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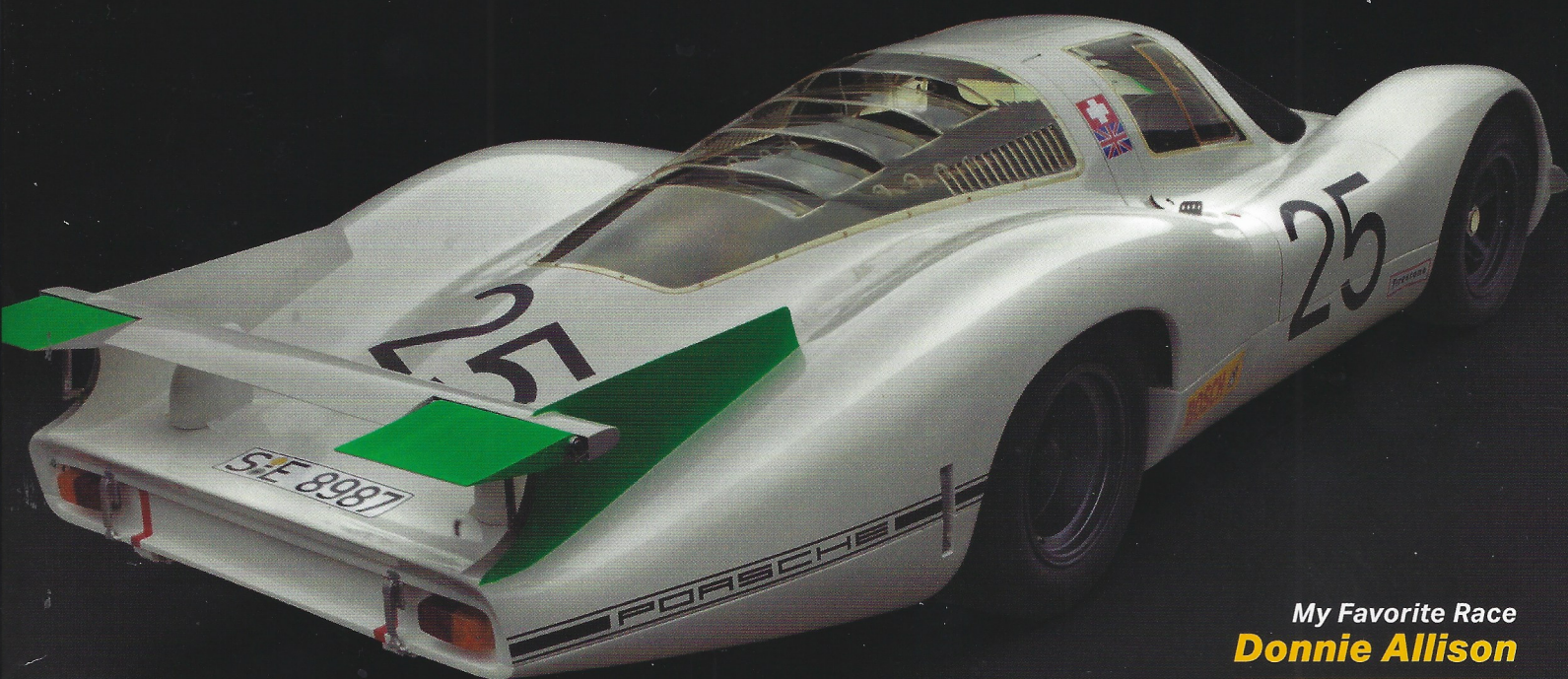


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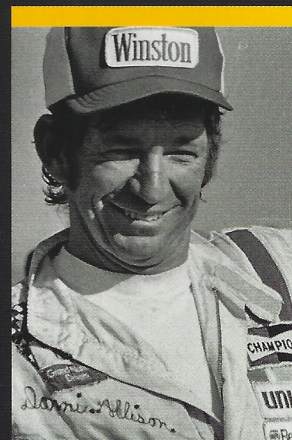
THE JOURNAL OF MOTOR RACING HISTORY

Screamliner!

Porsche's Flat-8 908 Long Tail



My Favorite Race
Donnie Allison



Hot Wheels Part 2

Riley & Scott Daytona 24 Winner

Up All Night
Racing: 24 Hours
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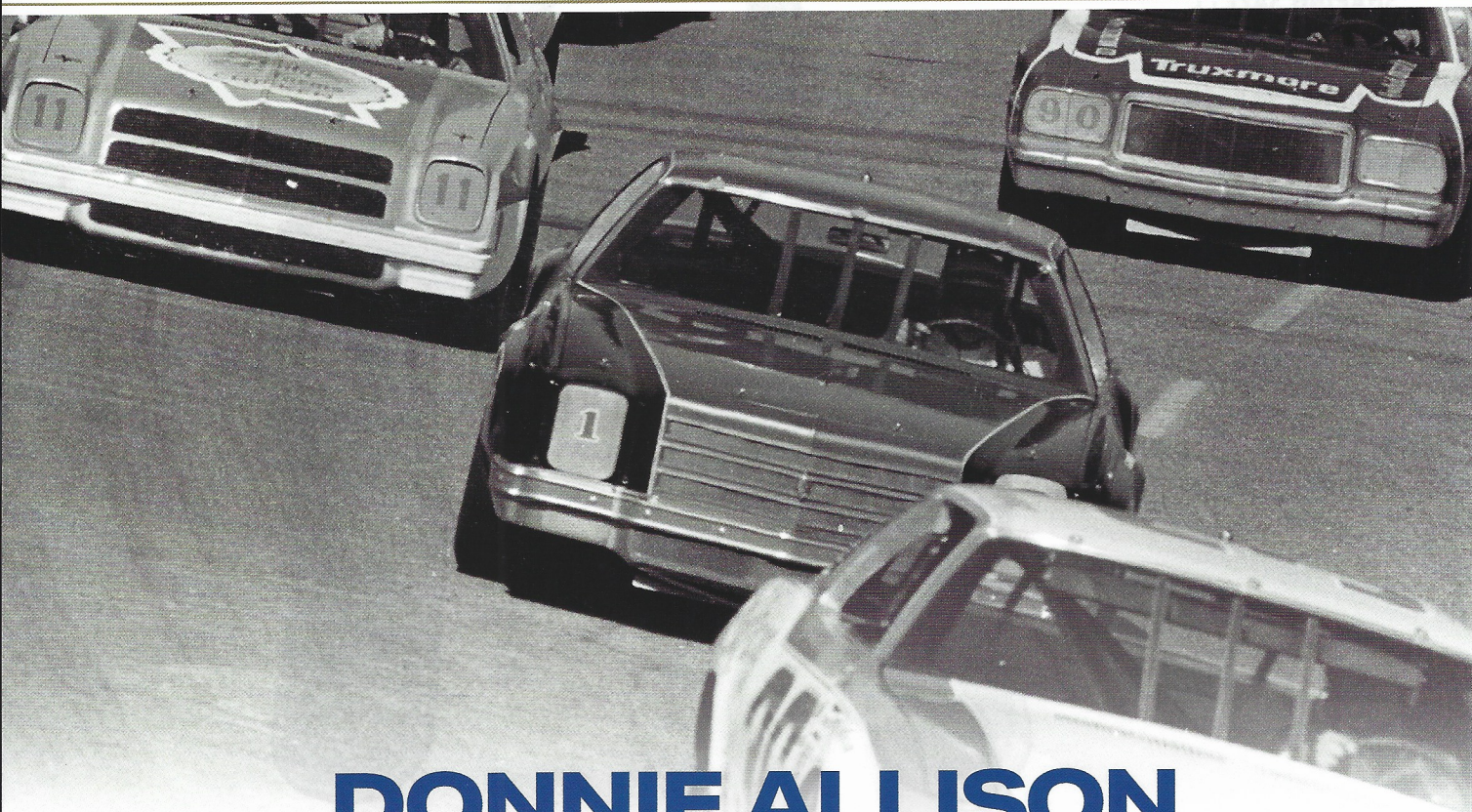
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DONNIE ALLISON

1976 NATIONAL 500 AT CHARLOTTE

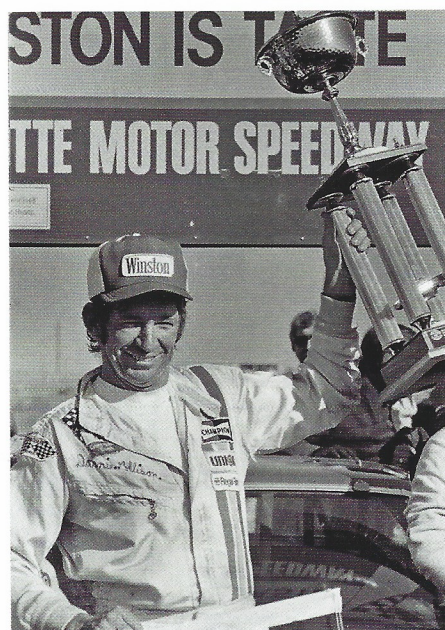
BY GARY WITZENBURG | PHOTOGRAPHY BY C. BRYANT MCMURRAY

We don't know, and he didn't say, but we suspect that the 1979 Daytona 500 might have been Donnie Allison's favorite race...if only that last-lap dust-up with Cale Yarborough hadn't cost him the win. As you may recall, it was the first-ever live telecast of the Daytona 500, and terrible weather all up and down the East Coast—back when there were just three TV networks—had millions tuning in who might otherwise have not.

And it climaxed in probably NASCAR's all-time most-watched finish when Yarborough and Allison took each other out in Turn 3, then took each other on in the infield. Bobby Allison stopped to defend his brother, Richard Petty won from a half-lap down, and Donnie (a lap up on nearly everyone else) was credited with 4th.

"I had as good a car as anybody," he relates today, "but when Cale, Bobby and I had that first wreck and spun down into the infield, I bent something on my car, and when we got it straightened out, it drove better than it ever had. I made up my lap on Benny Parsons and was leading, then Cale made his lap up on me and almost wrecked

me coming to the start/finish line for a caution. I was told that Cale was at least five laps down, but I knew better. You don't do that when you're five laps down. Then they said that Cale was on the same lap.



"After we got the last-lap white flag, I looked in the mirror coming off Turn Two and saw that he was going down inside me. The reason he got under me was that he ran into the back of me in Two, which knocked me sideways, and I lifted a bit. I thought, 'No, you can have all the room outside you want, but I'm not going into Three outside of you or I'll be a rotating beacon.' Then he hit me in the door going into Three." And we all recall what happened next.

So it turns out that Donnie's favorite race is the October 1976 National 500 at Charlotte in Hoss Ellington's No. 1 Chevy Monte Carlo. "I wasn't a favorite," he says, "I wasn't even talked about. But I beat them pretty bad. At that time, NASCAR had two days of qualifying, and I wasn't fast enough the first day to make it into the top 15. But I was fastest the second day and started

Allison led the last 27 laps of the 500-mile contest at the 1.5-mile Charlotte Motor Speedway, earning \$22,435 for the triumph, his seventh career win.

"On my first lap, I was over 175 and ran three laps over 174, but my last lap was about 172.8. When I came in, Foyt didn't say, 'Congratulations!' He asked, 'How come you slowed down on your last lap?' "

15th, and by race time, I was really good. I worked my way up to the front, and Cale and I had a helluva race. He'd lead, then I'd get back by him, and I went on to beat him."

What made that win so significant was that Donnie had suffered through a five-year drought with Di-Gard Racing after scoring five Winston Cup wins in 1968-'71 and found himself fired after the 1975 July 4th Daytona race. "I came from an owner telling me I couldn't drive anymore to winning that race. Not only did it do wonders for my career, it did wonders for my personal self because I was able to tell the guy who fired me, as I punched him in the chest with my finger, I'm the SOB who couldn't drive anymore, remember?"

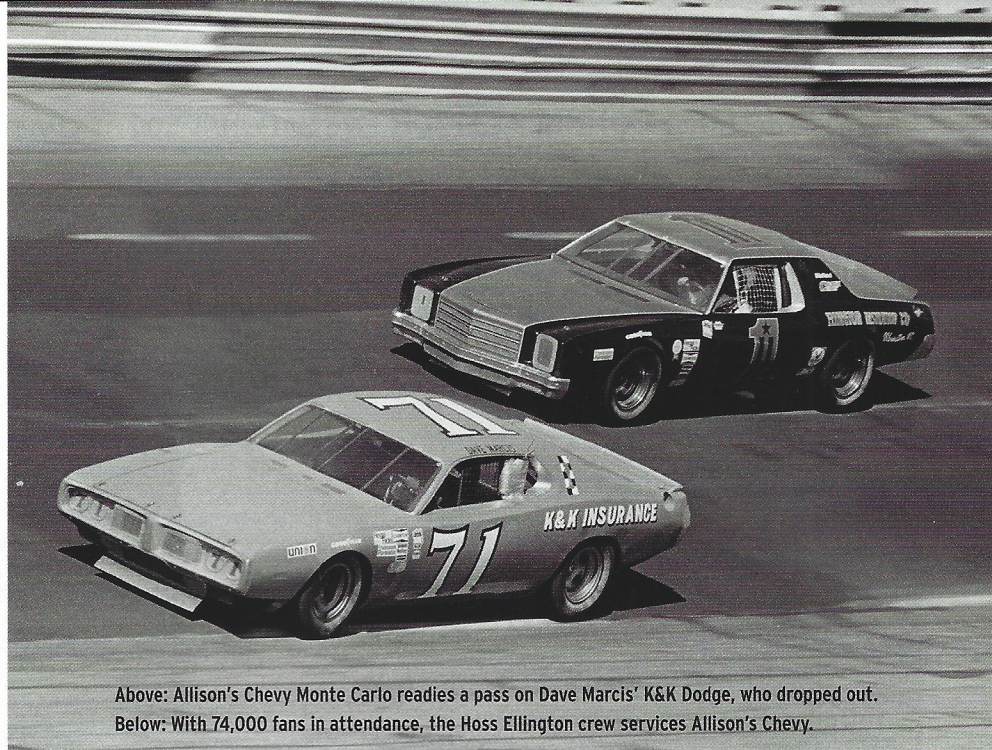
His favorite race before that one was his first Winston Cup win at Rockingham, NC in 1968. Although he was 1967 NASCAR

Rookie of the Year, he says, "I wasn't supposed to win, and Banjo Matthews wasn't supposed to win. And I'll never forget watching that man stand there in Victory Lane with tears running down his cheeks because he told me he didn't think he'd ever win a race again."

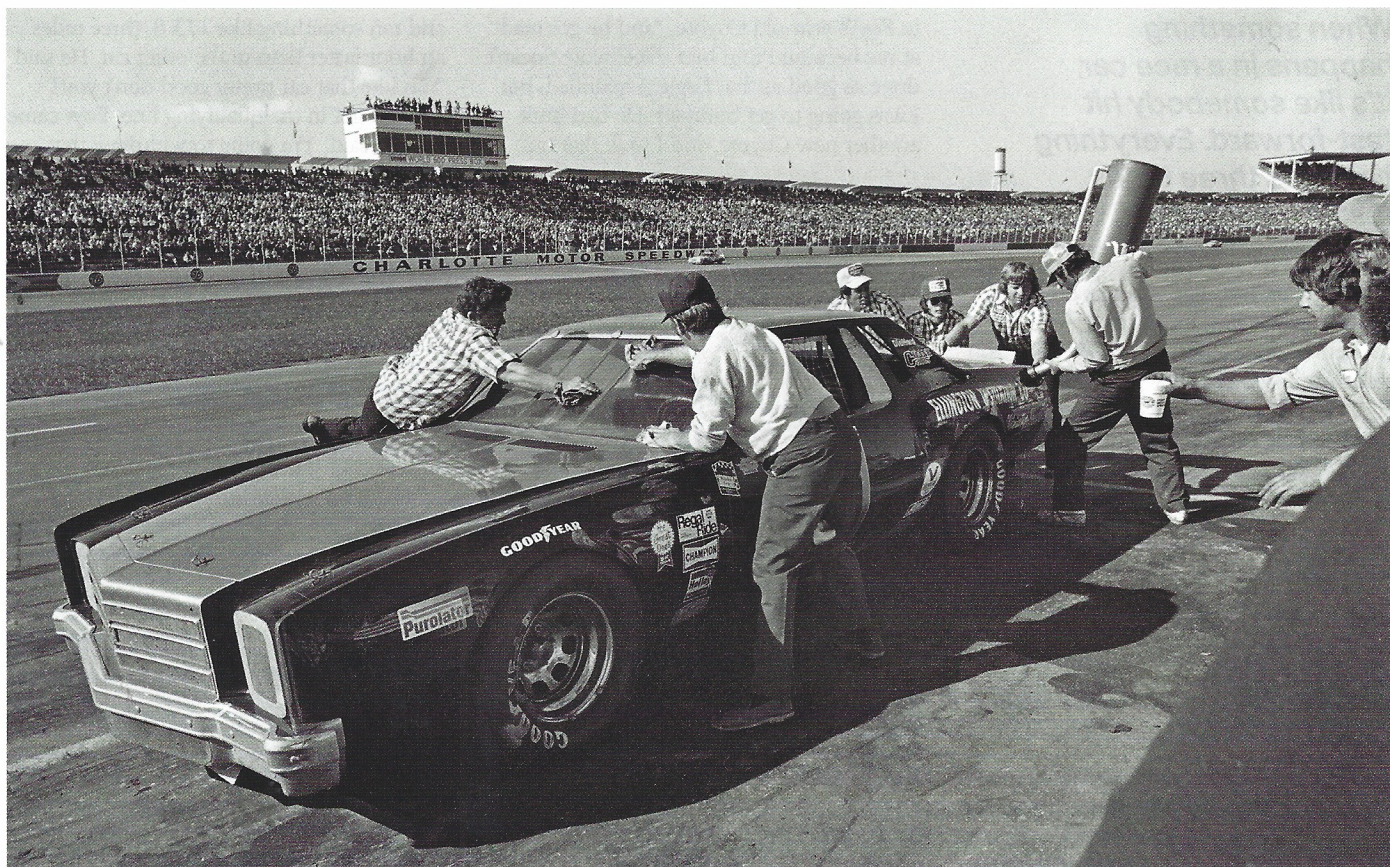
Then probably the 1970 Indianapolis 500, his first Indy car ride, where he started

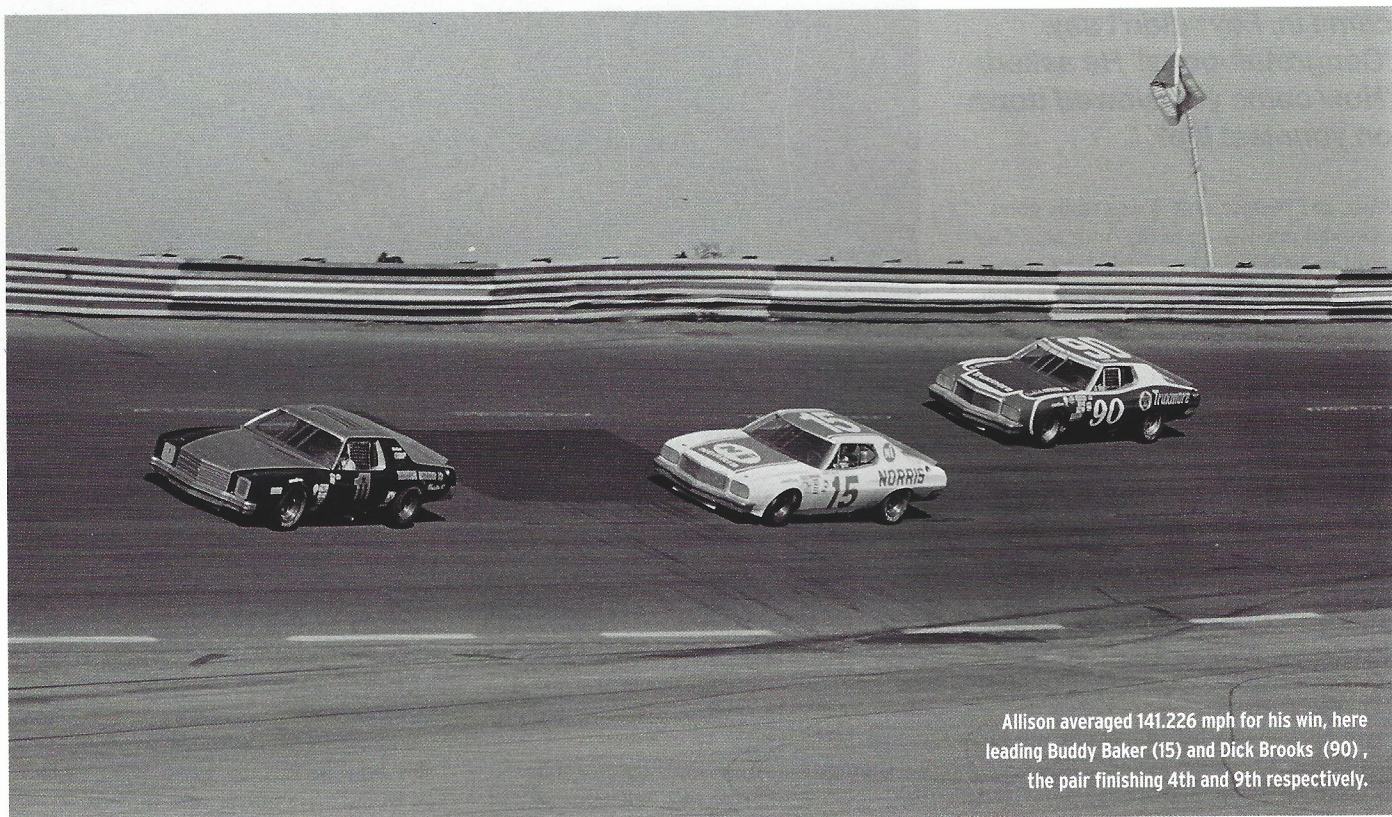
20th, finished 4th and was Rookie of the Year driving for A.J. Foyt. That finish stood as best for a rookie until Nigel Mansell beat it with a 3rd in 1993. And then he went down to Charlotte and won the World 600 that same week.

How did he get that ride? "Every time I saw A.J.," he tells us, "I said, 'When will you let me drive one of your Indy cars?'"



Above: Allison's Chevy Monte Carlo readies a pass on Dave Marcis' K&K Dodge, who dropped out.
Below: With 74,000 fans in attendance, the Hoss Ellington crew services Allison's Chevy.





Allison averaged 141.226 mph for his win, here leading Buddy Baker (15) and Dick Brooks (90), the pair finishing 4th and 9th respectively.

When something happens in a race car, it's like somebody hit fast-forward. Everything happens three times faster than before.

He would say, 'You're a taxicab driver. You can't drive an Indy car.' Then at the 1970 Daytona 500, I said again, 'Why won't you let me drive an Indy car?' He said, 'You really want to drive one?' I said, 'Yeah, I do.' He said, 'I'll call you.'

"I had heard that many times, but he did call and said, 'Come to Houston.' So I went down there, and we went back in his shop, and up on a rack was a tub with no suspension. It was a '68 Gurney Eagle. He said, 'That's what you're going to run. Get with Tony (his daddy) and put it together.' So Tony and I put it together, and that's what I ran that year."

Donnie was back at Indy in '71, assigned

to Foyt's year-old Coyote, "and he got mad at me because I told him the Coyote doesn't drive as good as that Eagle. I qualified, but I was going to get bumped. He had built another new Coyote, and I took that out

and ran something like 173.8, three miles an hour faster than in the other car. He said, 'You like that car pretty good don't you?' When I got in the qualifying line, Foyt came up and said, 'I'm going to withdraw that



Donnie Allison's win was not declared "official" until four hours after the race, where an engine teardown revealed the engine was within the 358cid limit.