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is little change in the Mustangs. Ford had made plans to homologate a set of "tunnel-port" heads for the 302, similar to the NASCAR engine, but has changed its mind. This setup reportedly pulled way over 400 horsepower on the dynamometer.

Roger Penske is campaigning two Camaros—with Mark Donohue as number-one driver. Chevrolet has introduced a new Z-28 package that includes a dual-quad manifold and four-wheel disk brakes. This could force Ford into releasing the new heads for their engine, since it was no secret that even last year's Camaro engine was putting out more than theirs.

A budget cut at Mercury has forced the withdrawal of their support from the Bud Moore organization, which means the Cougar team has disbanded.

Once again, all of the Chrysler Corp. performance budget has been split between NASCAR and USAC stockers and drag racing. It is unlikely that we'll see more than one or two Darts or Barracudas on the Trans-Am this year. It is reported that Bob Tullius in the East and Ron Grable in the West are building new Darts, but these will probably see action mainly in local and regional SCCA races with Trans-Am appearances only in their immediate areas.

The newcomer. American Motors is now backing a pair of Javelins for the year. This is AMC's first venture into the performance field since Hudson was a big name in stock-car racing. They badly need a new image and this is a good way to get it. They have contracted with Ronnie Kaplan to build and maintain four cars for Jerry Grant, Skip Scott, Peter Revson, and George Follmer to drive. These Javelins have shown a lack of speed so far, but could get faster as development continues during the season.

NASCAR will be offering a circuit similar to the Trans-Am. Open to cars with a maximum 116-inch wheelbase and 305-cubic-inch engine size, the Grand Touring class should prove another popular proving ground for intermediate-size as well as personal sports-type cars. Most of these races will be held in conjunction with Grand National events and run on the high-banked ovals. P 3

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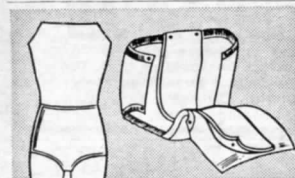
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